

Socio-Cultural Realities in Indian English Fiction of the New Millennium

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Under the Supervision of

Prof. Hemendra Singh Chandalia
HOD, Department of English,
Central University of Haryana

Prof. (Mrs.) Rajul Bhargava
Formerly HOD, Department of English,
Central University of Haryana

By

Arpit Kothari
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Central University of Haryana
Mahendergarh

Department of English
School of Language, Linguistics, Culture and Heritage
Central University of Haryana
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This to certify that I, **Arpit Kothari**, have carried out the Research embodied in the present thesis for the full period prescribed under PhD ordinances of the University.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this Thesis was earlier submitted for the award of research degree of any University.

Signature of the candidate

(Arpit Kothari)
Roll No. 3006

The present work as above has been carried out under our Supervision and the declaration as above by the scholar is correct to the best of our knowledge.

Signature of the Supervisor
(Prof. Hemendra Singh Chandalia)

Signature of Joint Supervisor
(Prof. (Mrs.) Rajul Bhargava)

Forwarded by-

Head of the Department
(Prof. Hemendra Singh Chandalia)

Abstract

The work is divided into six chapters. Chapter one is the introduction to India, politically, socially, culturally and above all in respect to literature, from before her existence to the new millennium. The chapter starts with the Preamble to the Constitution describes the India shaping politically under the leadership of Nehru, Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and many more. Like politics the orientation of Indian fictional writing in English since the first novel to the fiction of new millennium like Metro Reads, New Literatures which are easily digestible and comprehensible, has been described in this study.

Chapter two deals with the megalopolis, the city of diversities- Mumbai as a subject, backdrop with reference to the works of Suketu Mehta and Altaf Tyrewala *Maximum City: Bombay Lost & Found* and *No God in Sight* respectively. Chapter three includes Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* which is about the description of the ever widening gap between rich and poor, rural and urban, and the brutal reality of an economic system that allows a small minority to prosper at the expense of the silent majority.

Aravind Adiga is a post-modern writer who deals with the realistic problems of the Indian society in transition and reflecting the impact of globalization in India. Through *The White Tiger*, he wanted to enlighten the depiction of outsourcing within India and outside. In the long run it is not a particularly good thing for the country. It does not create real jobs. It does not actually give employees any skills. It is kind of like a shot of sugar - it is great at first, but it actually has no nutrition. This is only a myth that outsourcing is going to fix India's economic problems. Outsourcing counts for less than 1% of the entire Indian economy. 99% of Indians have problems that are entirely separate: water, agriculture, irrigation, electricity. Adiga wanted

to show that this is a very small, weird part of the Indian economy and the bulk of life is way outside this territory. This chapter also discusses the key metaphor Rooster Coop in which 99.9% of Indian population was trapped. The protagonist of the novel, *Balram*, was also trapped in the Rooster Coop and it describes the way he breaks out to freedom being a 'White Tiger'.

Chapter four is about the urban women of this era who are bold and beautiful and ready to achieve any goal either with talent or with charms. These women are enjoying the fruits of the liberty which they have found after a long struggle against this patriarchal world and are still moving on. In this post modern era, these post feminist women challenge the conventional system by accepting the challenges for their rights. But this time the challenges are a bit different from the previous ones. This chapter has taken two bold women writers Shobha De and Advaita Kala to illustrate the endeavors through their writings.

Chapter five has included two debut novelists Ravi Subramanian and Amitabha Bagchi from different professional fields; one is a banker and the latter is an ex-IITian with their works *If God was a Banker* and *Above Average* respectively. This describes the politics, frustrations, betrayal, and sexual harassment at their work places as both are from non-literary backgrounds they want to share their experiences through their writings. These English speaking people from upper middle class families after having achieved their ultimate goals, IIMs and IITs, have shifted their aim towards writing. This chapter portrays all the conflicts and the roles they are playing in building this world.

Chapter six is the concluding one which sets a highly optimistic tone for this young India, which is raising in the direction to reestablish her as the 'World Guru' and wants to become a country which has its unique culture i.e. 'unity in diversity' and will prove it right in every sense.

Acknowledgement

In ordinary life we hardly
Realize that we receive a
Great deal more than we
Give, and that it is only with
Gratitude that life becomes
Rich.

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Every pure work needs austerity and here is an example. So, for this study, I would like to show my gratitude to many important people, without whom, I could not imagine my existence in professional as well as in personal life and without their encouragement and support this thesis would not have been possible. First of all, I would like to show my indebtedness to the Ultimate Power ‘**God**’ to shower His blessings on me for every minute step which I have taken for this research. After Almighty its ‘Guru’, my greatest thanks go to my Supervisor **Prof. (Mrs.) Rajul Bhargava**. She spared time from her busy schedule and guided me for every minute hurdle very affectionately as a mother. She has opened the window to the world of literature for me. I have no words to express my reverence to her. Under her intellectual guidance, I found the passion of doing academic research and the audacity of facing the ups and downs in the process. I have enjoyed every moment of the insightful discussions with her.

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(Arpit Kothari)

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Synopsis submitted
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Central University of Haryana

Submitted by
Arpit Kothari

Department of English
Central University of Haryana
Villages Jant – Pali, Mahendergarh,
Haryana

Camp Office: 3113, DLF Phase-III, Opp. H.No.T25/8, Gurgaon – 122 010

The proposed research takes up the study of the novels of the new millennium by the following writers – Advaita Kala's *Almost Single*, Ravi Subramanian's *If God was a Banker*, Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average*, Altaf Tyrewala's *No God in Sight*, Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*.

The young writers use bold experimentation in their writings and also write in an English which is rather typical. These new young writers are becoming new stars overnight. The craze for their writing impresses the reader of every age (from young to old). The specialty of their writing is that they do not speak of traditions and sayings rather they talk about very simple things happening in our daily life.

The market for the readers of English fiction has increased tremendously and the readers specially include the youth of this country. The love of youth towards fiction is surprising and also indicates well for the future of literary awareness in the country. This has also broken the myth that the youth of this generation might not be interested in reading fiction, but the growing market for young fiction has proved this wrong.

The galaxy of young, dynamic Indian novelists includes Chetan Bhagat, Amitabha Bagchi, Advaita Kala, Ravi Subramanian, Suketu Mehta, Altaf Tyrewala etc. Each one of them has written one novel except Chetan Bhagat and has earned tremendous popularity. Chetan Bhagat's print order for his three books was more than five lakhs. Unlike Bhagat, the IIT Professor, Amitabha Bagchi's novel *Above Average* was reprinted four times. More than one lakh copies of Ravi Subramanian's debut novel *If God was a Banker* have been sold out. He is working at high post in HSBC Bank. He has earned 40 lakh rupees from this book alone now he is ready to write his second novel. Advaita Kala, Hotel Executive turned novelist has written her debut novel *Almost Single* and has become popular over night. More than 50 thousand copies have been sold and is a best seller nowadays. This shows how popular young fiction for the new generation of the country is.

They talk about their inner truths and feelings. They speak about the growing generation for the new generation. The most important point is that these writers have broken the traditional image of fictional writing and are setting forth a new culture cult. They have broken the prevalent obstacles created by the use of Standard English inventing a new idiom and style in their writings.

The most significant fact is that people from different fields are coming to write in English. They present the incidents and events related to their system which is also concerned with the common people. The benefit of this is that the writing has become more real and the writing presents a varied universe. In the last decade the range has been surprisingly vast from Bankers to IIT professionals have entered in this field. In past days people from different fields did not dare to express their views and thoughts willingly through creative writing but now this convention has broken down. The huge local and foreign names in publishing houses are producing new traditions. Thus, the youth are not far behind in writing with the help of their laptops. Through this, not only do they express their restlessness but also it is also been seen that the way of writing in which people express their frustration through writing is very open and is giving recognition to them.

According to a publisher one of the reasons behind that is these new writers come with new thoughts and frames. As they know that majority of the readers are the youth in search of a self-image concerned about their jobs, about their love affairs which is thought provokingly represented in this fiction. Movies had earlier cashed this tradition now publishers have come to know about it and are promoting this 'new fiction'.

The success of these books has proved that the scope of this type of fiction in India has a vast potential and is very huge. We can say that Chetan Bhagat, with his first novel *Five Point Someone*, is the father of this revolution. Today, about 90% successful figures of this field in the market are between 25 to 35 years of age ie all are young. Some of them have jumped into this field from the corporate sector and some of them have resigned from their jobs in order to become full time writers. Among the young female writers, Advaita Kala is the one who writes according to

the choice of her readers and has thus achieved popularity. Advaita's *Almost Single* is particularly discussed in metropolitan spaces.

In the new generation of our English literary world, Kiran Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, Vikram Seth and Arundhati Roy etc. had given India a new fame and frame in English fiction, but they all are limited to specific traditional grooves. To come out of this groove, to experiment boldly and to change English to a specifically indigenous variety has been done successfully by the writers of the new generation.

The specialty of their writings is that they do not talk about traditions and ideals rather they say very simple things, narrate incidents which happen in the routine life of the young readers, the only difference is that they say it in a very simple and interesting manner that catches and captures the imagination of our youth. India is a young country and therefore anything that is written for them, of them, by them is bound to be meaningful. This is the mantra of the 'new fiction' of the new millennium.

Aravind Adiga's award winning novel *The White Tiger* is described as a compelling, angry and darkly humorous novel about a man's journey from Indian village life to entrepreneurial success. It is an unadorned portrait of India seen from the bottom of the heap. The narrative uses a landscape and mindscape that is the common property of us all and this makes us see our world, our desires reflected in the book.

Almost Single by Advaita Kala is the story of a young and single woman who lives in Delhi and works as a guest relation manager in a Five Star hotel at Delhi. She shares her experiences with her friends. Some people consider it a very bold book since it reveals the inside story of the outwardly glamorous world.

If God was a Banker by Ravi Subramanian is the story of two IIM graduates who get the top posts in a New York International Bank. The story of two different personalities, Sundeep, who will stoop to anything to get ahead and the other, is

mature and sensible Swami, with a high regard for good old ethics. This book presents organizational politics, sexual harassment and disgraceful deeds of agents in banks in a very impressive manner.

Above Average by Amitabha Bagchi is the story of a middle class Delhi boy who has good ability in Science and Maths but has a desire to be the drummer of a rock band. Both of his wishes are fulfilled by his getting admission in a sophisticated IIT Engineering College. But, when he thinks that he is going on the right path of his life some people of a malicious mentality state an opinion about his life and change his life's direction. Such are the mechanisms of the world we live in and as similar stakeholders, this fiction goads us on to see how we can make do in a vicious world.

No God in Sight by Altaf Tyrewala is the story compiled with many stories having dozens of characters and incidents but at last ends it from where it started. Tyrewala portrays the picture of Bombay/Mumbai and the whole region around Mumbai including the relationship of the people from different fields and societies. Also, Tyrewala talks about the hot issues like clash between tradition and modernity to corruption to abortion to family values etc. In short, he describes the realities of India (in negative senses) why we are so much backward although we have everything. As the problem is that we are not sincere to ourselves, our goal, our society and our country.

Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found by Suketu Mehta is a non-fictional work. He has described about the tale of the city Bombay where he was born and left it in 1977 and about the city Mumbai when he came back from New York, America in 2001. This book is the whole description of the city Mumbai/Bombay and all about the differences he had experienced and felt. Anyone who wants to visit Mumbai must read this book. It explains about the slums, Mumbai underworld, Hindu-Muslim relations, Shiva Sena and Shiva Sena's chief Bal Thackeray etc.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the British Empire covered a vast area including parts of Asia, Africa, Australia, Canada, The Caribbean and Ireland. These were British colonies. With the demise of the empire and the process of

decolonization began a political period referred to as Post Colonialism. The main thrust of this political Endeavour was to cleanse the system that had been dominated by the 'other'.

Colonialism has taken different had engendered diverse effects around the world because of the potential for trade plunder, enrichment and the establishment of an imperial structure. To begin with colonialism was lucrative commercial operation which gradually turned into Imperialism. Post Colonialism began with taking governance in national hands, wiping out the traces of domination and subsequently growing into a world of its own. It was during this period that in the name of 'aftermath' literatures started being produced. Contesting the dialectics of the earlier rule and attesting the new found freedom. It was in this context Commonwealth Literature emerged in the 1950s. It was a term used to describe literatures in English emerging from countries with a history of colonialism. It incorporated the study of writers from predominantly European settler communities as well as writers belonging to those countries which were in the process of gaining independence from the British rule. Along with this literature there emerged theories of colonial discourse which aimed at understanding the subversive effects of a foreign dominion as well as the strategies of interpreting the new life. They also experimented with the novelty of a third world existence and tried to infuse local focus and local color in order to distinguish themselves. For Post colonial critics, the different pre occupations and contexts of texts were to become more important than their alleged similar abstract qualities.

Theories of colonial discourses have been hugely influenced in the development of post colonialism, in general they explore the ways that *representations and modes of perception* are used as fundamental weapons of colonial power to keep colonized people subservient to colonial rule. Colonialism it is said is perpetuated by justifying to those in the colonizing nation the idea that it is right and proper to rule over other peoples- this is called *Colonizing the Mind*. It operates by persuading people to internalize this logic and to speak its language. Theories of colonial discourse call attention to the role language plays in getting people to succumb to a particular way of seeing. Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiong'O believed that language carries culture and culture carries through literature

and orator the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. Therefore, by prescribing the use of a foreign language the colonial power, try to subvert cultural identity. In post colonialism, therefore the thrust was to use the colonizer's language for indigenous subject material and to cress-cross it with language of the vernacular.

Post colonialism has become a site for interrogating nation and nationhood. The work of Benedict Anderson in defining the nation has become very important. In *Imagined Communities*, he says that nation is the standardization of *one unitary language* and its specific features are exemplified by the realist novel and the means for the representation of an imagined community that a nation is. It is the assumptions about space and time common to these genres that are duplicated in the ways a nation is imagined. It is through the act of reading that a nation is reconstructed its structure, shelter and sequence for individuals cementing a deep horizontal comradeship is what a nation is. According to Benedict Anderson nation is a myth and the myth comprises that nations are imagined communities. It gathers together many individuals 'unified collective' who come to imagine their simultaneity with others. Nations depend upon invention and performance of histories, traditions and symbols which sustain the people's specific identity. Nations evoke feelings of belonging, home and community. Nations stimulate the people sense that they are rightful owners of a specific land. Nations are narrated through forms of representation which promote the unities of time and place.

Post colonialism is a reality to the cultural legacy to colonialism. It is a specifically post modern intellectual discourse that holds together a set of theories based on interrogation in philosophy, political science and literature. It deals with cultural identity in colonized society and the dilemmas of developing a national identity after colonial rule. Also it deals with the ways in which writers articulate and celebrate this new found identity. It deals with the knowledge of the colonized people has been generated and used to serve the colonizer's interest, the ways in which the colonizer's literature has justified colonialism via images of the colonized as a perpetually inferior people society and culture. It has created a vast literature based on binary opposition- east-west, black-white, superior-inferior, first-third, self- other. Post colonialism seeks out areas of hybridity and transculturalization.

The term Post colonialism is frequently misunderstood as a temporal concept meaning the time after colonialism ceased, but post colonialism is an engagement with and contestation of colonialism discourses, power structures and social hierarchies not of a fixed time. Post colonial theory addresses matter of identity, gender, race, and ethnicity *with the challenges of developing a post colonial national identity*.

There are three places from which contesting literature have emerged- the Middle- East, Africa, and the Indian sub continent. Scholars like Foucault argue that anywhere there is an unequal deployment of power anti- colonialism the colonized are able to express the discrimination a post colonial situation is born.

The study will be based on the hypotheses that the contemporary Indian society is depicted truthfully in the Indian fiction in English. The authors have chosen the theme of realistic portrayal of the Indian society in transition. The economic factors have the biggest impact on the lives of the people. The writers have written in an English which is more familiar to the readers apart from classics.

The objectives of the research will be to evaluate the impact of the type of language used on Indian society. The depictions of new realities of Indian society in these novels will be critically analyzed. And also it will be the aim to study the shifting focuses in locale and thrusts in this new millennium.

The relevance of the work is that as Indian English literature has today accumulated a vast readership and has made prominent inroads into the global literary prize factory, therefore, it is important to analyze what it is that the young writers are giving to the larger readership and explore the way they are doing it. It is also important to bring out the multi-cultural, multi-layered perspectives that they bring to their writing coming from different walks of life. This study attempts to evaluate new young Indian fiction after the boom of Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth and others.

Except for Suketu Mehta and Aravind Adiga we do not have any reviews leave aside critical articles and book by the literary critics of any of these writers. No

reviews of literature have been written about these young novelists till date. No research work has been done on these writers. Salman Rushdie author of *Midnight's Children* has written about Mehta's book:

Quite extraordinary – Mehta writes about Bombay with an unsparing ferocity born of this love, which I share, for the old pre-Mumbai city which has now been almost destroyed by corruption, gangsterism and neo-fascist politics, its spirit surviving in tiny moments and images which he seizes upon as proof of the survival of hope. The quality of his investigative reportage, the skill with which he persuades hoodlums and murderers to open up to him is quite amazing. It's best book yet written about that great, ruined metropolis, my city as well as his, and it deserves to be very widely read.¹

Amitav Ghosh, author of *The Glass Palace* has reviewed Suketu Mehta:

Like one of Bombay's teeming chawls, *Maximum City* is part nightmare and part millennial hallucination, filled with detail, drama and a richly varied cast of characters. In his quest to plumb both the grimy depths and radiant heights of the continent that is Bombay, Suketu Mehta has taken travel writing to any entirely new level. This is a gripping, compellingly readable account of a love affair with a city: I couldn't put it down.²

Jhumpa Lahiri, author of *The Namesake* too has this to say:

Mehta writes with a Victorian novelist's genius for character, detail and incident, but his voice is utterly modern. Like its subject, this is a sprawling banquet of a book, one of the most intimate and moving portraits of a place I have read.³

Mohsin Hamid, Author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has written about Adiga's *The White Tiger* "Compelling, angry, and darkly humorous, *The White Tiger* is an unexpected journey into a new India. Aravind Adiga is a talent to watch."⁴

For this research work all the novels, reviews, and articles, material on the websites and everywhere will be searched. The post-colonial cultural approach will be applied for this research work. If as far as possible interviews of these novelists will be taken to get firsthand knowledge of why and how they have come to write such works. Since no work is available *on* these writers, an in-depth critical study of the texts will be done in order to glean out the new and experimental themes and techniques.

The tentative chapter scheme will be as follows:

- Chapter I - Introduction: Post Colonial Aspects in Indian English Writing

This is the introductory chapter of this research work which includes point of views like theory of discourses, ways of representing the culture, language, society, current affairs of post colonialism in these young Indian fictional writings.

- Chapter II - Interrogating Nationhood

This chapter includes Suketu Mehta's non-fictional work *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, Altaf Tyrewala's *No God in Sight* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. All the three works are the description of the different and distinct places of India. These writers portrays the picture of real India from the bottom of the heap They talk about the glamour of the metropolitan cities like Delhi, Gurgaon, Mumbai, Bangalore as well as the other side, the Darker side of these cities. This chapter will take the idea of Benedict Anderson that nations are imagined communities.

- Chapter III - Interrogating Multiculturalism

This chapter covers Ravi Subramanian's *If God Was a Banker* and Advaita Kala's *Almost Single*.

"India unlike Australia, America or Britain does not have a rainbow population; hence the impact of multiculturalism in contemporary Indian literature has been slow to seep in. It is just beginning to make its

presence felt. Writers have started to trade in their identities to package it better in their literary pursuits so as to give their own places broader images," capital-based novelist Rana Dasgupta said.⁵

Chapter IV

- Language and Identity

This chapter includes Advaita Kala's *Almost Single*, Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. In all these novels the protagonists are in the search of their identities in society and this new globalized world. Rushdie argued about the need to decolonize the English language. Now literature from the one's colonized countries was fundamentally concerned with challenging the language of the colonial power, 'unlearning' its world view and producing new modes of representation. The writers have looked at the diachronic and synchronic history of English language in countries with a colonial background. They found that English was being displaced by different linguistic communities in the post colonial world who were remaking it as an attempt to challenge the colonial value system it enshrined. Thus, the 'new English' was irredeemably different from the language of the colonial centre. Besides language post colonial writing challenged the generally held values and their 'local' concerns were fundamental to their meanings.

Chapter V

- Conclusion

In this chapter, there will be the description of the conflicts between traditions and modernity with the conclusion of the whole research work.

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Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise.

— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

New India, now sixty five year old, began with the promise of a 'Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic' enshrined in the Preamble that the Constituent Assembly gave to the country on 26th November 1949. It wanted to secure to all its citizens:

Justice, social, economic and political;
Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;
Equality of status and of opportunity;
And to promote among them all
Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual
And the unity and integrity of the nation;
IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November,
1949, do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS
CONSTITUTION (Preamble).

It was a hefty task. All institutions had been derailed due to the parallel holocaust of partition and in its wake the law and order in the country having gone berserk. A herculean effort was needed to rebuild from near scratch after the fall of the British Empire. Even though the nationalist fervor was an all time high, the countries morale was at low ebb. The countryside had been plundered, the homes destroyed, whole villages' devastated and families pillaged monetarily, sexually and spiritually. Edifices can be bolstered, plastered, even built upon, but to rebuild a shaken faith needed tremendous gearing together of forces. Undoubtedly, under the unflinching stewardship of Jawahar Lal Nehru and his key group of leaders the demography and the pathology of the country were quietly and efficiently steered through the traumatic phase.

The political and the economic investments of the first decade proved productive in organizing the new born state and it seemed that 'the knowledge' that the

people at the helm of affairs prophesied were being put to good stead in raising New India. The mindsets of the people seemed to change – *Dukha bhare din bite re bhaiyya* rang out the filmic euphoria and by and large even though the *juta* was *Japani*, *Patlun Englishtani* the *dil* was *Hindustani*, incipient hybridity was making its presence felt.

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The Times of India

NO. 185, VOL. CIX. BOMBAY: FRIDAY, AUGUST 15, 1947 PRICE TWO ANNAS

BIRTH OF INDIA'S FREEDOM

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NEW CABINET OF INDIA
Fourteen Members
PANDIT NEHRU TO BE PREMIER
NEW DELHI, August 14. The new Cabinet of India which will function from August 15, announced tonight, will consist of the following: Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru—Prime Minister, External and Commonwealth Affairs; Bal Gangadhar Tilak—Minister of Education and Health; B. R. Ambedkar—Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs; C. B. Bhabha—Minister of Industries and Technical Education; Dr. Rajendra Prasad—President and Agriculture and Water Resources; Dr. J. B. Kripalani—Minister and

NATION WAKES TO NEW LIFE
Mr. Nehru Calls For Big Effort From People
"INCESSANT STRIVING TASK OF FUTURE"
Assembly Members Take Solemn Pledge

WILD SCENES OF JUBILATION IN DELHI
From Our Special Representative
NEW DELHI, August 14. ENTIRE DELHI KEPT AWAKE TO WITNESS THE HISTORIC EVENT OF USHERING IN THE FREEDOM OF INDIA AT THE HOUR OF MIDNIGHT. Unprecedented scenes of enthusiasm were witnessed both inside and outside the Constituent Assembly Chamber, where speeches, speeches, speeches were being made, heralding the dawn of a new era.

STATE VISIT TO KARACHI



LORD MOUNTBATTEN GREETES PAKISTAN
Mr. Jinnah Re-Affirms Firm Friendship With Britain
From Our Staff Correspondent
KARACHI, August 14. TOMORROW two new Sovereign States will take their place in the British Commonwealth of Nations, and young nations but heirs to old and proud civilizations," said Lord Mountbatten, addressing this morning the Pakistan Constituent Assembly.

FRENZIED ENTHUSIASM IN BOMBAY
Crowds In Festive Mood

THE national flag was hoisted over the 74-year-old Bombay Civil Secretariat at midnight when the citizens of Bombay greeted the dawn of independence with scenes of jubilation and frenzied rejoicing.
"Citizens of free India—free are now free," said the Prime Minister, Mr. R. G. Kher, in raising the flag at the midnight ceremony which was attended by all Ministers and departmental heads and employees of the Bombay Government.
The Secretariat was crowded with citizens from all quarters of the city at the approach of the hour of midnight. A strong police guard kept watch with the greatest efficiency to prevent any lawlessness.
The citizens of Bombay were greeted by the British Governor, Lord Mountbatten, who arrived in Bombay at 11.30 p.m. and was met by the thousands of citizens who crowded through the streets to greet him. The Governor's motorcade was a spectacle of triumph which swept the city as midnight drew near.
The Governor said: "This is the day of our independence. It is a day of great joy and pride for all of us. We are now free to govern ourselves. We are now free to build our own nation. We are now free to create our own destiny. We are now free to live in peace and harmony with all other nations of the world."
The Governor's message was a powerful one. It was a message of hope and confidence. It was a message of unity and brotherhood. It was a message of freedom and independence.

Hindustan thus flowered through its own fertile soil and with the help of the little foreign 'insecticide'; the harvest grew from large to bumper. The decade saw a change of hands at the top but the grassroots seemed to become more grounded. New ideologies impregnated the air and swept across the rarer strata of society. However, down below the parochial lifestyle still perpetuated. Caste, class, attitude towards women was gripped in traditional values. The spread of education, the impact of sciences, the flurries of economic changes touched only the outside world and within the Indian remained *Bhartiya*.

This was the legacy of the long drawn out debate about Indianness, whereas Gandhi has recognized that Hinduism was part of what it meant to be an Indian the secularity of Nehru advocated protecting cultural and religious differences rather than imposing a uniform “Indianness” (Khilnani, 1999, 167). This wove itself into the indecision regarding the national language as well. After Nehru’s death in 1964 there began a multiplicity of region and caste based preoccupations that invaded the political scene taking precedence over Nehru’s views of Indianness. Indira Gandhi’s Congress hoped to give more respect to the secular notion of Indianness. However, her own diffidence led to more dissents and deep fissures were created among the people of the Indian nation. With her death and the advent of the BJP a new sense of Indianness pervaded the scene standing in opposition to Nehru’s India and not in keeping with Gandhi’s Ideology either. Religious tensions grew and so did the people’s unrest. But, ironically the country was making a head way economically, set on the path of global modernity.

For many in India modernity has been adopted through conservative filters of religious piety, moralism and domestic virtue. This has spawned a novel Hinduism, where holographic gods dangle on well-used key chains and cassettes of devotional *ragas* are played in traffic jams: instances of a religious sentiment freed from its original defining contexts, from the subtle iconography of materials and the punctual divisions of the day into sacred and mundane time (Khilnani, 1999, 187).

It was in the decade of the nineties that liberalization swept across like a mighty force and changed the outlook of the nation. Liberalization, in general, means to gain liberty from previous governmental restrictions usually in areas of social and economic policies. Liberalization of autocratic regimes may precede democratization. In the arena of social policy it may refer to a relaxation of laws restricting for example divorce, abortion, homosexuality or drugs. Economic liberalization refers to the

greater participation of private entities by fewer government regulations and restrictions in the economy in exchange; the doctrine is associated with neo-liberalism. It includes greater efficiency and effectiveness that would translate to a ‘bigger pie’ for everybody. Most First World countries, in order to remain globally competitive, have pursued the path of economic liberalization: partial or full privatization of government institutions and assets, greater labor market flexibility, lower tax rate for business, less restriction on both domestic and foreign capital, open markets etc. Former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, wrote that “Success will go to those companies and countries which are swift to adapt, slow to complain, open and willing to change. The task of modern governments is to ensure that our countries can rise to this challenge” (Blair, 2005).

In developing countries, economic liberalization refers more to liberalization on further ‘opening up’ of their respective economies to foreign capital and investment. Three of the fastest growing developing economies today; China, Brazil and India, have achieved rapid economic growth in the past several decades after they have ‘liberalized’ their economies to foreign capital. Many countries nowadays, particularly those in the third world, arguably have no choice but to also ‘liberalize’ their economies in order to remain competitive in attracting and retaining both their domestic and foreign investments.

In the Philippines of example, the contentious proposals for charter change include amending the economically restrictive provisions of their 1987 constitution. The total opposite of a liberalized economy would be North Korea’s economy with their closed and ‘self sufficient’ economic system. North Korea receives hundreds of

millions of dollars worth of aid from other countries in exchange for peace and restrictions in their nuclear programme. Another example would be oil rich countries such as Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, which see no need to further open up their economies to foreign capital and investments since their oil reserves already provide them with huge export earnings.

Privatization came on its heels and further changes were etched on the mindscape of the already changed landscape of the nation. Privatization is the incidence of transferring ownership of business from the public sector (government) to the private sector (business). In a broader sense, privatization refers to transfer of any government function to the private sector including governmental functions like revenue collection and law enforcement. The term 'Privatization' also has been used to describe two unrelated transactions. The first is a buyout, by the majority owner of all shares of a public corporation or holding company's stock, privatizing a publicly traded stock. The second is a demutualization of mutual organization or cooperative to form a joint stock company. The term was first used in the 1930s by *The Economist* in covering German economic policy.

Privatization is a direction for public policy which draws its inspiration from several different visions of a good society, justified by the normative theories. By far the most influential is the vision grounded in laissez-faire individualism and free market economics that promises greater efficiency, a smaller government and more individual choice if only we expand the domain of property rights and market forces. A second vision, rooted in a more socially minded conservative tradition, promises a return of power to communities through a greater reliance in social provision on

families, churches and other largely nonprofit institutions. Privatization, in this view means devolution of power from the state to ostensibly non political and non commercial forms of human association. Yet a third perspective sees privatization as a political strategy for diverting demands away from the state and thereby reducing government 'overload'. This last view, identified particularly with recent non conservative thought, does not necessarily conflict with the other two-- indeed; some advocates of privatization draw on all three-- but each vision suggest a different frame work for analysis and policy.

At the turn of the century, globalization became the buzz word. Globalization literally means the process of transformation of local or regional phenomena into global ones. It can be described as a process by which the people of the world are unified into a single society and function together. This process is a combination of economic, technological, socio-cultural and political forces. Globalization is often used to refer to economic globalization, that is, integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration and the spread of technology.

Tom G. Palmer of the Cato Institute defines globalization as the diminution or elimination of state enforced restriction on exchanges across borders and the increasingly integrated and complex global system of production and exchange that has emerged as a result. Thomas L. Friedman examines the impact of the 'flattening' trade of the globe, and argues that globalized trade, outsourcing, supply chaining, and political forces have changed the world permanently, for both better and worse. He also argues that the pace of globalization is quickening and will continue to have a

growing impact on business organization and practice. Noam Chomsky argues that the word globalization is also used, in a doctrinal sense, to describe the neo-liberal form of economic globalization. Herman E. Daly argues that sometimes the terms internationalization and globalization are used interchangeably but there is a slight formal difference. The term internationalization refers to the importance of international trade, relations, treaties etc. International means between or among nations.

Globalization helps in the growth of cross-cultural contacts. Cultural diffusion embodied by the adventures of new categories of consciousness and identities, the desire to increase one's standard of living and enjoys foreign products and ideas. Due to globalization people throughout the world adopt new technologies and practices, and participate in a 'world culture'. Some bemoan the resulting consumerism and loss of languages.

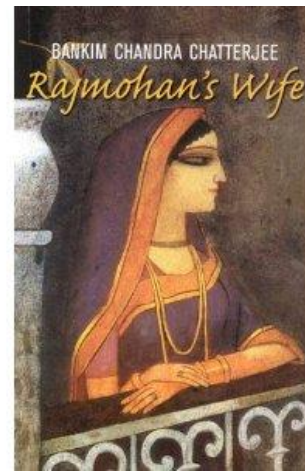
The impact of globalization has also been seen in the literary field. It can be traced with the reference of the locale; the language and technology have been used, foreign publishing houses etc after the 1991 economic reforms. But we will start from the very beginning of this genre in India till date and its influences on the society.

If we trace the broad spectrum of Indian writing in English right from the first novel, *Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1864), we can see how India figured as a subject in this novel. Whether it was Toru Dutt's *Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) or Sarojini Naidu's lyrics based on Radha and Govinda or Sri Aurobindo's *Kali, Laxmi, Durga, or Mother*, these novels explored India through the myriad forms of Indianness. Despite being written in English the writing variously

explored notions of Indianness through its people, its geography, its culture and its traditions. This is true even today and not only for Indians living in India but for those across the seas too, the homeland and its politics is the recurrent theme in imagining one's nation creatively. This perhaps is the way that Indian writers choose to self-position and self-validate themselves viz-a-viz their counterparts abroad. The sociology and the economy of their vast country inspired their imagination and continue to do so despite the fast changing literary scene.

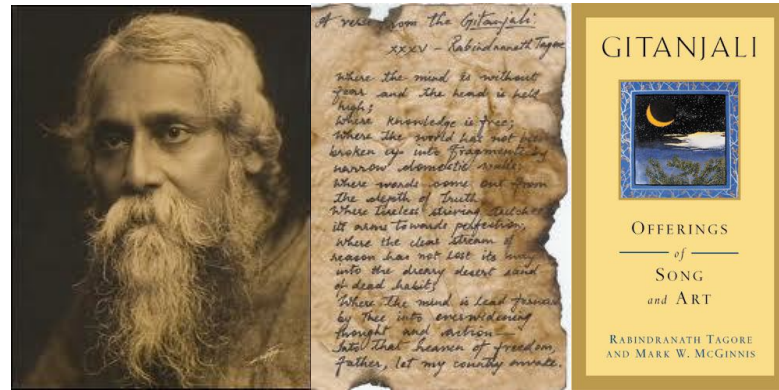


Bankim Chandra Chatterjee



Rajmohan's Wife

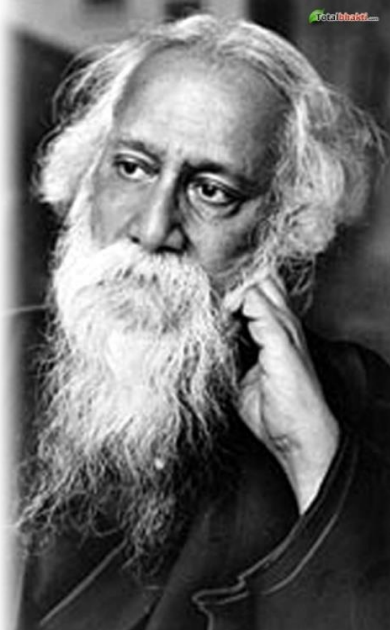
The canon of writing that emerged in the thirties and the forties including Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, later to be followed by Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Kamla Markandaya, Arun Joshi, and Ruskin Bond, all involved themselves with the historical legacy, the chronological changes and the culture's transition into a modern nation state. As sub text everyone used the impact of the western economies over which was positioned the Indian cultural dialectics. The resistance to one and the power of the other became an ongoing dialectics that persists even today.



Rabindranath Tagore

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
 Where knowledge is free
 Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
 By narrow domestic walls
 Where words come out from the depth of truth
 Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
 Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
 Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
 Where the mind is led forward by thee
 Into ever-widening thought and action
 Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake

www.totalbhakti.com



Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1912) was the first modern Indian text to be acknowledged in the West. It brought Indian writing to the eyes of the other world and since then the attention it has drawn has never abated, so much so that today we are storming across the barricades into a realm hitherto considered 'English.'

M.R. Anand through his first novel, *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and A Bud* (1937) opened up questions of caste and class and he continued to work through the endeavor to reconcile the village with progressive, urbanizing India. He grounded his work in social realism and infused Gandhism with explorations of tradition and modernity Raja Rao began with focusing on the Gandhian philosophy and non-violent resistance to the British occupation of India and later, also dwelt on the relationship between Indian and Western cultures. *Kanthapura* (1932) and *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) typify the two ends. *The Chess Master and his Moves* (1988) was his final way of projecting the ways of handling different identities. R.K Narayan's fictional territory Malgudi was the then location where Indianness thrived and which could later on in more advance times be taken as a Mumbai, a Kolkata or a Delhi and his bachelor of arts or painter of signs could well be the present day corporate and professionals. In these three stalwarts of early Indian writing in English one can easily get a glimpse of the polemics that was going to shape future writing in English. The genes of new millennium Indian writing in English were as evident as writing on the wall.

Moving on to Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, we are well into the seventies' and eighties' India, Indianness and its associated problematic. The scene largely shifts from the village (Malgudi, Kanthapura) to the urban cities, from the villagers to the modern middle class, from the traditional to the modern. These writers of the seventies and eighties explored the changing social consciousness which was the outcome of labor intensive industries, the manufacture of low priced goods, and its accompanied psychological changes. The religious piety and the

domestic virtues were receding, left behind in the earlier defining contexts. The sacred was losing its battle with the mundane. Though the White Sahebs had left, the *Kale Angrez* had taken over.

Come the nineties and the literary scene underwent a sea-change. As India opened markets to foreign trade, it embarked on a path that has led it to where it is now. It provided the necessary impetus to the commercial acumen of Indians. Added to this was a 'sense of vision, a belief in themselves' and they became "exceptionally nimble in seizing the right business opportunities" (Varma, 2007, xxii). Arundhati Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997) embodies this shift and itself inaugurates an era of Bookers, Commonwealth, Grammy and Oscars. We can now put our 'Thums Up', be the 'Gold Spots' ('India Shining') and 'Coca-Cola' the world with our 'Pepsi'. Alongside the 'India Shining' with its globalized capitalism, its upwardly mobile professional classes, its new leisure sites and practices it is also 'India Rising' and shedding its old persona, a more heterogeneous new middle class that has surfed the weaves of economic liberalization and has done well for itself. So well that it can now flaunt its well-being in the face of millions of poor friends and neighbors.

This briefly sums up the chronology of major changes in the history of India well into the new millennium. Literature has always been alluded to as the mirror of the society which reflects the diversity of life. The larger events in which individual players enact their single lives are fashioned with passion into a consistent narrative. The passions of the author/narrator and the actions of the protagonist/societal being are nuanced together and organized into a significant discourse that projects the whole

through the parts. Like fiction being written through the ages, the Indian novel, in different regional languages and in English, is no exception. A large canon of Indian writing in English today epitomizes New India, it demonstrates marked departures in writing in English often in genre, form and voices *Q&A* (Swarup, 2005), *Five Point Someone* (Bhagat, 2004), *Two States* (Bhagat, 2009) caused a great commotion as their 'young India' narrative took its audience in new and challenging directions. Now, the plots are set in metropolitan cities with their spate of advertising media and journalism and the protagonists are professionals with a new life style and craving for new opportunities. These confirm to an India that is changing both socially and culturally.

In the earlier Nehruvian model of Indian nation building, the "old" middle class was made up of government workers who served the nation by working for it. In a globalized model of the Indian nation, the middle class engages in a global economy of work and consumption, serving the nation by, ironically enough, directing itself away from it. (Radhakrishnan, 2011, 42)

Just one look at the new fiction will point towards new India.

Looking through the rear view mirror one can see that the Indian novelist never approved of the 'Art for Art's Sake' hypothesis, his inspiration stemmed from what was and this he made his 'is' for his creative work. Man becoming the measure of all things. It was more the Victorian concerns that took the upper hand in his novels - the Dickensian realism, the Hardyian regionalism, and the morality of Jane Austen superseded the more abstract concerns. And perhaps, it is this that has stayed as the essential Indianness in novelists even in the new millennium. A combination of regional realism with a backdrop of how morality is being flayed by the new insurgent global practices is what we read in the fiction of today. The commitment to a cause or

a catharsis through narration is now not the thrust which has shifted to presenting slices of the country with slivers of activities that has been generated by the circumstances of the times. These slices often are macrocosmic and the slivers the worms eye view of what is festering under the becoming garb of 'India Shining'. The social protest of Mulk Raj Anand, the distress that R.K. Narayan felt when the world of evil overtook the good or the inhumanity that Bhabhani Bhattacharya tried to expose through the depiction of merciless hoarders, profiteers and black marketers does not ring through the writing of today. Yes, corruption, evil and inhumanity are writ large across every page, but the concern is not with the 'why' it has come to be or the 'how' it can be resolved. It is there, has come to stay, for better or for good and it is the 'what' that makes modern India. It is in the description of the 'what' that the writer's narrative moves.

This is not to say that literature has taken over the concerns of historical or sociological writing, it is still literature because it psychologically penetrates into the minds of its protagonists and lays bare their souls in crisis. The novel is not dead but has changed its mode into a more journalistic endeavor taking off from the dozens of 24x7 news channels summing up what India is. The snippets are brief and their impact transitory. It is the expansion of this pan-Indic experience that the writers of today bringing to the readers. If the national news can thrive on rape, murders, scams and terror why can the novels not become a part of this nationalistic endeavor of laying bare the seething, teeming panorama of the India that has come to be? One look at the newspapers and TV news of a couple of decades ago is enough to say where we have moved into and similarly a few pages from the novels of the past and the present is sufficient proof of the miles traveled ahead.

