

Reading Postcolonialism and Postmodernism in Contemporary Indian Literature

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Study of Indian Literature

Vikram Chandra's novel *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* contains an Indian fable about Alexander the Great—who is known as “Sikandar the Madman to Indians” (*Red* 129). In the fable, Sikandar discovers a huge knot which had resisted unraveling for hundreds of years. In a fit of fury and pure brawn, he struck the knot, slicing it in two with one blow. In Chandra's tale, two Brahmin brothers— scholarly members of the highest ranking class in Hindu society, the priestly class— decided to create such a knot and strike at it to test the truth of the tale. As one of the brothers, Ram Mohan, describes:

I made the knot...I made it of twine, string, leather thongs, strands of fibrous materials from plants, pieces of cloth, the guts of animals, lengths of steel and copper, fine meshes of gold, silver beaten into filament, cords from distant cities, women's hair, goat's beards; I used butter and oil, I slid things around each other so intimately that they forgot they were ever separate, and I tightened them against each other until they squealed and groaned in agony...after a while, it took no effort—I'd bring something close to it, and it would attach itself, suck it up it seemed. (*Red* 130-131)

Indeed, the historical knot is said to have been a fantastic work of art which withstood tests of time and wear. What has intrigued and delighted generations of Indians for thousands of years, Alexander/Sikander destroyed in one swipe. Together, the two brothers mourn at the ferocity of Sikander, at how he could bring himself to deliberately break such a wonder of a knot:

how could he bear to...it [the knot] is a thing of profundity; think, a knot that nobody has been able to unravel for thousands of years, an undecoded mystery, an obscurity so deep that it becomes a pain and a pleasure at the same time, what I mean to say is: it is a

monument, and along comes this bravo, this puling upstart given to melancholic fits and uncontrollable rages, and he rips it in two! Cuts it. (*Red* 131)

What is most heartbreaking to the Brahmin brothers about Sikander cutting the knot is that the act was not based on any ideological grounds, such as subjugating India to western supremacy nor did he cut it out of curiosity to see what was inside. It was simply an act of rage.

During an interview with Ranjan Ghosh, Vikram Chandra addresses the way classical Indian literary theory focuses on the emotional exchange between any literary work and the reader (327). He believes that the key to any literary form is to invoke an exchange of empathy with the reader where a work expresses a certain emotion and the reader in turn experiences the emotion. To Chandra, it is this emotional exchange, an experience of *rasa*,¹ which epitomizes literature (“Writing...” 328). The brothers mourn the loss of the knot because there is no poetry in Sikander’s act; they cannot feel the *rasa* in the story, so they must reenact it in order to understand it.

This knot, this mess of thousands of different stocks of materials all bound together for thousands of years, each strand equally itself and the knot as a whole, is a good metaphor for India. In a land of countless tribes, a minimum of eighteen governmentally recognized languages, and hundreds of chutney and curry possibilities, the Indian culture is indeed a daunting knot, particularly to the western world.

And yet, much like Sikander, the western world approaches India, seeking an easy path to understand and categorize a culture that has developed over thousands of years. In particular, the British Empire left India in a very confused state, officially pulling out of the country as colonizer at the stroke of midnight on 15 August 1947, regardless of the fact that no constitution, elected leader, or official Indian government was in place at the time of withdrawal. Although

the British gave the Indian political parties ample warning of the date of withdrawal, no consensus on a leader or constitution had been found. Along with the political pressures created by Muhammad Ali Jinnah and his constituents, the British government also set into motion and oversaw the partition of India and Pakistan, a literal severing of the Indian knot into two which invariably created turmoil over international relations in India which were historically very tolerant over religious diversity. Now 65 years later, the British are still being pulled into the knot of Indian history, as the effects of colonialism are played out in the literature of India today.

The problem with critical approaches to Indian literature is that too often the works are read as either postcolonial or postmodern, as if the two theoretical approaches were mutually exclusive. Instead, contemporary Indian literature is better understood when read as simultaneously postcolonial and postmodern.

The dichotomy between postcolonialism and postmodernism is not surprising, especially when considering Gerald Graff's assessment of literature departments in universities across the globe as divisive to the field. According to Graff, literature departments tend to hire faculty along "field coverage" lines in order to ensure that every genre and time period is "covered" (1965). Unfortunately, this field coverage scheme also isolates scholars of various backgrounds and concentrations (Graff 1966). Likewise, it is only in the outpouring of conferences and symposia that scholars are finding space to debate and compare theoretical paradigms en masse (Graff 1968). Scholars are not communicating with the faculty in their own department about their research. Therefore, there is little crossover in the research of established theories and genres, even though theory is meant to overlap and serve as a tool for scholars to better understand literature, not to isolate them. Instead of scholars and students debating theory openly in the academic community, theory is being used behind closed doors.