Chetan Bhagat is the present iconic writer who is churning out bestsellers one after the other, consistently engineering successful books by crafting stories that strike a chord in his target audience. His skills are different from those of a Mulk Raj Anand or an R.K. Narayan or even those of a Milan Kundera who are densely literary and yet he is a greater success story who has used language that does not tax comprehension and fits in with the general scenario around. His revolutionary novel *Five Point Someone* (2004) has reshaped the entire literary canon. He has captured the voice of an entire generation in his *One Night @ Call Centre* (2005). His novel, which sold 1,00,000 copies in a single month, and this in a country where the best – seller threshold is 5,000, is set in the world of the call centre, wherever growing legions of well educated urban Indians waste their talent and knowledge. The locale is real life Gurgaon, a satellite town lying 35km south of Delhi, where gargantuan shopping malls and call centers herald the Indian version of the twenty first century. But Bhagat, himself formally active in the IT field, denounces this new lifestyle as a kind of decolonization of his country only this time, it operates not by means of violence, but instead by exploiting bodily desires. In stylistic terms, Bhagat's novel is conspicuous for its use of colloquial English, the true lingua franca of the urban middle classes, and for its renunciation of the type of elaborate diction associated with the works of many Anglo-Indian authors. It may well be that novels such as *One Night @ Call Centre* (2005) are less concerned with literariness as such and far more with the possibilities of identification. For, India's younger urban populations in particular are exposed to enormous social mutations. Increasing numbers of call centers are hiring full time psychologists as the parallel existences of their employees – here global lifestyle, there traditional social roles – is

taking a psychic toll. So called "chick lit" – stories of young, single professional women, or Indian Bridget Joneses – has begun to circulate on the market. As reading material goes, it is distinctly lighter fare. Still, the social displacements articulated therein do weigh heavily. Gone are the Big three – Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan – who distilled the polemics of their times to produce rooted Indian literature; gone are also the post independence writers who struggled against the British legacy and the colonial hangover attempting to 'Indianize' Indian literature written in English. The time has come of writers between the ages twenty five and thirty five years, fluent in English, professionally educated and trained who have access to a wider world at a mouse click and who are at home within the most divergent cultures. It is these who are depicting the inter-cultural world in their writing. One thing is obvious that they are rooted in India to an astonishing degree but they can still connect with the new and the innovative in surprising ways. However their writing is also localized in the sense that they make their lived world their microcosm and their individual towns and cities their macrocosms that govern their mindset. It is Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata that becomes their backdrop from where they foreground the inner quandaries of the young urbanities who find themselves caught between restrictive parochialism and enlightening globalization. They tell the stories of their own lives hinging on themselves and the milieu around them. These are not tales of the past generations, of the throes that India went through or what it is shaping into-desirable or undesirable. Their stories are, however, grounded in the biography of the city, in how life is going on, in how one can fight ones way up, the top being the desired goal.

The differentiation of lived experience is accompanied by a corresponding differentiation on the book market – a reliable index of the growing professionalism of the business as a whole. New genres are conquering the market – the comic book, and especially the fantasy and science fiction genres. And Samit Basu, born in 1979 and currently a resident of Delhi, has certainly performed a service by providing Indian literature with its first fantasy novel, *The Simoqin Prophecies* (2004). Here, we find an arresting and innovative mélange of myths new and old, Indian fables and Western pop culture, the *Mahabharata* and James Bond.

All in all, a new level of freedom is in evidence. This is also confirmed by 34 year old literature critic Nilanjana Roy, also a resident of Delhi, who has followed the development of Indian English language literature for years. This freedom, she emphasizes, can only mean that prior obligations to specifically "Indian" content have ceased to apply: "I'm delighted to see that today's authors, at long last, are writing out of a sense of freedom that they're doing exactly as they please. They can live in India and write about Bulgaria. They can write about their own world, and in which Bob Dylan and jazz are just as prominent as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Bollywood songs.

What the readers seem to want is something short, snappy and affordable, says Shobha De, something one can read waiting for a doctor or awaiting a delayed flight – *Fish in Paneer Soup* – not a meal take away but a book one can snack one's mind on, says Anuradha Varma

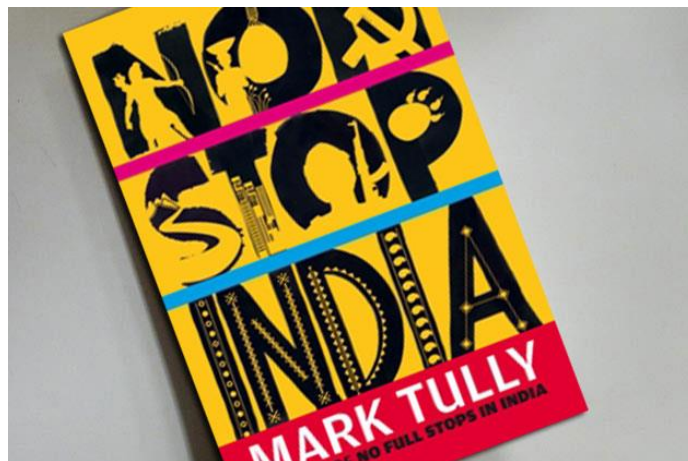
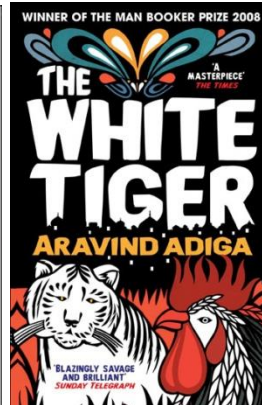
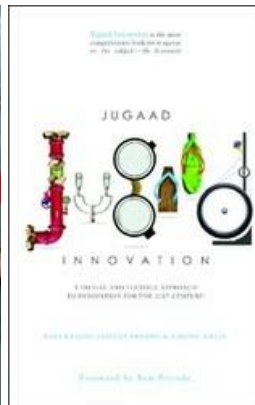
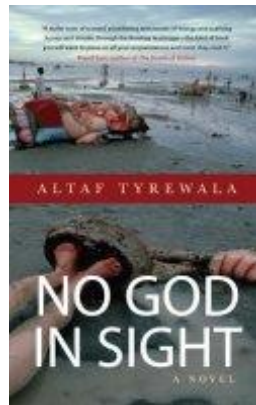
From office politics to teen chick-lit and urban angst, these books are often less than 200 pages between the covers priced between Rs. 95 and Rs. 250 and written by authors drawn from the very readers they aim at – college students and those starting their careers. Interestingly, they are brought out by leading publishing houses that have caught on to the

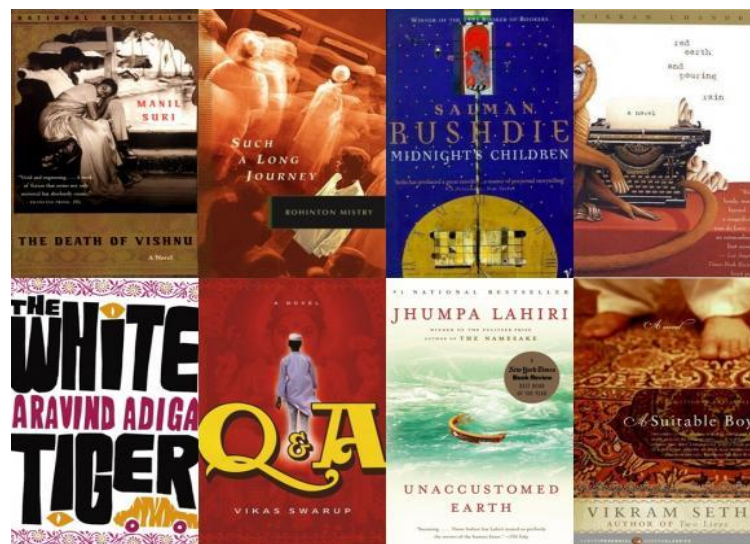
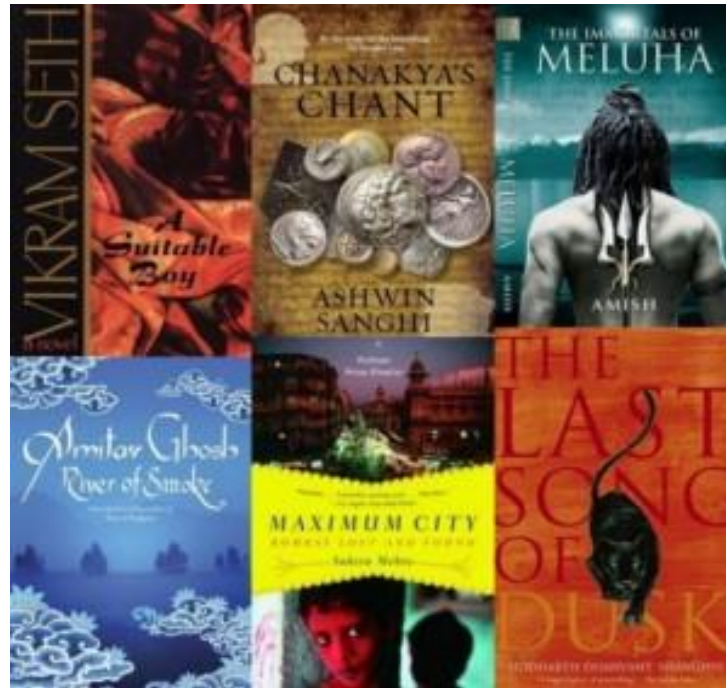
market survey catering to the young and restless with attention spans to match (Varma, 2011).

Vaishali Mathur, the senior commissioning editor at Penguin books India which has launched *Metro Reads* justifies the direction which writing in the new millennium must take. She says

For the reader who travels around, has a shortage of time and doesn't have the patience to lug around heavy books, we have these books that have a good, gripping storyline and accessible stories that they can read in their everyday lives (Varma).

These books are popular because the stories are very close to the target readers and the characters are very relatable. Of course, the word within literary circuits is that writing like Chetan Bhagat's isn't really literature but the word on the street says otherwise and it is the latter that have made a difference in the way the new millennium novels work. Chetan Bhagat in an interview to Swati Daftaur says that “the real middle class India that has been looking for a voice i.e. its very own response more actively to the novels that he writes. He acknowledges that if ask to write that J.K. Rowling’s he would be at a loss but then ‘J.K. Rowling couldn't write about IITs’” (Daftaur, 2012). What is important today is that one is able to relate to the larger readership which is the youth and it should be in a language that India talks and about situations that the young India acosts in everyday walk of life so we have *Love Over Coffee* (2011), *Losing My Virginity and other Dumb Ideas* (2011), *Boots, Belts, Berets* (2008).





My name is Douglas Misquita and I'm an action-thriller writer from **India** ...



William Dalrymple



Literature Festivals take **India** by Storm

Yet this is not the whole story about Indian English Literature in the new millennium. The other side is the books talked about and advocated for in the new literary phenomenon's Lit for Life and The Jaipur Literary Festival which have beautifully catered to Salman Rushdie, U.R. Ananthamurthy, and Keki Daruwalla on the one hand and made the presence of newer writers like Aravind Adiga, Advaita Kala, Daljit Nagra, Rana Das Gupta felt. In their reason for instituting the 'Hindu Literary Prize' it is said:

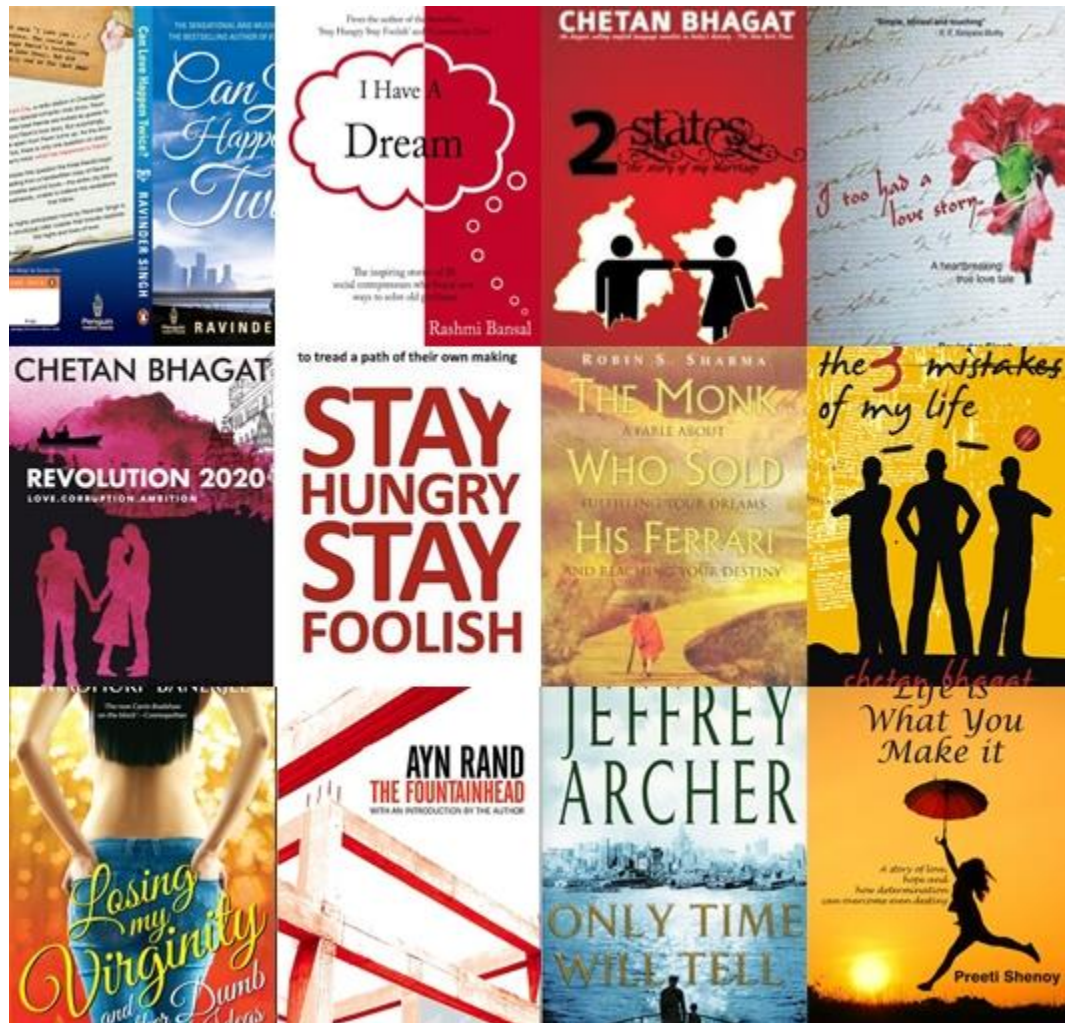
To celebrate the best of Indian writing in English; Around 130 nominations – novels and short story collections both in English and those translated from other Indian languages, published between June 2010 and June 2011, were received (*The Hindu*, 2011).

They argue that for a long time, when one spoke of literature, the references were mainly to foreign writers. As children, the majority read Enid Blyton, Billy Bunter and the like. Classics meant Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, and George Eliot. Some American and European writers too figured in this mix: Mark Twain, Tolstoy, Hemingway, and Dostoevsky etc. But where were the Indian writers? Of course one hears of Tagore and reads an odd poem by Sarojini Naidu in the English textbook, but on the whole one knew more about authors from other countries than about those from India.

It took a while before Indian writers made their appearance on centre stage. Writers in Indian languages had always been popular but they were known only in their respective states. As Indian writing in English began to gain prominence, the Indian publishing industry also began to grow. And this led to literature gaining more prominence in the media, especially newspapers.

As a result the Indian readership has never headed so good before. From best sellers to theatre to poetry to serious fiction, the world has opened up and

much of what has happened in the two *Melas* is what literature of the new millennium is all about.



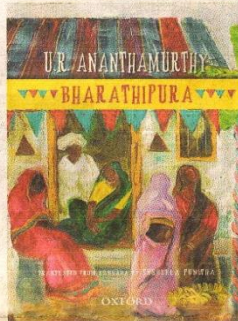
THE HINDU LITERARY PRIZE FOR BEST FICTION 2011: THE SHORTLIST

Seven that stood out

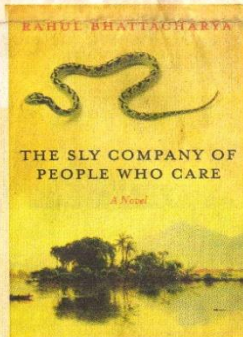
Here they are (in alphabetical order), some of the best books published in India over the last one year in English... The gruelling process of reading the books and interacting across continents began in June and culminated at the Lit for Life conclave in New Delhi on September 25, where Manu Joseph announced the shortlist. Announcing The Hindu Literary Prize for Best Fiction 2011 shortlist...



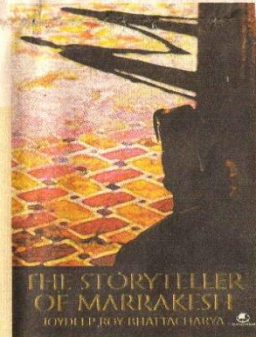
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THE HINDU
LITERARY PRIZE 



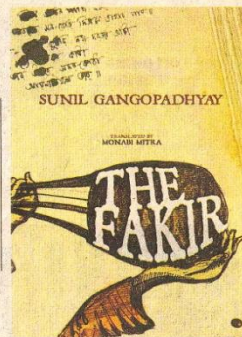
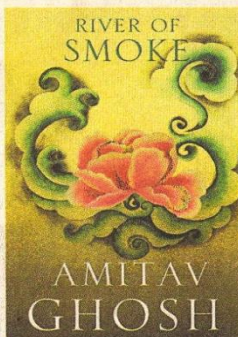
The Sly Company of People who Care, Rahul Bhattacharya, Picador



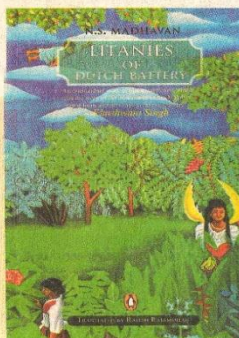
The Storyteller of Marrakesh, Joydeep Bhattacharya, Tranquebar



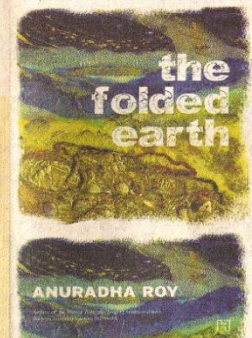
River of Smoke, Amitav Ghosh, Penguin.
PHOTO: DAYANITA SINGH



The Fakir, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Harper Perennial.



Litanies of Dutch Battery, N.S. Madhavan, Penguin



The Folded Earth, Anuradha Roy, Hachette

2 LITERARY REVIEW

DELHI
THE HINDU • SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2011

THE HINDU LIT FOR LIFE

Literary extravaganza

From food to films to politics and revolutions to bestsellers, Lit for Life, presented by Hirco, in New Delhi had something for everyone.

HIMANSHU BHAGAT



LOOKING AHEAD TO A LITERARY FEAST: At the inauguration.

A clear September Sunday morning at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi saw the organisers, panellists and attendees congregate for The Hindu Lit for Life presented by Hirco. Organised to mark the 20th anniversary of the launch of *The Hindu Literary Review*, the festival will also host the award ceremony of the annual Hindu Literary Prize in Chennai.

The day began at the Stein Auditorium lawns with a buffet breakfast — Chef Nikhil Chib was at hand serving egg-cheese and ham open sandwiches. Chib, a one-time Wall Street investment banker, runs the popular Busaba chain of restaurants in Mumbai. Post breakfast, he accompanied the crowd to the Stein Auditorium to weigh in on matters of food in the first conversation of the day, titled 'Are You Really Going to Eat That?'

Asparagus versus bathua

Writer Esther David moderated a spirited discussion on what we should eat, what our grandparents and forefathers ate, and why the big, ongoing changes in our food habits are not necessarily such a great thing. Nikhil Chib noted that the "Indian-Conti-Chinese" fare of the pre-liberalisation era has now been replaced by Thai, Japanese and Italian. "Are we going to become slaves to Araguilar?" asked Manu Chandra, an executive chef at the upscale Olive chain of restaurants in Mumbai and Bengaluru. There is, of course, a high likelihood that the aromatic salad leaf popular in Italian cuisine features in his restaurants' menu.

The dominant note was one of caution, of not letting go of traditional food and cooking habits. "Why do we prefer asparagus over bathua (the local spinach-like leafy green)," Chandra continued in the same vein. He then looked at the audience and challenged it. "How many people in this room eat bathua?" A respectable number of hands — say about twenty-five — went up, and Chandra seemed a little mollified.

David spoke fondly of the famous Bhatyar Galli in her native Ahmedabad, famous for its biryani and other non-vegetarian "mughlai" dishes that are part of a 600-year-old culinary tradition.

Ways to kiss and kill

Served up next was an appetizing conversation on the literary equivalent of fast food — popular fiction. What makes a book popular, asked moderator Angela Saini, the London-based science reporter and author of *Geek Nation*, an acclaimed book on scientists in India. Mukul Deva, author of many fast-paced thrillers, was ready with the answer: good setting, pace, good guy, bad guy and a woman. Anuja Chauhan, author of the bestselling *The Zoya Factor*, countered that a fixed formula was a recipe for boring books, but admitted to one guiding rule that she tries to adhere to — that every page in her book should have one "sparkling bit", be it humour or romance or something else. The challenge for the writer, she said, was to present the familiar in a fresh way. "After all, there are only so many ways in which you can kiss someone," said Chauhan. Deva had earlier made a similar point about writing thrillers, pointing out that there are only so many ways in which you could kill someone.

Pigeons, gol appaps and Mig 21

"I am a bad reader. I am ignorant. There is [in me] the darkness of not reading. But I like to listen a lot." Not the words you expect to hear at a literary festival but then filmmaker Rakesh Omprakash Mehra won over the packed audience with his straight talking. Film writer and journalist Jai Arjun Singh seemed to have picked the thread from the previous panel when he quizzed Mehra about the new wave in Indian cinema — which includes his hit film 'Rang De Basanti' — that has bridged the old divide between "popular" and "serious" films.

"I was born and brought up in Old Delhi; I would fly kites; play with pigeons, and have the best gol gappas in the world. In our school we had a Mig 21 in the compound that fascinated us, and during the Mandal agitation we went to protest at AIIMS," Mehra said. These vignettes all figure in his films.

Bismillah

Aman Sethi, who covers the Maoist insurgency in Chattisgarh for *The Hindu*, talked about the Arab Spring and the conflict in

Afghanistan with the Yemeni novelist Ali Al Muqri, the Israeli playwright Motti Lerner and Afghanistan-based radio broadcaster and imam John Mohammad Butt. Al Muqri introduced himself by recalling an old India connection — how he would skip school as a boy in Yemen to go watch Hindi movies.

But — a former hippie who arrived from England in 1969 and decided to embrace Islam and stay on — narrated a joke: An old Afghan man was stopped at a security check post and told that he will have to disrobe and be frisked. He protested against having to suffer this indignity, but was told that no one involved had any choice in the matter — he'll just have to comply. Resigned, he untied his robe, parted it with both hands, and remembered God, uttering the word "Bismillah". Immediately, everyone scattered and scrambled away from him. Amazed, he wondered what he had done. People told him that they ran away because they thought he was a suicide-bomber. Butt said that for Afghans reeling under 30 years of war, this joke was a coping mechanism: a way to talk about taboo topics such as suicide-bombing.

Surreal Delhi

Matching the surreal state of wartime Afghanistan was Aman Sethi's account of biometric identification of beggars in Delhi. Sethi was moderating the discussion about the relative merits of fiction and non-fiction in presenting reality along with two Delhi novelists — author Rana Dasgupta and writer and journalist Indrajit Hazra. "Beggars in Delhi," Sethi said, are often caught by the police and hauled off to something called the "beggars court"; their thumbprints are then scanned and filed for future reference, except that, as Sethi discovered, there was no mechanism to retrieve the digitally scanned thumbprints — the whole exercise was essentially pointless.

Inspired at twelve

Both playwright Mahesh Dattani and Sanjya Kapoor, who runs the iconic Frithvi Theatre in Mumbai, recollected formative experiences from when they were 12 years old — experiences that nudged them towards a career in theatre. Kapoor recounted driving around Ireland with her grandparents — her grandfather was the actor-manager Geoffrey Kendal — in a blue Citroen car and performing different bits of Shakespeare in schools. "I would play Titania to my grandfather's Oberon, and was falling in love with him!" she recalled fondly. Dattani contrasted Kapoor's rich family legacy in theatre with his own childhood, growing up in a Gujarati business family in Bengaluru. When he was 12, the family went to watch a Gujarati 'whoduni' play — there was continuous chattering among the audience in the foyer, which carried over inside the theatre and continued well after the play began. "Then there was a gun produced onstage and there was pin-drop silence," he recalled. "It was mesmerised; it shut up 500 Gujaratis!" It was a valuable lesson in the power of theatre.

The concluding session saw the young Member of Parliament Sachin Pilot and veteran CPM leader Sitarum Yechury take hard questions on politics after Anna Hazare from Siddharth Varadarajan, editor of *The Hindu*, and then face even harder queries from the audience. Rounding off the day were three short Bharatnatyam pieces performed by Alamel Valli — the audience was rapt and mesmerised. Spotted in the darkened hall was Ali Al Muqri, receiving every bit of the raptal on his small mobile phone camera.

And then came the much anticipated finale — the announcement of the shortlist for *The Hindu Literary Prize for Best Fiction 2011*. Three of the five judges were present — writer Mridula Garg, the poet K. Satchidanandan and academic Brinda Bose — along with Manu Joseph, editor of the *Open Magazine*, and winner of *The Hindu Best Fiction Award 2010* for his novel *Serious Men*. Garg explained the process by which they had chosen the seven shortlisted titles out of a total of 125 books that they read between them.

The day had something for everyone, from food to politics to films to the straightforward suspense over the shortlist announcement. If one day can pack in so much, one can't wait to see what the two-day concluding session in Chennai on October 29-30 would throw up. Get ready for some scintillating stuff and be there...



EATING ALL THAT: Nikhil Chib prepares a special dish



TALKING FOOD: Manu Chandra, Nikhil Chib, Jigyasa Giri and Esther David



INSPIRED BY LIFE: Rakesh Omprakash Mehra and Jai Arjun Singh



ACCOUNTABILITY CUTS BOTH WAYS: Sitarum Yechury, Sachin Pilot and Siddharth Varadarajan



OF VITAL PUBLIC SPACES: Sanjya Kapoor and Mahesh Dattani



OF COUNTRIES IN TRANSITION: Aman Sethi, John Mohammed Butt, Motti Lerner and Ali Al Muqri



FOLLOWING A FORMULA: Angela Saini, Mukul Deva and Anuja Chauhan



THE REACH OF REPRESENTATION: Rana Dasgupta with Indrajit Hazra.



MAN OF THE MOMENT: Manu Joseph with the judges Brinda Bose, Mridula Garg and T. Satchidanandan



SPELLBINDING: Alamel Valli.

PHOTOS: RAJEEV BHATT AND R.V. MOORTHY



Nirmala Lakshman, Director, *The Hindu* presents a *Rado* watch to Rakesh Omprakash Mehra; a section of the audience.

The habitable world has grown larger and paradoxically the people across the world are coming closer – the cliché 'A global village' fits in squarely with the demographic dialectics of today. Transnational movements have compressed spaces but enlarged mindsets so that acceptability is now being negotiated much more easily both politically and culturally. As a result, New York finds a place in all big cities of the world and an India exists in all the big cities of the world; McDonalds and Starbucks are cosmopolitan brand names as Levi's and Panasonic are and *samosas* and *dosas* have travelled into the farthest corners of the world. When an Indian writer writes about 'the *Bindi*' and 'the *saree*' he does not need to gloss it over and neither does a British writer explain Big Ben or Yorkshire pudding. What all this leads up to is that now the world is fast becoming a single chronotope and its synchronicity is largely accepted. That is to say that just like walking down the Janpath in New Delhi one finds all kinds and creeds, all fashions and foods clubbed together into a harmonious whole and no eyebrows are raised, similarly writing from different parts of the world address to certain common postulates. This is the truth about our present times and this is what is being represented in the fiction of our day.

Indian Writing in English, a regional subgenre of the larger enterprise 'fiction' is no exception. Its locales, its ethos, its very being has been redefined by the concepts of the new millennium. It is 'English' which joins it to other fiction being written in the language and it is 'Indian' that gives it a distinct aura of its own. Travelling down the timeline through the fiction of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan to the present days of Amitav Ghosh, Mukul Keshvan one can see the changes in both the themes and the narration. Earlier, Indian writing

was insular, parochial and the structuring was linear, conservative. Now, the themes are cosmopolitan, diversified and the narration proliferated, fractured. Whereas the protagonists then belonged to the rural ambience, since India was largely an agricultural country, today the scenes have shifted to the urban, the metropolitan.

Even a cursory stroll through a bookstore or a passing glance at the kiosks that line the pavements in big bazaars, it is evident that there has been a market boom of new literature, especially that written by young writers. Simultaneously along with this publishing enterprise there is an accompanied emergence of literary platforms where this literature can be voiced from and an upsurge of audience who can take cognizance of it. This makes for a thrilling time for all things literary – what with the book festivals, literary awards and prizes gaining currency by the day. The excitement is obvious with the increased opportunities of speaking with writers, publishers and literary critics. Since, the cream of young talent makes its way into the IT industry, the young Turks are buzzing to using their imaginary and entrepreneurial skills in making name and fame through this new avenue that has opened up.

What has added fuel to this creative fire is the enormous upheaval in the country centered on an explosion in the field of information and communication technologies. This has indirectly given rise to a large and consumer oriented middle class with an unprecedented purchasing power. Also, this has triggered the acceptance of English as the Indian language that can help one participate in the global market and those writing in it consider themselves as cultural ambassadors of India who can present to the world a new picture of the sub-continent.

The scene of new millennium Indian Writing in English is truly polyphonic. There is fiction written about the politics (The Emergency, Maoist Rebellion, Terrorism), about the wealthy New India with glories of the corporate world, Chick lit, Crick lit, call center narratives, fantasy and vignettes. But what gives it a unifying identity is that they all interrogate questions of Indianness: what it is to be an Indian, where is real India, what has India left behind and what it is looking forward to- the discursive ways of shaping and forming identities of being Indian in New India. The other unifying thread is the language, English, not the English English but English Vinglish and Hinglish. As Sadana says

This way of reading texts, focusing on place and linguistic context, illuminates a process of indigenization of the English language itself. And it is this process that tells us something essential not only about society and politics, but about the creative process and impulse itself. What is required, therefore, is a new politics of reading Indian English literature that is grounded in the very languages that it seeks to represent, and most centrally, that English itself has become (Sadana, 2009, 15).

The locales are not the old battle fields of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, they are thronging, over populated, urban spaces where many generations, many castes, creeds, classes, rub shoulders in their everyday work life; the heroes/protagonists are not of the Aristotelian brand, warriors, princes, *avtars* and *Maryada Purushottams* but the average Indian trying to fend for themselves, wend their way to the top.

Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City* (2004) is a novel that represents one foci of the new millennium writing-the interface of divergent strands of the Indian global impetus.

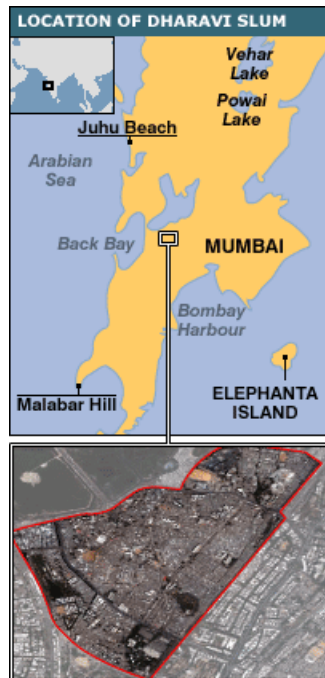
As Vyjayanthi Rao puts it

How does a city like Bombay become a subject of writing? Increasingly, the city's dystopic qualities are becoming the focus of a number of analyzes informing prophecies about cities of the future and the future of cities. The quintessential modernity of nineteenth and early twentieth century metropolises such as New York, London or Paris have ceased to define the contemporary telos of modernity in the world of urban studies and reflection. Instead, places like Mumbai, Lagos and Dubai are increasingly beginning to define the terminal conditions of modernity. This tendency is not without serious problems. More often than not, the idea of the city, of modernity and of the injustices materially embodied by the conditions of these places is tied to their colonial and neo-colonial histories and to their place within empires, old and new. In writings about such places, including Mumbai, heroic tales of survival and social movements seeking redemptive and distributive justice compete with stories about abjection and hopelessness and visions of coming anarchy and violence (Rao, 2005).

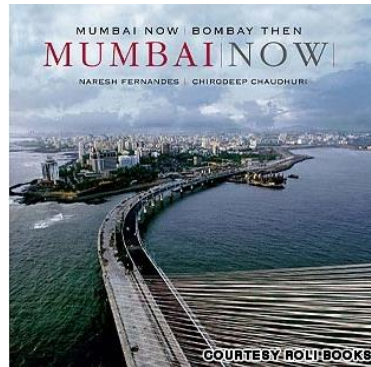
It is Bombay that he writes about, "the biggest, fattest, richest city in India" (MC, 18), the country's commercial, financial and entertainment hub. It is not just a city but rather a nation state and Suketu Mehta journeys its length and breadth finding stories in its crevices and corners and he seems to be data collector, a fact finder, a story gatherer and an architect of tales. His format is to take up major aspects and dominant personalities in the city and give them each a detailed and richly woven emphasis. From investigating its endless and often horrific underbelly where poverty, crime, conflict and the mafia survives. He includes the beauty and the affluence of the city as well. So, we have an array of gangsters, policemen, bar girls, slum dwellers and the elite, avante garde as well. Through the curly cues and byways of this meandering city he paints a picture of light and shadow, an insider and outsider.



Mumbai



Zara hat ke zara bach ke, yeh hai Bombay meri jaan- Lines of the famous song from the movie C.I.D(1956)



Sea of People



Marine Drive



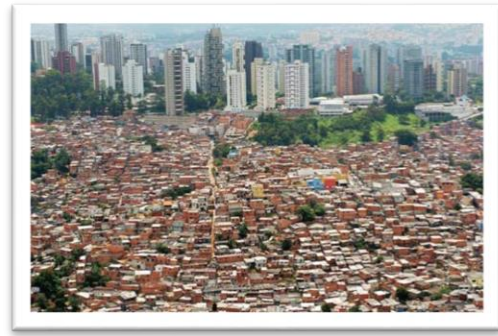
Malabar Hill



Mumbai



Cuff Parade, South Mumbai



Mumbai Slum

As a literary subject, Bombay first became available to a global audience through the success and notoriety of Salman Rushdie, whose novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) evocatively captured the rhythms and flows of the city of his birth. Subsequently, in his infamous *Satanic Verses* (1988), Bombay's film world was immortalized. Published nearly a quarter century after *Midnight's Children* *Maximum City: Bombay Lost & Found*, by New York-based writer Suketu Mehta recaptures a global stage for Bombay in much the same, powerful way as the former work. But works are literary events, which perform the task of locating a particular city on the world map in two historically distinct moments. If Rushdie's book is an artifact of the post-colonial moment in world cultural history, Mehta's *Maximum City*, appears in a global moment. This is a moment characterized by a great deal of uncertainty, especially regarding borders and the functions they perform in differentiating citizens and others in a world of multiple and fractured identities. Yet, as Chris Anderson, editor of the popular technology magazine *Wired* writes in his blog, although Bombay has become an obligatory stop on the itinerary of global CEOs, it is also the place that the foreign correspondent can still experience a foreign. For Anderson, as for many others, *Maximum City* serves as an evocative gateway to understanding the foreignness of Bombay.

The book chronicles, in three parts (respectively titled “Power”, “Pleasure” and “Passages”), the writer’s journey back to the city in which he grew up as a child before his family migrated to the US. It identifies a whole set of ‘Bombay types,’ characters associated in a special way with the world of Bombay through literature, journalism and especially cinema. Mehta spent several years meeting, interviewing and befriending these characters as part of his research for the book which is an arrangement of their stories into a powerful and evocative meta-narrative of how the city got to its present condition. The film directors, actors, hit-men, cops, dancing girls, small time thugs, slum-dwellers, diamond merchants and newly minted home owners whose stories are vividly recounted by Mehta all constitute, in some sense, the stereotypical characters that make up the city’s imaginary architecture. Their stories recount the contemporary history of the city, in particular its journey from ‘Bombay’ to ‘Mumbai’, the city’s official name since 1996. The name ‘Mumbai’ was bestowed upon the city as an act of regionalist and exclusionary assertion by a local political party, the Shiva Sena, during the period that it governed the state of Maharashtra.

This nomenclatural transformation happens during a particularly anxious period of the nation’s and the city’s history, during a phase of economic and cultural liberalization. The remaining of Bombay has become an almost conventional trope for thinking through particular issues such as violence, decosmopolitanization, and new formations of the public and new civic arrangements. This is, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Post-Colonial Bombay* (Hansen, 2002). The journey from “Bombay” to “Mumbai” is a central theme in recent writings on Bombay and should be read as shorthand for a search to find an appropriate set of conceptual categories to describe the city. In a sense, Bombay emerges as a real subject of research only after the particularly bloody period in its recent history in which the city was the stage for some of the worst communal riots in post- independence India. These riots form the backdrop of *Maximum*

City and permeate its exploration of criminality and violence as the dominant tropes for understanding the masculine cultures of the city.

Before the global success of *Maximum City*, these questions would have been, in some sense, limited to specialists and experts. Although the book is classified as ‘travel writing’, the ethnographic atmosphere it creates are important reasons to take it at least as a point of departure for raising the sorts of questions that Bombay-Mumbai prompts us to ask as an anthropologist. These questions have to do with the limits of generalization when speaking from a particular location, and with what lends a location its particularity.

The book begins with Mehta's longing to rediscover his lost ‘personal geography’. He returns to Bombay after about twenty years to trace the changes in the city he has left behind. And the changes are truly sweeping. The changes which seem to be sweeping seem to one to be so when one view them after many years. Yet one barely seems to notice it when it happens around us, as part of one’s daily life. It can be testified to this from personal experience, having lived in Malleshwaram for more than twenty-five years and now located twenty-five kilometers away from it. Each time one visit Malleshwaran – once a month – one sees a new change, which seems striking. Mehta is more shocked, nay *angered* by the changes that have taken place: his anger is rooted in the cultural, racial and political aspects of the change. The ‘ghatis’ – a derogatory term applied to the local Maharashtrians – in his view, have taken over the cultured neighborhoods in which he and people of his standing have lived.

In this book, the author is not a distant spectator, but gets involved with the characters in the book. He gets involved with the characters in the book and becomes a character himself. One can imagine how difficult it must have been for him to write his book. When one keeps meeting characters as varied as prostitutes, beer bar girls, and hardcore gangsters, day in and day out, the encounters don't fail to play emotional havoc

with you. As an instance you may end up empathizing and sharing for example, a murder's conviction. This reminds me of Nietzsche who said, "When fighting with monsters, take care lest you end up becoming a monster yourself" (Sandeep, 2005).

The book is divided into several major sections, each focusing on distinct and unique aspects of Bombay: Shiva Sena, Bollywood, the Mumbai police, the underworld, prostitution and spirituality. These exist in any big city but what distinguishes them from other cities is their uniqueness found only in Bombay. Suketu Mehta confirms certain widely – held myths and shatters certain other. For example, one didn't know that one of the major contributing factors to Bombay's urban crowdedness in the result of the misdeeds of a handful of powerful builders – the Rahejas are just one of them – who thwarted a well-thought plan to improve Bombay by expanding housing settlements to the West. Also the fact that several "sharp shooters" of the underworld often change allegiances from this don to that only for cash, and not out of loyalty or conviction. Or the fact Sanjay Dutt's character comes across as nothing more than a frightened school boy who likes to identify with the "tough guys" in the hope that they'll protect him from other tough guys/bullies. Mehta traces this attribute to Dutt's experiences as a school going boy who used to routinely get beaten by teachers and bullies by his classmates. Hence his fascination with the dons, his passions for guns and his obsession with bodybuilding, as the author remarks, Sanjay "was built like a brontosaurus" (Sandeep, 2005).

A considerable part of the book is spent on the life of the people living in slums where the most basic amenities are considered as luxuries. He realizes that the outdated Bombay Rent Act and a complete lack of political will to be the biggest reasons for the permanent existence of the slums. In those slums he meets with a lot of interesting characters like the Shiva Sainik who admits to have passionately killed Muslims during

the 1992 riots himself at the order of his bosses but is still roaming free and runs a hugely profitable business and by the help of whom he goes on to meet Bal Thackeray, who the author terms as "the one man mostly directly responsible for ruining the city I grew up in" (MC, 105). Then there are some Muslim youth who joined the underworld after the riots and are employed by the dons to perform extortions and murders which the boys carry out remorselessly. Their bosses are the same people who plotted the serial blasts that rocked the city in 1992 and which was touted as a revenge on the Hindus by the Muslim dons. Suketu even has a conversation with Chhota Shakeel on the phone where Shakeel becomes astonishingly patriotic and tells him "I always wanted to do something good for my country" (MC, 263) Then he meets a hard working and upcoming software engineer who despite sharing his single bedroom house with five other adult family members works hard and aspires to make a career for himself in the US.





He dedicates a lot of time on the Bombay Police which is called "Second only to the Scotland Yard" and chronicles the life of an honest IPS officer who despite facing threats and obstacles on a daily basis goes about his job commendably well. The most interesting part of the story though is where the nightlife of Bombay brought alive by numerous Dance bars is depicted. The author comes across a top notch bar dancer barely out of her teens yet with more than a couple of suicide attempts to her credit. Then there is another dancer who is actually a man but every evening dresses up as a woman with help from (believe it or not) his own wife. Then there are the people who frequent these

bars with ages ranging from the early twenties to late fifties and who spend exorbitant amount of money on these dancing girls.



The Bollywood angle is present as well where Suketu Mehta ends up working with Vidhu Vinod Chopra on the script of his movie *Mission Kashmir* and gets to know the trials and tribulations of being a movie producer. Then there is the proverbial struggler, a guy who left behind his well settled family and business in Dubai to come there with dreams of becoming a star in Bollywood. The most heart wrenching story though is of an upcoming Hindi poet in his late teens who has taken to the footpaths of the city as his *Karmabhumi* despite belonging to a well to do family residing in Bihar.



Maximum City does not immediately divulge the grandness of its scope. It starts as a personal journey – Mehta, a Bombay boy who left his home town for New York as a teenager returns twenty-one years later to see if he can make a life for himself and his family in the city he still thinks of as "the place I'm from." But Bombay has in those twenty-one years, changed almost as much as he has and so the 'return home' becomes a process of learning how to live in "the country of No" (MC, 18). One of the first things

he learns is the uses of anger: "It is the only way to get things done; people respond to anger, are afraid of it. In the absence of money or connections, anger will do" (MC, 33). The anger Mehta experiences on a personal level he also sees reflected – and magnified – all around him. Bombay is a city enmeshed in communal violence, gang activity and police brutality. One of the more remarkable features of *Maximum City* is Mehta's ability to gain access to people deeply involved in all these overlapping centers of anger and power. Members of extremist political parties, gang members, police officers – Mehta doesn't merely interview them, he virtually becomes part of their lives for months on end, developing relationships with them that extend beyond that of interviewer and subject. The section "Power" which details Mehta's interactions with those different groups is nothing short of spellbinding. Although his writing is utterly located in Bombay, he is also embarking on a profound, abstract look at the nature of violence and how it intersects with power and powerlessness. "What does it feel like to take a human life?" (MC, 535), he asks, over and over, of people on both sides of the law. This could easily become voyeurism – and he is intelligent enough not to deny that he is drawn into these lives fascinated by them in a way that is hardly distanced – but it never does. His purpose is something far deeper than titillation: "There is a gulf between the human heart and murder, and I was intent to seeing the bridges men build for themselves over that gulf"(Shamsie, 2006), he explains.

After scripting the lives of the law's upholders, the author moves on to the other side of the fence and gives the reader a close look in the lives of the law breakers – the criminals and people from the Mumbai's notorious underworld called '*bhais*' (meaning big brother). The chapter has some gory parts, but is enjoyable like a gangster movie. Then the author takes a short detour and acquaints the reader with famous food joints of Mumbai – not the swankiest, but the one loved by its people. And then he moves on to detailing more voyeuristic pleasures the India's city of sin has to offer the dance bars and

its girls. The author details the life journey of some of the top bar dancers he met in an interesting way, sharing the sad and joyous parts of their lives, making them human and understandable.

Then the curtain unveils from the most glorious part of Mumbai - the part which forces thousands of people to run away from their homes, their jobs to Mumbai to be a part of its Film city fondly called Bollywood. The reader is taken through the film world by the eyes of the stars that make it shine- successful actors, directors, their dreams, fears and frustrations. And another view of the same world is presented by wannabe actors, aptly called strugglers. The Author takes care to cover a story of a family living in the slums of the city and of a youth who has run away from his home and come to Mumbai to complete the kaleidoscope. He ends the books with a story of a Jain family renouncing the world and becoming monks, their thoughts and reaction of the society and their extended family.

Given his occasionally uncomfortable position as neither as insider nor a true outsider, Mehta is nonetheless capable of offering a unique perspective on the city. There is a real poignancy and distress to his exploration of Bombay's underbelly, as he accompanies a tough local cop as he investigates the simmering tension between rival Hindu and Muslim gangs (as Mehta notes, the lack of governmental response to the riots led many Muslim teens to pursue gang life as a method of obtaining vigilante justice of a sort). He examines the city's sex industry and its thriving movie business (the latter is the subject of an extended diary style expose of the on-set antics of some aging stars). Mehta has won both an O. Henry Prize and a Whiting Award, and *Maximum City* was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. For someone like me, with both an interest in India and its culture but little real experience with much more than imported impression, one thought the book seemed to be a wonderful snapshot of a city and a society on the crossroads of the past

and the future, juxtaposing as it does the ancient with the contemporary. To Mehta, it seems that Bombay is embodied by contradictions, not the least of which is the city's name. Be is the corruption, the draconian rent laws, the ability of politicians to control the judicial process, the population density of the city (17,550 people per square mile, compared to 1,130 per square mile in a city such as Berlin, or-even more amazingly – the one million people per square mile in Central Bombay), the 60% of the city's population who are homeless, or the fact that Indian filmmakers produce more than twice as many films a year than Hollywood studios against the backdrop of such social tension, there is simply a dizzying array of fascinating insight found in Mehta's book.

After a brief introductory personal geography of what it meant to be in Bombay again Mehta is struck by the vast change that has come to be. It is no longer just a state in India but a nation state in all its diversified reality. It has a socio-cultural emphasis of its own which is being a place of 'no':

"Can I get a gas connection?" 'No' 'Can I get a phone?' 'No' 'Can I get a school for my child?"

"I'm afraid it is not possible.'

'Have my parcels arrived from America?"

'I don't know?

'Can you find out?'

'No.'

'Can I get a railway reservation?'

'No' (MC, 18-19)

In this country of No nothing is fixed for the first time round.

You don't just call a repair man; you begin a relationship with him. You can't bring to his attention too aggressively the fact that he is incompetent or crooked, because you will need him to set right what he has broken the first time around. Indians are craftsmen of genius, but mass production, with its attendant

standardization, is not for them. All things modern in Bombay fail regularly: plumbing, telephones, the movement of huge blocks of traffic. Bombay is not the ancient Indian idea of a city. It is an imitation of a Western city, may be Chicago in the 1920s. And, like all other imitations of the West here – the Hindi pop songs, the appliances, the accents people put on, the parties the rich throw – this imitation, too, is neither here nor there (MC, 26).

Splendid and splendorous it is a city with a negative undercurrent where money made through scams is more respected than that made through hard work which is aptly stated on the back of trucks.

Sau me ek sau ek beimaan. Phir Bhi Mera Bharat Mahaan.

101 out of 100 are dishonest. Still my India is the best (MC, 32).

This Mehta explores through multiple pictures of those that make up the city. In chapter two, Mehta starts with the Shiva Sena party. In a way it was responsible for the emerging new face of Bombay, prophesying its theory of anti-communism, Fascism, Socialism, anti immigrant, anti-Muslim, and Pro-Hindu praxis. Its chief, Thackeray had ruled the passions during the 1992-93 riots but in the ever changing mindset of the city the worst that partisan strongholds could do was to shatter the public confidence in justice and excite a formless free floating urban anger in the young man. Characteristically Mehta identifies this kind of an ideology with men without faith. And what brings about faithfulness is to be rooted in traditions and conventions. How can this ever be possible when people are "...in transit within their own city, within their individually multiple selves" (MC, 121). The city they live in thrives on rental residences which are hard to get even if one barter the human self. Thus, there are also 400,000 empty residences in the city, empty because the owners are afraid of losing them to tenants if they rent them out. Assuming each apartment can house a family of five people, on average, that's two million people – one-fourth of the homeless – who could immediately find shelter if the laws were to be amended. This of course is the origin of the slums in Bombay, where the population doubles every ten years. The result of the

Indian Rent Act leads to this peculiar, cancerous outgrowth in Bombay. Added to this is the 'paying guest factor'. The paradoxes that the Act was an 'institutionalized expropriation' of 'private properties', where someone can rent a flat for a year and stay for the rest of his and his progenies life and still have the law behind him.

The city is full of people claiming what's not theirs. Tenants claim ownership by virtue of having squatted on the property. Mill workers demand mills be kept at a loss to provide them with employment. Slum dwellers demand water and power connections for illegal constructions on public land. Government employees demand the right to keep working long past when they're needed, at taxpayer expense. Commuters demand further subsidies for train fares, which are already the lowest in the world. Moviegoers demand that the government freeze ticket prices. The Indian Government has long believed in the unreality of supply and demand; what you pay for an item, for a food or for a service, has no relation to what it costs the producer (MC, 128).

Such is the ground reality of the city. A ground that was 'reclaimed from the sea' and therefore the history of the city consists of a struggle against the sea. The sea continuously challenges the validity of the claim.

Water takes its revenge on our buildings; it corrodes the exteriors, makes the potato chips and the papads soggy, enters our walls, and leaks through our ceilings. Every monsoon is an assault on Bombay. The furious rain is a severe, pitiless arbiter of basic engineering principles. What the municipality can't do, the rain does: It demolishes unsound structures. The sea and the rain are joined by the sewage, human waste, all around us.

There is water everywhere, except in my taps (MC, 133).

Mehta suggests that as in Bombay so to in all urban spaces there are but two ways for crowded cities to sustain themselves: by creating new land or by thinking up new uses of the existing land; either the agricultural land can be reappropriated or the floors of the existing tenements increased. As it is in this era of upward mobility this has become a prerequisite. The sprawling city that ones were is now no more. Moreover the change has had other consequences as well. Since Machines have taken over the working of hands the brain has become more fertile. It is ideas, data and dreams that have taken over the

physical realities and this is a fact that cannot be wished away. And the mind is not always a saintly recluse, it festers with hellish conceptions alike. The missionary zeal having been rendered ineffectual, hell reigns supreme. Thus, even in Bombay there is the *upar* Bombay and the *niche* Bombay the underworld, as fretting and fomenting as the Dharavi slums. Mehta has researched well into the 1993 Bomb blasts and its subsequent aftermaths.

The most fascinating of the men who deal in violence is the policeman, Ajaylal. His humiliation at the hands of his own department- transfers, inquiries etc is the price he pays for his honesty.

‘In eighteen years of service I haven't taken a glass of water from anybody’, he declares. He had long ago made a career decision. ‘In the long run, it pays to be clean’. His money comes from college friends who, he says, have invested wisely on his behalf. But there are people in the police force out to get him. They plant stories about him. ‘Only Ritu and my mother and my sister have stood by me’. Ajay and his family have just come out of departmental inquiry instigated against him on allegations of corruption that dragged on for four years. Ritu had to account for every rupee she spent during those years, down to where she got the money for the washing machine. Finally he was cleared of all charges (MC, 193).

In a city reeking of corruption, he is the incorruptible man dogged in his pursuit of the murderers and gang members who rule Bombay."...Until 1998, when the authorities decided that the nuisance of Ajay's incorruptibility was outweighed by his expertise in fighting the gang war, and brought him back into the city police" (MC, 167).

He is also a torturer because how else is he to get the information he needs from criminals who have judges in their pockets and witnesses intimidated or shot into silence? Ajay instructs in methods of police interrogation. First of all, he points out, it is not always done in the police station. During his investigation of the bomb blasts of 1993, the interrogation was carried out in the compound of the special reserve force. Sometimes, lacking a safe house, he has to conduct the interrogation in a moving car with darkened

windows, barking questions from the front seat as his men slap the suspect around in the back.

If Ajay has the time, the suspect is deprived of sleep for a whole week. Usually, neither party has such luxury. So another method is to take two ends of an old style telephone wire and apply it to the arms or the genitals; a portable dynamo is whirled, and a powerful electric current is generated. Sometimes, he takes the suspect to a creek and ties a heavy stone to his legs. Then one of his men gets behind, put his arms under the suspect's and takes him into the water, where the weight of the stone pulls him downward. All that's keeping him up is the cop; the cop is his savior, his last hope. The suspect is dunked a few times in the water; gasping, screaming, he comes up out of the water and tells Ajay what he wants to know.

'Fear of death is the most effective. During the bomb blasts I just took a few of the suspects to Borivali National Park and fired a few bullets past their ears.' But with many of these suspects, ordinary violence wouldn't work. There had to be special methods. 'Those who have no fear of death also have no fear of physical pain. For them we threaten their family. I tell them I'll plant some evidence on their mother or their brother and arrest them. That usually works'. When Ajay's boys make an arrest, they tell him, 'sa'ab, we would like you to frighten him a little'. So as they are bringing the prisoner into Ajay's imposing office, they say, 'The Sa'ab will finish you: it is not in our hands now. You are a dead duck.' It would be best, they suggest to the suspect, if they intercede on his behalf, make a good report to the sa'ab, so that he is spared the very worst of the torments ahead of him in the long night. In short, summarizes Ajay, 'that very old technique: the hard and soft approach'. One last method: give the suspect one kilo of jalebis. Then you don't give him water this sounds like an unusually enticing form of torture, I say.

'Have you ever had sweets and not had water? If you have a kilo of sweets you must have water'. A man will do anything for water after so many sweets" (MC, 143-4).

Mehta also bonds with and eats sweetmeats with Inspector Vijay Salaskar, Bombay's most celebrated specialist in 'encounter' killings, where gangsters are bumped off in setups – the police department's casual circumvention of an inept judiciary.

‘The criminal justice system has totally collapsed’, says Ajay. ‘This is the reason why the underworld thrives. A dispute over a flat, which takes twenty years in court, is taken care of in a week or a month by the underworld. You work out the economics...The culture of the gang war is intrinsic to the culture of the city. Madanpura, Nagpada, Agripada, Byculla, Dongri, Bhendi Bazar, Dagdi Chawl: the heart of Bombay is the heart of the gang war (MC, 156).

But Ajay also sees the reasons why encounters are so prevalent ‘The judicial system is so tilted in favor of the accused that he is not at all afraid. It’s very frustrating for the police. Someone is arrested in a murder case, the case comes up in four years, the witness is threatened and turns hostile, and you know the man is going back to kill again. He is operating with absolute impunity, and the courts are giving him bail.’ This agreed with my own experience. All the hit men I had spoken to, men, who had murdered many people, had been in and out of jail on murder charges. The only fear they had been of the encounter (MC, 189).

Mehta also exposes the murky details of ‘criminals in uniform’ aka cops who went on a shooting spree, killing even innocent people merely on unfounded grounds of suspicion, shakes us. Overall, the picture one get is that the efficiency shakes us. Overall, the picture one get is that the efficiency of Bombay cops is top class given the severe constraints under which they are forced to work. And yes, he, too, has, killed, but when a policeman turns executioner there is no outcry from the public. “When you live in a world of fear, you give unlimited power to the state” (MC, 211).

What is in dispute is the extent to which he will torture people. What would be reassuring to believe is that he will beat only men whom he knows are criminals, and that he will beat them with only a strap or have his men given them electric shocks pain that will not permanently harm them but will act as that necessary spur, in the absence of a functioning judiciary, for them to give out information that will save lives, information that will prevent bombs from being planted that will blow up completely innocent people not connected to the gangway in any way. It is evident that Ajay does not enjoy the torture part of his work. I have never seen him physically hit anyone; only direct others to do so. He is also unaffiliated with any political party, gang or religion; I have never heard Ajay mention god, not once...In the sliding scale of the Bombay police, Ajay Lal is a

good cop. Ajay will not shoot people wholesale. He hates the 'exterminators' like Salaskar and Sharma and Sawant, not because death is a violation of human rights but rather, bad police work" (MC, 198).

He wants his son to get an MBA or to become a doctor. He wouldn't mind if he went into the civil services or the Foreign Service, but not the IPS. 'I know what price I have had to pay. If I could do it again', says the winner of the President's Medal for meritorious service for his work in detecting the Bombay blasts, 'I would have called in sick on the day they assigned me the bomb-blasts case [...] If you ask me, I don't think I can do anything else but this, I can't do anything else but be a cop (MC, 200).

Mehta creates a dream cop Ajay Lal who is besotted with 'micturition' "I would go to police headquarters and stand in front of it and abuse all my corrupt seniors, reveal everything. Then, I would pee in their direction and turn around and leave the force" (MC, 142). He thinks that this would be a sensational ending, a cathartic ending, a blockbuster ending to his career.

It is in this context that Mehta presents his very well researched analysis of the beginning of gang war which has resulted in organized crime in the city of Bombay. This is controlled by two exiles,

One is in Karachi and one in Malaysia – or Bangkok, or Luxemburg, depending on which night you ask. The gang war is the fallout from the bomb blasts of 1993, during which a series of bombs planted by the Muslim criminal syndicate headed by Dawood Ibrahim – the D-Company – killed 317 people in the city, in revenge for the anti-Muslim programs of a few months earlier. After the blasts, Dawood's main lieutenant, a Hindu named Chotta Rajan, broke with him and formed his own gang, the Nana Company, so called because Rajan is nana, elder brother, to his troops. He swore to eliminate all those involved in the bombings. The two dons control their organizations from outside the country, and they have been at war ever since (MC, 144).

The insights that he draws and the descriptions that he gives of Dawood and Chotta Shakeel are indeed illuminating and to make his narrative more cohesive Ajay Lal is given that charge of investigation of the chain blasts in which 257 people died and 713

were injured in one day. It is this kind of a dialectics that gives the Twenty First Century Indian novel its identifying difference. Whereas earlier novelists were more concerned with social polemics – issues of untouchability, women reforms, the urban-rural divide etc, now the underworld predominates. Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City* is in this sense not very different from Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* where the Bombay underworld meticulously described. This underworld and the ruling Mafias are not a world apart but impinge on the way the city works. The revenue to feed the gangs comes from extortion, money laundering, gambling, boot legging, film financing, upscale prostitution and drugs and the common man has to suffer the pinch and so the corruption seeps into every walk of life. It is very true to say that because of this the criminal justice system has totally collapsed and the culture of the gang war has become the intrinsic culture in the city.

What Mehta gives us as the prevailing condition in Bombay is unique to this city alone, different from the metropolis Delhi. This is because Delhi has a more upscale political population and the wars there are party wars not gang wars. But the police everywhere are a part of a non-profit institution. In the age of the market economy, globalization and multinationals, no one puts money into this institution. Therefore, they use other means to keep themselves going. This reality of the institution which is the protector of law and order comes in for harsh criticism in most twenty first century writing. Another parallel organization which is unique to the urban, cosmopolitan cities, so meticulously narrated by creative writers is the night life. It is true that

Cities like Bombay live at night. The day is a gathering-up of forces for the night. The city unfurls itself, luxuriously, after the sun sets, in the receptions, premiers, parties and dinners of the night; in the beer bars, hotels, dance clubs, warehouses and alleyways. The night has no time; it is freed from the corporate rigor of the day. And the night contains sexual possibility: that man so fine in his jacket, that woman across the room lighting a cigarette (MC, 285).

‘Women came and go, speaking of Michael Angelo.’

The city wakes up in the beer bars or dance bars. Undoubtedly it is the money from X means which is pumped in to inflate these bars. The customers literally blow money on the dancers. They will walk up to the dance floor and stand with a stack of notes over the head of the favored dancer. The notes, in an expert hand, traverse the distance between customer and dancer on air and fluff out, forming a halo or fan around the girl, enveloping her in the supreme grace of currency, its wealth adding immeasurably to the radiance of her face exalting her in this most commercial of cities, until the floor is littered with rupee notes and the male attendants scurry around to collect them and deposit them in the dancer's account (MC 291). Of course it is money that the dancing girls aspire for and they feed the imaginations of those who have the money but not the beauty that ignites their imagination. The rich traders and merchants who are surrounded by men during day and by their fat wives in the evening this might be the only place in their lives where they can look directly at beautiful young girls, young enough to be their daughters. The moment the customer walks in, he's the star in his own custom – made Hindi movie song. No matter how old or ugly or fat he is, for the two hours he's in the bar, he's a movie star (MC, 292-93).

The most enchanting of Mehta's stories come from his encounters with what he refers to as "the lower humanity", in the beer bars of Bombay - an inebriating space full with liquor intoxication, bright lights, and beautiful dancers. The world of the beer bar is unique to Bombay, Mehta writes, "and for me it is the intersection of everything that makes the city fascinating: money, sex, love, death and show business" (MC, 285). A paradise for meager mechanics, rash *tapories*, rich traders and affluent merchants alike; these dance bars are a space that realizes the 'Bollywoodised idealization of love' for its countless guests. Mehta develops an honest and heart rending friendship with Monalisa, the most dazzling bar dancer at Bombay's famous dance bar *Sapphire*. "Since Monalisa would never get married, she would be put into the bar line. She was seventeen years old" (MC, 309).

The stories that she reveals to him confirm the struggle for life and dignity in the modest lives that embellish the filthy core of the city. "Behind every earner there are fifty eaters" (MC, 297). These damsels, much like Bombay's hit men, disclose it all to him, and in large chunks - Mehta possesses the most intimate details of their lives; he knows when they are sad, suicidal, vicious or exuberant. "Every man wants me", Monalisa tells

Mehta - The world may endlessly desire these beautiful notch girls but it is Mehta who spins and twirls them under the confetti of his words, making them more real, and more alluring than the people they are in flesh and blood.

Mehta writes that he was puzzled by the beer bars and couldn't understand why men spent such large amounts of money there: "On a good night a dancer in a Bombay bar can make twice as much as a high class stripper in a New York bar. The difference is that the dancer in Bombay doesn't have to sleep with the customers, is forbidden to touch them in the bar, and wears more clothes on her body than the average Bombay secretary does on the broad public street" (MC, 290). Monalisa provides an answer to that puzzle, and much besides. She draws him into her world telling him of her failed tryst with the son of a Bombay don "Samar was the grandson of a man named Karim Lala, who in the 1970s had been the biggest don in Bombay" (MC, 312) and explaining the tattoo of slash marks on her wrist. "The top model in India and the top bar dancer in Bombay have this in common: Their arms are marked with their anguish, like gang tattoos"(MC, 305).

She is faithful to Bombay. She flourishes in the city, as she could not in Delhi, as she would not in New York. Unlike the girls of Malabar Hill, where I grew up, Monalisa has no desire to go to America. *Bombay sahi hai*. In ten years, she says, India will be as free as America. Monalisa likes as the freedom money gives her. She bought a Maruti 800, banged it up, and upgraded to Maruti Esteem, she loves to go shopping. After she finishes work in *Sapphire*, Monalisa roams the discos of the city often just by her. 'I do everything. I drink, I go to discos, and I play pool. Everything happens in Bombay, I can wear any kind of clothes freely. How free is life in Bombay!' (MC, 300-01)

Monalisa has two lives. One is her life in the bar and the time she spends with her customers. Then there is the other life: her time in the discos, watching TV, sleeping all day. She never goes to bed before six in the morning [...] A man comes into a bar when he is tired of his family, of taking care of his wife and children, and tired of the office. The dancers are buying the *armaan* of the customers. That is a very bad thing. Why can't we save our money? Why do we have bad luck? Because we buy their difficulties (MC, 317).

Mehta becomes very close to Monalisa. It's a testament to Mehta's intimacy with his subjects that he felt compelled to justify his relationship with her in an interview promoting the book as such:

I became involved with her in a way that was more intimate than sex. I never did sleep with her. I realized if I had slept with her, all the stories would have been cuts off. Then I would have been just another customer. I was at once a Vaguer and her best friend (Blogging the book shelf, 2005).

While his relationship with Monalisa was probably closer than his relationship with any of his other subjects, the level of intimacy described above is fairly representative of the access he had to each of his subjects.

Talking about the food, Monalisa switches to Gujarati, the only time she uses the language common to us. Her Gujarati has a strong Kathiawari accent, but she is self conscious about it. She prefers Hindi: Bambahiyya Hindi, filmi Hindi, *tapori* Hindi. Gujarati is the first language, the core language, and it is too intimate to be used between us, narrator and chronicler (MC, 322).

Once Monalisa brings Mehta along for a reunion with the father she has not seen for ten years. "We all stare at it (TV) in relief; the long lost father, the mother who sold her daughter, the brother who recently tried to kill him, and me. When they ask me, 'What is your business?' I reply, 'I'm a writer' It is an effective conversation stopper (MC, 333). Monalisa once says her dream is to win the Miss India pageant, so she can make a speech with millions of people watching. The speech would be in English, a language that she is working hard to acquire. She is going to say to the respectable audience, "I am a girl from the bar line. Now you can take back all your prizes, all your money, but I wanted to prove that I could get to this point. That we in the bar line are also part of society" (MC, 372). At the end of Mehta's finely fleshed portrait of the dancer Monalisa, he writes

[W]hat I am adoring, what I am obsessed with, is a girl beyond (Monalisa), larger than herself in the mirror beyond her... it is her that I'm getting to spin and twirl

under the confetti of my words. The more I write, the faster my Monalisa dances (D' Souza, 2004).

As much as the beer bar on any night in Bombay, *Maximum City* is full of stories of desire and vast wealth, sweat as well as liquor, beautiful bodies, scarred bodies, excitement and bright lights, and of course, immense filth. The likes of Monalisa sin people around their little fingers and the moneymakers who have to kill their fancies in their day-to-day dealings are willing to spin out money for these dancing girls. This sexual hunger is not confined to the higher ups alone. As a matter of fact the city of Bombay exudes a sexual energy just as it exudes heat.

The womanless rickshaw-wallahs, the Bollywood wannabes, the fashion models, and the sailors from many countries – all in search of some heat, a hurried furtive fuck in whatever hidden corner the world will permit them. They do it in trains, railway stations, the backs of taxis, parks, urinals. The rocks by the sea are a favorite. Along Carter Road in Bandra, at Scandal Point in Malabar Hill, rows of couples are wrapped in each other on the rocks, all facing the sea. It is no matter that the thousands of people walking by can see them, because they can only see their backs, not their faces, and the lovers to the left and the right of them are all busy with each other, kissing, and feeling. Anonymity is erotic. That woman hanging out clothes on her balcony, with the hair long and wet around her shoulders from her bath, the crows of girls in short skirts outside the catholic college. 'The whole city is a bedroom' (MC, 341-42).

It is not only the men who want such fulfillment but even the so called elite women desire much the same satisfaction.

In China Garden, at the Oberoi, groups of society women discuss their lovers over lunch. The young blades of walkeshwar watch the painted women of the West gyrate on the music videos and download hard-core pornography on the Internet and can't get a peck on the cheek from the good girls of their social circle. In the five-star hotels, young male models pray to their gods before beauty contests while ageing Parsi queens cruise them in the toilets, trying to look at their dicks. An industrialist's wife is caught on tape with one of the contestants. Women are held and held back; in the streets, in the skyscrapers, in the beer bars, in the chawls (MC, 342).

The bar girls, just like the other women, feel that are doing nothing wrong and earning but dancing is just another way of earning money. Coming to the film industry,

Mehta gives a detailed comparison between Hollywood and Bollywood. Accounting for the superiority of Bollywood he says that it has got to be bigger because it is supplying dream material for over a billion people. In a way it has become the means of taking revenge on the western mind, a veritable cultural aggression of the twenty first century. Writing in 2004 Mehta sums up its impact thus

The thousand feature films and forty thousand hours of TV programming and five thousand music titles that the country produces are exported to seventy countries. Every day, fourteen million Indian see a movie in one of thirteen thousand theatres; worldwide, a billion more people a year buy tickets to Indian movies than to Hollywood ones. TV is galloping in; the country has sixty million homes with TV of which twenty-eight million are cabled, bringing to city and hamlet alike a choice of around a hundred channels (MC, 376).

This is the most prompt and generous way of the suspension of disbelief. Mehta's pages go further to sketch out the big, multifaceted world of Bombay filmdom - What is typically known to the world as Bollywood. In a close friendship with Indian filmmaker Vidhu Vinod Chopra, Suketu Co-writes the script for *Mission Kashmir* and reveals details of the entire filmmaking process in niceties that are sometimes funny, sometimes tragic, and sometimes buoyant. The author steals a look at the private lives of mega celebrities such as Sanjay Dutt, Amitabh Bachchan, Hritik Roshan and Mahesh Bhatt. After the release of the book, the ostensibly unedited, honest representation of private lives got the writer into trouble with Vidhu Vinod Chopra, who felt he had been defamed with the account of his three wives, "I have specifically written he has one current wife, and two ex-wives. But when you write non-fiction you cannot hold yourself back over who you think you're going to affect (with your writing). I thought I had painted Vinod in completely human terms." (Samakshi, 2009) was Suketu's response to the filmmaker's agitated reaction to the book. We have all grown up watching Bollywood movies have captured the eccentricity of Mumbai; the riches of Malabar Hills and Colaba to the slums of Dharavi, the Mafia, Underworld the Bombay riots, the 'chawls' the north Indian

immigrant or the Mumbai dance bars. Movies like *Satya*, *Black Friday* and *Company* have all touched upon some nerves of Mumbai; Even a literary masterpiece like *Shantaram* (2003) has had Mumbai depicted in a similar fashion. But, if one think that *Maximum City* is just another compendium on the history of Mumbai, then one is wrong. It is a unique narrative told in such a fast paced action that the book is just irresistible. The events and political as well as historical blunders that make Mumbai as it is today has been uniquely told by an author who once belonged to that place but now is seen as an 'outsider': someone who does not understand how Mumbai works.

Towards the end of the book the writer came to show the extremes of spirit in the *Maximum City*. He delivers a vivid account of a Jain family that lies in the other extreme from henchmen like Satish and his ilk. While on side of Bombay's intoxicated continuum has men who sleep tranquilly after taking human life, the other end of the insatiable city accommodates Sevantibhai's family that thinks it is sinful to end the life of even minute water organisms, by stepping into a puddle of water. Sevantibhai's family, as Mehta informs, has decided to dramatically reject the city of movie stars, murderers, and cops, painted women, and businessmen by denying themselves of everything family, possessions and pleasure. The family is determined to take on the utter final simplicity of life no violence, no untruth, no stealing, no sex, and no attachments. "We will live in a life completely without sin. We live in happiness" (MC, 559). Rakshaben, Sevantibhai's wife tells the writer. It is somewhere around this point that Mehta's affair with the robust, unapologetic city comes to an end. Mehta ends his realist thriller by giving startling digits to prove that Bombay itself is reaching its farthest point; twenty three million people by 2015. The city's population that should halve actually doubles. But Bombay, the city of dreams continues to thrive on the dreams of every individual.

Mehta's *Maximum City* thrives on the heteroglossia and the carnivalesque that cities like Bombay have to offer. Despite the infighting, the gang wars and the sexual decadence, the city is alive and thriving. However 'sickly' the pursuits of its people are, the melody is not terminal, 'a killing city' it might be but it is not a dying city; though its people may be morally compromised each one is shaped by the exigencies of living. As Mehta, himself, points out

Most of us live guarded lives and resist any pull that takes us too far towards this extremity. We watch other people push the limits, follow them up to a point, but are then pulled back, by fear, by family. In Bombay, I met people who lived closer to their seductive extremities than anyone I had ever known. Shouted lives. Ajay and Satish and Sunil live on the extreme of violence; Monalisa and Vinod live on the extreme of spectacle; Honey is on the extreme of gender; the Jains go beyond the extreme of abandonment. These are not normal people. They live out the fantasies of normal people. And the kind of work they do affects all other spheres of their lives, until there is no separation between the work and the life (MC, 579). And even though Bombay itself is reaching its own extremity it will not be washed away. "The Battle of Bombay is the battle of the self against the crowd. In a city of fourteen million people, how much value is associated with the number one? The battle is man against the Metropolis; which is only the infinitive extension of many and the Demon against which he must constantly strive to establish himself or be annihilated. A city is an agglomeration of individual dreams, a mass dream of the crowd. In order for the dream life of a city to stay vital, each individual dream has to stay vital (MC, 280).

It is the vitality that the people of Bombay get by being individually multiple and severally alone that makes the city live on.

Mehta's book has the silent intrusiveness, the busyness and ubiquity, the voraciousness of a book of pictures as well as the largesse that prose gives. We are in a new world with *Maximum City*: the book is a giant embrace not only of a city but of hope – and its more complex, earthly, incarnation desire – in the age of the free market. It performs this embrace brilliantly and passionately. It is not, really, a nostalgic book, in spite of all it says about loss, displacement and the act of returning: its elegiac notes are its most restrained. It has the hard-headed exuberance of a nineteenth century novel a

fascination with the spirit of compromise and with survival skills, a complete understanding of the importance of the mercantile and the pecuniary. All this it engages with not by examining the lives of major industrialists, as it might have, but by looking at low-life the dancing girls in bars, the whores and transsexuals, the hit men, the lowly cadres in political parties who do the dirty works during riots like the elephant headed Ganesha, who transcribed *The Mahabharata* as the sage composed it aloud, Mehta sits uncomfortably, close to garrulous hit men, typing their memories and impressions of murder into his laptop.

To quote Rao again cities such as Bombay become the monographic subjects because they capture the urban ethos of a nation completely and also because they stand at a juncture balancing both the singularization and universalization of the conditions of today. Moreover, they are symbolic simultaneously of the apocalyptic and the dysfunctional attributes of modernity, the global wealth and the local poverty coexisting side by side. Perhaps what characterizes Bombay as the local of modernity is sense of urgent crisis as seen in terms of the governance and the breakdown of the historicity of the past. As sociologist Sujata Patel writes, “Though colonial capitalism fostered dependent economic development and unevenness in urban growth, Bombay represented for many commentators what is possible *despite* these odds” (Patel, 2004). She writes that Bombay “symbolized the paradigm associated with achievements of colonial and post-colonial India both in its economic sphere and in its cultural sphere” (Patel). Within a less regionally invested literature on urbanization, these dystopic conditions are increasingly beginning to attract attention but largely as contemporary exemplars of the “pasts” of western metropolises like Paris and London. Geographer Michael Watts, for example, recently observed that “the Parisian slum...figured centrally in Baudelaire’s poetry. And it is the slum that constitutes the defining feature of contemporary African metropolises” (Watts, 2005). Watts sees hyper cities such as Mumbai as the most “stunning

morphological and sociological” expressions of global society in the twenty first century (Watts).

Along with Suketu Mehta Altaf Tyrewala is another that represents Bombay though another dimension of it. Thirty year old Altaf Tyrewala wrote his debut novel *No God in Sight* in 2005. Just 170 pages in length, the slender novel is a slap in the face of the tradition of the ‘Great Indian Novel’, the favored form of Anglo-Indian literature. Within its restricted dimensions and in a language that is as plainspoken as it is condensed Tyrewala succeeds in capturing the psychic inner life of Mumbai, India's most frequently portrayed city. Tyrewala himself was born in Mumbai in 1977, where he continues to make his home, having made a guest appearance in New York City. For, as he says himself, he needs the city in order to write: "It's incredibly important for me to live with my own culture, in the location I'm writing about. I can't imagine living abroad and visiting my country once a year to stock up on material before returning to the comfortable First World, where I would live while writing about the Third" (Pereira, 2005).

By means of brief vignettes, he anatomizes the underside of the glittering capital, where ordinary – and at first glance inconspicuous – individuals move about in the shadows of brilliance and glamour. Above all, his Mumbai is a city of the Muslim middle classes, whose members (and here is the novel's un-stated framework) struggle for survival and dignity within a political landscape that has been radically transformed by the Hindu fundamentalist Shiva Sena (Army of Shiva) party.

Indirectly then, a novel such as *No God in Sight* gives voice to critical dissent in relation to the one-sided success story the country seeks to narrate about itself in campaigns such as "India Shining" or "India on the rise". Such counter images are frequently found in the works of this young generation of authors.

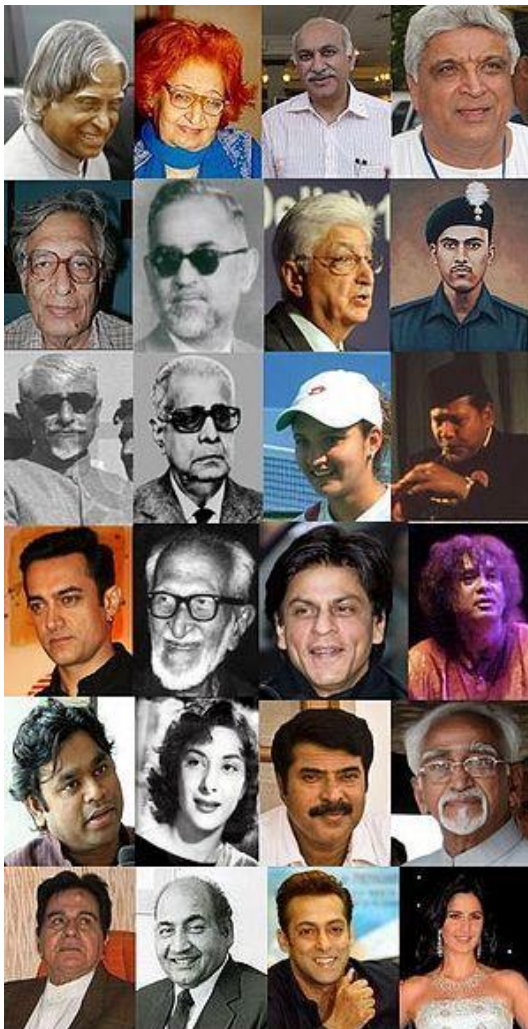
Of the nearly half a dozen novels set in Bombay by Indian writers in English Altaf Tyrewala's *No God in Sight* (2005) is yet another attempt to delineate the complexities of new millennium India through the eyes of its youth. The young generation writers coming from varied classes and creeds bring to their writing a critique of their times through a spacio-temporal interrogation. Bombay as a cosmopolitan metropolis with its struggles and strife is a favored locale to reflect on the loves and lives of new India. The multi layered conflicts present an insight into life itself. However, unlike Vikram Chandra's three novels – *Love and Longing in Bombay* (1997), *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995) and *Sacred Games* (2006), and Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* (2004), *No God in Sight* shifts its focus to religious extremism, a theme so integral to our ethos and yet kept at bay with a pair of tongs. Altaf Tyrewala coming from a liberal middle class Muslim family, though not himself actually a victim of communalism or religious discrimination, picks up certain nuances of the daily interaction between Hindus and Muslims that become eye openers of how religious affinities can viciate into paranoia.



Haji Ali



Sunni **Muslims** pray in memory of the victims of November 26th **Mumbai** terror ...



An image of most famous Indian **Muslims**



Muslim Women Voting



Mumbai. 2006. On Dharavi's Main Road, **Muslims** gather for Friday prayers

Altaf Tyrewala was there when the religious riots took place in 1992-93 and left at least 1400 people dead. Of course there had been sectarian riots in Bombay earlier but 1992 was different for there was a lot of venom and vehemence towards each other which became more pronounced as one went down to the lower level of the economic strata. Moreover it was in 1992 that the lines were drawn more cuttingly between the majority and the minority communities and it was an unequal fight. Altaf Tyrewala makes an attempt here, as a Muslim himself to capture the angst and the restlessness, the prejudices and the inherited beliefs of his own community and makes an attempt to humanize the milieu and thus present a different picture of Bombay, more detailed and real, more bifocal.

From the stories of about two dozen characters, nameless, faceless, Tyrewala culls out a whole graphics of the Muslim community. An abortionist, a small shoe shop owner, a riot escapee, a convert, a seventy year old unmarried woman, a disinherited salesman, a paralyzed young man, a gluttonous matchmaker, a chain smoker, a corrupt *Hawalदार*, a waiter in an Irani hotel, a *paanwala*, a good for nothing Urdu tutor, a butcher, an aspiring lawyer, a news channel correspondent, a bar dancer and a beggar comprise the motley. Through the voices of the array of characters, Altaf displays how widely the Muslim population has percolated in all layers of the Indian society and how most of them, if not all, still prefer living in Muslim colonies for the sake of safety or for plain brotherhood; how they *are* a part of this country and how they aren't; how they've become used to the subtle sorrows of the poverty in their lives and the constant fear of the fanatics.

And none of these weave in and out of each other's lives but perhaps connect in a linear line from one to the next. There is no interrelation but mere vignettes. Each of the fifty chapters are not more than two to five pages long but collectively comprise a kind of a central character, the citizen of Mumbai. There are no epiphenic movements, simply portrayals of the human condition. It begins with Mrs. Kwaja, a onetime poetess who has long exchanged her metaphors for a life of cooking. A woman silenced by 'the hum of air-conditioned rooms and twenty four hour TV'. From her voice, we move to that of her husband, Mr. Kwaja, a man who knows the poetry no longer exists. Their son Ubaid spends hours online, chatting with strangers, looking for a place to belong. Their daughter Minaz has other demons to fight. She's pregnant, and grappling with the idea of an abortion. Through these eyes, and with these thoughts, we take our first, hesitant steps into Altaf Tyrewala's Mumbai.

The first pages plunge one into what feels like a strange place. Our focus shifts constantly, forcibly, from Minaz to her abortionist. He runs a nursing home in a seedy by lane of Colaba and his badly spelt fliers get him a customer or two every day. It reads

Get rid of Unwanted Pregnancy in hour

Rupee 300 absolutely secretive

Shamma Nursing home

Opp. Janvi Manzil (Bahind Colaba Post Office) (NGS, 8)

He is happy because he thinks he spreads relief; he saves family lives and marriages. But he needs to be saved himself from all the unborn baby voices in his head. He yearns for children, several children who will hopefully drown out the unborn baby voices in his head. Moreover he is not qualified but of course very careful because that is his only qualification and to boot at all he is a Muslim whose mother had to pay the dues of his irreverence right there in Mecca for her Hajj. We move from him to his father, who works at a shoe store. Kaka believes that religion killed his wife that she was visited by paralyzing worries of sin and all other no-good dogmatic clap trap. He says

There is a no Allah, no heaven, no hell. No life after death. No sense in wasting precious hours of life inside mosques and temples and churches. When the stomach buckles and the skin sizzles, money is the only god who answers prayers. How to tell the idiots in the world this? How to have told the idiots in my family this? (NGS, 18)

His boss Amin Bhai wants to leave India forever and is lucky in juggling a Visa out of frustrated embassy personnel. It is Rukhshana's sympathy for the slavish and impudent behavior of his seniors that wins their day and he leaves the ungrateful city, the nation of his ancestors and fades away into the distance.

It wasn't worth it, I will tell myself. And I will repeat, like a mantra, like a dua, it wasn't worth it, it wasn't worth it. And even then, if my idiot nostalgia refuses to die, I will remember the protection money demanded, the covert and blatant religious slurs, the riots, the aftermaths, the newborn niece named Nidhi, the rewritten history books, the harassment at the passport office. Wasn't it enough, wasn't it enough that we lived in our ghettos and worked in our holes and paid our taxes and demanded nothing in return?

The aircraft's projection screen will show a blue India, with our plane's route so far outlined in white like an anemic tapeworm in the belly of a diseased nation.

I will sit back in my seat and pretend to breathe easy. *Forget it, I will tell myself, let go. Let them have it, let them have what they have clergymen for, razed mosques for, driven out fellow Indians for. Let them have their Hindustan for Hindus*" (NGS, 28).

It is at this point when one realizes that it isn't a strange place at all. Its home, what we've all grown up with. Home turned inside out. Tyrewala is more than equipped to try and map out the consciousness of the city. He was born in January 1977 at Byculla's Masina Hospital, schooled at St. Mary's in Mazagaon, and studied commerce at HR College for three years before moving to New York in 1995 for a bachelor's in business administration. "I hardly had any interest in books before I went abroad," he tells me, by e-mail.

In NYC, homesickness turned me into a reader, especially of fiction from the subcontinent. Over the years, I became convinced, unfortunately, that I could 'do India' better than the Rushdies and Roys. I returned to Mumbai in 1999 and tinkered around as an instructional writer for a few years before taking the plunge into full time writing (Pereira, 2005).

It is a crisp, no-nonsense plunge. The novel moves from one first person account to the next, incorporating monologues, headlines, anecdotes, vignettes. The book's sleeve describes the cast of characters as unusual but, to be honest, they aren't. They are the kind of people you could meet on a walk down any street in Mumbai, were you to look carefully, and this is what gives the novel its honesty. With a new beginning there is the impotent Babua, who turns rabid fanatic in order to hide his impotence

What should I do? Oh-rey, I cry to myself, What should I do? I want to be a man like my grandfather; a man like my father, whose rare words and ample riches make people tremble. I want be like the barber, doctor, bus driver, and even our orchard workers – they are all men, siring sons like rabbits, unmindful of their bodies (NGS, 35).

But he remains half a man and thinks of nothing but his 'giraffe' that won't lift its neck: "Inside my wide chest is an ant's heart, and in this heart is immense regret for having a lineage that, by giving me everything, has left me with nothing better to do than contemplate the catastrophe in my dhoti" (NGS, 36). It is ironical that a Mahant who visits his village calls everyone an eunuch and appeals to their manhood to throw out the outsiders from their house, their village and their country "Hindustan for Hindus! Hindustan for Hindus! Understand, donkey eunuchs? Not for outsiders, our Hindustan! Who? Who will correct history, who will avenge the past and drive the outsiders out...?"(NGS, 37)

It is Babua who takes up the challenge and is thumped on his shoulders for his national fervor. Prowling he nozzles Zail Singh, the scape goat out and is dragged to the Mahant's feet victoriously but he turns out to be not an outsider although Zail Singh insists that he is a Sikh not a Hindu. Even the Mahant turns out to be a hyper enthusiast who did not know how to define 'an outsider'. Sulaiman like many others has to leave Barauli because of the outrage created by the Mahant. Coming to his grandfather in Naamnagar he expresses his intention to go to Bombay and live like the other refugees. But before he goes he must understand "I must know so I can endure. Only you can tell me because *you, you* served us

from who we were *you* turned us into outsiders to be driven out of villages... what mischief made you become a bloody Muslim?" (NGS, 45)

In the next chapters characters are piled up, all from the lower class Muslim society who lives on the periphery of the great thronging city. As a novel about Bombay the story does not map the central contours but dwells on the collective psychologies of the books narrators. Everyone is a type and infuses a complexity of people plagued by the faith they belong to. Whosoever's voice Tyrewala uses, the nauseated matchmaker or the obese runaway daughter, the person who has dialed a wrong number, Tyrewala seems to become vulnerable to examination because of his own familiarity with the woes of his innumerable protagonists. No God seems to extend any joy or relief to these destined to live life on the fringes of existence. What is remarkable that Tyrewala opens our eyes to people whom we take for granted and not even lend them a flicker of a question as to why they are there and how to they survive – The *asli Kasaai*, the oblivious beggar, the immigrant slum dweller or even the convert who quietly dies with a Hey Ram, Ram Ram on his lips. Tyrewala's half-baked personalities however are capable of throwing up burning questions that unsettle the mind and after even sixty pages of reading open unknown windows in the far from comfortable shanties in Mumbai's slum.

Far from the madding crowd of Cuff Parade, Marine Drive and Nariman Point, a continuous discomfort besets the reader as he ventures deeper into the heart of darkness. These often nameless, faceless protagonists remind one of the hordes of moving ends who play God knows what business and are crushed by giant feet into insignificance. This other side of the picture, the irony of megacities, is the inevitable outcome of the process of globalization. Whenever, one tries to draw a circle on a square or rectangle sheet of paper there are scraps that fall a sunder because the axis has its limitations of holding things together, the center can only hold a certain amount and what it cannot falls apart. The rich and

the beautiful, the educated and the employed, the mainstream religions all survive, rise, ascend to a needed importance while the other half of humanity is distorted, disintegrated into nothingness, it continues to live the flesh out meaninglessly. Tyrewala's array of protagonists more than amplifies the non-existent existence of this other half of humanity. Most fiction of the recent times, in one way or the other, try to throw up into sharp relief, this adverse grayness that has gotten out of focus when the camera zooms in on India shining.

All the lives that Tyrewala has captured are disparate; the only thread that binds them together is of tension. Tension is the running theme of how these non-descript eek their lives in a Hindu dominated world. Here to be a convert, a pervert, a subvert, a nincumpoop '*sab chalta hai*' as a matter of fact only these can survive for the righteous and the well-meaning can never withhold, it is the survival of the fittest and only the 'fallen angels' can withstand the fires of hell. Hamida for example who had set her herat at being Rafiq's fourth wife even compromises to marrying a rich cripple and divorcing him to take his money and come back to be Rafiq's fourth wife. And Nawaz, the self-proclaimed poet who in order to look one dresses up in a baggy sherwani, bunching pajamas and a dark brown embroidered skull cap with a pile of faded books and leaves in his arms. And guess who he gets for a patron, the *paanwala* and for a student Abhay who believes his Guru when he says that "Urdu poetry is to be secreted like a silk' and basking in its beauty one must allow it to invade one like a tan. The irony was that Nawaz was as ignorant as his student and when pressed into answers all he could do was to escape "I crumpled my face. 'I cannot do this!' I stood up. 'Sorry, the mood is gone. I cannot teach poetry today.' I shivered my hand over my skull. 'I feel frazzled!' I stormed out the door, ran down the stairs, and cycled like a maniac all the way home" (NGS, 94).

Abhay is unfortunate that his attempts to imbibe some culture to impress his girlfriend attend in a failure because of Nawaz, his teacher. But what emerges as an important

facet of this interlude is how incompetent and in proficient is a lot of the lower class Muslims who are willing to sell their culture to earn a petty living.

Abhay also comes in handy to bring up another dialectics, that of inter marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims. Abhay's sister Avantika is married to a Muslim Sohail Tambawala who is missing as the story about him unfolds. Avantika as a wife has full faith in her husband but others take his disappearance has doubly significant – the second for his being a Muslim. The knowledge of such second grade treatment is quite obvious to Avantika who knows that families like hers suffer, tolerate, mediate, pay anti-social men to settle sticky deadlocks, but they can't go to the police who would harass them instead of assisting them. Avantika tries to masquerade as a Hindu wife with a borrowed *bindi*, *mangal sutra* and tandoori masala from the kitchen shelf vermilion in her parting but to no avail as the police take no cognizance and despite her raving attempts they laugh her plea away. Then when her tears do bring about a change she has to face further ignominy.

'Now tell me, what happened? House burgled, chain snatched, underworld called, what?' She tells me. My jaw drops. What? All this hassle for a runaway husband? Has she not seen herself in the mirror? 'You have his photo?' She stops crying; smiles a little. She removes the photo from her purse and shows me. Aaho, now I understand how the two got together. 'Good', I say, 'What's his name?' 'Tambawala', she says. Yes, but that's a surname. What's her husband's name? 'S', she says. Is this any time to be coy? S? What S? Suraj, Sumit, Sudanshu, what, 'Sohail...' what? Sohail? Like Sohail Khan, the actor?" She nods, and then she says, 'But my name is Avantika.' 'You have some ID card or something?' She looks more scared now. She tries to take back her husband's photo. *No, no* I shake my head, *ID card first*. 'Show whatever you have. Bank card, ration card, anything.' She brings out something from her handbag. 'My railway ID'. She gives it to me. It's true: Name: Avantika Joshi. 'Why still Joshi?' I ask. 'My husband did not insist on a name change. He is very open minded, very liberal. He even lets me wear sindoor and mangal sutra.' I look closely at her head and neck. 'And he lets you go for puja also? To the temple?' 'yes, yes, of course'" (NGS, 110-11).

The report is filed but Avantika has to leave knowing that nothing will come of it because "Arrey aye, madam, enough! If you do not like it here, take your miya-ji husband and go to Pakistan" (NGS, 112). And this is the parting advice. And lo and behold what really

happens next that the police have an encounter with some terrorists who are shot dead and in order to passify the uncomfortable questions of some troublesome activists a terrorist is named Sohail Tambawala. The news unsettles many who share the name. For one Sohail Tambawala, 57, "the death of a namesake is startling, like fate urging one to take note of a life, and death, that could have been one's own. And while one is incapable of empathy for anybody, leave alone antinationals, one finds oneself, in spite of oneself, reciting Surah Fatiyah for what could have been the soul of oneself" (NGS, 122).

Another Sohail Tambawala, 13, Tambi is a runaway small town boy who works at the light of Asia Restaurant. The news excites him and he whispers to himself "You're famous, I whispered, striking a parate-chop pose on the rat infested landing" (NGS, 123). The third Sohail Tambawala, 42, is an elite cosmopolitan who is embarrassed by the slugs of his own community and is happy that one of them is dead – "I think all those lower class butchers and *bhais* and stinking bearded bastards must be shot dead for giving the community a bad name" (NGS, 124).

Sohail Tambawala 29 lies in a hospital bed with his smoker's lungs festering with cancer and a wife and family and re-united in laws holding him back with their love – "you're too young to go, Avantika says; but one is never old enough to suffer like this. I say – I read the papers and watch the news and wonder, will I be next? In the grand sweepstakes of death, will all Sohail Tambawalas be unlucky?" (NGS, 124) Another Sohail Tambawala, 20, is very unnerved because he wants to become a barrister but it dawns on him that

...today it is a terrorist. Tomorrow it will be some enemy country's dictator. In the future, when a 'Sohail dada' makes headlines, where will I hide my barrister face? Who would have imagined a man's name to be his biggest enemy? Fed up, that's what I am. I want to do more in life than stand up for 'Sohail Tambawala' and the cultural maelstrom it implies" (NGS, 126).

He decides to change his name to Jiten Mehra. Now, with a new identity he will travel around the country freely; he will check into obscure hotels and not lie that he is Jayesh

or Nimesh. One day, when he has become rich, he will move out of Yasin Baag to a cosmopolitan area. He will not see eyebrows rising (at police stations) or lips pursing (at railway counters) at the mention of his name. And when the electricity fails, Jiten Mehra will not wonder whether it's because of who he is or where he lives. The very next moment sanity dawns on him. "What am I doing? At least some things in life must remain inviolate. I am a coward. I am being wise. I must stand by my roots. Must I sacrifice myself for my roots? And if 'Jiten Mehra' becomes a liability, will I obliterate him too?" (NGS, 128)

When the Muslim God seems nowhere in sight to deliver His believers, He must go with such frustration asks Tyrewala how can the community hold together. With every day the good name of the community being 'butchered', Amzad, the slayer of lesser life forms cannot but question his own com. He muses over the damage done due to excessive inbreeding, due to excessive poverty, due to excessive rigidity of religion. He believes that things have come to such a sorry pass that Muslims wish that they weren't Muslims. Like hungry beggars there is only concern is with money and food as they very sagacious beggar himself says

Please friend, money, food, hungry, God – these are the only words you need as a beggar; to charm the tourists, you learn to render these words in every tongue spoken under the sun. *Please, friend, money, food, hungry, God* soon, these are the only concepts you know, the only objects you recognize. You start to believe that the solicitous is the only tone in which to address you fellow humans; that if you call people 'friend' they will be kind to you. You cannot think beyond the loose change in people's pockets. You cannot imagine being satiated by anything finer than food and sex. And God? Ha! That's just something you say to vex the indifferent fuckers (NGS, 158-59).

This then is the truth about the other Bombay, the Bombay that does not throng coffee houses and clubs, that does not live in penthouses with air conditioning, the Bombay of incalculable bliss but a Bombay that is being 'aborted' day and night with infidelity and demise, where the Azan rings out loud and clear but where the heads that bow do not bow in faith but in hunger and want and pain.

In the literature that seeks to diagnose global conditions by generalizing from particular urban dilemmas, a city like Bombay is an exemplar of a “perverse” sort of urbanism (urbanism without economic growth). Bombay is not *at* risk but also constitutes a risk in and of itself to ideas and forms of global justice, equity and conviviality. In the interpretation of scholars who write from within a national paradigm, however, Bombay appears as the subject of the construction of the national modern. Its cosmopolitan culture and artistic productions are seen as products and symbols of the “achievements of colonial and post-colonial India.” (Patel 2004, 328) The nomenclatural transformation of this national symbolic terrain and therefore constitutes a risk of national self-understanding, especially one that values a secular and ecumenical style of convivial relations amongst various groups.

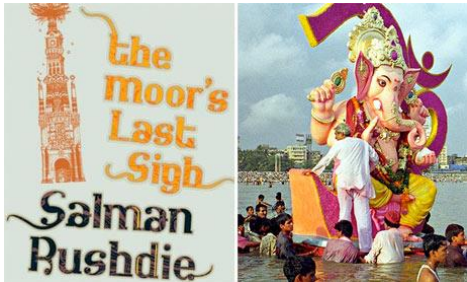
But both these positions, which involve specific interpretations of what constitutes risk, are tied to particular moral and political projects that animate their readings of the city and an interpretation of its malaise. Within the particular moral-theoretic terrains of such generalizations, the specificity and material qualities of city life often seem to disappear. When they do appear, they do so under the sign of new political frameworks of ‘resistance’ largely having to do with a new intersection between politics and religion” (Patel, 2004, 330). Connecting these various literatures, however, is an underlying sense of the shift from the city *of* risk, which causes the city to appear as a different sort of a theoretical subject. This is perhaps the most general answer that can be provided for why particular, singular and excessive urban conditions have historically been the focus of modern social and cultural theory from Walter Benjamin to Mike Davis.

To conclude it can be said that work such as *Maximum City* and *No God in Sight* capture the two apparently contradictory movements of today’s world- singularization on the one hand and the phenomenology of the global on the other. As Rao so neatly put it:

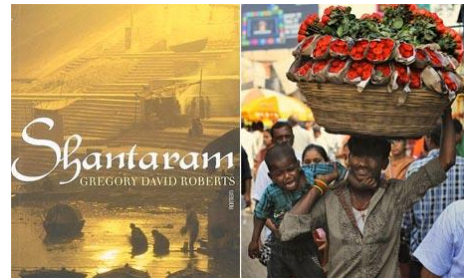
The moments that are centralized as moments of crisis in the context of Bombay (and other cities like it) are thus no longer merely tied to any local story as such nor can they stand in as teleological proxies for the conditions of modernity. Rather they serve as platforms for the sorts of intersections that reveal the fundamentally elusive nature of global flows (Rao, 2005).

Some Good Readings on Mumbai

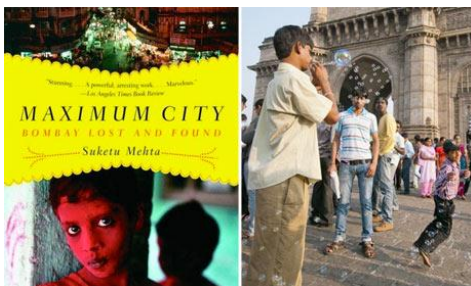
Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, 1995



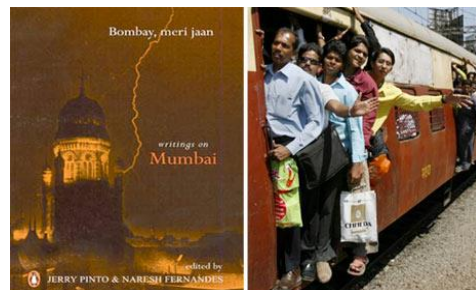
Gregory David Roberts, *Shantaram*, 2003



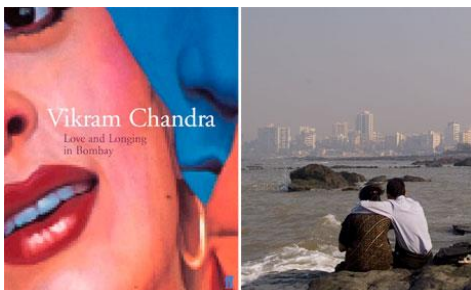
Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, 2004



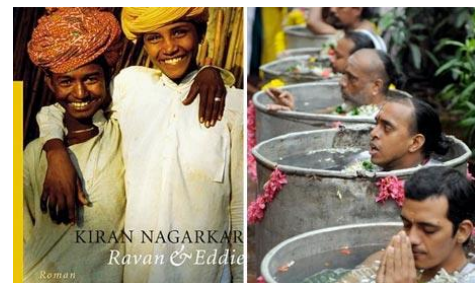
Jerry Pinto and Naresh Fernandes (eds.), *Bombay, Meri Jaan*, 2003



Vikram Chandra, *Love and Longing in Bombay*, 1997

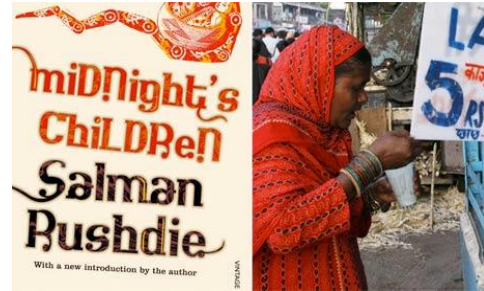
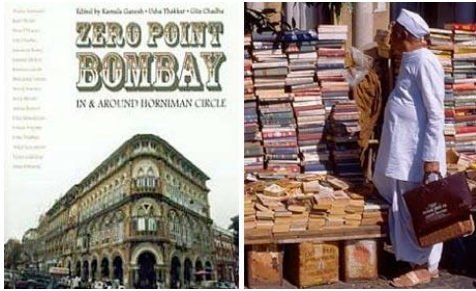


Kiran Nagarkar, *Ravan & Eddie*, 1994



Kamala Ganesh, et al, *Zero Point Bombay: In and Around Horniman Circle*, 2004

Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 1981



Some Recent Bollywood Movies Set on Mumbai



Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai (2010)



Slumdog Millionaire (2008)



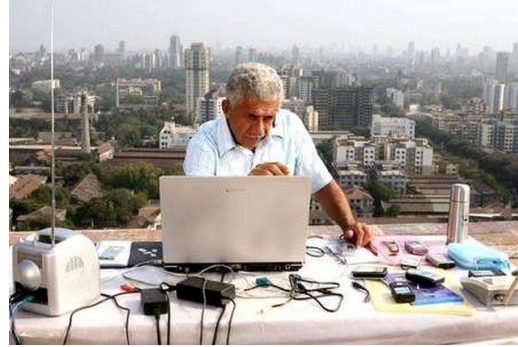
Salaam Bombay! (1988)



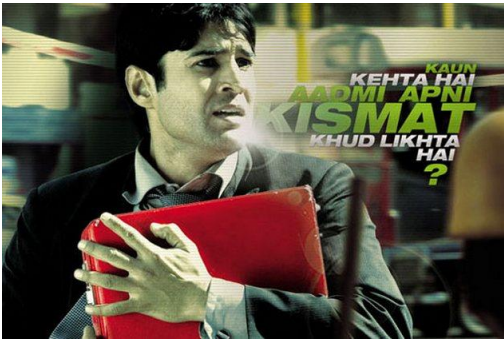
Mumbai Meri Jaan (2008)



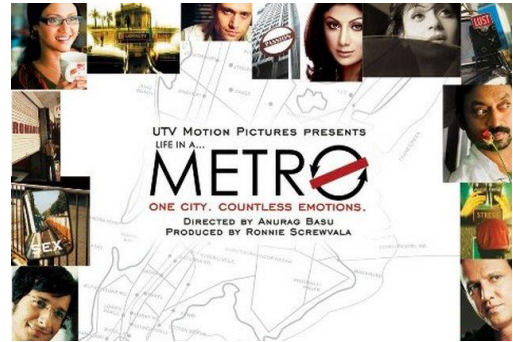
Tum Mile (2009)



A Wednesday (2008)



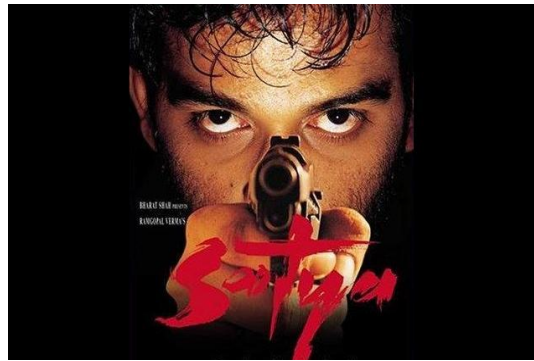
Aamir (2008)



Life in a...Metro (2007)



Black Friday (2004)



Satya (1998)



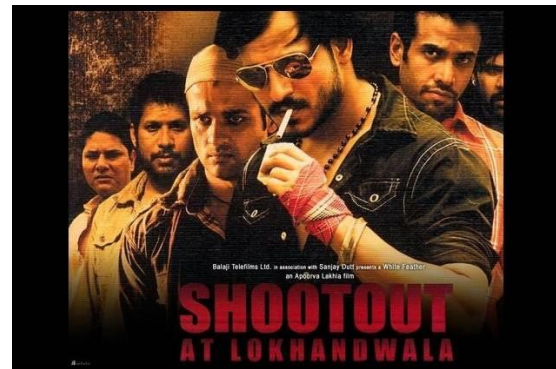
City of Gold (2010)



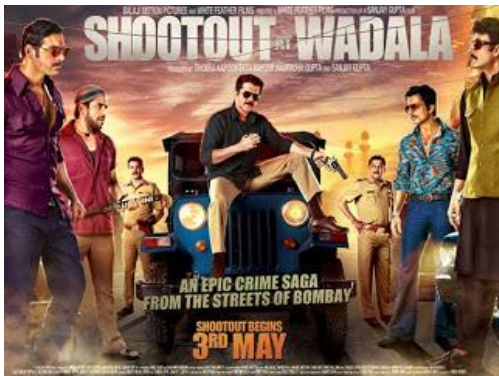
Mumbai Salsa (2007)



Mani Ratnam's
BOMBAY
Bombay (1995)



Shootout at Lokhandwala (2007)



Shootout at Wadala (2013)



Bombay Talkies (2013)

I found Bombay and opium, the drug and the city, the city of opium and the drug Bombay.

— [Jeet Thayil](#), *Narcopolis* (2012)

The new battle fields of new writing from India are the urban scapes, the sprawling metropolitan cities- Mumbai, Kolkata, New Delhi and Bangalore. As mentioned in the earlier chapter the publishing industry has also targeted these spaces for its prospective readers- the *Metro reads* (Penguin, 2010). It is here that the stories of today spring up from, stories of young professionals making their way in its jostling, jiggling crowds, encountering all kinds of travails and traumas, accosting the rich and the poor, the bold and the beautiful, the ugly and the evil. Life here is on the go at all times of the day, some make it at dawn, some at dusk, and others at night, and yet there are many who don't make it at all. It is from these scapes that the material for *Magnum Opuses* is gleaned by the new, discerning writers in order to materialize the dictum that 'every life has a story'- the life of cricket, *The Premier Murder League* (2010), the crime and murder thriller *Close Call in Kashmir* (2010), the corporate narrative, Jack Patel's *Dubai Dreams* (2011) or *With or Without You* (2010) and even chick lit, *Almost Single* (2010), *Love Over Coffee* (2010). The dynamics and the complexities of interfaces and encounters of all classes and the class less is explored in these settings. Not too long ago Rohinton Mistry had reverentially recreated his *The Tales of Ferozsha Baag* (1992) and the Mumbai *chaal*, thereafter there has been a spate of fiction written about Mumbai and its diverse populations living in the Saraswati Parks and Vishram Societies.

So far, about morals, I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after.

- [Ernest Hemingway](#), *Death in the Afternoon*

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) is yet another attempt at trying to reclaim an imaginary home that has slipped out of the ken because of spacio-temporal distancing. Thus, when the *Time* magazine opportunity presented itself to travel through India in an attempt to 're-lens' it Adiga could not refuse the temptation. What emerges in another *Midnight's Children* (1981) but without the magic realism? With the slender story line of an oppressed protagonist murdering his employer and getting away with it in pursuit of his ideal of social mobility Adiga has intertwined political, economic and cultural dialectics: The division of society into the haves and the have nots, the cultural imperialism of the elites and a veiled critic of the cosmopolitan/global ethos that has gripped the mindset of India shining.

The novel begins its journey from now, when the protagonist has a booming business as a travel agent in Bangalore trying to arrange an 'insider's view' of India for Wen Jiabao, the Prime Minister of The People's Republic of China. This here and now takes him into the then and there of India, a strategy intimately connected with a diasporic mindset that simultaneously wants to unravel ones roots in order to trace the routes not only he himself has taken but those his nation has taken as well. So, the novel rolls through some important locations like an Indian railway train from one stop to another over seven chapters that are notionally recounted over seven nights. During this cross country ride Adiga presents a cross-section of the Indian society especially hinging on the underclass and recounting their hope and rage. As he himself points out that it was a rickshaw puller who set him thinking about India in a different way. The choice of the protagonist as a driver turned tycoon is therefore not surprising at all and even the fact that his ancestors were at one point of time Halwais, now because of displacement rickshaw pullers, is symptomatic of what the rise of the Urban Jungles does to the establish order. The choice of the name Balram also is symbolic. As a driver Balram portrays the endlessly patient and silently watchful tribe who can catch on sleep and wait while the employer does important building. This

Balram Halwai turned Driver is Macbeth like in his vaulting ambition and akin to the driver hero of Shaw's *Man and Superman* (1903) wherein he enshrines Shaw's iconoclastic belief that a Chauffeur will be 'the first of the working class to move up to new technocracy and meritocracy'. Also the driver is that oblivious, non-entity who gets to hear also the backseat conversation about anything and everything that the passengers are a part of Adiga's Balram is no less a recipient of the inside story of the rich, the bold and the beautiful who sit on the other-side of the driver's seat, but it is the driver who maneuvers through the throng and arrives at destinations, he has the sense of the geography and of the system that delivers.

Also, in order to come to grips with the vastness of India and its heterogeneity Adiga perhaps did not want to foreground the incredible India, the picturesque and the glamorous, the spiritual and the mystic. He wanted to look at the underside, of the dark and deep abyss that divided the class based ethos of India and he also wanted to prove that no gorges are unspanable – given the spur and spark of mobility all heights are scaleable – this is proved by Balram the driver turned tycoon. If it needs a murder or two to hop, skip and jump into possibilities, there is nothing wrong for are not thousands being murdered in this unprecedented drive for betterment: the politicians are doing it, the top-notch corporate are doing it and so are the *Bhais* and *Dadas* down the line. In this sense Adiga's *The White Tiger* envisages the hope and achievement of today's Indians who have to fight exploitation by breaking social hierarchies and chartering an uneven course from the margins to the centre, a deconstructive process that works at the level of both the individual and society.

Beginning with the premise that 'the hardest thing in India is to see India', Adiga uncovers very systematically and persistently layer after layer but he reverses the process, not from the surface down but from the deep recesses to the superficial synchronicity. Bullied, uneducated, under privileged, Balram Halwai comes from that vast, rural hinterland in which seventy percent of India's population still lives in shocking deprivation, that area of darkness which is in itself a

continent of Circi where the wounded civilization still eeks out a below subsistence level existence. It in but natural that in this man created neither world there are satans, beelzebubs, mammons and mollocks incarnating the desires that have remain unfulfilled. Balram, however, is an exception to begin with, a white tiger, the rarest of animal who comes along only once in a generation, sharp, intelligent, gritty and resourceful. It is no surprise that he out does his counterpart Ram Persad, the driver of a Honda City, his first overture in the quest for better. It is this that takes him to Delhi and to a whole new atmosphere of debauchery, depravity and wickedness. The innocent Balram learned to cheat and indulged in things he was ashamed to admit and it was not guilt that wrecked his soul but the rage of how circumstances can derail the best of intentions, how the onslaught on basic human rights of an individual can lead to a shocking disregard for the sanctity of human life. His employer, Ashok has a blemished genealogy. His forefathers symbolically named Stork, Wild Boar, and Raven are all predators, shrewd, cunning and lusty, those responsible for raging and ravaging the smaller animals out of the jungle. It was this that Ashok had inherited as part of his Indian heritage but had acquired a Western mindset having been abroad, having studied and married there. Back at home he indulges in nefarious activities of which Balram is a witness for eight months. The underhand, under the table transactions are now nothing new for the driver who has imbibed this aesthetics of the so called upward mobility so on a dark rainy night he executes a clean operation of removing his employer from his path and with the acquired booty of seven hundred thousand rupees he makes his way to Bangalore and establishes himself as an entrepreneur.

The novel is not, contrary to confused assertions in the Indian press, another attempt at a form of Indian magical realism in the wake of Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy. No one has telepathic or supernatural powers here; time is broadly Newtonian in its flow. This is a novel that wants to be realistic, even if the realism is meant to be understood as tinged with black comedy. There may even be some moralizing intention, with Adiga denouncing the greed and

corruption of the New Indian Society. But the merit of the book must eventually rest on the credibility and verisimilitude of the voice of Balram Halwai.

As it turns out, the Halwais are an upper-middling caste of sweet makers, resident across large swathes of northern, India and often using the caste name of Gupta. Balram is presented in the novel as impoverished but with some education, even if it doesn't give him access to English. 'Neither you nor I speak English' (WT, 3) he writes to Wen Jiabao at the outset of the novel and yet the novel is written in English. We are meant to believe even within the conventions of the realist novel- that a person who must really function in Maithili or Bhojpuri can express his thoughts seamlessly in a language that he doesn't speak.

This is a problem that takes us back to the roots of the Indian novel in English and its two broad categories. One type deals with Indian characters who speak English because they have had a western education (as in the work of Vikram Seth) and often involved middle-class angst, urban lust and loss, or satirical views on post-colonial pretension. Some of these novels describe more or less ironically the tragic fate of anglicized members of India's elite colleges, rotting away in the 1980's in the wilds of places like Dhanbad while dreaming of Fleetwood Mac or Super tramp. As it's most genteel, this attitude may be found in an Indian-American writer such as Jhumpa Lahiri, whose work would never embrace the subjectivity of a crass chauffeur from Bihar who smashes his employer's head in with a whisky bottle in Dhaula Kuwaan while chewing betel-leaf.





Dhanbad Coal Mines

The other-more common-type of novel tries to represent in English dialogue spoken in another language. Some writers, like Raja Rao, adopt an elaborate sing-song tone supposedly intended to correspond to the rhythms not merely of the various Indian vernaculars but of Indian life itself. Others, including Rushdie, have tried the macronic solution, sprinkling their English with Hindi or Urdu words or even inventing words. Still others, such as Lee Siegel (who navigates between Indology and fiction writing), have attempted for comic effect to have Indians speak in a drolly exaggerated way, though the use of odd vowels and diphthongs. None of these solutions really works; what they bring to mind are the SS Officers in World War Two films speaking English among themselves with a strong Mittel European accent. Rushdie's characters sound like no known Indian, but it is not meant to matter because his novels are not realistic. None of these writers has the ethnographic ambitions of a Zola, attempting to capture, notebook in hand, the vocal nuances of the other.

What of Balram Halwai? What does he sound like? Despite the odd *namaste*, *daal*, *paan* and *ghat* his 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 are dealing with a member of the "subaltern" classes. He doesn't engage in Rushdian word-

play. But he does use a series of expressions that simply don't add up. He describes his office as a 'hole in the wall' (WT, 7). He refers to 'kissing some god's arse' (WT, 8), an idiomatic expression that doesn't exist in any North Indian language.

'Half-formed ideas bugger one another and make more half-formed ideas' (WT, 11), and the Chinese Prime Minister is advised never to 'let that blasphemous ideas into your yellow skull (WT, 8). On another matter, he sneers: 'They are so yesterday' (WT, 6). A clever little phrase appears. 'A statutory warning - as they say on cigarette packs - before we begin' (WT, 9). 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. This is not Salinger speaking as Hoiden Caulfield or *Joyce* speaking as Molly Bloom. It is certainly not Ralph Ellison or James Baldwin, whom Adiga has claimed as his models in speaking for the underdog. What we are dealing with is someone with no sense of the texture of Indian vernaculars, yet claiming to have produced a realistic text.

Imagine recording the speech of your interlocutor - a driver encountered in a car park in Gurgaon, say - in an Indian language and trying to render it not literally, but credibly, and with some effort at verisimilitude, into English. This is no easy task. The translator always faces dilemmas, of course, and can never get it quite right. But we also know. What it is to get it disastrously wrong. It is when the 'autobiography' of an Indian untouchable woman appears in French using expressions from Victor Hugo. The falsity in *The White Tiger* goes much further. It means having a character that cannot read Urdu, and certainly has no notion of Persian; tell us that his favorite poets include Jalaluddin, Rumi and Mirza Ghalib. It means having someone who can't read English being able to recall a conversation in which his interlocutor speaks of books by James Hadley Chase, Khalil Gibran, Adolf Hitler and Desmond Bagley. "Try that lot

out on a Hindi speaker who knows no English next time you are in India" (Subrahmanyam, 2008).

Adiga gets the tone right only when he writes of the world of the bourgeois. Some of this is quite funny and rings partly true.

'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' (WT, 154-5).

Some two decades ago, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak wrote a celebrated essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' At the time, a folklorist is said to have responded: 'More importantly, can the bourgeois listen?' We can't hear Balram Hawlai's voice here, because the author seems to have no access to it. The novel has its share of anger at the injustices of the new, globalized India, and it's good to hear this among the growing chorus of celebratory voices. But its central character comes across as a cardboard cut-out. The paradox is that 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. This book adds another brick to the patronizing edifice it wants to tear down.

Gridlocked in corruption, greed, inhumanity and absolute inequality-of class, caste, wealth, religion - this India is unredemptive. What Adiga India the lid on is also in exorable true: not a single detail in this novel rings false or feels confected. *The White Tiger* is an excoriating piece of work, stripping away the veneer of 'India Rising'(Mukherjee, 2008).





The novel is a social commentary and a study of injustice and power in the form of a class struggle in India that depicts the anti-hero Balram representing the downtrodden sections of the Indian society juxtaposed against the rich. "Guilt is a terrible thing. It makes one suspicious. It makes you see conspiracies everywhere. And the guilt of killing a man you call your 'second father' could be huge. So, even as he rolls in money and lives his dream in New India..." (Saxena, 8, 2008)

Balram Halwai can't get rid of the blood stains on his conscience. His personal guilt of realizing his ambition through murder turns political and this morally bankrupt man confesses to Chinese premier Wen Jiabao, telling the story of his rise from the Swamp to Silicon Valley. But, it becomes a story of darkness that is India, where an election is "like eunuchs discussing the Kama Sutra" (WT, 98), where the new economy means shiny call centre workers sitting in air-conditioned towers overlooking filthy shanties, where an entrepreneur can survive the slime and grime of bureaucracy only by greasing palms.

For most Indians, there is nothing new about this territory. For them, there is nothing novel about western tourists looking at India as a dustbowl, where death hangs in the air like a stale smell and a glass of water can kill you with diarrhea in minutes. India readers are familiar with the works of Western writers who travelled through India and saw nothing but the broken bodies of beggars, buzzing flies, dirty drains and famished faces. What's new - for prosperous, post-liberalization India - is the old suspicion that the West is holding up *The White Tiger* as a mirror to us. It's telling us that India is not shining and, despite its claims of a booming economy, it is still "the near - heart of darkness" which it has been since time immemorial.

There is no conspiracy. The present Booker jury thought it was a good book and it got the award. A different jury might have given the award to an equally good book on the bright side of India", says William Dalrymple, author of *The Last Mughal* (2008) and *City of Djinns* (1994). Left - leaning Australian writer and broadcaster John Pilger is even moral dismissive, calling the Booker "Only one award that represents the views of a clutch of mostly elite, London - Centric, conservation - liberal judges (Saxena, 8, 2008).

But that's not how many Indians see Aravind Adiga's success. They were euphoric when Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai won the Booker. This time, there is a stunned silence: for many of us, our worst fears have come true. The west is once again using our poverty to humiliate us. Seeing the award as a stamp of disapproval on India's poor social indicators, a recently published, Indian author calls *The White Tiger* "a tourist's account of India." He raises question about the intentions of Adiga, who grew up in Australia and went to elite Universities in England and the U.S.

Reality may be a question of perspective, but in an age where history is being written like fiction and fiction is being read like history, the Booker for *The White Tiger* might be The West's way of telling us that it's not been thinking about us the way we thought it was. "Everybody knows the truth", says a Mumbai -based U.S. diplomat dealing with trade and business. "We don't need a novel to tell us what's wrong with India. It's visible to us every day" (Saxena, 8, 2008).

To India's middle - class elite, says Dalrymple things like hunger may not matter, but they are "obvious to westerners". There should be more of this kind of book", he says. However, Pilger believes "the most important way to tell India's dark stories is through journalism and not just fiction" (Saxena, 8, 2008).

But the age of embedded journalists, it is argued that only one novel can tell the true stories of countries torn apart by conflict. Thousands of reports coming out of Afghanistan failed to do what Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) did for the country - Chronicling contemporary history through the eyes of an insider. The truth about Iraq, it is being said, will be captured by a novel written by an Iraqi. And that's where *The White Tiger* falls short. Even as India struggles with conflicts of caste, class and religion, Adiga's story may remain the view of a professional observer, who failed to see anything good about the country he travelled through as a journalist, always recording and never experiencing anything real. It could be mere suspicion, but it takes care of our guilt. As Adiga says

The novel is written, in "voice" - in Balram's voice - and not in mine. Some of the things that he is confused by or angry about are changes in India that I approve of; for instance, he is uncomfortable with (as many men like him are) the greater freedom that women have in today's India. Some of the other things he's unhappy about like corruption - are easier for me to identify with. When talking to many men whom I met in India, I found a sense of rage, often suppressed for years and years and years, that would burst out when they finally met someone they could talk to. But their anger was not the anger of a liberal, middle class man at a corrupt system; it was something more complex - a blend of values both liberal and reactionary - and I wanted to be true to what I'd heard. Balram's anger is not an anger that the reader should participate in entirely - it can be seen at times like the rage you might feel if you were in Balram's place - but at other times you should feel troubled by it, certainly (Di Martino, 2008).

Deirdre Donahue labeled *The White Tiger* an angry novel about injustice and power. "But Tiger isn't about race or caste in India. It's about the vast economic inequality between the poor and the wealthy elite. The narrator is an Indian Entrepreneur detailing his rise to power. His India is merciless, corrupt Darwinian Jungle where only the ruthless survive" (Donahue, 2008).

Adiga depicted his protagonist as

.... his talking out into the night, in his isolated room. He has to tell his story to someone, but he can't ever do so because it's a terrible story. Indians, traditionally, are stimulated into reflecting on their society and nation by the arrival of an outsider who asks questions; in the past, this outsider was the European or the American - today, it is the man from China, which is India's alter-ego in so many ways. Indians today are absolutely obsessed with the Chinese and keep comparing themselves to China out of a belief that the future of the world lies with India and China (Di Martino, 2008).

Adiga's first hand meeting the poor of India inspired him to create his protagonist.

Many of the Indians I met while I travelled through India blended into Balram; but the character is ultimately of my own invention. I wanted to depict someone from India's underclass - which is perhaps 400 million strong - and which has largely missed out on the economic boom, and which remains invisible in most films and books coming out of India. My aim was to draw aspects from the people I'd met to create someone whom I see all around me in India, but never in its literature : someone whose moral character seems to change by the minute - trustworthy one minute, but untrustworthy the next - who would embody the moral contradiction of life in today's India. I'm glad you point out that he is a hustler - which he is! - one of the frustrations of writing a book like this is that so many critics seem to think that Balram's views are meant to be taken objectively! (Di Martino, 2008)

Balram does have something to get off his chest of course and his letters to the Chinese premier are a confession of sorts. Balram tells his life-story, recounting how he got to where he now is a successful entrepreneur in Bangalore. He calls his life's story "The Autobiography of a Half-Baked Indian" (WT, 10). He said this because he was the poor side of India and in that side major people were not able to complete their studies because of poverty and illiteracy. But he became glad to explain that only this half - baked people had the ability to become a successful entrepreneur and those who completed their studies in fifteen years worked for us - half - baked Entrepreneurs.

Me, and thousands of others in this country like me, are half-baked, because we were never allowed to complete our schooling. Open our skulls, look in with a penlight and you will find an odd museum of ideas : sentences of history or mathematics remembered from school textbooks, sentences about politics read in a newspaper while waiting for someone to come to an office, triangle and pyramids seen on the torn pages of the old geometry textbooks which every tea shop in this country uses to wrap its snacks in, bits of All India Radio news bulletins, things that drop into your mind, like lizards from the ceiling in the half-hour before falling asleep - all these ideas, half-formed and half digested and half correct, mix up with other half - cooked ideas in your head, and I guess these half - formed ideas bugger one another and make half - formed ideas and this is what you act on and live with [...] the story of how a half baked fellow is produced...Entrepreneurs are made from half- baked clay (WT, 11).

But Balram belonged to the rural part of India a tiny hell-hole called Laxmangarh. His family was too poor that his family couldn't bother to give him name. Initially, they told Balram as "Munna" which only means 'boy'. He gained his name by the school teacher. The near feudal conditions there meant that everything was controlled by a very few powerful families and that opportunities were limited. "Please understand your Excellency that India is two countries in one: an India of light and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well-off. But the river brings darkness to India - the black river" (WT, 14).The black river is the Ganges, beloved of the sari and spices tourist image of India. "No! - Mr. Jiabao, I urge you not to dip in the Ganga, unless you want your mouth full of faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion and seven different kinds of industrial acids" (WT, 15).

In fact, he was a smart lad, and that was even recognized by a school inspector, who praised him as a 'White Tiger', "the rarest of animals - the creature that comes along only once in a generation" (WT, 35). The school inspector promises to arrange a scholarship and proper schooling for the young boy, but of course, instead his family takes him out of school and puts him to work at a teashop, smashing coals and wiping tables as part of the conditions of a loan his family takes from one of the village landlords to meet the expenses of his cousin sister's wedding. By shrewdly listening in on the conversations of customers, Balram gathered that his best option was to become a driver, an ambition he doggedly pursues.

Go to a teashop anywhere along the Ganga, sir and look at the men working in that tea shop - men, I say, but better to call them human spiders that go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still 'boys'. But that is your fate if you do your job well - with honesty, dedication, and sincerity, the way Gandhi would have done it, no doubt [...] I did my job with near total dishonesty, lack of dedication, and insincerity- and so the tea shop was a profoundly enriching experience (WT, 51).

While Balram retains some affection for his father and his elder brother Kishan, the woman of his large extended family, led by his hypocritical, grasping grandmother, were portrayed as parasitically driven the men to premature death -they were described as 'pouncing' on the men who return home with their earnings as migrant laborers 'like wildcats on a slab of flesh' (WT, 26) more concerned with feeding the family buffalo than the men of the household. "A month before the rains, the men came back from Dhanbad, Delhi and Calcutta leaner, darker, angrier, but with money in their pockets" (WT, 26).

The women like Kusum, grandmother of Balram, were also responsible for forcing the boys of the family into child labor and the young men into early marriage for the sake of dowry. When Balram returned home to find Kishan, he imagined that instead of chicken the women "had served me flesh from Kishan's own body on that plate."

While it could be argued that the misogyny is Balram's rather than Adiga's, the author clearly shares his protagonist's distorted perception that women of all classes only consume. Why else, for example, are there no women in the world of domestic servants in Delhi - where

are all the maids and ayahs, so many of whom have also migrated to Delhi from Bihar and Jharkhand to work? (Wilson, 2009)

Ultimately, Balram's family's poverty was explained all too stereotypically in terms of the joint family system, too many children, a per chant for lavish weddings and with so little depth to his personal history, he inevitably remained a superficial character.

Balram Halwai is a composite of various men I've met when traveling through India. I spend a lot of my time loitering about train stations, or bus stands or servants' quarters and slums. I listen and talk to the people around me. There's a kind of continuous murmur or growl beneath middle class life in India and this noise never gets recorded. Balram is what you'd hear if one day the drains and faucets in your house started talking (Adiga, 2008).

Balram slowly managed to distance himself from his family, but it took a while. He got his break when a rich man, his village landlord, hired him as a chauffeur, and took him to live in Delhi. He was taken on as 'Number Two Driver' and all round servants by the same landlord. Quite soon, having dispatched driver number one by threatening to expose his Muslim background, he was on his way to Delhi as driver to the younger son of the family, the liberal, cosseted Ashok, newly returned from America, and his wife Pinky. The City is revelation. As he drove his master to shopping malls and call centers, Balram becomes increasingly aware of immense wealth and opportunity all around him. But he knew that he will never be able to gain access to that world. He wanted to be the part of modern India. A vision of the city changed his life forever. His learning curve was very steep. He quickly came to believe that the way to the top is by the most expedient means. And if that involved committing the odd crime of violence, he persuaded himself that this is what successful people must do.

See, this country, in its days of greatness, when it was the richest nation on earth, was like a zoo. A clean, well kept, orderly zoo. Everyone in his place, everyone happy. Goldsmiths here. Cowherds here. Landlords there. The man called a Halwai made sweets. The man called a cowherd tended cows. The untouchable cleaned faeces. Landlords were kind to their serfs. Women covered their heads with a veil and turned their eyes to the ground when talking to strange men.

And then, thanks to all those politicians in Delhi, on the fifteenth of August, 1947 - the day the British left - the cages had been let open; and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law. Those that were the most ferocious, the hungriest,

had eaten everyone else up, and grown big bellies. That was all that counted now, the size of your belly. It didn't matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim, or an untouchable: anyone with a belly could rise up. My father's father must have been a real Halwai, a sweet maker, but when he inherited the shop, a member of some other caste must have stolen it from him with the help of the police. My father had not had the belly to fight back. That's why he had fallen all the way to the mud, to the level of a rickshaw puller. That's why I was cheated of my destiny to be fat, and creamy -skinned and smiling. To sum up in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies.

And only two destinies: eat-or get eaten up" (WT, 63-4).

"The India that we see in *The White Tiger* is a brutal, dog-eat-dog world, totally corrupt and unjust, where people behave like animals and everything is for sale: far distant from the Shining India" (Apte, 2008). Adiga was particularly good on describing *Indian Corruption*, from the vote-rigging of the local elections, where the 'Great Socialist' candidate was unopposed, to the conditions at school, where the teacher steals the money for the school - food – program and sells the uniforms meant for the students - but no one hold's it against him, because he hasn't paid in six months and that's simple the way the system works. Anyone in power abuses it for his or her own benefit.

A man in government uniform sat at the teacher's desk in the schoolroom, with a long book and a black pen and he was asking everyone two questions.

'Name'

'Balram Halwai'

'Age'

'No age'

'No date of birth'?

'No sir, my parents didn't make note of it'. He looked at me and said, 'I think you're eighteen. I think you turned eighteen today. You just forgot didn't you?'

I bowed to him. 'That's correct, sir. I forgot. It was my birthday today.'

'Good boy'.

So, I got a birthday from the government (WT, 96-7).

I had to be eighteen. All of us in the tea shop had to be eighteen, the legal age to vote. There was an election coming up, and the tea shop owner had already sold us. He had sold our fingerprints-the inky fingerprints which the illiterate person makes on the ballot paper to indicate his vote. I had overheard this from a customer. This was supposed to be a close election; he had got a good price for each one of us from the Great Socialist's party (WT, 97).

The White Tiger veered between detailed and highly specific descriptions of the world Balram enters as servant in Gurgaon, and a crudely simplified code used to describe the world he left behind in Bihar lower castes became 'Pigherders', a powerful and corrupt politician, possibly intended as an amalgam of *Laloo* and *Mulayam*, is 'the Great Socialist' (he is a 'Pigherder' too) and most tellingly, the entire Gangetic plain is referred to simple as 'the Darkness'.

A total of ninety three criminal cases for murder, rape, grand larceny, gun-smuggling, pimping, and many other such minor offences - are pending against the Great Socialist and his ministers at the present moment. Not easy to get convictions when the judges are judging in Darkness, yet three convictions have been delivered, and three of the ministers are currently in jail, but continue to be ministers. The Great Socialist himself is said to have embezzled one billion rupees from the Darkness, and transferred that money into a bank account in a small, beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money (WT, 97-8).

Balram's father told Balram about the voting process and way of election goes, in detail. He told Balram that one of his friends who did a very little resist against the Great socialist and was murdered by the police and Vijay, a member of the party of the Great Socialist. He also told that he had never gone to vote. After wards, Balram also told the readers that he also never gone to vote. As Balram's father said "I've seen twelve elections-five general, five state, two local-and someone else had voted for me twelve times. I've heard that people in the other India get to vote for themselves - isn't that something (WT, 100).

As Balram said about his power of voting "I am India's most faithful voter, and I still have not seen the inside of a voting booth" (WT, 102). In each case, Adiga's own disdain for political distinctions was cleared -and was very much in time with the metropolitan elite's view of Bihar. Thus the 'Great Socialist's party was shown sloganeering not about 'social justice' but 'stand up to the rich, the landlords form a party called the *All India Social Progressive Front* (Leninist Faction) and Naxal's main activity was kidnapping the children of the rich. "The stork himself came out to see Vijay, and bowed down before him - a landlord bowing before a pig herd's son! The marvels of democracy!" (WT, 103)

Here, another example of the corruption was the Government Hospital when Balram's father fell ill and Balram and Kishan took him to the general hospital whose name was:

Lohia Universal Free Hospital

Proudly Inaugurated By the Great socialist

A Holy proof That He keeps His Promises (WT, 48).

But in the hospital, there were no doctor. All were busy with their personal clinics. But their presence was recorded in the government ledger that they were on the duty till 6o'clock in the evening. At last, without any cure, Balram's father died of tuberculosis in that government hospital that was dysfunctional because of endemic corruption.

...although there are three different foundation stones for a hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections (WT, 47). There's a government medical superintendent who's meant to check that doctors visit village hospitals like this. Now, each time this post falls vacant, the Great Socialist lets all the big doctors know that he's having an open auction for the post. The going rate for this post is about four hundred thousand rupees these days (WT, 49).

This all shows that how corrupt are the government jobs in "darkness". There is no honesty at all. From top to bottom, officers to peon all have got corrupt. Adiga tries to show all the reality about them.

...Nothing in its chapters actually happened and no one you meet here is real. But it's built on a substratum of Indian reality. Here's one example

Balram's father in the novel dies of tuberculosis. Now, this is a make -believe death of a make -believe figure, but underlying it is a piece of appalling reality — the fact that nearly a thousand Indians, most of them poor, die every day from tuberculosis. So if a character like Balram's father did exist; and if he did work as a rickshaw puller; the chances of his succumbing to tuberculosis would be pretty high. I've tried hard to make sure that anything in the novel has a correlation in Indian reality. The government hospitals, the liquor shops and the brothels that turn up in the novel are all based on real places in India that I've seen in my travels (Adiga).

In government schools, there were no separate classrooms, no school uniforms for the students. If the government sent uniforms, they were never reached to them as the school teacher sold

them to the shopkeepers in a nearby village. Also the school teacher stole all the lunch money. "No one blamed the school teacher for doing this. You can't expect a man in a dung heap to smell sweet" (WT, 33).

The real picture of his native village Laxmangarh was shown to Mr. Jiabao by Balram in a very ironical manner.

I am proud to inform you that Laxmangarh is your typical Indian village paradise, adequately supplied with electricity, running water, and working telephones : and that the children of my village, raised on a nutritious diet of meat, eggs, vegetables and lentils, will be found, when examined with tape measure and scales, to match up to the minimum height and weight standards set by the United Nations and other organizations whose treaties our prime minister has signed and whose forums he so regularly and pompously attends.

Ha!

Electricity poles - defunct. Water tap - broken.

Children - too lean and short for their age and with oversized heads from which vivid eyes shine, like the guilty conscience of the government of India (WT, 19-20).

Adiga created two desperate worlds, Balram's tiny native village in the Darkness and the Silver of Delhi he inhabited in his life as a driver for the urbanized son of the village landlord. The first is a place of absolute hopelessness presided over by allegorical figures of corrupt wealth : the four landlords known as The Stork, The Buffalo, The Wild Boar, and The Raven. From afar, the Great Socialist is re-elected again and again through promises of change (always unkept) and corrupt electioneering. Balram's family, it was cleared, will be poor forever.

When Balram came to Delhi with his employer, Mr. Ashok, he compared the two India's - India in Light and India in Darkness. The place where he came from is Darkness and we have discussed it in detail previously. Now, there is a description about the shining New India. "Delhi is a crazy city" (WT, 118). "The main thing to know about Delhi is that the roads are good, and the people are bad. The police are totally rotten" (WT, 124).

In light, the location of the residents of the servants was also distinct. Balram explained about the residential facilities for the servant class. but in India every apartment block, every house, every hotel is built with a servant's quarters - sometimes at the back and sometimes underground - a warren of inter connected rooms where all the drivers, cooks, sweepers, maids and chefs of the apartment block can rest, sleep and wait. When our masters wanted us, an electric bell began to ring throughout the quarters - we would rush to a board and find a red light flashing next to the number of the apartment whose servant was needed upstairs." (WT, 130) [...] the smooth, polished road of Delhi that is the finest in all of India... (WT, 245)

Balram told Mr. Jiabao that Delhi is the capital of two India's not one India. "Delhi is the capital of not one but two countries - two India's. The Light and the Darkness both flow in to Delhi. Gurgaon, where Mr. Ashok lived, is the bright, modern end of the city, and this place, old Delhi, is the other end" (WT, 251).

Glass skeletons being raised for malls or office blocks; rows of gigantic T-shaped concrete supports, like a line of anvils, where the new bridges or overpasses are coming up ; huge craters being dug for new mansions for the rich (WT, 158).[...] Delhi is full of grand hotels. In ring roads and sewage pipes you might have an edge in Beijing, but in pomp and splendour, we're second to none in Delhi. We've got the Sheraton, the Imperial, the Taj Palace, Taj Man Singh, The Oberoi, The Intercontinental and many more (WT, 199-200). However, displaying their usual genius for town planning, the rich of Delhi had built this part of Gurgaon with no parks, lawns or play grounds - it was just buildings, shopping malls, hotels and more buildings. There was a pavement outside, but that was for the poor to live on. So if you wanted to do some 'walking'. It had to be done around the concrete compound of your own building (WT, 225).

In light, there is almost everything was good and developed. The things which, are not developed, are growing and changing tremendously. But, with every good aspect the bad is also there. The pollution in Delhi was the best example of it. Adiga explains the traffic problem and pollution problem in detail. This is the very reality of Delhi.

Rush hour in Delhi. Cars, Scooters, motorbikes, auto-rickshaws, black taxies, jostling for space on the road. The pollution is so bad that the men on the motorbikes and scooters have a handkerchief wrapped around their faces -each time you stop at a red light, you see a row of men with black glasses and masks on their faces, as if the whole city were out on a bank heist that morning (WT, 133). [...]They say the air is so bad in Delhi that it takes ten years off a man's life (WT, 133). There was a fierce jam on the road to Gurgaon. Every five minutes the traffic would tremble - we'd move a foot - hope would rise - then the red lights would flash on the cars ahead of me and we'd be stuck again. Everyone honked. Every now and then, the various

horns, each with its own pitch, blended into one continuous wail that sounded like a calf taken from its mother (WT, 137).

....Full of things that the modern world forgot all about - rickshaws, old stone buildings and Muslims on a Sunday, though there is something more : if you keep pushing through the crowd that is always there, go past the men cleaning the other men's ears by poking rusty metal rods into them, past the men selling small fish trapped in green bottles full of brine, past the cheap shoe market and the cheap shirt market, you will come to the great second - hand book market of Darya Ganj (WT, 251-2).

Aravind Adiga explained the vast difference between the rich and the poor of India in all respects.

As Adiga said in an interview that

My background as a business journalist made me realize that most of what's written about in business magazines is bullshit and I don't take business or corporate literature seriously at all. India is being flooded with "how to be an Internet businessman" kinds of books and they're all dreadfully earnest and promise to turn you into Iacocca in a week. This is the kind of book that my narrator mentions, mockingly—he knows that life is a bit harder than these books promise. There are lots of self - made millionaires in India now, certainly and a lot of successful entrepreneurs. But remember that over a billion people live here and for the majority of them who are denied decent health care, education or employment, getting to the top would take doing something like what Balram has done (Adiga, 2008).

Adiga told about the lives of poor in Delhi and the lives of rich.

The rich of Delhi, to survive the winter, keep electrical heaters or gas heaters, or even burn logs of wood in their fireplaces. When the homeless or servants like night watchmen and drivers who are forced to spend time outside in winter, want to keep warm, they burn whatever they find on the ground. One of the best things to put in the fire is cellophane, the kind used to wrap fruits, vegetables and business books in: inside the flame, it changes its nature and melts into a clear fuel. The only problem is that while burning, it gives off a white smoke that makes your stomach churn (WT, 157).

The dreams of the rich and the dreams of the poor - they never overlap "...the poor dream all their lives of getting enough to eat and looking like the rich. And what do the rich dream of? Losing weight and looking like the poor" (WT, 225) [...] how the rich always get the best things in life and all that we get is their leftovers" (WT, 233) [...] all these construction workers who were building the malls and giant apartment buildings lived here. They were from a village in the darkness"(WT, 260). [...]

these people were building homes for the rich, but they lived in tents covered with blue tarpaulin sheets and partitioned into lanes by lines of sewage. It was even worse than Laxmangarh" (WT, 260).

Balram also described about the difference between Bangalore and Laxmangarh. This was the difference of 'choice'."...it is not as if you come to Bangalore and find that everyone is moral and upright here. This city has its share of thugs and politicians. It's just that here, if a man wants to be good, he can be good. In Laxmangarh, he doesn't even have his choice. That is the difference between this India and that India: the choice" (WT, 306).

Adiga also explained this difference with the reference of history.

...the history of the world is the history of a ten-thousand-year war of brains between the rich and the poor. Each side is eternally trying to hoodwink the other side: and it had been this way since the start of time. The poor win a few battles (the peeing in the potted plants, the kicking of the pet dogs, etc) but of course the rich have won the war for ten thousand years. That's why, one day, some wise men, out of compassion for the poor, which appears to be about roses and pretty girls and things like that, but when understood correctly spill out secrets that allow the poorest man on earth to conclude the ten-thousand -year-old brain-war on terms favorable to himself (WT, 254).

The homes of middle class and wealthy Indians are staffed by teams of servants who cater to their employer's every need. Born in poor states like Bihar or countries like Nepal and Bangladesh, these live-in drivers, cooks and cleaners often work twelve hours days and seven-days week. Despite the economic upswing that has enabled their bosses to decorate their homes with plasma televisions and purchase European cars, the lifestyles of domestic workers have only improved marginally in recent years. Their working conditions remain unregulated, and as India's population continues to grow at exponential rates, their wages remain low, from fifty to one-hundred and fifty dollars a month (Sawhney, 2008).

Balram Halwai, the eponymous 'white tiger', was a diminutive, over weight ex-teashop worker who now earned his living as a chauffeur. But this was only one side of his protean personality; he dealt in confidence scams, over ambitious business promotions and enjoyed approaching life with a philosophical turn of mind. But was Balram also a murderer? We learnt the answer as we devoured these 300 odd pages. Born into an impoverished family, Balram was removed from school by his parents in order to earn money in a thankless job: shop employee. He was forced into banal, mind -

numbering work. But Balram dreamed of escaping and a chance arose when a well-heeled village landlord took him on as a chauffeur for his son, Ashok and his wife Pinky. Ashok's main activity in Delhi turned out to be to bribe various ministers and politicians on behalf of the family's illicit coal business. Balram Halwai remained a superficial character. Once installed in an up market apartment block in Gurgaon, however, Adiga was clearly on more familiar ground, and in fact the portrayal of Balram's employer Ashok, seen through his driver's eyes, was much more complex and credible. America-returned Ashok was attached to his self - image as more liberal and caring than his feudal father and brother. He expressed concern over Balram's cockroach-infested living quarters. "You and Ram Persad will both get a better room to sleep in. And separate beds. And some privacy" (WT, 79) [...] "His eyes seemed full of wonder: how could two such contrasting specimens of humanity be produced by the same soil, sunlight and water?" (WT, 80)

Mr. Ashok was always kind to Balram. When they visited to Laxmangrah, Balram went to meet his family members and got late. Pinky madam yelled on him but Mr. Ashok took Balram's side. "Have a heart, Pinky. He was seeing his family. You know how close they are to their families in the Darkness" (WT, 88). Mr. Ashok was very caring master and he felt always sorry for the lack of comforts of the servants. In Delhi, when we went to Balram's apartment and saw some red marks on his hand and behind his ear, he immediately told him to get treated. He took responsibility for paying all the bills. "It's the twenty-first century, Balram. Anything can be treated. You go to the hospital and get it treated. Send me the bill, I'll pay it" (WT, 237).

When Pinky madam went back to America, Mr. Ashok beaten Balram almost try to kill him. Now, he became alone and Balram found that it was now his responsibility to take care of him like a wife. He went to his apartment, prepared food and fed him. He also told some jokes to feel him happy. After few days, the relationship became stronger than before. To cheer up the mood of Mr. Ashok he philosophized like Lord Krishna, joked, even sang a song so that he felt better finally, he said "Has there ever been a master- servant relationship like this one?" (WT, 86)

When Ashok demanded

'Take me to the kind of place you go to eat, Balram.'

'Sir?'

'I am sick of the food I eat, Balram. I'm sick of the life I lead. We rich people, we've lost our way, Balram. I want to be a simple man like you, Balram.'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Order for us, Balram. Order the commoner's food.'

I ordered okra, cauliflower, radish, spinach and *dhal* enough to feed a whole family, or one rich man. He ate and burped and ate some more.

'This food is fantastic. And just twenty five rupees! You people eat so well!'(WT, 238)

"Many of Adiga's readers, particularly NRIs might recognize something of themselves in this" (Wilson, 2009). As a driver, he began to understand the relation between master and servant in his culture, "The servant is nothing more than a throw away item to be used and discarded." (Johnson) When Ashok's wife demanded to drive after a wild night out with her husband, on the way home, she hit and killed a young child. No one saw the accident. Yet, to be safe, the landlord's family arranged for Balram to confess to the hit-and-run accident. Also, the dispensability of Ashok's principles was brought home when he agreed to his family's scheme to make Balram took the rap after his wife, Pinky.

Much of the second half of the book focuses in on the relationship between 'servant' and 'master' a relationship which grew increasingly obsessive on Balram's side. Adiga seemed to intend this as a metaphor for the current Indian economic model. There was much emphasis on the increasing polarization between rich and poor (which, according to Balram, had rendered all previously existing barriers of caste, community and gender obsolete!) But the India presented in *The White Tiger* had been demanded not only of its vast and varied middle class, but also its working class. People who had to wait for buses were all servants in the houses of the rich or destitute pavement dwellers; Delhi's call centre workers are all the daughter of the rich. By doing this - and by embodying the poor in Balram - a man apparently without human tied of any kind, inextricably bound to his employer, and only

desiring (literally) to become Ashok. Adiga avoided and elided any question of the possibility of challenges to the model itself.

India is a land of chicken coops. The Chicken coops have been in existence since Manu wrote that kings and priests came out of god's prettiest and purest body parts while, shit-eating lowly men and women came out of his holy anus. The chicken can move freely-two inches to the right and two inches to the left. If any chicken dares to poke its head out of the coop, a moment later the chicken's family can pull the stupid chicken back in, lament the lack of a head on it and bury it quickly. Once in a while there comes a daring chicken that thinks out of the coop. "Aravind Adiga's Man Booker Prize winning novel *The White Tiger* is about the chicken coop and a certain chicken that turns into a White Tiger" (Selva, 2008).

The story unfolded the way Balram broke out to his new found freedom from a caged life of misery through crime and cunning. This was a reflection of contemporary India, calling attention to social justice in the wake of economic prosperity. It was a novel about the emerging new India which was pivoted on the great divide between the haves and have-nots with moral implications. "Everyone thinks he should do what was written on his forehead but a fire in him burns and .moves him away from the established path of penury and servitude" (Selva, 2008). The key metaphor in the novel was of the Rooster Coop. Balram was caged like the chickens in the rooster coop. He, being a White Tiger, had to break out of the cage to freedom.

Go to old Delhi, behind the Jama Masjid, and look at the way they keep chicken there in the market. Hundreds of pale hens and brightly colored roosters, stuffed tightly into wire - mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and shitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench - the stench of terrified, feathered flesh, On the wooden desk above this coop sits a grinning young butcher, showing off the flesh and organs of a recently chopped - up chicken, still oleaginous with a coating of dark blood. The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country" (WT, 173-4).

Balram decided to become a big bellied man, by resorting to corrupt ways he had learnt through bribery, crime, disregarding all civilized ways of life. His violent bid for freedom was shocking. "Did he make just another thug in India's urban Jungle or a revolutionary and idealist?" (Turpin) Adiga "strikes a fine balance between the sociology of the wretched place he has chosen as home and the twisted humanism of the outcast" (Prasannarajan, 2008). Balram broke away slowly from his family which was contrary to the Indian tradition where loyalty to one's family upholder moral principles. Through his criminal drive Balram became a businessman and runs a car service for the call centers in Bangalore.

"Above all, it's a vision of a society of people complicit in their own servitude: to paraphrase Balram, they are roosters guarding the coop, aware they're for the chop, yet unwilling to escape. Ultimately, the tiger refuses to stay caged. Balram's violent bid for freedom is shocking." (Turpin, 2008) The protagonist confirmed that the trust worthiness of servants was the basis of the entire Indian economy. This was a paradox and a mystery of India.

Because Indian's are the world's most honest people, like the prime minister's booklet will inform you?

No. It's because 99.9 percent of us are caught in the Rooster Coop just like those poor guys in the poultry market.

The Rooster Coop doesn't always work with minuscule sums of money. Don't test your chauffeur with a rupee coin or two - he may well steal that much. But leave a million dollars in front a servant and he won't touch a penny. Try it; leave a black bag with a million dollars in a Mumbai taxi. The taxi driver will call the police and return the money by the day's end. I guarantee it. (Whether the police will give it to you or not is another story, sir!) Masters trust their servants with diamonds in this country! It's true. Every evening on the train out of Surat where they run the world's biggest diamond - cutting and polishing business, the servants of diamond merchants are carrying suitcases full of cut diamonds that they have to give to someone in Mumbai. Why doesn't that servant take the suitcase full of diamonds? He's no Gandhi, he's human, and he's you and me. But he's in the Rooster coop. The trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy.

The Great Indian Rooster Coop. Do you have something like it in China too? I doubt it, Mr. Jiabao. Or you wouldn't need the Communist Party to shoot people and a secret police to raid

their houses at night and put them in jail like I've heard you have over there. Here in India we have no dictatorship. No secret police. That's because we have the coop.

Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many, Mr. Jaibao. A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent, as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way - to exist in perpetual servitude; servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse.

You'll have to come here and see it for yourself to believe it. Everyday millions wake up at dawn - stand in dirty, crowded buses - get off at their masters posh houses - and then clean the floors, wash the dishes, weed the garden, feed their children, press their feet - all for a pittance. I will never envy the rich of America or England, Mr. Jiabao: they have no servants there. They cannot even begin to understand what a good life is. Now, a thinking man like you, Mr. Premier, must ask two questions.

Why does the Rooster coop work? How does it trap so many millions of men and women so effectively?

Secondary, can a man break out of the coop? What if one day, for instance, a driver took his employer's money and ran? What would his life be like?

I will answer both for you, sir.

The answer to the first question is that the pride and glory of our nation, the repository of all our love and sacrifice, the subject of no doubt considerable space in the pamphlet that the prime minister will handover to you, the *Indian family*, is the reason we are trapped and tied to the coop.

The answer to the second question is that only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed - hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters - can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature (WT, 175-7).

Balram showed his perverted psychopathic nature by deciding to break out of the coop betraying his family and society. He had to suffer humiliation in the hands of his masters with ever increasing menial duties which climaxes in his being blackmailed when Ashok's wife Pinky killed a man in drunken driving. He was forced to sign a statement accepting full responsibility for the accident.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN,

I, Balram Halwai, son of Vikram Halwai, of Laxmangrah village in the district of Gaya, do make the following statement of my own free will and intention:

That I drove the car that hit an unidentified person, or persons, or person and objects, on the night of January 23rd of this year. That I then panicked and refused to fulfill my obligations to

the injured party or parties by taking them to the nearest hospital emergency ward. That there were no other occupants of the car at the time of the accident. That I was alone in the car, and alone responsible for all that happened.

I swear by almighty God that I make this statement under no duress and under instruction from no one (WT, 168).

He has to suppress his embittered feelings being confined to the Rooster Coop. He cannot go contrary to his master's bidding. He was falsely implicated and forced to accept responsibility for a crime he had not committed. A remorse filled Pinky madam left Mr. Ashok for good in the middle of the night pushing a fat envelope with cash into Balram's hands. From then on, he had to play the wife - substitute for Mr. Ashok. He had to oversee his master's every need as he turned to heavy drinking. Left to control his master, Balram began to awaken from his reverie in the Rooster Coop. Having been a witness to all of Ashok's corrupted practices and gambling with money to buy politicians, to kill and to loot, Balram decided to steal and kill. Adiga spoke out his mind why he wrote the novel:

...I want to challenge this idea that India is the world's greatest democracy. It may be so in an objective sense, but on the ground, the poor have such little power... I wanted something that would provoke and annoy people ...The servant-master system implies two things: One is that the servants are far poorer than the rich-a servant has no possibility of ever catching up to the master. And secondly, he has access to the master-the master's money, the master's physical person. Yet crime rates in India are very low... What is stopping a poor man from taking to the crime that occurs in Venezuela or South Africa? You need two things (for crime to occur)-a divide and a conscious ideology of resentment. We don't have resentment in India. The poor just assume that the rich are a fact of life. For them, getting angry at the rich is like getting angry at the heat ...But I think we're seeing what I believe is a class-based resentment for the first time... (Sawhney, 2008).

Injustice and inequality had always been around us and we got used to it. How long could it go on? Social discontent and violence had been on the rise. What Adiga highlighted was the ever widening gap between the rich and poor and the economic system that lets a small minority to prosper at the expense of the majority. "At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the West, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society...The great divide" (Raaj, 9, 2008).

Commenting on a servants' viewpoint in the novel, Adiga wrote "It is his subjective views which are pretty depressing. There are also two crimes that he commits: His roles and he kills, and by no means do I expect a reader to sympathize with both the crimes. He's not meant to be a figure whose views you should accept entirely. There's evidence within the novel that the system is more flexible than Balram suggests, and it is breaking down faster than he claims. And within the story I hope that Balram suggests, and it is breaking down faster than he claims. And within the story I hope that there's evidence of servants cheating the masters systematically... to suggest a person's capacity for evil or vice is to grant them respect - is to acknowledge their capacity for volition and freedom of choice" (Sawhney, 2008).

When he planned meticulously how to snatch Ashok's huge money bag he would get out of his Rooster Coop and would take a plunge into the entrepreneur's world. He never gave up the fight for survival like the freak white tiger. While visiting the National Zoo in Delhi he told Dharam "Let animals live like animals; let humans live like humans. That's my whole philosophy in a sentence" (WT, 276). When he chanced to see the white tiger in the enclosure, he began his musings:

...Not any kind of tiger.

The creature that gets born only once every generation in the jungle.

I watched him walk behind the bamboo bars. Black strips and sunlit white fur flashed through the slits in the dark bamboo; it was like watching the slowed -down reels of an old black-and-white film. He was walking in the same line, again and again-from one end of the bamboo bars to the other, then turning around and repeating it over, at exactly the same pace, like a thing under a spell. He was hypnotizing himself by walking like this that was the only way he could tolerate this cage. Then the thing behind the bamboo bars stopped moving. It turned its face to my face. The tiger's eyes met my eyes, like my master's eyes have met mine so often in the mirror of the car. All at once, the tiger vanished. A tingling went from the base of my spine into my groin. My knees began to shake, I felt light (WT, 276-7).

It was the experience of being hypnotized by the tiger that energized the criminal in him to be blood thirsty and took law into his own hands. The more he was educated, he became more corrupt, and the reader's sympathy for the psychopath never dwindles. The Rooster Coop continued to exist

like a never ending oppressive system, "The Rooster coop was doing its work, and Servants have to keep other servants from becoming innovators, experimenters, or entrepreneurs... The coop is guarded from the inside" (WT, 194). An Andrew Holgate opined, "Rather than encouraging freedom and "enterprise", everything in this system... landlords, family, education, politics... seems designed specifically to suppress them" (Holgate, 2008).

Balram escaping from the Coop was a servant turned villain and a murderer who became a self - proclaimed entrepreneur who called himself "I'm tomorrow" (WT, 6). He subscribed to a philosophy of future with hope. As he waited to board a train he got on to weight machine which represented for him "final alarm bell of the Rooster Coop. The sirens of the coop were ringing - its wheels turning- its red lights flashing! A rooster was escaping from the coop! A hand was thrust out – I was picked up by the neck and shoved back into the coop. I picked the chit up and re - read it" (WT, 248). His subconscious kept haunting him of his escape from the coop of his past oppression. Moving from train to train he kept his track untraceable by the law enforcing agencies who had advertised his pictured as a wanted man.

Life in Bangalore had to be that of a fugitive as "White Tiger keeps no friends. It's too dangerous" (WT, 302). But he had to keep in touch with the world of the road and the pavement where he received his education to freedom. Speaking of the socialist leaders in Bangalore on whom people placed their hope of revolution.

Keep your ears open in Bangalore - in any city or town in India - and you will hear stirrings, rumors, threats of insurrection. Men sit under lampposts at night and read. Men huddle together and discuss and point fingers to the heavens. One night, will they all join together - will they destroy the Rooster coop?...May be once in a hundred years there is a revolution that frees the poor (WT, 303).

Sitting in his comfortable office as an entrepreneur living in the world centre of technology and outsourcing, Balram was confident that he will not be caught by law enforcing

agents as he had stepped out of the coop of his past. "I'll say it was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant" (WT, 320-1).

In portraying the character of Balram, Adiga had excelled in projecting a 'typical psychopath/sociopath, our society can churn out. In "Behavioral Traits of Psychopaths," Jennifer Copley points out : "While most people's actions are guided by a number of factors, such as the desire to avoid hurting other people, the Psychopath selects a course of action based on only one factor - what can he get out of it. This cold - blooded mode of reasoning enables the psychopath to commit acts that most people's consciences would not allow" (Copley, 2008). Psychopaths were also known as sociopaths who were manipulative, deceitful, impulsive, lacking self - restraint, and inclined to take risks. They were "Callous, deceitful, reckless, guiltless... The psychopath understands the wishes and concerns of others; he simply does not care... The psychopath believes that rules and morals are for other, weaker people who obey because they fear punishment" (Adams, 2008) ... All these traits are found in Balram who went about heroically planning his heinous crimes.

In the 1940's African- American author Richard Wright's *Native Son* told a similar tale about a poor black man named Bigger Thomas, but there are two important differences. One is that the Balram Halwai character easily gets away with his crime, and the second is that Balram's character never actually changes: he already has a self-described model of how the world works and of his place in it (Apte, 2008).

Balram was exceptional and beyond his circumstances, a rare "White Tiger" amongst his generation. He achieved that which seemed impossible - to break free from the chains of his poverty, lack of education and low social status to develop a business of which he was the master - rather than the servant. Balram's amoral attitude made him unlikeable, but his circumstances created within us a feeling of sympathy and compassion. Adiga skillfully weaved a multifaceted picture of India and its people that stirred similar conflicting response from us, driving the story forward and drawing the reader into this blackly humorous, insightful and thought-provoking tale.

But with his sinister humor and storytelling virtuosity, Balram traced one nobody's reckless route to status and security. Even now, most will never follow him. Yet, as any visitor grasped, the country kept the place to a baffling violence, most of India remains miraculously civilized in everyday life.

Adiga grabs our hands and places it on the pulse of new India, the India which like the moon shines brightly on one face and is utterly dark on the other. He grabs our face and rubs it on the unwashed underbelly of real India (as opposed to pretend India where the chicken masters live). The real India is where private car drivers wait for three hours while their masters have their nails manicured and their butts wiped, where a poor child is taken out of school to walk a dog that wears a silk scarf. If reality is what majority agree to, then real India is where poor people live and how they live (or die), all else is pretend India. A few may cross over to Light from Darkness but that's only a few. Even a Revolution cannot turn the Darkness into Light in India. Besides, Revolutions are not for India (again, like the moon). They are for countries like China where one man can decide to starve a hundred million chickens because they are dead weight when making The Great Leap Forward.

Adiga captures both the opportunities and the rottenness that pervades our society and out time with unceremonious and in your face narrative. The novel frames the issues from a very one - sided angle that of the intelligent but culturally and ethically impoverished protagonist. This is by design however; it does make the novel limited in scope. Nevertheless, the novel succeeds in pressing home the colluding factors that make or break a person born to poverty and the senselessness of the suffering that millions of Indians go through every day. Between the lines that tell Munna's story, the stink of India viscerally penetrates our minds that the story lingers in one's head long after the book is finished.

Statistics show how poverty is on the rise in India:

- i) 4 in every 10 Indian children are malnourished according to a UN report.

ii) India Ranks a lowly 66 out of 88 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2008. The report says India has more hungry people - more than 200 million - than any other country in the world.

iii) One third of the world's poor live in India, according to the latest poverty estimates from the World Bank. Based on its new threshold of poverty - \$ 1.25 a day - the number of poor people has gone up from 421 million in 1981 to 456 million in 2005.

iv) India ranks 128 out of 177 countries in the UN's Human Development Index
Aravind Adiga's story of a rickshawallah's move from the "darkness" of rural India to the "light" of urban Gurgaon reminds us of the harsh facts behind the fiction (Raaj, 9, 2008).

Excessive economic inequalities and unwarranted delay in applying the remedies for them are often the causes of such dissention. Besides, quest for power and total disregard for human rights helps escalate violence and strife among men. There is need for organizations that promote peace among men. Remedial measures have to be taken by Government and law makers to prevent rampant corruption and oppression of the downtrodden. Let not the *law of the jungle* prevails as Adiga has proven through his protagonist. Mere anarchy and chaos will prevail if an evil is hatched to counter another evil.

There are some Indian's who wonder if the award was given to *The White Tiger* to mar the face of India in the international arena as she is becoming a global economic power. Is the west exposing our poverty and unrest to hurt our national pride? Such fears are baseless as Adiga has brought out a fable with superb mingling of his observations. Though several critics have raised eyebrows stating that Adiga has not depicted the brave new India in a sufficiently glowing light, David Godwin comes to his rescue saying, "It really isn't the job of a writer to be the ambassador for his country. A writer's commitment is to the truth as he sees it" (Roy, 4, 2008). Manjula Padmanabhan, author and playwright, is very critical of Adiga when she says that the book is "a tedious, unfunny slog ...compelling, angry and darkly humorous... But is this school boyish sneering the best that we can do? Is it enough to paint an ugly picture and then suggest that the way out is to slit the oppressor's throat and become an oppressor oneself?" (Padmanabhan, 2008) Whatever be the critical appraisal, as Gurcharan Das would opine, "A book

should not be judged on the basis of whether it creates a negative or positive picture of a country. It should be seen as a work of art and judged on its literary merits" (Das, 2008).

However, *The White Tiger* should make every right thinking citizen to read the signs of the times and be socially conscious of the rights and duties of each one, irrespective of cast, creed or economic status, to prevent create the types of Ashok and Balram in our society. No use building giant cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata where the residents do not have enough water, transport and electricity. India should become a country of smaller cities and towns. All that the government and industry have to do is to select suitable areas where offices or industries can be conveniently located. In each of these places, the government and private enterprise must provide a good school, a college and a hospital. They are already spending that money but mostly in big cities. Let them do it in smaller new and old towns and the people will do the rest.

It was pleasantly surprised to find a most unlikely person knowing what India needs. Ironically, he is the king of high fashion, Pierre Cardin, who was in India. What would he be planning for India? Making India dazzle in fashion so that he could earn his millions? His reading of the Indian situation was remarkably wise:

I have not come here to dress 10 rich women; they can come to Paris to buy my clothes. I will be happy to dress one million Indians in the street. Because your country is a poor country, I did not want to come here with eccentric clothes. You will look ridiculous in sophisticated clothes and I am not ridiculous (Verma, 2008).

This is the true message for India - We must look to the millions, not just the few who, through segments of golf clubs and five star hotels, make India seem desirable. But India lives beyond. While we let those few make the millions that will help India, let us also let the others make themselves and also India.

The strength of a woman is not measured by the impact that all her hardships in life have had on her; but the strength of a woman is measured by the extent of her refusal to allow those hardships to dictate her and who she becomes.

— [C. Joy Bell C](#)



The roles that the women are playing in the twenty first century India are phenomenal. They have come a long way from being just a daughter, a wife, a mother to potent forces that are shaping the country. They have crossed the threshold of their homes and stepped out into different professions that are significantly important for the economics of the country. Everyone is aware of Indira Nooyi, Swati Piramal, Falguni Nayar, Chanda Kochhar and their likes who have carved a niche for themselves and are taking full advantage of the fruits of globalization. This has been possible because of education which has given this new found independence. They now have a room of their own from the vantage point of which they speak a language of Independence. This was echoed many decades ago by Simone de Beauvoir who had said that “the independent woman is one who like men can move from immanence to transcendence in her public life activities and avoid sadomasochistic relationships in her personal life” (670). This comes from her feminist treatise *The Second Sex* (1949) in which she has ripped apart the veneer of prevalent social order and has tried to instill that sense of grit and rebellion in women that is needed to fight against male hegemony. Culminating the long standing debate begun by writers such as Margaret Fuller in the nineteenth century, Beauvoir also asserts that women can only free themselves by “thinking, taking action, working, creating on the same terms as men” (727). It is obvious that thought is changed by education and ability to work and create comes from the power that is thus generated.



Indira Nooyi



Swati Piramal



Chanda Kochhar



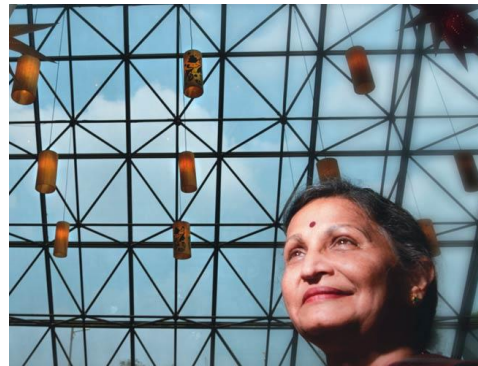
Shobha De



Falguni Nayar



Zia Mody



Renu Sud Karnad

(Managing Partner, AZB & Partners)



Ritu Kumar

(Fashion Designer)

(HDFC Managing Director)



Debjani Ghosh

(Intel's South Asia Managing
Director, Sales and Marketing)



Neha Kirpal

(Founder and Director of the India Art Fair)



Leena Nair

(Executive Director, HR,
Hindustan Unilever)



Renuka Ramnath



Tanya Dubash

(Founder, Multiples Alternate Asset Management)



Sangeeta Pendurkar

(Managing Director, Kellogg's India)



Schauna Chauhan Saluja

(CEO, Parle Agro)



Arathi Krishna

(Joint MD, Sundram Fasteners)

(Executive Director & President (Marketing),
Godrej Group)



Archana Hingorani

(CEO, IL&FS Investment Manager)



Aisha De Sequeira

(MD and Head, Investment
Banking, Morgan Stanley India)



Meher Pudumjee

(Thermax Chairperson)



Kirthiga Reddy
(Head, Facebook's India Operations)



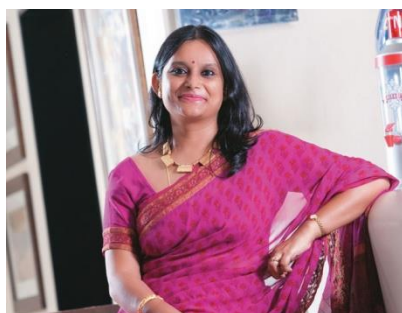
Zarin Daruwala
(Head of Wholesale banking,
ICICI Bank Ltd)



Jyotsna Suri
(Chairperson and Managing Director, Bharat Hotels)



Ekta Kapoor
(Joint MD, Balaji Telefilms)



Abanti Sankaranarayanan
(MD, Diageo India)



Vinita Gupta
(CEO, Lupin Pharmaceuticals Inc)



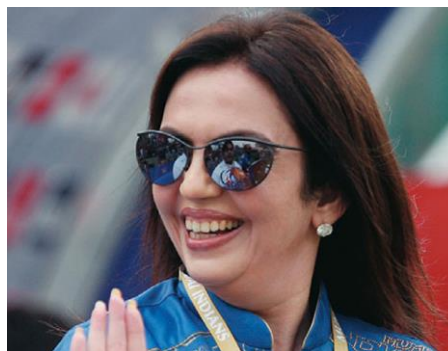
Aruna Jayanthi
(India CEO, Capgemini)



Chiki Sarkar
(Publisher, Penguin Books India)



Lynn De Souza
(Chairman and CEO of Lintas Media Group)



Nita Ambani



Vinita Bali
(MD, Britannia Industries)

Earlier, because of unawareness and primarily due to traditional bondages women had willy-nilly agreed to subordinate themselves; and because of their lack of resources had taken the unequal distribution of power between man and woman as being predestined. Susan Moller Okin in *Justice, Gender and the Family* (1989) sums this up very succinctly

When we look seriously at the distribution between husbands and wives of such critical social goods as work (paid and unpaid), power, prestige, self-esteem, opportunities for self-development, and both physical and economic security constructed inequalities between them, right down the list.(136)

What has happened today has been a redistribution of resources which has enabled a woman to gain a semblance of equality and shaken the shackles of dominance. Due to their strident endeavor to get out of the subaltern syndrome, women today are also breaking the walls between the object and the subject position. It was this that was the root cause of their oppression and clearly, linked to their body and to sexuality. Such notions are now being reconceptualized. But this is true of urban, middle class working women alone and we restrict to those and the texts referred to are by and about this seeming minority. We say *seeming* because the reality of new India is that a much larger percentage of women are working than is statistically recognized.

Women continue to play a marginal and peripheral role despite constituting almost half the population with a critical role in production and social processes. The initiative taken by the early social reformers did resolve certain basic issues about the socialization process which resulted in better opportunities for education, employment, earnings, empowerment and entitlement to property but still there is a long way to go and the fight against the long standing prejudices has yet not been resolved. Women in India still face enormous pressure to conform to social mores and the need to conform to traditional roles within families poses a barrier. Though women have made great strides in the corporate world in the last three decades, they are still too often discouraged from having careers that infringe too much on family life. On the other hand, it is also true that women who have achieved academically and

economically are seen to be smart and savvy, often not in a positive way. Working women from the lower classes often take their economic independence too literally and fall a prey to violence but harassment at the work place is a pan-global phenomenon and India has its share of the evil. However, there is another side to the question. It is widely observed that earning power has allowed women to find a voice and form opinions of their own; women are increasingly becoming aware that a career will not cost them the neglect of their family and children but allow them greater power to spend not only on others but on themselves as well.

The new situation in which Indian women are now finding themselves in has made them more vocal about their experiences and writing about their felt worth has changed over the years. Gone are the days when women had to write under pseudonyms or write what was expected of them. Today, women can talk about anything and write it as easily. From Baby Halder, a domestic help who transcribes her life (*A Life Less Ordinary* 2006), the harshness of growing up- oppressed to Ravathi, a hijra telling the truth about herself, to Sagarika Ghosh, a journalist (*The Gin Drinkers* 1998) who writes about her experiences as does Barkha Dutt to others from different professions the writerly scape is growing every day. There are those who have received acclaim as novelists in their own right such as Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapoor, Gita Hariharan, Jaishree Mishra, Kiran Desai, and those who are in different professions and translate their experiences into the printed page for the world to recognize their being and becoming.

Women writers are a major force to reckon with and form a good seventy per cent of English writing in India. This is largely because of the opportunities that women have been given and the reforms enacted in the past couple of decades especially in the field of education. As a result of promoting women's education more and more girls belonging to the middle class graduated and entered into the job market. Undoubtedly, they were subjugated and not only were the women's jobs considered secondary to the men's but also they were economically not at parity with the men's job- Nurses, teachers, stenographers and bank clerks was what they began with but gradually the new working woman made her mark and today through several years to agitation, litigation and gender sensitization as well as sexual

harassment she has acquired a status of her own and at parity with her working counterparts. Today it seems that in India gender has become irrelevant in the new professions and as the world opens up wider and wider opportunities are increasing for those who have made ambition their prime goal in life. The old struggles are now irrelevant to the new age women and it seems that the Indian woman has definitely come of age. If we look at the writing and the publishing industry in India we witness a sea change, a complete face-over. Women are gathering more laurels and their work are being appreciated for the precision, the meticulousness and the added humane touch which has delivered more goods than even before.

Travelling down the history lane from a Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutt through the wide-reigning realm of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande to the now overly popular Diasporic writers on the one hand and ‘chick lits’ like Shobha De on the other, one is appalled by the quantum of output. And today in the era of *Metro Reads* one finds women from different professions trying to make a new mark through the narration of their diverse experiences- a woman from the media writing her reportage, a bank CEO, a head of a food industry, from the science and technology sector, from those in the upcoming call centers, everyone has a lot to lend to the feminist discourse of the day.

This chapter takes as its focus young Indian women writers and their largely revolve around their own area of experience. The foremost name that comes to the ken is Shobha De- a Bombayite, a socialite and a part of the elite glitterati. Her works reflect her attitude to life, her station in society and her world view.

Shobha De was born in January 1948 to a supportive parentage of Justice Govind Hari Rajadhyaksha and his benevolent wife Mrs. Indira Govind Rajadhyaksha, of Saraswat Brahmin community, in Satara, Maharashtra. At the time of her birth when Shobha De was born her father was a special magistrate in Satara, but very soon he was promoted as an Assistant Solicitor to the Government of India at the centre in Delhi and later on became the joint Secretary in ministry of law at Mumbai. She is

the daughter of that conservative family in which a female child is regarded as a liability to the family whereas the birth of a male child is celebrated. Shobha De presents this situation so tellingly. When her brother Ashok was born, the eldest sister Mandakini had an auspicious kumkum hand impression imprinted on her back. When Shobha De was born, her elder sister Kunda also expected the same celebration but met with a withering snap from their maternal grandmother: “What? You want kumkum on your back? Go and fetch some cow-dung instead. Do you realize there are three daughters in the family now? Three, weren’t two enough?” (*Selective Memory*, 32)

Shobha De was educated in Delhi and Bombay. She graduated from St. Xavier’s College, Bombay, with a B.A. degree in Psychology and Sociology. Shobha is introduced to the field of modeling by Shashi Banker and worked as a model, because it provides her enough money equivalents to that of full-fledged salary and the feeling of independence. It was Mr. Nari Hira, a Sindhi businessman who introduced her to the field of writing in 1970 with *Stardust*, through her friend Shilpa Shah, who asked her “can you write?” (84) De says, “I didn’t choose modeling, it chose me. I didn’t choose writing, writing chose me” (76). *Stardust* shows her credible level of objectivity about society and her experiences about film people who are in her eyes are heartless. Since 1970, she founded and edited three popular magazines *Stardust*, *Society*, and *Celebrity* and is Consulting Editor to *Sunday* and *Megacity*. She enjoys writing like her independence. She earned both name and fame while working as a free-lance writer and columnist for several leading newspapers and magazines.

After the failure of *Celebrity*, the magazine edited and published by Shobha De, which led to her financial bankruptcy, isolation and even divorce from her first husband Sudhir, the superstitious streak in De “compelled her to search her titles that begin with ‘S’, the first alphabet of her name” (Adhikari, 284). Inspired by the success of her first novel *Socialite Evenings*, she begins the title of all her writings with ‘S’. So far Shobha De has published fifteen books out of which seven are novels. *Selective Memory* has helped the reader to understand much about the writer, why she writes the way she does of what she does. Her novels and short stories, her television serial *Swabhimaan* and *Sukanya* and her news paper columns,

are all, she admits, inspired by and based upon people, incidents, experiences and emotions in her own life. The dark side of human nature, the squalor and the evil in the society and in human relationships that Shobha De explores in her fiction are, it becomes evident as she narrates of her vision of her life, the product of her own middle class puritanical upbringing, which has always kept her an outsider in that glittering “upper crust” world into which she has been thrust (or has thrust herself) (*Selective Memory*, 330-331). The rewriting of her life enables Shobha De as the narrator/author of her text to reinterpret the multitude of social and cultural codes imprinted on the personal consciousness.

Her individualistic and idiosyncratic views on social aspects of life in *Surviving Men* and *Socialite Evenings*, her emphasis on sex in *Starry Nights*, the depiction of the new woman in *Sisters* and other works are dealt at length by Shobha De herself in her autobiography *Selective Memory*. One very important aspect of the autobiography is Shobha De’s handling of the language as signifying her gender consciousness. Barthes points out, an autobiography is “really a novel that does not speak its name” (Cronin, 254-78) and it is as much fiction as novel proper. Interestingly Karuna’s character in *Socialite Evenings* bears a close resemblance with the facts in Shobha De’s life. Facts of Karuna’s life in the novel under consideration such as her childhood, education, trip to New York find a place in De’s *Selective Memory: Stories from My Life*, written on being fifty years. *Socialite Evenings* bears a marked resemblance to the story of Shobha De- only the name has been changed from Shobha to Karuna. Similarly these details find place in her latest book *Superstar India: From Incredible to Unstoppable*. Sharad Srivastava observes:

In India also women authors have boldly come out with intimate details of their lives in their autobiographies. When women could talk so freely about themselves, it was natural that they would be more uninhibited in their writings, especially in their novels (Srivastava, 81).

In *Selective Memory* there is an attempt at demolishing the male ego while writing about males. Instead of submitting to the general male-centric view of woman as merely erotic objects she discovers males as insecure who “feel terribly threatened by self-sufficient women” (*Socialite Evenings*, 88). The

same feminist views here depict males through an animal imaginary associating the power and option of taming the animals with women. She refers to a man in disapproval: “the man was a dog. A rabid one. I didn’t see myself as a lamp-post” (*Selective Memory*, 97). Similar utterances are there in her fiction (that can be read as concealed autobiography) like *Socialite Evenings* where “Ritu confesses to Karuna the lesson that men, like dogs, could be conditioned through reward and punishment” (Samanta, 81).

De proverbially speaking sowed the wind by launching her lust-laced *Socialite Evenings* and reaped a whirlwind, in turn with the phenomenal release of her *Starry Nights*, her orgiastic marvel that virtually caused to the puritans of art much heart burning, wrathful introspection and bitter pangs of sour-grapes. Shobha De’s *Starry Nights* in the light of contemporary feminist critical theories put forth by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Taking a cue from M. H. Abrams much-celebrated *The Mirror and the Lamp*, they use the symbols of ‘mirror’ and ‘vamp’ to illustrate and illuminate “the intellectual assumptions and strategies of most contemporary feminist theorists” (Gilbert, 32). The mirror, for the feminist critics ‘becomes a space in which to capture the shifting historical images of gendered reality’ (34). What Gilbert and Gubar postulate about the feminist critic is largely true of the feminist author also. The feminist author belonging to the ‘mirror’ category, tries to rebuild the past, often questioning the misinterpreted and distorted cultural history. But he/she does not challenge the concepts of reality which underlie the very activities of periodization and evaluation under the patriarchal umbrella. To name a few feminist novelist that may be said to fall in this mirror category in the Indian English Fiction, one can easily recall the likes of Anita Desai, Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and even Bharti Mukherjee, who have fearlessly probed into the question of the subaltern, subordination and liberation of woman in the Indian milieu.

The second category in which, Gilbert and Gubar place the more vocal and violent feminist critics is that of vamp. A vamp serves as a paradigm for the artist’s expressive autonomy as well as “...for rebelliously antirational and anti-hierarchical impulses that have been repressed but not erased by patriarchal culture” (145). The ‘vamp’ artist, like other feminist, also demand total liberation from the

male domination, a re-writing of female discourse and deconstruction of the binary opposites of culture/nature, man/woman, mind/body, day/night, reason/imagination etc, in their works. They hate, may dislike, the phallogocentric standards of art, culture and history. The ‘mirror’ authors are definitely full of decorum and rationalism and do not believe in breaking down the aesthetic taboos in pell-mell fashion. To the contrary, “like a dark double, the vamp acts out the desire for the apocalyptic revolution against law and order that lurks on the other side of the mirror” (157). Shobha De’s striking affinity with the ‘vamp’ group of feminist authors with special reference to *Starry Nights*, places her amongst those radical writers who are against subalternity.

Shobha De’s women are ones who form a new and highly intriguing group- they are daring, educated, unconventional, shrewd, rich, and self-absorbing with loose morals. Shobha De is different from predecessors, as she makes it clear where she writes about herself and her books:

I was caught between the two- not quite here and not quite there. Perhaps because of the publicity I received, my books were regarded with suspicion and skepticism for being commercially successful. We were still clinging to the virtue of low-key⁶, underplayed, quite conformist writing in English that didn’t shake the status quo. Writers, who preceded me particularly women, were either erudite elderly ladies or fierce single woman with a strong message to deliver. I didn’t fit in. There was no clear slot for me. It was far easier to dismiss my books and concentrate on the publicity- which, when I think back, was phenomenal by those days’ standards, but modest by today’s (*Selective Memory*, 348).

Shobha De displays the first signs of being a vamp artist in *Socialite Evenings* in which the troika of female characters symbolizes the absolute freedom of womankind from all types of patriarchal restraints. In *Socialite Evening* Anjali is highly attractive and charming. Anjali throws off the conventional moral values by wayside as she seductively rises from her middle-class background to the upper-most rung of society. She enacts a marriage of convenience with Abe, “an experience rake with a wild reputation” (*Socialite Evenings*, 12). Both of them revel in the orgiastic rituals. Her passion for sex is illimitable indeed as the novel bristles with her frequent sexual encounters. Even Karuna discards the traditional role of a wife and fondly relishes the extra-marital relationship with Krish. Taking a lesson

from her mentor Anjali, Karuna brazenly adopts a militant attitude with her husband when he tries to prevent her from enjoying a week-long sexual orgy with Krish in Rome. Anjali, Karuna, and Ritu are the proverbial succubi who reign supreme in their world of limitless libido. *Starry Nights* is a blend of the mirror and the vamp approaches to feminism. All the events in the novels up to Aasha surrender to Kishanbhai fall in the mirror category and after that it is of vamp category.

The modern Indian woman, who is at the centre of fiction of Shobha De, is no longer a model of Vedic, or pre- Vedic dignified woman, nor is she modeled on the post-Aryan woman who is passive and subalternate in nature and accepts the dominance and superiority of men in society. De's women born in post-war generation, in an atmosphere of bewilderment and confusion, have become bold and capable of surviving in degrading moral values of life. These characters suffer a humiliation as far as their social, economic, and cultural life is concerned but they also find themselves capable of struggling, compromising, and realizing their existence in the end.

Shobha De has either been dismissed or, at best, discussed among literary circle as a female counterpart of Khushwant Singh. Shobha De, like D.H. Lawrence, is modern novelist who is famous for portraying the sexual mania of the commercial world in most of her works. But they cannot be easily termed as pornographic. Her women are strong enough to say a big 'no' to every unfair treatment meted out to them. In narration of incidents she is very frank and straight forward. She emphatically says that she is not a writer of sex alone. Sex is there in her novels and no one can deny it, but according to her, she is not like Khushwant Singh and condemns him for writing *The Company of Women*:

I may write something stronger in future. And no, I'll definitely not write *The Company of Woman*. It gives sex a bad name. My fantasies happen to be far more imaginative. Khushwant should never have written the book-sex, in Khushwant's case, has always been in his head and there it should have remained. I adore Vikram Seth. And I love reading Amy Tan, Kathy Lette, and new women writers with something original to say, like Helen Fielding of Bridget Jones' Diary (Bhattacharya, 1).

She does not welcome those beings who have no logical insight to understand the undercurrent of her writings especially novels. Shobha De's remarks about how *Socialite Evenings* originated, is also helpful in understanding her manner of writing. For instance, she points out that her *Socialite Evenings* is not Indianized version of *Beverley Hill* but an entirely accurate if merciless exposure of Bombay "high society" (*Selective Memory*, 330). That is why she used the kind of language and the explicit sex scenes that cause 'major shock waves' among readers when it was first published: "this was the first time that an Indian woman wrote in this manner, and it was difficult to accept" (331). Shobha De believes, obviously, that she was writing the truth as she saw it, in the only way it could be expressed, and not because it ensured quick sales and a glamorous notoriety with which, however, she is only too often an easily identified. She further says about her novels that one encounter to bring home the fact. I had always been gravitating towards women. I was a women's woman" (Sanghvi, 1).

Partly her own writings and to some extent media have projected Shobha De as a glamorous person who is a keen observer of upper-class life of cosmopolitan cities (particularly Mumbai) but lacks commitment to the social cause. This kind of public and literary image does not augur well for Shobha De, the person, either. Thus, we can say her novels are based on some real story, but presented through she could either "ruminate or write" (Bhattacharya, 1). In other words, we can say she is "a social commentator" (*Selective Memory*, 229).

But it does not mean that she is a revolutionary, as is clear from her words:

I'm only a newspaper hack. My printed opinions are hardly likely to change the world, topple governments, and make heads roll. A mention or two in my column may help some society lady sell a few more Salwar-Kameezes. It may let a few leaders of the paper know that such-and-such person exists and is doing interesting stuff or that I feel strongly about certain issues. (330)

The same thing she suggests in an interview: "Where people could not be reformed by the writings of revered saints and gurus, can my writing reform them?" (Shukla, 1) She further speaks about her writing style: "I am teller of stories. If there is a subliminal message in there, somewhere, readers are welcome to it. I do not see myself as a Nineties version of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in a sari" (Guha, 3).

Shobha De is perhaps the first woman writer to write about man-woman relationship with our inhibitions. Of Course there is Kamala Das who, through her poems and her *My Story* brought out the hypocrisy that pervades all human relationships. De differs from Das in the sense that De is more familiar with the darker side of the so called sophisticated section of society which parades as a decent crowd when there is sunshine. The sunset brings about a great transformation in social actions and cosmetics take over in bright lights or in more fashionable candle lights. Morality takes a backseat and people become shadows. De is familiar this world and she watches everything and writes beautifully about the women who have decided to refuse to continue with the conventional patterns of sexuality, subalternity and gender specific roles and attains sexual independence by moving against sexual subalternity.

Whatever Shobha De has portrayed, she has done it with a conviction that the readers may have a real feel of the life of people who are rich and powerful. In fact De's women are contemporary, urban; middle-class Indian ladies who are not out with a sole aim to over throw the establishment or the social system in order to grab power. They are a set of well-equipped women- filthy rich, well-educated, talented, and unbelievably ambitious. These women are calculative and use men as means to an end, the end being a fulfillment of their aim to become rich, famous, and independent, as her novel *Snapshots* has rearranged the equation of the power game wherein woman either controls power or is in a position to ignore the prescriptions of male authority. The drama of the novel has the backdrop of Bombay in the last decade of the present century. None of the critics have analyzed the novel in light of Shobha De's women struggles of attaining economic independence while moving against economic subalternity. Historically, thematically, economically and culturally *Snapshot* depicts woman against subalternity.

A very striking group of new modern women are emerging stealthily in Indian aristocratic society, which De presents in her novels with enthusiasm and creative energy. Her women in the novels show a continuation of similar behavioral traits of the new women. They are all daring women and have lots of stamina to face the stress and strain of the high society they live in. They are not afraid of facing

every brick thrown in their way in their way in their endeavor to lead lives on their own terms. Power, money, and fame are the three biggest aspirations of these women.

They are ready to take up every challenge which lies before them to get what they want. Nothing matters to them as long as they can enjoy life. They refuse to look on man as their superior. They are daring lioness on the prowl, out to attack everything that comes to hinder them from catching their prey. Mallika (Mikki) in *Sisters* is a woman who struggles against the constraints of being a woman and finally completes her odyssey of moving against economic subalternity. The novel set in the corrupt world of big business, appears to tell an interesting story of two wealthy and socialite women who, driven by ambition and lust, are involved in an unending rivalry and go through the ordeal of self-assertion.

Another example of the new dark and sinister image of modern women De daringly unravels in her novel *Socialite Evenings*. Here De views woman not only as meek, passive, and subaltern but as the embodiment of power also. In *Karuna* this power syndrome assumes a positive figure but in *Winnie* it is a negative force, the destructive image, the image of Kali. Let us have a look at what *Karuna*'s husband says about the bewitching *Winnie*: "She is a very strange and powerful woman. I feel ashamed to admit this, but I'm scared of her. I can't do anything because I know she will destroy me. She has that power" (*Socialite Evenings*, 264).

Shobha De has emerged on the literary scene of Indian fiction dealing with the vital aspects of existence and survival in high class society of India. Closely acquainted with the Bombay cinema and the world of modeling, she has beautifully mirrored the shattering human values of this glittering society. Her novels occupy themselves with the themes of over-powering materialism, lack of spirituality and the crumbling moral values in which a wretched and isolated women longs for pleasure and wants to fly freely in the sky of freedom. Her women characters represent a true picture of the modern Indian women.

Her novels dissect the metropolitan India with such clinical success that reveals all its inner characteristics. "It is a terrible insular world, not without its titillations, but ideologically stark and barren,

helplessly cocooned in the frenetic energy that wealth and social unconcern produce in the upper classes of India” (Verma, 4). In fact, in her writings, De exposes India’s rituals, customs, hypocrisy, sexual behavior, prejudices, corruption in politics and what not! However, she exudes great optimism at the same time. This honest spirit is clearly visible in her latest book, *Superstar India*,

I love what I see around me! I love the options and opportunities they beckon and I love the thought that if nothing goes wrong, I’ll be around to see our country rising like the sun, in all its majesty...seeing another golden era, this one even better and more glorious than the one of the Emperor Ashoka’s time, when Gupta’s dynasty ruled over vast swathes of the country and India resembled a lush garden in full bloom. Such a flowering is not beyond us even today, provided we don’t blow it (*Superstar India*, 24).

De’s writing focuses attention on both manifestation of a female sensibility, a feminine reality and on its significance as a means of bringing about an awareness of this reality and this awareness results in De’s woman movement against subalternity. Gender, like other categories such as race and class, has become abundantly clear, is a significant category of social and political reality. Shobha De’s novels delineate the awakening of woman’s consciousness which impels her to strive for moving against subalternity in an absurd and oppressive world. This awakened consciousness of woman stands for the human effort to be whole human being, regardless of difference in gender, caste, and religion.

The studies of Shobha De’s novels show the novelist’s perspective portrayal of the secret depths of human psyche. Like Anita Desai, she has the gift of exploring the subdued depths of women psychology. De’s accurate portrayal, saucy racy and charismatic style, and vivid descriptions compel the reader to identify him or herself with the character and situations.

The search for identity has been a popular theme in fiction. Many writers have portrayed the problem of the place of woman in society, her true belonging, and her place in marital relationship. But often the novels end where these problems begin; writers, no doubt, raise the problem without offering any solutions. Sometimes there is an escape from the misery of the world; sometimes they yield sorrows

of the world. Shobha De has very realistically presented the models before us. Her women, rather strong in character, take bold decisions to survive in society. Shobha De's novels trace the growth of the protagonist such as biography/autobiography sets out to do.

Thus, one finds conflicting critical opinions about the novels of Shobha De and on Shobha De herself, who is an Indian woman, and it's the greatest tragedy in the history that the Indian woman has no ground of her own to stand on and so critics are free to comment on her rationally or irrationally. By and large the critics do not rate her as a serious novelist. In case of Shobha De, some critics have crossed the limit of civic and logic, some remain within, but few are able to read the novelist's mind and reach near the reality. But *Selective Memory* has worked wonders in favor of Shobha De, the person as well as the writer. After reading this one is bound to shake off the image of the writer who could inhabit only the fringe of literary canvass. There also emerges the image of a person who is deeply conventional and devoted and tries to play every role assigned by life or circumstances to perfection, has immense capacity to judge people impersonally and possess a mischievous charm to disarm people even while appearing to be modest. One comes across a woman of tremendous grit who was prepared to fight her way out.

Selective Memory is written when the author turns fifty and coincidentally the country commemorates fifty years of independence. The story of Shobha De's life is the story of the New Woman of independent India. Her self-identification is described in the new ideology. Her combat against the fixed identity of the docile, tortured and conformist woman of pre-independence period turns out to be an individual protest as much as it is a product of influence of the new pace, the invasion of the western culture.

Shobha De, whose entire career is one of rebellion against patriarchy, from her choice of professions and her relationships to her language and her attempts to 'write the body', might accept the authority of authorship in her belief that she is in control of her matter and her medium but in *Selective Memory* her construction of her selfhood is subverted by the way she has "chosen to carve up [her] life

into those segments [she has] no reservations about revealing and serving up to readers” (*Selective Memory*, 527).

Shobha De has tasted the narcotic called fame by choosing to tread a less-peopled path way. Rebel is an open ended concept. Rebel is “one who resents and resists authority” (Geddie, 919). Independence of mind is the basis of a rebel. This is exactly what Shobha De has done throughout her life. De has given a full throated message in her novels that no man should underestimate women and that new woman is here to stay and man beware of the new reality. She visualizes that there will be a time when a woman’s voice will be universally heard and heeded. This is again evident when she says: “the quarrel is not who will scramble to the top of the human heap and stay there but with the race being run in fair terms and without weighted handicaps. Man will have to come to terms with women power. This is not the voice of naïve female optimism. It is the voice of reason and logic. I simply believe that another alternative just does not exist any longer” (*Shooting from the Hip*, 113).

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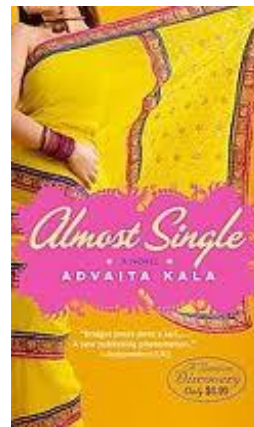
The quarrel is not who will scramble to the top of the human heap and stay there but with the race being run in fair terms and without weighted handicaps. Man will have to come to terms with women power. This is not the voice of naïve female optimism. It is the voice of reason and logic. I simply believe that another alternative just does not exist any longer (*Shooting from the Hip*, 113).

Interpreted in a positive light De’s novels may be seen as her various artistic endeavors to give the message that these women though admirable and commendable yet need to keep a balance in their overly independent life-style and make life more purposeful. Their talents may not be spent merely in tracking down the rich and powerful man or spurning their gorgeous diamonds and rubies.

It is evident from this brief critical look at Shobha De's major works that her treatment of modern women in the field of sexual, economic and emotional and mind and art. The brief analysis of various strategies De's women characters adopt to cope with the pressures and challenges of life shows that De is a writer who depicts the universal struggle, through the specific example of her upper class women, for equality, freedom, justice and above all, for a life of wholeness and human dignity. A detailed in depth analysis of this theme appears to be necessary in order to arrive at a fair interpretation of her views of the world today as well as her vision of life. It can enable one to put in proper perspective the kind of upper-middle class world of women, she has chosen to depict with its intricacies, conflicts and struggles for domination and survival. A focus on this major concern of Shobha De can also help us to appreciate treatment of her art of characterization, her treatment of some of the more controversial issues and into her feministic cum humanistic approach to life if one examines her works with a special focus on the coping strategies of her characters. In fact, the workings of sexual, economic, emotional, social and psychological structures, and how they have an in built element of against subalternity, affecting lives of De's women in varying ways and with different consequences, appear to be very important for our understanding of the relevance of her art to society.

Let us extend the argument raised by Shobha De to women who are working and single as in the case of Advaita Kala's novel *Almost Single* which takes up the issues related with the hotel industry of today. The book is a racy rehash of the Bridget Jones' Diary, where the life of a twenty-nine year old career woman battling weight, wavering between self esteem and hangovers and woefully complicated love life, captures the imagination of the readers. She typifies the hyper active single woman in a big city who has to 'make it' in a man's world. She drinks, smokes, takes up challenging assignments is always on the verge of nervous breakdowns, and is a very conceivable stereotype of a guest relations manager in a five star hotel. Though almost irreverent of Indian womanhood, it is a reflection of the growing confidence of women

working in metropolitan cities. The very fact that they are away from home and in habit two worlds- the cosmopolitan city and the absolutely westernized ambience of a five star hotel- gives them a freedom that very few in India can think of. Their motto seems to be ‘to enjoy life is empowerment’.



... and glitterati of Chennai. Cream Centre has been popular in Mumbai for ... Indian glitterati rejoice! The Queen of Prints herself, ...



Glitz and glamour at the Sunday brunch

Like Pope's heroine Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*, eleven o'clock is too early to get up after a particularly dense hangover. This is Aisha Bhatia, Guest Relations manager who's 'most nights these days are girl's nights out'. She is an avowed alcoholic. She simultaneously tolerates her job, hates her boss, annoys her X, bonds big time with friends Misha and Anushka and routinely suffers umbilical cord whiplash. As part of her work she meets the rich, the bold and the beautiful (ugly as well), dines at five star luxury hotels, stays in them during her travels, can name old and new world wines with élan. Though well paid, her salary gets sucked by her breezy lifestyle.

The novel begins with a typical Sunday hangover. Neither a hot shower nor two double espressos at the neighborhood *Barista* can wipe away her ennui. Another Sunday is wasted but Aisha is too tired to care. A pizza is ordered at six for the greasy desperate cravings and the evening goes by in tele surfing with of course the cigarettes to intervene. Aisha is a typical in job, young Delhiyte surrounded by the two friends who complete the picture of the urban female city dweller. Misha with her one point programmes of netting the perfect NRI and Anushka recently divorced and on a look out for a 'second sherwani' guy. Their body language, the vocabulary they use, the places they haunt are all indicative of the lifestyle of these young, embellished, care-for-nothing belles who indulge in crazy, juvenile, irresponsible, escapades without even a passing twang. It is at one of these that she meets Karan Verma who turns to be a special

guest of her demanding boss who warns her, “don’t get into your bitchy spinster mode. He’s paying 350 dollars a night. I want no complaints” (AS, 33). One of the errands that Mr. Verma assigns her is a list of people whom he wants flower and perfumes delivered to as gifts in the next three months. And the next three months is what it takes the novel to wind up and Aisha to realize that it’s Karan who will ultimately deliver her from the drab monotony of her almost single life. Despite her job, her own lifestyle, friends and an identity, Aisha is still the Indian woman inside and still concern about the other woman in his life. Karan of course waves away every petty offense and acknowledges that although he doesn’t understand her, he loves her anyway.

What we see behind this very frivolous, at times irreverently wicked novel is an insight into the strange pressures that women encounter as professionals in the show biz industry, the adjustments that they have to make to protect themselves from unwanted and unsolicited attention. Also just below the scratching surface is the whole hostile environment of sexual harassment at the work place, where a woman employee is exposed to unwanted sexual advances from colleagues or superiors. The likes of Aisha have to learn to ward off these with as they are capable of. If they do not keep their cool and their distance just about anything can happen to topple the apple cart. Moreover, the not so thinking bosses would have an aversion to women employees if they did not help him upward mobility even if it meant a downward plunge in the latter’s morality, the new spaces that women have entered into like Aisha’s guest relations officer, calls for a reinvention of womanhood, the makeover into an articulate, glamorous being is not without a price to be paid. What if Karan had not been the responsible, understanding type- would not Aisha the almost single turned into an always single spinster dissatisfied and cynical about life? What if Karan had let that one binding towel cloth of fall before the nuptial knot was tied? These and other questions plague one’s conscience despite the breezy roller coaster that *Advaita Kala* takes us on.

We see that Aisha has no inhibitions- she lives as she likes, spends as she likes and is answerable to none about her way of life. This freedom and ensuing power she derives from her economic independence. We can see that employment in a socially productive work system has given Aisha a freer

hand; she can dictate life at her own terms and is not forced to tolerate subjugation that is otherwise the lot of a vast majority who do not have the same chances as she has despite the fact that Aisha has in a way abused her recourse to more self-esteem and self worth. The very fact that she is fending for herself, is neither helpless nor dependent, makes her overcome the meekness that leads to subordination and the passivity that makes one suffer violence. She has access to affording all that she wishes for which other women merely yearn after. Her economic independence has also given her the right to dictate her terms even as far as choosing a life partner is concerned. She can now actualize her fancies and the one wish to get NRI husband too she can fulfill.

The case that Advaita Kala's novel *Almost Single* makes though indirectly is that a good, profession oriented education is a key to a better life. The social, political, filial and even biological wrongs done to women which the women accepted and tolerated quietly not because they were not gritty or defiant, but because, being ignorant, illiterate and uneducated they had not been able to recognize these as wrongs at all. A woman can recognize her own worth, can identify her need to be an individual in her own right, and assert herself in her own independent capacity only when she is educated. Education is the weapon she can use to fight the war of inequality between the illiterate and the educated. Education is the ornament that beautifies a woman forever and knows no barrier of age, race, class, or status. Education is the ticket that allows a woman to proceed on the journey towards economic independence. Education helps in raising the status of women in four ways. Education helps a woman to (1) earn an income in later life; (2) participate actively in public life; (3) determine her own fertility; and (4) achieve personal autonomy. The educated woman has both the choice and the bargaining power in getting a job and salary, unlike her uneducated sister. She can also exercise a choice about the location of the job in the sense that she may or may not choose to go out of the home in order to get productive work. The fact remains that the higher the level of education attained by a woman, the more likely is she to enter and remain in employment for a longer period.

Another significant point made by the novel is that a working woman has to mould herself to the need of the times; she has to accept the dictates that her profession makes. Whether it is one way one dresses, the company one keeps, the time schedule that has to be punctually adhere to, these are sacrifices against a total freedom. But the saving grace is that it is not only she as a woman who has to bow down, but her male counterparts have to do the same. It is this awareness of not being singled out that makes the dictatorial axe more acceptable. There is also the realization that if one is asked to do more it is because she is considered more proficient and competent and this increases self worth. Here it is not a question of a woman being over burdened but it is a matter of efficacy which makes over work and overtime more pleasurable. Aisha gains a sense of superiority when her employers ask her to do that which others might be incapable of.

Undoubtedly there is a woman deep down within her that makes her yearn for 'girlish' pleasures. The tall, dark handsome man from abroad who will lift off her feet and take pride in her love is even her dream which she can now see coming true. This is unlikely in the case of vast majority of women in India who are tied down in an arranged marriage and have to live a life crushing their childhood fantasies. In the case of Aisha, there seems to be no threat of an overpowering marriage, she can walk out of the relationship if it doesn't suit her or turns sour. This privilege is denied to those who do not have an alternative to fall back upon. Although as time passes by she knows that she will have to take a decision. At the very thought of her buddies getting hooked up there is an onset mind of anxiety which is abetted by her mother and in a threatened moment she calls up her astrologer

'Shastriji, *namaste aap kaise hain?*'

'I am fine. I need to ask you something.' I state the obvious.

'*Haan, bolo?*'

'Do you see marriage in my future?'

'Well, your stars are changing. Lagna yog starts on the twenty first of this month. This time is auspicious for marital alliances.' Shastriji is a computer whiz; he has it all on his PC.

‘So, do you see me getting married soon?’ I ask, getting straight to the point.

‘Ummm... the time is auspicious... so let’s see... there are indications.’

Shastriji is also the Artful Dodger; he never commits to anything. I think that’s what keeps me going back. I can never say for certain that he was wrong about something.

There are always ‘indications’(AS, 13).

She also knows that age will bring down her market value and for her this how it works

You start out being called *baby* and then the respectful *didi*, then comes the biggest and most traumatic transition, from *didi* to the dreaded *aunty*; and finally, the truly god-awful *mataji*. But in today’s botoxed world, if you get to the *mataji* stage, you probably don’t care anyway. I’ve been called *aunty* on some rare occasions, but mostly *didi*, so I figure I’m still good to go (AS, 11).

So marriage is perhaps always at the back of their minds and to catch the most eligible bachelor, a decided pursuit. Besides, it would be the best way to ward off the naughty glances of the boss. She knows that he is a philanderer but her career is precariously placed and she has no intentions of getting embroiled. She is also aware that it is the other women who are the powerful mafia in the hotel biz.

The *grandes dames* are seated in order of importance: Rosie, the owner’s secretary, twenty-six years at the hotel; Jayanti, the GM’s secretary, eighteen years in the hotel biz; Madhu, secretary of the Director of Sales, with twelve years of experience; and finally Sarla, who has been working for the Director of Human Resources for fourteen years. I bow my head deferentially and flash them my most obsequious smile (AS, 30).

But these working girls have learnt to take care of themselves. Aisha’s friend Misha is an insurance advisor who comes from a well-to-do family from Bhatinda. She works as and when she has a client or when her liaison officer at the insurance company pleads with her. Bade Papaji got her the job and she doesn’t want any negative feedback finding its way to Bhatinda. It would mean a Skoda ride home via Chandigarh. For Misha, this job in Delhi means a release from the shackles of small-town

living and gidda soirees, and not the money or career prospects it offers. She has no fixed routine as she picks her clients more often than they choose her. Besides, her parents are happier with her away. They don't have to keep explaining why their kudi is still not married. Misha herself is circumspect about her roots. The big city has tutored her well, and she always answers any question about where she grew up with a breezy 'up north'.

These girls also fantasise and romanticise about marriage and are aware that those already married have a different perception:

What is it about single women in our age group? The day they find a man, they totally disconnect from the rest. Their single girlfriends become a burden, reminders of just how close they came to missing the boat. Suddenly, the single girl community is perceived as a group of hungry piranhas, waiting to sink their teeth into any man, even the unavaible variety. The soon-to-be-married species starts to take refuge in married friends, like they understand the nuances of relationships as opposed to the single gals (AS, 117).

So *Almost Single* is a treatise upon knowing what it is to be single, wanting to be married, and yet being afraid to take the plunge. And this is the story that Advaita Kala weaves. Thus, chick lit is not about just any and every upper middle class women but about those women who have worked hard to be able to take the reins of their lives in their own hands. No doubt some of Shobha De's women are those who are born with a silver spoon or those upon whom fate has been munificent, but the likes of Aisha are those who have worked their way up. In their case, the chances of staying up are more. And this is true of the professional career women of modern India; they are the *Maitreyis* and *Gargis*, no *Draupadis* or *Sitas*. No husband of theirs can barter their self worth or renounce them to isolation. Aisha cares not what others would say to her boozing out on the weekends, getting up late on weekends and pampering herself with McDonald food and chocolates as long as she is out there on Monday morning to grace her position as esteemed hotel employee. Gone are the days when women were loathe to enter such jobs today they are coveted and come after one has spent long years in a challenged atmosphere working for them. No job is now mean or disrespectful. One look at what women have achieved in various spheres is enough evidence

that they are taking the world by a storm and not being stormed out by adverse assessments. This rings out loud in *Almost Single* when Lata Didi, the so-called happily married blurts out about the other half of women scape:

Every night is a battle. But what do I do? It's been ten years now and I'm only a college graduate. Where can I go? Papa has also retired. Aisha, it's good you're waited. You have a job, a life, friends, an identity...(AS, 276).

Getting back to the polemics that Simon-de-Beauvoir floated with *The Second Sex* (1949) about women not being biologically but socially the other, chick lit dwells largely on the extremes of otherness that educated, urban young women can fall a prey to. In order to profess difference gendered entities like Aisha, Misha and Anushka flaunt their sexuality which becomes the hallmark of women in 'show' spaces. They affirm to the notions projected by the French feminists regarding sex and sexuality, the cultural agenda of radical feminism.

If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it.

-Margaret Fuller.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think we become.

- Gautama Buddha

New fiction in India is not only a reconstruction of the world around the writer but a reworking of experience fused with his values and thus a reproduction of a fictional universe that is particular rather than general. If we look at the emerging class structure the rising affluence of those associated with the corporate world becomes more than obvious. It is here that our best minds from the IITs and the IIMs are inducted. These are our new elite and once established, their minds yearn for more, not only within their distinctive fields but without as well. They stir out into realms that are not binding and step beyond their 7-11 confines into worlds of creativity. These pursuits have yielded a rich harvest and now we have a spate of fiction coming from those young professionals whose craving for individuality has turned them narrators more than corporators.

India's growth has taken off against the backdrop of a surging global knowledge market, where workers are becoming both more mobile and highly prized. The country has looked wonderfully placed to take advantage of this, and for global and Indian companies looking for large numbers of high –quality and affordable talent, India seems to have it all. I have had the opportunity to watch this up close- the bright, young engineers and analysts across our Infosys campuses have over the last two decades drawn the world's capital, attention and admiration (Nilekani, 2008, 314).

So, the technically educated, English speaking, young urban Indian becomes a polyvocal persona tasting the best of life and testing his multifaceted dimensionality. He becomes a Bakhtinian chronotope intrinsically connecting his space and time into an artistic expression. The time, the present takes on flesh and the space from where he hails becomes charged and responsive to the movement of plot and time. It is this intersection of axes and their fusion that has brought about a generically distinctive fiction which dwells on past experience, ongoing involvement and yet-to-be-accomplished goals.

The publishing industry has also given a boost to such fiction after the phenomenal success of Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* (2004) as G. Swaminathan puts it "It is, in fact, a good trend that the creative writing bug has bitten many a corporate personnel in recent times. It is all the more enjoyable to read novels based on their personal and professional experience in that chosen area hitherto not explored by writers fully" (Swaminathan). This has particular reference to Ravi Subramanian *If God was a Banker* (2007) which makes the reader take a long winded detour through the world of money, power and the associated upsides and downsides of the profession. It comes in tune with Kurt Eichenwald's *A Conspiracy of Fools* (2005) based on Enron Crisis, Dan Reinhold's *Confessions of a Wall Street Analyst* (2006) about what happened with Worldcom and Sucheta Dalal's *The Scam* (1993). Although some have tried to associate with real life characters and events associating the stories New York International Bank with Citibank, the protagonist Sundeep with Sarvesh Swarup, the Citibank Retail Banking UK and Swami with P.S. Jayakumar who was the country manager for Citi India, yet it is a fictive transformation of personal life and the corporate world.

If God was a Banker (2007) is a story of two young management graduates – Sundeep Srivastava and Swaminathan from the premier institutes of IIMB and IIMA respectively and started their professional journey on the same day in New York International Bank. The story depicts the hardcore truth of realities in banking industry. Also, it describes the changes that have been taken place from the eighties and nineties to the new millennium. It describes the high profile politics for post and money, the pressure to achieve the targets and goals, indulgence into the Retail banking and the means by which one can get anything in this world. Also there is a contrast between in the characteristics of the ethical and sensible Swami and over confident, aggressive Sundeep. In the end of the story, it shows the win of good over the bad and above all the role of Aditya Rao who plays the role of God for these two protagonists.

The story starts in New York with the morning when Sundeep is going to face the trial. This is his judgment day in NYB. He did not sleep a wink last night and was gazing the chandelier whole night. He gets ready for the office and leaves very early that morning. Natasha, his wife of nineteen years does not

know anything about what is going to happen. Sundeep and Natasha have two children – Alka and Ajay, six and seven years of age respectively. Sundeep is the Managing Director – Retail in NYB at present and settled in the US from twelve months.

Sundeep eased his car into the slot marked Managing Director Retail. This slot had become his when he moved into New York twelve months ago. To manage the retail business of New York International Bank in the emerging markets, the Group CEO had handpicked him from a shortlist of fourteen candidates across the bank (IGB, 4).

When he enters into his office, tells his secretary Louisa not to be disturbed by anybody. He reaches his office at 8:30 a.m. his meeting with Mr. Tedd Bridge, CEO, and NYB at 9.45 a.m. It means he has seventy-five minutes more. He is very tense and anxious. In pin drop silence in his office he recalls his journey till date.

It all began in 1986. That was the convocation day at IIMB and Sundeep was announced as the topper of the batch 1986. He was honored by the industrialist Mr. Ratan Tata. During the discussion with Mr. Tata, Sundeep showed over-enthusiasm and rudeness. Everybody there was shocked by his behaviour. This facet of Sundeep's nature was highlighted for the first time. That was Sundeep – aggressive, over-confident, over enthusiastic and rude.

'Did you think for a moment what you would have done had this medal gone to someone else?' 'Pardon me sir, but that option never existed. I play to win and not only for the spirit of the game,' said Sundeep, with the attitude of a veteran.

'That's excellent, Sundeep. I like people who play to win. I am sure you will too. This attitude will take you a long way. Could you tell us what you aspire to achieve over the next ten years...in the next decade?' asked Mr Tata.

'I would like to be standing here and asking the same questions that you are.' He was getting cheeky now. Everyone in the audience was shocked. Such impudence was very unlike Sundeep.

'I am sure you will. Thank you, young man. Congratulations again.' Mr Tata, visibly embarrassed, cut short the discussion and handed the microphone back to Rao (IGB, 6).

India of the eighties and nineties had no scene of retail banking and none of the banks took interest in small customers. Everyone was keeping on chasing the business with large corporations. It was

NYB that planned to launch Retail banking in India. That was very new in India. For that, NYB called back Aditya Rao, from New York to India. Now he needed a team of people who with energy and aggression would have high intellectual caliber. So, he decided to pick top five students from each IIM institutes. Sundeep as the topper of his batch got entry as a Management Trainee (MT) in NYB in May 1986.

The novel is divided into eighty two chapters. In few chapters like chapter 1, 4, 8, 20, 24, 34, 52, 74 and 81, there is the description of the present scenario of Sundeep's life in New York and in all the other chapters, he recalled his life as flashback. In the above mentioned chapters, Sundeep is time to time interrupted by his secretary Louisa and intimates him about his meeting which has got postponed till six in the evening. All the time he has been reminding his deeds of last fifteen years.

On 6 May 1986, Sundeep reached at the head office of NYB too early and the guard did not allow him to enter into the building until some personnel would come, so, he had to wait till then. There he met a man who was in an oversized coat sitting on the bench was also an MT in NYB. His accent shows that he was a South Indian. He introduced himself to Sundeep as Swaminathan, graduate from IIM-Ahmadabad. They chatted for next an hour and here started a legendary partnership or rival ship of these two grandmasters of management.

Chapter Six was the whole description of Swami's past life.

Graduation completed, Swami was faced with a dilemma. Should he continue his studies, or should he give it all up and take up a full-time job to provide for his family. His mother made the decision easier. She insisted that he should study further. She had somehow managed for 19 years, with occasional support for Swami. She didn't want to stumble at the final milestone. She knew that another two years and Swami would make it. She had great faith in Swami's commitment and intellect, and was hopeful of him getting a scholarship.

True to her expectations, Swami got into the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmadabad, the best management institute in the country (IGB, 13).

In induction programme when they entered in the seminar hall the whole trainees were welcomed by their Boss Aditya Rao. "Aditya had a reputation of being a tough boss. A banker with a reputation to protect. A person who was heavily focused on the task at hand, and for whom career was everything" (IGB, 15). Aditya intimated the MTs about the working style and the work in NYB. Swami was keenly listening to him sitting in the first row while Sundeep was sitting in the last row flirting with his batch mate Kalpana almost ignoring the introductory speech of Aditya. After the seminar, Sundeep was called up by Aditya's secretary Natasha in his office in the evening. On the other hand, Kalpana introduced herself to Swami and joined him. They decided to go for a walk to Marine Drive and have some coffee and snacks during lunch as Kalpana seemed very impressed with Swami's simplicity and intelligence. So, she tried to spend more time with Swami. Swami was very shy to get intimated with Kalpana as this was the first time ever since his childhood that he was talking and spending time with a female.

There was a party in the evening at 8.30 organized by NYB for the newcomers so; there was a lot of time with Swami and Kalpana to know each other. But Sundeep was tensed about what's in the pipeline for him on the very first day in the bank. Natasha, Aditya's secretary, was pity for Sundeep as she knew Aditya very well. Aditya in his first meeting with Sundeep first warned him about his attitude in the seminar hall and then discussed about the launching strategy of Retail banking in India. After the long discussion, he was quite impressed with him. On the other hand, in party, Brian close, the CEO of NYB that time discussed the same thing with Swami and Kalpana and was also quite impressed with them. Next day, when Aditya consulted about the matter at Brian's office with him both got startled that these guys were genius. They decided to build a team of five i.e. Aditya, Swami, Sundeep, Kalpana and Natasha to launch the Retail banking in India. In this way the main characters of the story collaborated and the story started gaining the shape.

In the chapter Twelve, there was the description of another reality of Indian banking in private sector which was that the top most position in these foreign banks were never kept by any Indian although they were highly intellectuals and talented but it was honored by some foreigner which was an average

employee in his country. The talented and deserving foreign candidates did not aspire to come India as they thought it was an inferior place and far behind from their growth and if they joined in India their growth would be stopped or rather diminished so people like Brain Close joined India as CEO of NYB as he was a cashier for three decades in the US.

The hierarchies in every multinational were reminiscent of the days of the Raj; the *brown* Indians would never get the top post. A foreigner needn't be a top performer to become a CEO in India. An average performer willing to go to India stood a good chance to get the job. India was perceived to be a difficult and hostile country to work in. Punishment posting, it was called. Expats sent to India also got a hardship allowance for having agreed to work here (IGB, 31).

After consulting with Brain Close, Aditya decided to invite his team at his house on Saturday evening at dinner. Meanwhile, Natasha started liking Sundeep while Sundeep was mad for Kalpana and Kalpana had decided to marry Swami. Initially, Swami hesitated as their family backgrounds, economic conditions had vast difference but after thinking a bit he and both of their families agreed. Kalpana announced that she was going to marry Swami in forty five days time and also quitting from NYB as MT. This information shocked Sundeep and was almost completely shattered. He showed his frustration over Natasha but she consoled him. In frustration, they tried to make love in office but Aditya caught a glimpse of them. After few months probably as a result of this incident Sundeep and Natasha also tied the knot with each other.

After appointed as MT and before they four had got married, Sundeep was given the project of car loans and Swami and Kalpana had to work on two-wheeler vehicles. All of them proved themselves were succeeded. NYB was happy with their performance. For next twelve months this team performed extremely excellent in all its tasks. Aditya assured Swami and Sundeep's presence globally; a year after, both were honored by Rising Star award. After this grand successful start of retail banking, Aditya decided to quit NYB as he wanted to start his own business. "The fact was that he wanted to quit and start a new business when his confidence and market reputation were on a high. And given his recent achievements at NYB, this was the best possible time for him to quit" (IGB, 67).

This decision highlights the recent mental approach of private employees whether they are at high post or low, all of them are self-centered. This shows the change of moral aspects in contemporary scenario. Economically sound position has become the main goal at any cost. There are many examples of this approach in this novel also whether it would be Swami or Sundeep or other characters all of them could fall to any extent to achieve money and power. On hearing the news of Aditya's resignation, both Swami and Sundeep were shocked and sad. "Both Swami and Sundeep felt they would be orphaned by his exit. Aditya had protected them all along and they could focus on the task given to them" (IGB, 67). Aditya introduced them with their new boss Suneel Dutt. The reaction and impression on the first meeting with their new Boss was juxtaposed. Swami did not like him from the very first sight, he had no logical reason of his unlike but he did not like him. On the other hand, Sundeep impressed him brilliantly. So, in this battle, Sundeep clearly won. Swami got strongly attached with Aditya. He wrote in a mail, after meeting Suneel, he couldn't work with Suneel and whatever he was today it's all because of him (Aditya). He would not tolerate Suneel. So he requested Aditya either transferred him in any other division or he would resign from his post. Also, when they met, Swami was contemplating to join Aditya's new business. On this, Aditya, as he always played the role of God for them, taught the chapter of the practicality and not to get too emotional.

The entry of Suneel Dutt's in the story changed all the values of Sundeep and Swami. Suneel and Swami both disliked each other but Suneel and Sundeep's companionship started rising. Suneel was the first corrupt character both financially and ethically described in the novel. Now, Sundeep was going to start to follow the same path as story would proceed which led him to the judgment day and at the edge of the destruction of his whole career. "Suneel was not a clean guy and his reputation preceded him. Bit of a wheeler-dealer, he would do anything to get his work done. For him, self was above everything. He was the kind of guy who would sell his wife to get a deal through" (IGB 72).

Now onwards there had been started the detailed description of politics and sexual harassment in banking industry which depicted the real scenario of banking. On the occasion of Suneel's joining in India

he threw a lavish party as Zeenat Aman as the MC for the night. Suneel tried to flirt with Natasha on the dance floor. Natasha felt very uneasy when he was trying to cross his limits, Kalpana took her from dance floor Natasha described whole incident to Sundeep but he did not listen to her, just said her that she was over reacting. The incident did not close here, as Natasha was the secretary to Suneel so her life had become miserable at office but Sundeep did not want to listen and understand a single word from Natasha against Suneel as he was blind to build relationship with him.

In 1990s, the loan policies were too difficult and long. Customer had to undergo a long and torturous process. So, NYB decided to introduce DSA (Direct Selling Agents) who would play the role of mediator between the bank and the customer. This policy became successful.

Now with this, another important character Ram Naresh was introduced. He was a DSA for NYB in Calcutta. He was introduced as a Gujju bhai but he spoke Punjabi in Calcutta (now Kolkata). He was very sly, shrewd and corrupt man. He had great links in NYB upto the Vice Chairman. "Occupying the pride of place on one of the walls was a stick-on board that had pictures of every one of Sundeep's seniors at New York International Bank who were now in senior positions overseas" (IGB, 78). So, it was not a difficult task for him to trap Sundeep. He wanted to use Sundeep so that he could easily make money through NYB by wrong means. Sundeep's biggest weaknesses were women and money. He could stoop to any limits for them. This was easily noticed by Naresh. Naresh trapped Sundeep with the help of his secretary, Monica who was in her early twenties and very seductive. Sending Monica to Sundeep Naresh made all deals in his favor and bought Sundeep forever. At once Sundeep wanted to curse Naresh for his doings but later he thought when everyone in the bank enjoyed this type of life than why didn't I? That was how the long relationship between Sundeep and Ram Naresh started. "The conversation eventually turned to the financials of the DSA proposal. Sundeep agreed to a deal heavily tilted in favor of Naresh. Well, after Monica's performance, it couldn't be otherwise" (IGB, 79).

When Sundeep was enjoying sinful pleasures in Kolkata, his wife, Natasha was sexually harassed by Suneel. Suneel told her the most secret and shameful incident of her life which made her restless and tensed. She was not shocked by Suneel's action but by the sentence he said, "My bed is better than the loo. I can promise you that" (IGB, 82). Only Sundeep and Aditya were the other two people except Natasha who knew the loo incident and she was surprised who told him, Sundeep or Aditya? She thought Aditya told him about it. But it was not clarified by the writer till the end. Swami and Kalpana consoled Natasha and took her with them. Swami was very depressed about the deeds of Suneel and decided to consult with Aditya in this matter. Swami contemplates

Is this becoming a culture in the bank? Are women meant to be walked over? Is this the way all foreign banks worked? The bank may be foreign, he thought, but the people working here are all Indian. Why should a few slime balls like Suneel be allowed to bring disrepute to a bank? He didn't have the answers (IGB, 84).

Aditya convinced him to do something. He talked to Shelly who was her friend and a senior manager in NYB's Singapore branch. But he came to know that she resigned because of the same reason. Aditya wondered that how the corporate culture was keep on changing drastically. Natasha, Swami and Kalpana decided not to tell about this incident to Sundeep because he did not understand it at all. Now it was difficult for Natasha to work with Suneel. Her condition was becoming miserable day by day. Swami talked about it to Aditya, he asked for six months time to regenerate his network in NYB so that he could do something. Very smartly by hiring, a secretary from NYB from treasury department at double salary he made a vacancy for Natasha over there as it was Swami's department. Again, Aditya played the role of God for his dear ones. Now, everything became alright for all of them.

On the other hand, Sundeep's relationship with Naresh was growing tremendously; his Kolkata trips and sleeping with Naresh's secretaries were become more frequent. Now, Naresh had a plan in his mind in which he wanted to use Sundeep. He wanted to settle a call centre and would do business with the help of NYB. He offered Sundeep a sixty-forty partnership. The deal was done OK by Sundeep.

'Look Sundeep, I will invest in this call centre. You give me the business. I will manage the complete customer service for New York International Bank in India.' At that time there was no concept of phone banking in India. Even the now thriving BPO industry had not reared its head. Naresh was smart. He knew how to get his work done. He knew that Sundeep could swing the deal for him.

When Sundeep started thinking, Reshma came back with the tea. Sundeep's thinking went for a toss. Then Naresh threw in the sweetener. 'I will run the call centre on paper, but we will actually own it.' Sundeep looked at him questioningly.

'Yes,' continued Naresh, 'it will be a sixty-forty partnership between us. Sixty mine and forty yours.' After a pause he said, 'Think how many Reshmas we can hire in the call centre. Every day, someone new to fuck.'

Sundeep didn't react. Naresh knew he had won (IGB 92-3).

Now Sundeep was seeing the corporate world through Naresh's eyes. He told Sundeep to recruit new employees by T&A criteria i.e. Tits and Ass criteria. That means mainly appoint females who were beautiful and attractive etc., not by their qualifications. Also, with one incident Sundeep understood the strength and approach of Naresh in NYB. As usual Sundeep was on his Calcutta trip. After meeting and had lunch with Naresh he went to his hotel and as usual Naresh's secretary Reshma came to him with another new one, Linda. All the three of them had great fun all the night. Early in the morning nearly at 5.30, when Sundeep stepped out of his room to see them off, one man caught him red handed. That man was Swami. He was shocked. Later, when both of them Sundeep and Swami were on their way to Mumbai. Swami asked Sundeep "How long has this being going on"? (IGB, 98) He said for three months. The whole conversation was held in the plane. Sundeep did not feel ashamed for what he had done. His only concern was that Swami did not open his secret to anybody else. He had no regrets at all. When they arrived back, Sundeep called Naresh and narrated the whole incident but Naresh took it very lightly and assure Sundeep to take away Swami from his way. As on his word, Naresh managed Swami so cleverly to get selected for ITDT (International Talent Discovery Programme) with the help of Joseph Fernandes, the Vice Chairman of NYB and Suneel, Sundeep's boss. Although Suneel did not like Swami he had to select Swami over Sundeep all because of Ram Naresh. This was a golden opportunity for Swami to be the part of this programme. This was one more feather in his cap because after being part of this programme he

would assure global recognition. So, for this he had to move to New York. At first after hearing this news Sundeep was again disappointed as he was feeling defeated with Swami but after hearing the whole event he was very satisfied that this whole was done for him only to make his way clear without harming Swami. Now, he clearly understood how important Naresh was for him? As when he could manage Swami for him then he could arrange anything for him to make his career sky high. For this he had to take a very good care of Naresh.

This was how Sundeep's whole career bent on Naresh's side and he was getting indulged into this very dangerous game of corporate world where he was only a step to move upward for people like Naresh. But Sundeep did not realize it at all. He was blind with success which he was getting very easily by adjusting a very few things with the help of Naresh and which he had achieved in a very short interval of time with tremendous speed. “‘How did he manage to do it so well!’ He was not referring to Swami. He now knew how Swami got that nomination to ITDP. It was his dear old fixer friend Ram Naresh (IGB, 108).

Before shifting to New York, Swami and Kalpana enjoyed annual vacation of a fortnight at Amsterdam, Barcelona and islands of Palma de Majocra and Corsica. It was like their second honeymoon after Kodai. Swami had been abroad for the first time in life and was very excited. Just after the vacation, he got an order to join ITDP as soon as possible. Swami and Kalpana moved to New York. They started enjoying American lifestyle as weekends were only for family and to enjoy the trips to famous places. It did not take time to imprint impression for Swami. He was a doer and hard worker. After a year this ITDP programme was a great success and Swami was on the top for its credit. Another hallmark had added in Swami's career. Then he got a short term assignment of acquisition in Korea for NYB. Then, he went to South Africa and then back to Chicago where he joined Kailash Advani's team to manage the fragmented business of South America. Kailash's team had done a great job. Also, in this assignment Swami played the key role. Everything was going superbly well. Swami and Kalpana had only regret that they did not

have a baby yet. So, they tried whatever they could do for it but all in vain. So, they consoled each other that God would not give everything to everyone.

One day Swami was on his way back to home, there was an international call in his cell phone but he did not receive as he was driving. After few minutes, Kalpana called her to come quickly at home. When he reached she told him. Ambiyam, his sister, met with a severe accident near Mahabalipuram in India and had got fractures in ribs; lungs were punctured, also got skull fracture and she was in coma, admitted in ICU. Only Swami's mother, Amma, was with her there. This made Swami very tensed and nervous. He made a call to Aditya for arrangements until he would reach there. After two days both were there at Chennai near them. This incident made Swami to contemplate about his move to India as when he was in Kailash's team and Kailash had got transferred to India as Retail Head of India, he offered Swami to join him but Swami refused as he did not want to be Kailash's man at all. But now circumstances arouse that made Swami to talk to Kailash about the possibility to get back in India so that he could care his family. As Swami's reputation and profile did not hide to anyone in NYB so he easily got back to India and also due to his honesty and reputation, Kalpana also got job again in NYB in India. He had joined as Head Distribution in India, the job of Senior Vice President Level. On one hand Swami assured his presence in NYB globally and became a star and on another hand Sundeep in India was on his royal ride.

When Swami and Kalpana had relieved from New York, Sundeep did not have any danger with them. To fly high with Naresh's wings, Sundeep could stoop to anything. There was an example. When Natasha informed about her pregnancy Sundeep was twice happy as one was obvious and second was that now he forced her to quit job so that his wrong deeds would not get exposed to her sooner or later. For a safer side, he set up the gynecologist to recommend her for complete bed rest. That's how he removed Natasha making his way clear with Naresh's advice. Now, Naresh and Sundeep's tuning was great going. They made millions of dollars together. For next ten years NYB was established as the most recognized

and organized bank in India. No doubt Sundeep was a great leader but above all he took most care of Naresh and himself only, his only aim to earn more and more name, fame and money.

After his great performance in retail banking he moved on as the Head in Branch Banking. As NYB has become the third largest bank after Citi Bank and Bank of America in the world, its hunger grew more and more. Now NYB started mergers and acquisitions of other Banks. As Sundeep is the head, he merged a South Indian bank named South India Urban Commercial Bank (SUICB) with his team into NYB. He took a great care of his bank and himself also. Call Centre was next in his pipe line but as it was a heavy investment project, it seemed hard to get approval by Suneel. So, Sundeep decided to wait until Suneel left from India's in his new role and the new fellow replaced him. At that very time he would perform his action and no one there to question him. As this became a very easy battle for him to win. One thing was sure that what Sundeep touched made it gold. He was successful in his every role. Introducing phone banking was also a success and Sundeep got twice benefits. One from Naresh due to his share in call centre and other by its success for NYB, which made him won the Asia Pacific Best Retail Banker Award for NYB four times in the six years and became a global star.

Till now, both of our protagonists were on the success ride. For next few pages there was a description of high profile politics for post and money. The central character of this episode was obviously Naresh. As he had great links in NYB up to New York and up of NYB. He managed all the things according to him and won from all sides. The scene was as follows:

Now after great success Sundeep decided to move to London as Head of NRI Business based in London. As Kailash Advani replaced Suneel Dutt as Head of Retail banking this was the next promotion for Sundeep. But as Kailash came back to India at the age of 51, before four years of his retirement so there would be no chance for Sundeep to get this post and he did not want to be the prince in waiting for four years as it did not suit his personality. So, he decided to move to London for four years. In London, he again achieved success but the way he did was wrong. Success made him almost an animal. Initially

when he joined NYB, he was a strategy leader but now his team consisted of target achievers by any means. Till this time everything was OK. No one hurt a lot. The real power politics started after this.

Sundeep was settled in London, Swami returned India as Distribution Head and Kailash Advani as the Head of Retail banking, Anindyo, Rajendran, Swami, and Vivek had to report Kailash. “Kailash introduced Swami to his team of Business Managers: Akshay Bhalla for home loans, Vivek J for personal loans, and Anindyo Roy for auto loans. All the three had worked with Sundeep” (IGB, 128). One day Kailash Advani organized a dinner party at his house for some leading members of NYB, India. There they all got together. Some managers worked with Sundeep when he was in India and were great fond of him and did not like Swami they kept on praising Sundeep and comparing Swami with him as it seemed Swami lost his battle before it got started as they all seemed to be Sundeep's men. In this party, there was a Surprise entry of Sundeep who was there to meet Kailash to deliver him information about some transfers. The news was Rakesh Makkar, the CEO of NYB of India was transferred to New York in new strategic role and this post was going to vacant. If he was interested to be the CEO he would talk to Naresh for this matter.

When Kailash talked to Naresh he threw a deal that he would get the seat of CEO for him and he had to pay half a million dollars and Sundeep got back from London into his role. After a little hesitation he agreed. Naresh paved the way clear for Kailash as the new CEO of India and Kailash also fulfilled his promise and made Sundeep as the new Head of Retail Banking almost ignoring Swami as he deserved this post more than Sundeep.

Finally, Sundeep got the post of his dream, under which he and Swami started their careers with Aditya as their Boss. Today, he became the boss of everybody and Swami had to report him was an additional bonus. In this way, Naresh by using Sundeep for Kailash and Kailash for Sundeep made every deal successfully in his favor. Now, the CEO of NYB of India and the Head of Retail Banking were in his pocket and in addition, the honest workers like Swami were Sundeep's juniors. In this way, Naresh won

all the battles shrewdly. In August 2002, Sundeep returned from London to his new role in India. There was a great and warm welcome organized by NY Bankers and his lovers. Plenty of parties were organized. In these parties, there was a special party organized by his former boss, Aditya. The other invitees were only Swami and Kalpana. There Aditya gave some tips to Sundeep as he was now in that role which Aditya played several years ago but Sundeep almost ignored all. It hurt Aditya but he did not take it seriously.

Sundeep, you now have a job that I held several years ago. It's a big job now. The lives of a number of individuals depend on you. You have to make sure that you do everything honestly, keeping the interests of your people and your customers in mind.' Aditya had said as they left.

'Aditya, everything has changed in the last ten years. I am sure I will be able to do a better job than you did,' said Sundeep, much to Aditya's surprise (IGB, 149).

Success, power and post made Sundeep a tyranny. He was a strict boss. Every evening he wanted to target and achieved sales through SMSs in his mobile. His leadership led everyone in great stress and pressure. The means did not matter to achieve the target and only thing matters were the target. Swami was against this approach but Sundeep ignored him. "Sundeep wanted success at any cost. The mantra in New York International Bank became sell, sell and sell more... the customer be damned" (IGB 150). Sundeep's success story changed into tragic ending story after an incident. As we knew the shortcomings of Sundeep were money and women. He achieved money by all means and now it came to women. Now, as the Head of Retail Banking in India, having many powers of transfers and replacements in hand he used them for his convenience.

There were two major incidents (women scandals) described in the novel which led Sundeep to face the trial at the end of the story.

First one was Insurance Scandal. That was the time when banks started selling insurances and by law each bank could make tie up with only one insurance company. NYB tied up with KAIC insurance company. Sharda Rajan was the relationship manager. She was very beautiful, intelligent and smart lady.

Her growth in the company was very fast because she knew how to get the work done. Her philosophy for work was depended on two things, first, use your intellect and experience to the fullest to get your work done, if it failed then use your charms to fulfill it. Sundeep and Sharda had great tuning because of their same philosophies towards work. Now, that year when Sundeep became the Head, NYB have fulfilled all the targets of selling insurances for KAIC but other banks were far behind to achieve the targets. As Sharda was much closed to Sundeep, she told her to do something. Sundeep tried every curse and blessing initially on the surface but failed. But when Sharda offered him an incentive of "full service" in Switzerland he became uncontrolled. "When it came to women, Sundeep just could not control himself" (IGB, 156).

Sundeep started selling insurance with personal loans home loans but could not get the target. Now, he planned to sell it with credit card as this was the best option. But that Amit Suri, Head of credit cards was on leave and Swami was handling it. Sundeep changed the strategy to sell insurance to credit card customers as they were in huge numbers. "It had over one and a half million cards in circulation in 2004" (IGB, 157).

This time he approached negative confirmation strategy. Initially they called/mailed their customers for positive confirmation whether they wanted insurance or not. When it seemed not fruitful for targets Sundeep started selling it by negative confirmation.

He implied that the best way to do the deal was to send out a mailer to all customers that New York International Bank was offering a KAIC insurance to all cardholders and that the premium amount would automatically be debited from their credit cards. Customers were to be given an option of calling back and confirming only if they didn't want insurance. In case customer do not confirm back, they would start getting charged for insurance premium, month on month.

Sundeep was counting on the fact that many customers do not read mailers and many of them would not make the effort of picking up the phone and calling NYB. In case they did, he would happily reverse the premium charged and claim a refund from KAIC. He was counting on the inertia of people to make this programme a success.

Swami was taken aback when Sundeep recommended this. 'Sundeep, this is not right. We will be hauled over coal for doing something like this. Customers will lose faith in us.'

'But we are on the right side of the law, Swami,' argued Sundeep.

'But, only in the letter of it. I do not think this is in the right spirit,' Swami insisted (IGB, 157-8).

In this conflict between Sundeep and Swami, Sundeep won after few controversies like NYB's name was in media and newspaper headlines for few days. But all this was fled away immediately and everybody forgot about this scandal. And, finally Sundeep earned five million dollars from this strategy for NYB. Now, Sundeep's rivalry ship with Swami even grew deeper. As he was the boss he wanted to teach him a lesson. Soon he got the chance.

That time many western countries started outsourcing business in India. For this they preferred the same bank/company not the third party so that it would be beneficial for them. A BPO named BOCA which is Delhi based small company was acquisitioned by NYB. It came under retail banking. Sundeep accepted it unwillingly as it seems a worthless job. He attended the induction seminars. Soon he realized that it was a bull shit business and also he had got a devilish idea in his mind. After grilling them entirely for three hours Sundeep decided to transfer Swami in BOCA as Managing Director but this post was suitable for the five years junior fellow from him but Sundeep had done this to take revenge. Swami narrated whole incident to Aditya. Aditya talked to Sundeep on phone but Sundeep answered him very rudely and he forget everything that what he was today only because of Aditya. Aditya was also very shocked by his attitude. In this way for a woman only (Sharda) he made everybody against him. He had lost his two most true friends in Swami and Aditya and NYB was about to lose faith in customers.

The incident was not closed here only. Now Sundeep started screwing up Swami's men. In that, the top name was Vivek Jalan who was the head of personal loans. For last two months Mumbai team couldn't achieve its targets. So Sundeep started insulting Vivek in the way that whole office could listen to it. He also called a meeting with Mumbai team where he almost made everyone shed into tears. He clearly warned everyone that either fulfill their targets or leave the job. Swami was very upset by his move in BOCA. Aditya met Swami in a restaurant. He taught some calculations in his typical style to Swami. After doing this calculation Swami was smiling that meant he got the solution to deal Sundeep.

He happily joined BOCA as MD against Sundeep's expectation. Now, Swami did not know even the basics of BPO but Aditya after quitting from NYB started this business, helped Swami entirely to establish the business. Now, Swami wanted a faithful and hardworking intellectual person and also who was his man. He found it in Vivek J. He requested Sundeep for Vivek to move him in BPO. Sundeep was twice happy. After getting Vivek, Swami slogged their butts up to make it a successful business with the entire help of Aditya. The result came sooner within six months period of time.

In the next three months they were able to convince people from across the globe to transition to India two back office operations and one outbound calling activity from UK, four processes from the US and three more from Argentina. They were in business. They delivered these transitions within ninety days of getting the orders. Revenues started flowing in.

In no time the gross monthly revenues of the BPO started crossing ten million dollars. The business was operating at a margin of thirty percent. BOCA became a star, the biggest and the best performing business for New York International Bank in India. Swami was again a hero.

The phenomenal run of BOCA left Sundeep wondering what went wrong in his assessment. He had sent Swami there to make life miserable for him, but Swami had actually turned it into a golden opportunity (IGB 183-4).

Swami was again a hero because of his hard work. During this period of time Sundeep was busy in developing relationship with a new gorgeous woman named Karuna to whom he met in Chennai. When Chennai team achieved success by beating Standard Chartered Bank in the Chennai in selling personal loans, the head of Chennai team was Nitin, Karuna's husband. In the very first sight Sundeep felt crazy about her. Now, he had started trying schemes to how to make closed her and make relationship with her. An opportunity came to Sundeep after few months, when he was busy in meeting with Vivek and the Mumbai team of personal loans. Meanwhile he met Karuna in his office that was in Mumbai for some training for a week. His scheming mind started working and he decided to transfer Jinesh Shah, AVP of personal loans, Mumbai city to Chennai replaced Nitin and he appointed Karuna as the executive assistant in his office. All he had done to get Karuna, the gorgeous twenty five year old wife of Nitin. Initially when Sundeep offered Karuna that opportunity she resisted as she thought she could not give priority to profession over morality. But after some hesitation she agreed. "She was terribly confused, scared of

turning down her CEO and, at the same time, afraid of violating her own sense of morals" (IGB, 179). Sundeep's philosophy towards women and sex was "Sex is fun if the other partner wants you. Else you can always buy it" (IGB, 179).

Now their relationship started gaining some shape. Everybody in the office started giving some special treatment to Karuna as she was considered as their Boss's near and dear one. Sundeep took her wherever he went- in parties, in tours, in meetings etc. She was also enjoying this new found promotion and respect only because she was closer to Sundeep. Gradually making love at weird places and playing hide and seek with their family had become their hobby. Karuna got emotionally attached with Sundeep but on the contrary Sundeep was only enjoying the relationship with a woman who was lovely married woman. "Making love to her made him feel like God - the God of banking" (IGB 182). In the office they chatted through SMSs not in person. Even when Sundeep was out of station they conversed mainly through SMSs.

That's how women had become the integral part of Sundeep's life. But he did not know in his worst dreams that the women to who with he was playing and making relationships according to his own choice would blow on his own face in the form of trial at the end because in the trial the major and main complaints were from these women. As story proceeds now from here there were few more women would come in Sundeep's life that would complaint against him later.

Sundeep's downfall story started from Chapter sixty-six in which there was a description of the success other bank Citibank over NYB. As Citi Bank's better services and payments attracted both customers and employees respectively of NYB. This was the primary result of the strategies and approach implied in Sundeep's leadership. Sundeep was leading with Naresh's eyes which result him a short-term success and now his and NYB's downfall had started. His strategy of hiring beautiful girls who may attract the customers with their charm worked for a very short interval of time. Now, it all failed in front of Citi Bank's qualified and professional intellectuals. Success had made Sundeep an animal; his only

goal was to achieve targets and sells by any means. Now, NYB was on weaker side so its wealth and relationship managers started forging their customer's signature to transfer their money from savings account to mutual fund. There was an incident of fraud narrated here which was the output of Sundeep's leadership.

NYB had three categories of customers – Value Plus customers, Super Value customers, and Club Class customers: Customers were graded as per their relationship value with NYB. Customers with relationship value of over one million dollars brought up the Club Class. They were the most pampered customers. Legend had it that NYB once hired a helicopter to ferry a Club Class customer from Mumbai to Pune, when a landslide had blocked the highway (IGB, 190-1).

Arun Jain was one of the Club members in NYB for over a decade. He had great faith in NYB and its team. Nidhi Agarwal was the relationship Manager at Nehru Palace branch where there was Arun Jain's account. Mr. Jain left for America to meet her daughter who was expecting her first child and would not come back before six months. At that time there was a flood of selling investment products and insurance. By convincing customers to invest in mutual funds and insurance policies the bank were getting double profits as they got commission on every mutual fund sold. Sundeep was a hungry banker and for him only result matters that's why he announced a contest 'Hawa se Hawaii' in which the bumper prize was a trip to Hawaii for whom who achieved the maximum sales target in that specific period of time. Nidhi Agarwal and Pooja Deshmukh had tough competition. Nidhi was behind 1.3 crore sales than Pooja in the last week of the contest. But she was not worried because she had a trump card to get used in the form of a factory owner in Gurgaon. When she reached at his house in Gurgaon she found income tax put a personnel raid at his house and he had gone underground. That was the last day of contest and she wanted to win that at any cost. When she was returning she found a small piece of paper in her diary and a devilish smile came on her face. She directly went to the bank, done some paper work and returned home happily. Result was announced and Nidhi was declared as the winner of the contest. Sundeep and specially Anindyo congratulated her as she was much close to her. She offered Anindyo to come to Rio

after that Hawaii trip to enjoy for only two of them. He delightfully accepted and told Sundeep to make arrangement of sponsorship by KAIC through Sharda. He agreed.

After some time when Mr. Jain came back before six months with his whole family as his daughter got a miscarriage. He went to bank to check his balance and to take his statement. He was shocked after checking it. He found 5.4 crores less from his account. After the whole investigation, the bank and Mr. Jain found that somebody had transferred that amount to mutual funds and insurance policies by forging his signature. The whole scene was created by Nidhi as she forged the signature and transferred the fund to win the contest as it was the last day. But she asked permission from Sundeep and Anindyo before doing all this. Sundeep permitted her but he couldn't think in the wildest of his dreams that it would blow in his face back.

Instantly, he fired Nidhi as she was in Hawaii only that time. She was ready for all this happenings and did not worry. She decided to visit Rio with Anindyo because he was also a big name in banking industry and she did not want to make furious him. Soon this scandal blew like fire and became the newspaper headlines. After that it was revealed that there were 359 cases of forging signatures and transferring funds into insurance and mutual funds discovered. Meanwhile, the share market went down to thirty percent as North Korea tested a nuclear bomb. America was preparing for taking some serious military action. The entire world's economics were shaken and India was no exception. So, Mr. Jain's fund of 5.4 crores invested in mutual funds after the crush of share market hold at 3.9 crores only. This made him very much furious. But after consulting with Sundeep by that branch manager, they decided to pay his whole amount and NYB would bear the loss. Like Mr. Jain's case all the 359 cases were solved out in the same way but NYB lost its customer's faith and market reputation. This was all because of Sundeep and during whole this period Kailash Advani was at leave. That's why the whole blame came on Sundeep.

With 359 reported cases across the country, the only person they could point a finger at was Sundeep. He had fostered a culture built on low morals and low integrity, and now it had come back to hurt him.

The media glare brought with it a host of new problems for Sundeep. The whole issue blew up into an ideological debate on national television (IGB 202).

RBI cancelled the approvals of opening new branches and ATMs. At that time NYB had licenses for four branches. All of them were withdrawn without an explanation. RBI inspected NYB and found a number of loopholes in NYB. So, NYB decided to move out Sundeep from his current role to Head of Retail for UK. Sundeep was lucky enough to get rescued in this way rather he got opportunity in these adverse conditions. He grabbed this role with both his hands. Now, Chetan Bindra, the Global head of Retail Banking decided to make Swami as the new Head of Retail Banking India as he was most perfect suit for that role.

Finally, Swami achieved his target and fulfilled his mother's dream. He was the happiest man now on the earth. Kalpana and Aditya were other two people who were happiest to the fullest for Swami. But Swami had to recover NYB from all the scandals created by Sundeep. He took a very smart step. He appointed Aditya as a consultant for the bank. Now, he started taking some tough decisions against the corrupt personnel. He fired around 125 people from Naresh's team and had no hesitation to fire some more frauds. Time went on and everything became normal and Swami became hero again. Now, he understood perfectly that for being a good leader "one had not to be flamboyant or sexy. You have to honestly apply your mind" (IGB, 209).

"Chetan Bindra moved on to replace the Worldwide Head of Retail Bank" (IGB, 211). Now he would report directly to Tedd Bridge, the CEO. So, he was very excited. Now, he had one problem that to whom he would replace in his role; when no one seemed suitable for the role he split it into two parts; Managing Director – Retail Banking (Emerging markets like India, Brazil and China) and Managing Director – Retail Banking (Rest of International except USA). He approached Sundeep and Swami for

these two roles. Sundeep grabbed this opportunity with both hands but Swami refused because he could not leave his mother alone in India in her old age. So, he decided to remain in India.

In chapter Seventy five, there was the whole description of Swami's strategy and approach towards his job profile. How he started exercises to clear the system and Naresh's channels. NYB has an international audit team and audit was considered as a very serious operation in NYB. This audit team had distributed its working strategy in three parts: low, medium and high risk countries. The audit team would audit the high risk countries once a year, medium once in two years and low once in three years.

After the mutual fund fraud, the rating of the India business was changed to high risk and towards the latter half of 2005, the global audit team decided to visit India.

Global audit was a very serious exercise, which was at times career threatening. There had been instances in the past in which a poor global audit led to shutting down of businesses or sent high-flying careers tumbling down. Everyone, including Swami, was paranoid about the consequences of a poor global audit. Around the same time Mona Albance, a member of the Global HR team, was expected to visit India for a week. She was in charge of diversity and work environment" (IGB 215-6).

Mona came to India for a week for some secret investigation which would be helpful for the global audit team also. She did not reveal this to even Swami. She stayed at hotel. Then, she wanted Karuna to assist her instead of Ekta who was appointed by Swami for Mona. Mona gave a list to Karuna for what she was here in India. She wanted all these details within two days of time. The list was as follows:

1. List of all women employees in the organisation with name, date of birth, date of joining, background, designation and salary.
2. List of all women employees who have been promoted in the last three years.
3. List of salary hikes given to women employees in the last three years.
4. Name of women employees who have resigned in the last three years.
5. Performance appraisal reports of all women employees for the last three years.
6. List of women who have moved into head office in the last three years.
7. Gender, mix, unit wise in the last three years.
8. Compliance hotline complaints for the last three years.
9. List of all bank employed drivers (both on rolls and contractual) for senior management also with their phone numbers.... (IGB 222-3).

It was clear that the whole investigation was women centered and the period of last three years only. Mona was typically professional and of colonial sort of mind set. As in the novel many times she showed her mentality. One when she saw the people living beside dwellers and second, when he met Swami and then, Akshay and Vivek.

Now from here we could catch some topics related to feminist approach like the gender mix in NYB:

The gender mix in the Indian operations of New York International Bank was very good. About thirty two percent of its employees across all businesses were women. That compared very well with New York International Bank's global average of 24.6 percent. This ratio dropped dramatically at senior levels where only eight percent of the India leadership team and their direct reports were women. A large population of women worked in BOCA and in the Branches. Indian women seemed to love the service sector (IGB, 225).

, how the Indian married woman made balance between house and profession?

'India is an evolving society. It is a culture where brazen adaptation of the Wild West is looked down upon. Women are still expected to get married early and raise a family. Men and women are not equal. Why outside, within our organization, do we treat men and women as equals? We don't.'

'But we intend to,' said Mona.

'So many times women lost out on senior positions because someone senior says, "Forget it, she is married and she will not be able to give it her best." Or "She will not be able to travel to the extent we want her to and so she will not be able to deliver." We have created a glass ceiling that is very difficult for any woman to break out of. How many women are there in our own management committee? Have we checked how much time it takes for a male to get there and how much time it takes for a woman with equal capability to get there? Women normally compromise and keep quiet, because if they make a noise, it may adversely impact them' (IGB, 226-7).

When Mona met Swami and Kalpana she would feel more comfortable and then, Karuna organized a dinner party for Mona and NY Bankers. In the evening when everybody was at Karuna's home Mona minutely observing everyone's behaviour (Kalpana, Swami, Karuna etc.) Now after some time, Mona started a game named Quick Answer Game (QAG) where she found some unexpected answers which made her

surprised and shocked. The question she asked and the answer was "Priya, your turn. One word which would describe how the bank has changed in the past two years?" 'Safer' (IGB, 231).

Later, Mona met Aditya and asked about the relationship between Swami and Sundeep and some their personal relationship. Aditya explained all clearly to her.

Sundeep is forever competing with Swami. But Swami looks at him as a friend...Do you see any difference between them?'

'Oh tons. The key is short-cuts. Swami will never take a short-cut. Sundeep will always find reason and method to beat the system. Swami is a horse for the long race.'

'Who will you back, if you had a choice.'

'Undoubtedly Swami, because he was virtues of CHILD.'

'Child,' queried Mona.

'Yes, because of his Commitment, Honesty, Integrity, Leadership and Dedication. I would rate him higher than Sundeep on most of these,' elaborated Aditya as the car drove into the lobby of the hotel (IGB, 237-8).

Next day, the audit team came. The leader of this audit team was Ravi Subramanian who is the author this book and now a character. He met Mona and exchanged some information and Ravi received some papers from Mona. Just after that Mona left for USA. As it seemed that her worked has done and now she had to present all these things to someone.

In chapter Eighty one, the story came to the present day where it was started in the memories of Sundeep in his NY office. It was quarter to six and the meeting was fixed with Tedd sharp at six. Now the trial started, there were few more people in the meeting room. They were Chetan Bindra, Michelle and Aditya Rao, the surprised one. Now, Mona started uncovering the data and things for which she was in India. One by one whole sins and misdeeds done by Sundeep revealed in front of him. For all of them, he shamelessly lied but at last he accepted all his crimes. Finally, decision was taken that Sundeep would put in papers on his will otherwise NYB would send him to jail in sexual harassment and fraud cases. Aditya came into rescue for Sundeep finally. He appointed him for his company and promised him that no one would come

to know what happened in this room except the present ones. At last Sundeep said "I would not imagine that you would come to my rescue. I have never been a believer in God. Aditya, today I know, if God was a banker, he would look like you" (IGB 258). In the last chapter Eighty two, which is the epilogue there was the description of all's well that ends well. "Life goes on, but everyone has become smarter from the learnings at NYB" (IGB, 260).

The story is written on the backdrop of the IIMs and the lives of its alumni a space that is gaining, a huge potential in sales. This is 'the locale' which breeds New India and creates the success stories that the youth are today dreaming off. Although the protagonists come from different backgrounds and different ambitions but they are tied with a common thread of the banking industry. Set alongside with some of the popular Bollywood films like 'Life in a Metro', 'Corporate' etc there is all the masala- sex, betrayal, boardroom tales to ignite the curiosity of the reader. Besides, the little punch dose of good versus evil, the slow and the steady versus the sky-rocketing ambitious and the ensuing poetic justice mix for a good cathartic denouement. Though such fiction do not try to convey a message yet there is a highlighting of the importance of setting once expectations right. The 1990s, where the book is set, was the heyday of making it big in the banking world, but the euphoria having receded and the recession having set in it visualizes the unreasonable aims and desires that might not be sustainable in the long run. The citidable of secularity and relative prosperity that we are trying to scale need caution not lopsided approaches. What the book projects is the unprecedented rise in the economy after the shackles were released from the Indian economy in the 1990s allowing new freedoms to create and participate in economic wealth. It also in a way makes us more than aware of the prophetic warning that Nandan Nilekani, ex-co- Chairman of Infosys and co-founder NASSCOM and TiE has to say

The ideas that the country has become more optimistic about over the last sixty years- deomographies, entrepreneurship, the English language, the role of IT, globalization and democracy- have been the foundation for an expanding economy. They have also led to a kind of catharsis- it now finally looks like India has escaped from its sense of persecution and the limitations of its history. This change in our mindset has in turn led to a growing demand for new ideas on primary education, urbanization, infrastructure and a unified single market. While the

new popularity of these latter issues has created pressures for change, we face big challenges in implementing them (Nilekani, 2008, 287).

For many of us India who has had the opportunity to rise above the rest and participate in the fruits of success knows that the standards of expectations have risen high and the challenges as well. Lilliputs cannot survive in this world which wants corporate giants. The success story is of those who have crossed the hurdle of being 'average'. Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* (2007) is all about the dilemmas of this mad race to reach to the top, a winding, uphill task beset with unimaginable hurdles. The IITians have a more advantageous predilection. Bagchi explores what goes into the making of an IITian and how they are chiseled and honed to face the challenges of the future and attest to the promise that is enshrined in them.





IIT Delhi

Period 2000-09		
RANK	Institution	Author count
1	ISB**	11
2	IIM-Calcutta	10
3	IIM-Bangalore	9
4	IIT-New Delhi	5
5	XLRI	4
6	IIT-Kanpur	3
6	ISI-Calcutta	3
6	ISI-New Delhi	3
6	TIFR	3

Article Published in Economic Times on 7th Feb, 11

Above Average by Amitabha Bagchi is a stand-out book from the current crop for various reasons. Structurally, it dispenses with the linear plot, adopting instead an array of interlocking circles, moving the action in both space and time from 1980s New Delhi to twenty first century Baltimore and back again. Thematically, it is a coming-of-age story, a striving-for-progress post-colonial story, a there-and-back-again voyage of self-discovery, and also a tale of unrequited love, of effort without results. The narrator has no discernible hamartia, or perhaps just that he is detached from his surroundings, his friends, and his actions. He is not a tragic hero, but there are tragic heroes in the tale- there are those who inhabit a 'Hindi-movie world', 'full of stories of violence and greed and lifelong grudges'. There are characters who repay kindness with ingratitude, and there are those who find it hard to let go, even when letting go is the only thing that makes sense.

Divided into eight chapters, the novel is set in Delhi. The narrator, Arindam Chatterjee, or Rindu as he becomes in IIT, is a Delhi boy, East Delhi to be precise, and his experiences with a variety of people are a chronicle of life in urban India, an India on the cusp of transformation, much like his own life. The story starts with the description of his coaching classes for IIT entrance Examination. "It's the room in which I had taken the screening test to get into Study

Circle; a test to prove that I was good enough to study under their guidance for another test. They don't want to waste their talents on people who don't stand a chance of getting into IIT" (AA, 9).

In Study Circle he met two acquaintances Bagga and Karun, who are energetic and enthusiastic about IIT. Both are preparing for IIT diligently and have tremendous knowledge of coaching classes and study materials for IIT. They keep on discussing it with Arindam. But in the end unfortunately due to some reason Bagga didn't fill up the entrance form and didn't appear for IITs and there is no description of Karun later on. Meanwhile they keep on talking about their role model and topper of their school, Kartik. They considered them a born genius. "When Bagga spoke of Kartik's academic exploits, his eyes would gleam with unreserved hero worship. Hyperbole would pile on hyperbole and I would think that either this Kartik was a figment of his imagination, invented to gull me, or he was some kind of savant, the new Ramanujan" (AA, 17).

Bagga narrated Arindam an incident of Mechanics problem. No one even his Physics teacher Bhatkande failed to solve that problem. But when he asked Kartik about it, he solved it within two minutes. Later when Arindam and Kartik became friends at IIT Delhi, Arindam discovered that Kartik had solved it few days earlier only but he pretended to be ignorant. Arindam contemplates about Kartik's behavior that why he pretends the things which Bagga and Karun expect from him. What is the need of a topper like him to do all this show off?

We all lied in one way or another. Some lied brazenly like Kartik; others went about it more subtly. Some lied just to others, some to themselves as well. In the years to come, as I slowly began to unravel the truths and falsehoods of my own life, I realized that it was not enough to catch a liar in his lie, it was much more important to figure out whether he believed the lie himself (AA, 20).

The narrator also describes about why he has taken into IIT? But after the whole description even he does not find the reason that why he has chosen for IIT? The only reason he finds out is he has done very well in X board so the obvious choice was Science. The story sets up in early nineties. That time computer science subject was gripping roots in the field; once someone has taken Science stream than the only aim to achieve is getting into IIT. Why? No one knows. Might be this is the right place for extremely intelligent people in India. Through this they can make more and more money, get settled in the US or abroad, take civil services examination which are considered to be easy after IIT and the last option is to establish your own industry or business which is far more difficult and challenging task and the success rate is also very low. But all these consequences of IIT are discovered by Arindam in the four year of IIT not before that.

I must have decided at some point in my time at school that I should try to get into one of the IITs. But when I made that decision, if I ever made it consciously, I could never remember. It was not my parents who suggested it, it was not my teachers. I never talked about such things with either. It may have been the people I studied with, it may have been the friends I played cricket within the government colony we lived in before we moved to Mayur Vihar. It could have been anyone, or it could have been no one in particular (AA, 11).

The title of this chapter comes from an incident when Bagga, Karun and Arindam were discussing about from where do Arindam take coaching for particular subjects? He answered he is planning to take Agrawals next year not Brilliants. In reply, Bagga told him to arrange only the YG file from Brilliants but Arindam didn't understand from where will he find it? In reply, Bagga said 'photocopy'. As that time the photocopy and computerized techno culture was not so common but the change had been started since then. This chapter also mocks intellectual pretensions of the narrator and his school friends who being aspiring IITians "Pooh-poohed board exams" because "JEE was big one, the real challenge" (AA, 22).

The next chapters “Parachute” and “Asian Paint Women” particularly focus on adolescence, the most critical phase in a person’s life. The protagonist is, really, Mayur Vihar, a place, where the narrator, along with other boys and girls, grew up. At Mayur Vihar, in the evening when he felt bored he decided to hang out all alone on foot. As he moved on from his block to another than park, ground, shops he described all the things in detail. Also, he tells us about the conveyance facilities which had started recently for this locality as it is in the outskirts of Delhi, at NOIDA highway. Arindam tells; on Sundays they had nothing to do just reading newspaper, watching TV, eating omelets. But some Sundays were enjoyed by outing to Rose garden. For that he had to get dressed up which he hated a lot.

Mayur Vihar and the society which was established at the east of Yamuna by DDA were considered to be the society of middle class families. Most of them were government employees and owners. Some of them whose postings were out of Delhi put their houses on rent. So, there were two categories of residents- owners and tenants. For Mayur Vihar society Bengali contractor was engaged because there were many Bengali families. All of them were gazetted officers. After describing his personal family details Arindam jumps into now his personal life with friends in the society before he got entered into IIT. He wonders how he came particularly closer to Bobby, a bully, who participated in drinking, smoking and vandalism. His curiosity to know and talk about sex probably made him bond with Bobby. He would indulge himself with Bobby’s sex-stories. The title “Parachute” came from one of the stories between Arindam and Bobby. Apart from those “*panga* stories” (AA, 47) Bobby also told him about share market. In one of their discussion over it Bobby once asked “which is the best coconut oil in India? Arindam couldn’t answer it. So, Bobby told him Parachute. But in one’s opinion this might not

be the reason to give this title to this chapter. The reason was the next few lines which he narrated which showed the depth of their relationship.

One day he asked me: ‘Do you know which is the best coconut oil in India?’ ‘Which one, Bobby?’ ‘Parachute. It has the largest market share. Which oil do you use?’ I didn’t use Parachute. I use a brand called KMP. I told him so. Some weeks later we were talking and somehow coconut oil came up again. ‘Arindam, do you know which are the two best brands of coconut oil in India today?’ ‘Which ones, Bobby?’ ‘Parachute and KMP’(AA, 47)

In the next few pages Rindu and Bobby share their libido. Their philosophy on sex is also juxtaposed. Rindu says to Bobby “you know, Bobby,” I said, ‘I have decided to never have sex with prostitutes.’ He smiled, ‘Never?’ ‘Ummm, well, the first time I have sex it won’t be for money.’ I had just sex it won’t be for money.’ I had just made this rather momentous decision. Bobby said nothing...(AA, 55). Then, there comes an entry of another character named Abhilasha who was one year senior than him. She visited Arindam’s house with her father where they were introduced formally. But Arindam knew her because of Bobby. Bobby was deeply in love with her and wanted to marry her but Rindu was not really get impressed by her and made a certain mindset about her. “On reflection I realized that her anemic lankiness, her insipid beauty, her slightly hunched walk did not connote a person to me; they were just a blank white screen on which the feature film of Bobby’s hopes and desires was projected, preceded by my mother’s newsreel” (AA, 65).

He had a fascination for an adolescent girl, Bhavna, and her involvement with Winky, a mindless Vandal, disturbed him. Bhavna was the society girl. She was very pretty, polite, helping, descent, charming and attractive. Rindu’s mother always mentioned about her qualities whenever she came to see her. The gruesome fact of her murder by her paramour, who later

killed himself, deeply affected Rindu. He tells us, "I tried to sleep. But whenever I closed my eyes I saw Winky and Bhavna standing next to my bed" (AA, 112).

The novel is rich in fun and humour. The particularly amusing "Rocksurd" describes Mandeep's metamorphosis into Rocksurd. His desire and curiosity to be a rock-star gave him nickname "Rocksurd", i.e., rocksardar. His willingness to be a devil-worshipper to be a rock-star made him an object of ridicule. He envied the narrator when the later started learning drumming. The tension between human aspirations and human achievements is all pervasive in the novel. The author claims that "we aren't what we do or what achieve or what we acquire or what we become. We are and we always will be what we want" (AA, 289).

Above Average may be labeled as a campus novel, the prime characteristic of which has been to highlight follies of academic life. The plot made up of a series of anecdotal stories unmasks affectation, hypocrisy and snobbishness of narrator's college friends. The narrator observed that "some lied brazenly" (AA, 20) and "other went about it more subtly"(AA, 20). His friends, who deluded themselves into a belief of "being exceptional," chased their sky-high goals, zealously. Neeraj was hoping to win the Turing Award, "an ambition on unbelievably audacious scale" (AA, 208). On the contrary, the narrator, who had a desire to be accepted as ordinary, was confused about his goals. With his averageness as his most intimate friend, he lacked passionate interest in everything he did.

He admits that being a "Satti" (seven pointer) in the Computer Science Department, he was not taken seriously academically by his classmates, people in the other departments and even by his own professors. He felt "bewildered and shaken" (AA, 216) when his Professor Kantikar rejected him and selected Neeraj for PhD, despite his (Neeraj's) low CG. Ironically, he

who suffered humiliations being a “Satti” went up to Baltimore to pursue PhD in computer science. The writer brings to light fallacious standards of judging academic worth.

My first reaction to this theory was disappointment and anger. Kanitkar’s story was not a story of Indian defeat in a noble cause, it was just another partially interrupted story of American success. He had lied in his mail to Neeraj. His plans hadn’t changed. They had just been implemented a few years behind schedule.

Only many years later when I was in Baltimore facing the rigours of graduate school, and still later when my own friends and collaborators were breathlessly running the race for tenure, did I begin to get an idea of how crushed Kanitkar his best option. Every time I heard a story of someone having to leave a job for a lesser one because of the tenure system, even when my friends left graduate school after years of trying unsuccessfully to get a PhD, I felt less resentful of Kanitkar...Kanitkar’s return to the US- and that was the true return, not his earlier move to India- taught me many things over the years. There were many moments in my own life that gave me a further insight into the complexity of that moment in his life. It was this intermeshing of our lives that taught me the meaning of the word empathy. Perhaps the single biggest lesson I got out of it was that it is a blessing to be understood, and that it is an even bigger blessing to be granted understanding (AA, 225).

“Hey Joe” delineates his first unsuccessful foray into drumming. Cheated by his fellow competitors, he made a fool of himself at rock-prelims.

‘Hey Rindu!’ a voice called from across the mess. It was Rocksurd. ‘Wait,’ he said. ‘Coming.’

I wanted to leave but the same time I realized I had to face the ridicule head on; the only way to deal with it was to participate in it.

‘Total chutiya cut in the prelims, man,’ I said when Rocksurd came and sat down at the table opposite me. He had a broad smile on his face. ‘Do you know why?/ he asked. ‘Why?’ I said. ‘Why what?’ ‘Why your stick broke on stage/ Why you got fucked in mid-song?’

‘Why my stick broke?’ I was confused. ‘What do you mean *why* my stick broke? It was a stick, it broke. It happens.’ He laughed out. ‘Yes, it does,’ he said. ‘It does happen. Especially if you saw through it a little with a knife beforehand.’

‘What? What the fuck are you talking about?’

‘You know very well what I am talking about, Rindu,’ he said evenly, the laughter falling out of his voice. ‘So I am a limited drummer, is it? I just know a couple of beats and a couple of rolls. I can’t improvise and I can’t pick up a beat just by listening to it.’

‘I never said that,’ I said.

‘It’s useless denying it, Rindu. All of IIT knows that it’s because of you I couldn’t become Instigate’s drummer. You convinced Kartik not to take me, to take Darrell instead.’

The first thought that went through my mind was that Darrell was a much better drummer than Rocksurd. But even in that state of shock I realized that this simple fact would not get through to him. Sitting there in the mess, the logic of his revenge unfolded clearly in front of me. It left me sick to my stomach (AA, 149-50).

The chapter "Bandhu" sketches narrator's closeness to SC/ST candidates. He was shockingly disillusioned to realize that he was omitted from their secret society, i.e., the Bandhu Batch of 1996.

'This is our SC ST yearbook,' he said evenly.

'The bandhu Batch of 96,' I said, more to myself than to him. It was a phrase I had never heard before: bandhu batch. 'That's what we call it.'

Pratap was in there. Meena was in there. Guys I had done pracs with, and chatted with for hours in the mess, and studied with, and copied homework from, and shown exams to, and been ragged with, and joked and laughed with, were in there. Surprise gave way to a heavy feeling of sadness. An image of a tubelit hostel room full of all these people flitted through my head. I had always identified them in the ways IIT had taught me: this guy was from Nilgiri hostel, that guy was a five-pointer, the other fellow was from Chemical, such and such girl was, well, a girl. And here was evidence of this secret society they had formed, to which I wasn't invited, that no one had told me about.

'Rindu,' said Meena. 'Rindu, it's your turn.' I took the striker in my hand and looked down at the coins on the board. For a moment my mind went totally blank. 'Which one am I?' I asked. 'Black or white?' (AA, 168-69)

He was failed in his attempt to win his girlfriend's heart by writing on her. His girlfriend made him realize that "to write about people meant having to leave oneself behind and enter into them." And that "...to love someone also entailed roughly the same thing" (AA, 247).

He was obliged to resort to "ironic self-depreciation" to face up to betrayals, jealousy and losses. For the presence of multiple strains of irony and injustice in the social fabric, he confronted "defeat in more than one flavor." Mindful of his "inner ordinariness", he was always graceful in defeat.

Two quotes from the web are ample evidence of how the book has been taken.

Dear Amitabha, just to tell you that I enjoyed reading your book. A whole LOT of us, I guess, could see ourselves in place of Rindu. *Above Average* typifies a section of us middle-class/upward middle-class Indian boys, who grow up in cities and find themselves judged (and also judge themselves) by which college they attend. Our lives involve a different sort of pressure as compared to that the smart kids who come from the smaller towns face. There, according to the small town boys' social circle, they have already done something incredible by learning how to speak English fluently, let alone getting admitted to a top notch college. Everything after that is a bonus, and maybe that helps them go about charting their career in a more sensible manner. With the big city boys, its about getting into the best schools. And after we do that, we are taken by surprise by the competition. We really need to slog our backsides off, and that's where we lag behind and become disinterested. All of a sudden, you have everyone around you who is a topper, and is smart and intelligent, and you no longer have the luxury of a guaranteed one-two-three position. We feel like we've been there and done that and now have to do it all over again. Some of us lose the plot a bit, and lose our focus. I went to Shri Ram College of Commerce (graduated in 2004) and messed up my grades with only a 51%... almost got beaten by a few sports quota friends of mine. But the interesting part is it didn't hurt at all. In fact internally, I was quite nonchalant about it, because I knew I had not put in any effort. The only people who were really depressed were the ones who had expectations from me. Anyway, am in the process of resurrecting my career, and managed to do fairly well at an investment firm. Am still trying to figure out what I want to excel at in life... and so am chasing the big school dream once more. Am in the process of applying to business schools in the United States. Let's see how it goes. Thought I'd share some of my thoughts on above average city boys. Your book was pretty close to the heart. Wish you all the very best! (Akshay)

There is something deeply satisfying when a book catalogs the backdrop of your own life especially if the book is well written. Before finding *Above Average* I would point people to various books about India and tell them that the book was interesting but the India described there was an 'alien' to me as it would be to them. They would look at me oddly; I suspect that you have to be Indian, to really understand the complex web of worlds with in worlds that somehow co-exist without intersecting. *Above Average* is a significant addition to modern Indian literature. I don't just say that because it features my erstwhile bus route. Being able to see ourselves in the context of the mirror it holds up is possibly the first step towards the future. It is not just my non-Indian friends who need a book to understand where I am coming from. Anyone from any of the multitudes of con-existing non intersecting spheres that make up India- would read this book just the way I read those other books. They would find it interesting and yet alien. They would likely walk away from it with a truer understanding of India. (Maya)

The book is one to which most Indian youth can identify with because it stories, experiences that most of them are familiar with. It goes in touch with the daily lived life neither exoticizing nor down

toning. Bagchi has really hit it big by building on the ambitions and emotions of that section of our society that wants to overcome their inner ordinariness and stand out as exceptional- and most would like to do so. Everyone who enters the pottles of IITs is above average but to be above the above average is what is needed today in order to face the challenges of the growing competitive world.

Since the novel is largely autobiographical there is a marked degree of authenticity both as far as characters, dialogues and the IIT identity is concerned. Bagchi does not seem to aspire much above a slice of life rendition of a personal story about growing up but it is the everyman ordinariness of the protagonist and the people around him that makes *Above Average* strike a chord with the young Indian reading public. The epiphanic moment is the real cathartic one: “He “wondered if what I had learned that day would change my life forever.”... nothing ever changes our lives forever, either our days are cocooned in a dull patchwork of non-events or, worse, what we learn from tragedy fades with time” (Thayil). This moment of realization is indeed something that can change one life forever.

The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently.

— Friedrich Nietzsche

About her (India) there is the elusive quality of a legend of long ago; some enchantment seems to have held her mind. She is a myth and an idea, a dream and a vision, and yet very real and present and pervasive.

(Jawahar Lal Nehru)

So quotes Shashi Tharoor (2007, 7) contradicting what Winston Churchill had summed up as ‘merely a geographical expression’. Despite the fact that India embraces an extraordinary mixture of ethnic groups, a profusion of mutually incomprehensible languages, varieties of topography and climates, a diversity of religions and cultural practices and a range of levels of economic development, India is uniquely singular. The likes of Churchill might have had the difficulty of assimilating this diversity. The truth is that it is India’s plurality which is singular and it is because of this truth that we have attained *Satyamev Jayate* (Truth Always Triumph). This is also what has made liberalization and globalization possible and more easily acceptable to her people and she has assimilated all the convergent influences of the world into the fabric of her society.

India has survived innumerable onslaughts and has in some way or the other made room for the various legacies left behind by its invaders and just like its multifaceted geography it has accepted its equally multifaceted history and still reaffirmed its identity. The various immigrants, invaders and visitors, with intentions war like or peaceful, integrated themselves within the fold of its diversity and have to make here. They could not curb its essentiality although the overlap of many peoples did leave some lasting scars that have been indelible. This is our tryst with destiny and thence after we have redeemed the pledge and worked towards the large cause of humanity.

Again, despite the fact that Nandan Nilekani (2008) still feels that “India is a country caught in a mix of feudalism and a promising market economy”, but, he continues, it

has “the advantage of the flattening, transformational power” (Nilekani, 2008, 381). It was this that made it go in for wide scale liberalization and globalization ventures that have paid rich dividends and have put the country on the path of unprecedented progress. Yet, if we look into the rear view mirror the Phantoms of the past lurk close behind, often, shackling our footsteps into the future. Globalization in itself is not the Midas touch; the consonant awareness is not its complementary companion. Despite our longing to leave the past behind we are still dangling between the old and the new. Yet, there is hope, for, whereas the West is struggling with the fallout of sky-rocketing capitalism, we as slow achievers are trodding on and can still see the goal post, though the distance is large and the path beset with quagmires and the atmosphere laden with mist.

Stepping into any five star hotels now or a corporate office one is struck by the technological and human efficiency and this could well be America or Europe by the looks and sounds of it. It is a part of what contemporary India has grown into both as regards its society and culture. And this is what Tharoor has to say about both the terms. He paints a very impressionistic picture of the variety that co-exists today.

In the Indian context, even so narrow a usage embraces something rather vast and varied, from the five-star hotels with which I began this chapter to the homeless sleeping huddled on railway platforms, from the classical schools of Indian dance to the village equivalents of the whirling dervishes, from the ancient Sanskrit epics to the B-movies of Bollywood, from stories retold around rural fires to those recycled on the television screen, from the patterns daubed on the walls of mud huts to the postmodern canvases now sold regularly at high-priced auctions by Sotheby’s... (Tharoor, 2007, 278-79)

This is the broad and indefinable India that we are living in. As he says that in 1996, when he came to India he found America! That was the last millennium and now we are further into the future; and in the new millennium globalization, good or bad, is here to stay with us along with its consort cosmopolitan. The nation that was born on 15 August 1947 awakened into independence matured into liberalization and now has gradually edged into globalization.

Pluralistic democracy which is our greatest strength has allowed us to flow freely into a new world where ironically big is becoming beautiful, and paradoxically to be the 'other' we are becoming modern Indians.

Change has come to India, change in both the positive and the negative way. On the one hand political corruption is on the rise and on the other hand sociological transformations are. What one loses on the downward swing one gains on the upward push? Our future however is being reshaped through the increased ability to educate our children, develop the potential of our women, provide opportunities to the historically underprivileged, diminish unproductive conflict between communities and prevent the abuse of the human rights of our fellow citizen. All this is happening and happening from within as we shade off the weight of two hundred years colonial baggage. The pessimists might say that there are grounds for hope but not for certitude, and the optimists argue that since the spring has fulfilled promises, the maturing sun will load and bless.

Tzvetan Todorov (1976) has observed that: 'it is because genres exist as an institution that they function as horizons of expectation for readers and as models of writing for authors' (Tharoor, 2007, 163). This is to say that since its inception Indian Writing in English travelled through a kaleidoscopic fictional scene. India's first generation novelists hardly had any access to Tolstoy, Melville, or Flaubert. They servilely imitated mediocre English novels often devaluing their own talents in the process. It was only much later that with the rise of the novel of purpose, the polemical novel that Indian writers started defining their native identity. From experimenting to create a narrative form previously not part of the Indian literary heritage and writing in a medium hitherto largely untested as a mode of literary expression, Indian writers gradually graduated into a form and style of their own. The difficulties were immense because with hand sight it seems clear that the British model was the least suitable for the Indian mind because of the brooding inwardness and the philosophical quality with which they had been endowed. Out of this was born our own

writers Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao (see chapter- I). However, the sudden spurt of narrative creativity can be delineated in three dominant strands- the novels of purpose for social reform and missionary enterprise; historical and supernatural fiction for the creation of an ethos remote in time; and the rendering of contemporary society realistically. It was the last that came to form the mainstream of Indian writing in the twentieth century. Today's fiction of the new millennium is a continuum of that endeavor though post-modernly diversified into heteroglossic carnivalesques of the rising city scapes.

It is in this environmental change that the writers of the new millennium have emerged, imbibing the legacies of the old and the challenges of the new. They are in their own way writing the sociology of the times which ironically dwells on the hamartiae that withholds and the poetic justice that will deliver the right and the wrong equitably. There are indeed the legislators of the world, judging and reckoning as they go along. And, so we find in their fiction an interface between April as the cruelest month with the promise of a blossoming spring. These writers, largely young, write for the new generation. They have themselves experienced what it is to grow up in India and their writing is a sharing with like minded co-existentialists. Indeed, they are privileged since they come from more affluent backgrounds and have not borne the brunt of those disadvantages that a good other half of their compatriots have. But, with a discerning edge gained from education and recourse to that 'world at one's doorstep' called the computer and the internet, they are way ahead in their awareness capacities. With these decided advantages they seem to have taken upon themselves, the responsibility of projecting 'India Shining' or 'India Rising'. Needless to say that most of these writers have had a 'past' before they chose of their present occupation and this has made them view the world and write about it from that point of view, Advaita Kala comes from the hotel management industry and has worked as a Guest Relations officer, so her novel *Almost Single* looks at India and Indians through those lenses, Ravi Subramanian and Amitabha Bagchi have a corporate/ IIT background and their writing revolves around that experience; Suketu Mehta, Altaf Tyrewala

and Aravind Adiga have been journalists, therefore they write in an investigative reportage and carry the journalist's microscope and telescope as they look at and feel into things.

Besides, the professions that these writers have prophesied, there are other forces at work for an Indian writing in and about India. The first is the cultural diversity of this homeland. Not only many generations rub shoulders together but also many castes, creeds and ethnicities walk along the common path. Though they are all Indian, living in the first quarter of the new millennium, they carry with them the burden of their pasts and their heritage as well; though of the same nation and contemporaries they are divided by where they come from what religious sect they belong to, what class and what caste- and all these together make them different from each other. If we try to deconstruct the average Indian it is the Derridian difference that one must understand in order to arrive at an explanation of being Indian. So, it is but natural to see Altaf Tyrewala explore the underside of Mumbai with its rich mosaic of the Muslim culture for Mumbai is both *Siddhi Vinayak* and *Haji Ali*; the two inseparably linked yet obviously apart. When Tyrewala focuses on how the Mumbai Muslims feel about being discriminated, Suketu Mehta brings in other Minority groups that make religion a dividing juncture. And perhaps all the writers look at 'class' as an imperative in the unjust distribution of choices. Mehta dwells a long while on the Dharavi slums, Adiga narrates a 'wanting' past and Subramanian, Bagchi and Kala seem to be so obsessed with their own urban, upper middle class lifestyle that they seem to have close their eyes to the living reality of the other world. Tyrewala seems to believe that the Muslim minority has also been deprived of an upward economic mobility, for reasons of their own making and the making of other institutions.

What emerges as a sub text in the new fiction of the millennium is a conglomeration of unity, diversity and contradictions. The unity is in the way we celebrate festivals and other occasions, the diversity is of caste, class, regions and dialects and the contradictions are in the way the past walks hand in hand with the present and raising one head one sees the sky scrapers of the future. It is only when on being asked, "what caste are you?" one can reply, "I

am an Indian!” can the inherent paradoxes of our country be resolved and the ethos restored. What these fictions of today are trying to ironically analyze is that an India that denies itself to us could end up being denied to all of us. Let us not hurry on a second partition, for this time there will be no Noah’s Arc and in the words of Tharoor, “The partition(s) in the Indian soul would be as bad as a partition in the Indian soil” (79). So, let us beware the ideo- of the present times and work towards recreating the old in new forms. The new millennium fiction presents these shocks so that we gear and oil our shock absorbers to smoothly transit out of the blue (s).

Arise, Awake and Stop not until the goal is reached.

–Swami Vivekananda.

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Summary

If we trace the broad spectrum of Indian writing in English right from the first novel, *Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, 1864, we can see how India figured as a subject in this novel. Whether it was Toru Dutt's *Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) or Sarojini Naidu's lyrics based on Radha and Govinda or Sri Aurobindo's *Kali, Laxmi, Durga, or Mother*, these novels explored India through the myriad forms of Indianness. Despite being written in English the writing variously explored notions of Indianness through its people, its geography, its culture and its traditions. This is true even today and not only for Indians living in India but for those across the seas too, the homeland and its politics is the recurrent theme in imagining one's nation creatively. This perhaps is the way that Indian writers choose to self-position and self-validate themselves viz-a-vis their counterparts abroad. The sociology and the economy of their vast country inspired their imagination and continue to do so despite the fast changing literary scene.

The canon of writing that emerged in the thirties and the forties including Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, later to be followed by Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Kamla Markandaya, Arun Joshi, and Ruskin Bond, all involved themselves with the historical legacy, the chronological changes and the culture's transition into a modern nation state. As sub text everyone used the impact of the western economies over which was positioned the Indian cultural dialectics. The resistance to one and the power of the other became an ongoing dialectics that persists even today.

Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1912) was the first modern Indian text to be acknowledged in the West. It brought Indian writing to the eyes of the other world and since then the attention it has

drawn has never abated, so much so that today we are storming across the barricades into a realm hitherto considered 'English.'

M.R. Anand through his first novel, *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and A Bud* (1937) opened up questions of caste and class and he continued to work through the endeavor to reconcile the village with progressive, urbanizing India. He grounded his work in social realism and infused Gandhism with explorations of tradition and modernity. Raja Rao began with focusing on the Gandhian philosophy and non-violent resistance to the British occupation of India and later, also dwelt on the relationship between Indian and Western cultures. *Kanthapura* (1932) and *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) typify the two ends. *The Chess Master and his Moves* (1988) was his final way of projecting the ways of handling different identities. R.K. Narayan's fictional territory Malgudi was the then location where Indianness thrived and which could later on in more advanced times be taken as a Mumbai, a Kolkata or a Delhi and his bachelor of arts or painter of signs could well be the present day corporate and professional. In these three stalwarts of early Indian writing in English one can easily get a glimpse of the polemics that was going to shape future writing in English. The genes of new millennium Indian writing in English were as evident as writing on the wall.

Moving on to Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, we are well into the seventies' and eighties' India, Indianness and its associated problematic. The scene largely shifts from the village (Malgudi, Kanthapura) to the urban cities, from the villagers to the modern middle class, from the traditional to the modern. These writers of the seventies and eighties explored the changing social consciousness which was the outcome of labor intensive industries, the manufacture of low priced goods, and its accompanied psychological changes. The religious piety and the domestic virtues were receding, left behind in the earlier defining contexts. The

sacred was losing its battle with the mundane. Though the White Sahebs had left, the *Kale Angrez* had taken over.

Come the nineties and the literary scene underwent a sea-change. As India opened markets to foreign trade, it embarked on a path that has led it to where it is now. It provided the necessary impetus to the commercial acumen of Indians. Added to this was a 'sense of vision, a belief in themselves' and they became "exceptionally nimble in seizing the right business opportunities" (Varma, 2007, xxii). Arundhati Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997) embodies this shift and itself inaugurates an era of Bookers, Commonwealth, Grammy and Oscars. We can now put our 'Thumps Up', be the 'Gold Spots' ('India Shining') and 'Coca-Cola' the world with our 'Pepsi'. Alongside the 'India Shining' with its globalized capitalism, its upwardly mobile professional classes, its new leisure sites and practices it is also 'India Rising' and shedding its old persona, a more heterogeneous new middle class that has surfed the waves of economic liberalization and has done well for itself. So well that it can now flaunt its well-being in the face of millions of poor friends and neighbors.

This briefly sums up the chronology of major changes in the history of India well into the new millennium. Literature has always been alluded to as the mirror of the society which reflects the diversity of life. The larger events in which individual players enact their single lives are fashioned with passion into a consistent narrative. The passions of the author/narrator and the actions of the protagonist/societal being are nuanced together and organized into a significant discourse that projects the whole through the parts. Like fiction being written through the ages, the Indian novel, in different regional languages and in English, is no exception. A large canon of Indian writing in English today epitomizes New India, it demonstrates marked departures in writing in English often in genre, form and voices *Q&A* (Swarup, 2005), *Five Point Someone*

(Bhagat, 2004), *Two States* (Bhagat, 2009) caused a great commotion as their 'young India' narrative took its audience in new and challenging directions. Now, the plots are set in metropolitan cities with their spate of advertising media and journalism and the protagonists are professionals with a new life style and craving for new opportunities. These confirm to an India that is changing both socially and culturally.

In the earlier Nehruvian model of Indian nation building, the "old" middle class was made up of government workers who served the nation by working for it. In a globalized model of the Indian nation, the middle class engages in a global economy of work and consumption, serving the nation by, ironically enough, directing itself away from it. (Radhakrishnan, 2011, 42)

Just one look at the new fiction will point towards new India.

Looking through the rear view mirror one can see that the Indian novelist never approved of the 'Art for Art's Sake' hypothesis, his inspiration stemmed from what was and this he made his 'is' for his creative work. Man becoming the measure of all things. It was more the Victorian concerns that took the upper hand in his novels - the Dickensian realism, the Hardyian regionalism, and the morality of Jane Austen superseded the more abstract concerns. And perhaps, it is this that has stayed as the essential Indianness in novelists even in the new millennium. A combination of regional realism with a backdrop of how morality is being flayed by the new insurgent global practices is what we read in the fiction of today. The commitment to a cause or a catharsis through narration is now not the thrust which has shifted to presenting slices of the country with slivers of activities that has been generated by the circumstances of the times. These slices often are macrocosmic and the slivers the worms eye view of what is festering under the becoming garb of 'India Shining'. The social protest of Mulk Raj Anand, the distress that R.K. Narayan felt when the world of evil overtook the good or the inhumanity that Bhabhani Bhattacharya tried to expose through the depiction of merciless hoarders, profiteers

and black marketers does not ring through the writing of today. Yes, corruption, evil and inhumanity are writ large across every page, but the concern is not with the 'why' it has come to be or the 'how' it can be resolved. It is there, has come to stay, for better or for good and it is the 'what' that makes modern India. It is in the description of the 'what' that the writer's narrative moves.

This is not to say that literature has taken over the concerns of historical or sociological writing, it is still literature because it psychologically penetrates into the minds of its protagonists and lays bare their souls in crisis. The novel is not dead but has changed its mode into a more journalistic endeavor taking off from the dozens of 24x7 news channels summing up what India is. The snippets are brief and their impact transitory. It is the expansion of this pan-Indic experience that the writers of today bringing to the readers. If the national news can thrive on rape, murders, scams and terror why can the novels not become a part of this nationalistic endeavor of laying bare the seething, teeming panorama of the India that has come to be? One look at the newspapers and TV news of a couple of decades ago is enough to say where we have moved into and similarly a few pages from the novels of the past and the present is sufficient proof of the miles traveled ahead.

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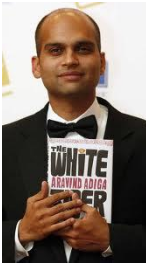
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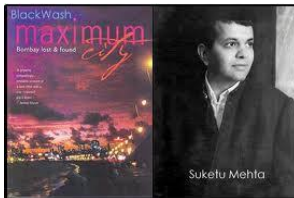
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About the Authors



Aravind Adiga was born in 1974 in Madras (now called Chennai), and grew up in Mangalore in the south of India. He was educated at Columbia University in New York and Magdalen College, Oxford. His articles have appeared in publications such as the *New Yorker*, the *Sunday Times*, *The Financial Times*, and *The Times of India*. His first novel, *The White Tiger*, won the Man Booker Prize for fiction in 2008. His new novel, *Last Man in Tower*, has been published in 2011 and has written another short story collection, *Between the Assassinations* (2008).



Suketu Mehta was born in 1963 is a writer based in New York City. He was born in Kolkata, India, and raised in Bombay where he lived until his family moved to the New York area in 1977. He has attended New York University and the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. His autobiographical account of his experiences in the city of Mumbai, *Maximum City*, was published in 2004. The book explores the underbelly of the sprawling city. It was a 2005 Pulitzer Prize finalist. Suketu Mehta also co-wrote the screenplay to the Bollywood film *Mission Kashmir* with novelist Vikram Chandra. Suketu lives in Manhattan. He is currently working on a book about the New York City immigrant experience. He joined the New York University journalism faculty in 2008.



Advaita Kala has written a novel titled *Almost Single*. She believes that the idea of *Almost Single* came about when she observed that the concept of love and dating had changed considerably. After the novel, Advaita Kala has written scripts for mainstream Bollywood movies especially critically acclaimed movie *Kahaani*. An hotelier by profession, Advaita quit her job as a hotel executive to pen the sequel to *Almost Single*. Advaita has lived in six cities before choosing to stay in Delhi for over two years. However, she still travels extensively. Advaita Kala is a passionate reader and loves reading suspense novels written by

Nancy Drew and Agatha Christie. She also reads biographies and history especially books on Mughal Era. Along with this Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, are authors who she really enjoys reading. In an interview Advaita has stated: When I started writing it, I did not even know that it will be a novel. I wrote *Almost Single* when I had taken a break in my career and was angry at how single women were being treated. I was approached for a movie adaptation but I think something is better left as a novel. The book *Almost Single* is also rereleased in French, Hindi and Marathi.



Altaf Tyrewala was born in January 1977 is an Indian, English-language author. He lives in Mumbai. Altaf studied advertising and marketing in New York, he earned a BBA from Baruch College in 1995, before returning to Mumbai in 1999 to work on his critically acclaimed debut novel *No God in Sight*. The novel, published by Penguin India in 2005, has been translated into Marathi, German, French, Spanish, Italian and Dutch, and published in the US and Canada. Tyrewala's short stories have been included in several Indian and international anthologies. Altaf's work has been hailed as "more sophisticated and universal than Adiga's" by some critics.



Amitabha Bagchi was born in Delhi and went to school there. The last few years of school were a blur of exams- Junior Science Talent Search, National Talent Search, Annual Mathematics and Physics Olympiads- and coaching classes to prepare for those exams. He finally found himself at IIT Delhi in the summer of 1992 thinking that the worst was over. It was not. Belying the expectations raised by his uninspiring performance at IIT, Amitabha got his PhD in Computer Science in 2002. Then, after loitering around a couple of years with the nebulous designation of post-doc, he returned to IIT Delhi where he is currently employed as an assistant professor.



Ravi Subramanian is the award winning author of four bestselling books: *If God was a Banker* (2007), *I Bought the Monk's Ferrari* (2007), *Devil in Pinstripes* (2009) and *The Incredible Banker* (2011). Ravi's maiden fiction venture, *If God was a Banker* was published in 2007, establishing itself as a National Bestseller. The book has sold over 200,000 copies and has been appreciated by readers across genres and age groups. The book also won the prestigious Golden Quill Award for Readers Choice in the year 2008. Writing is a passion, which this alumnus of Indian Institute of Management (Bangalore) pursues in his free time. Ravi also writes popular columns for well-known magazines and has his own personal column in *The Economic Times*.

A career banker and financial services professional, Ravi has worked with various multinational banks (Citibank, ANZ Grindlays Bank and HSBC) for over 18 years. As a result of his extensive background in foreign banks, writing about banking comes quite naturally to Ravi. Each one of his books thus far have been set in the backdrop of a foreign bank. Aspiring to be the John Grisham of banking, Ravi sees an opportunity in this space and intends to continue writing in this genre. "If people think of a banking story, they need to think of me. That's when I would count myself as a successful author, he says He currently lives in Mumbai with his biotechnologist turned banker wife, Dharini and his daughter Anusha.