Just as Graff demonstrates that such isolation of scholars is not conducive to the development of literary theory and understanding, so too is this coverage system incomplete as it tends to isolate theories from one another except at specialized seminars and conventions. In an effort to bridge this gap between theories in the classroom, contemporary Indian literature in English can be studied as it participates in postmodernism and postcolonialism simultaneously. The correspondence between postcolonialism and postmodernism is displayed in the works of E. M. Forster, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, and Vikram Chandra. A greater understanding of the ramifications and limits of literary theory can be gained by examining how postmodern and postcolonial themes are integrated seamlessly in these authors' novels.

Before beginning, there are three literary terms which need to be defined: postmodernism, postcolonialism, and Indian literature. Postmodern literature is literature which seeks to deconstruct commonly held views of humanity, the world, or theory while integrating ideas of tradition and modernity in the same space to create a new understanding of the times. After the modernist movement which sought a complete break with tradition, postmodernism seeks to examine past modes of thought and expression in order to gain understanding so that history does not get caught in an inevitable cycle of blind repetition (Lyotard 1466). What has been historically accepted as a norm is called into question under postmodernism.

Next, postcolonialism can be understood as meaning more than "after the colonizer left." Postcolonialism in literary studies examines the effects of the colonization process on the educational development of the country. It also examines the question of nationhood as a colonized people who were artificially brought together into a nation under an external, colonizing power seek to define who they are once the unifying power—the colonizer—has left. Postcolonialism calls into question the imperial practice of asserting a culture, in this case

European culture, as a signifier of all human advancement. Under the umbrella of creating “progress” in colonized nations, the cultural hegemony silenced the voice of the colonized and suppressed native cultural practices. Native cultures were set as a foil by which to gauge European progress. The colonized were used as the uncivilized “other” to bolster the presumptuous power of the imperial state as the norm by which all other human societies were to be measured. Postcolonial studies is marked by an innate assumption that the colonized masses were largely marginalized and voiceless; now, these subaltern voices—those of the poor and underrepresented—are sought after in postcolonial studies to develop the larger view of humanity outside of the imperialist norm.

Finally, Indian literature is as complicated to define as the idea of any nation is to define. The multiplicity of Indian literature is a rich field which warrants close examination; however, for the sake of time I will try not to digress too far into this highly politicized and intriguing debate on defining the authentic Indian novel. There are two camps with differing opinions on what is the authentic Indian novel. On one side, Meenakshi Mukherjee defends bhasha literature—works that are written in Indian vernaculars such as Urdu, Hindi, or Marathi—as the indicator of authentic Indian literature. She asserts that this literature captures the Indian spirit in a way which is unnatural for English and these novels deal with issues that are locally pertinent to the Indian living in India, such as that of caste discrimination and the effects of partition, while the Indian novel in English deals with concerns which homogenize Indian culture for a global stage, such as issues of nationalism and defining “Indianism.”

Meanwhile, Salman Rushdie asserts that “the true Indian literature of the first postcolonial half-century has been made in the language the British left behind” (qtd. in Shankar 64); to Rushdie, bhasha literature is provincial and simple while the Indian novel in English is

intended for a global audience and thus seemingly more pertinent. Mukherjee reminds us that Rushdie has not read these bhasha works (Mukherjee 119) which he calls “tractor art” (Shankar 67). Rushdie supports this assertion, commenting that he writes in English, not out of choice, but because he does not have a strong command of his mother tongue (“The Literary Rushdie” 30).

Debate over the authenticity of Indian novels is even more heated by the way postcolonialism and postmodernism have been played out as mutually exclusive theories when discussing Indian literature. Postcolonial studies tend to look at Indian literature with connotations of the literature being forever injured by the colonial process. Meanwhile, scholars who apply only postmodernism to Indian literature tend to revere specific texts, such as Salman Rushdie’s, as examples of the progression Indian literature has made into a form of magical-realism. There is little agreement over which story of Indian literature is the accurate one: that of the injured postcolonial text or the miraculous and magical postmodern text. In order to avoid this debate over authenticity, for the purposes of this paper all Indian literature discussed will be clarified according to the language in which it was written.

The Indian subcontinent is already divided into cultural and geographical groups depending on language. Using language as a degree for categorization takes into account not only the background and education of authors but also the cultural background of their communities —those in which they belong and about which they are writing. This paper is not so simple as to examine Hindi literature from Dharamsala or Marathi literature from Mumbai; it examines Indian literature which has originally been written in English and achieved international notice.

Only a handful of Indian novels in English are discussed here, all of which were written by men with privileged backgrounds: E. M. Forster, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, and

Vikram Chandra. What is proven, however, about these novels—that postcolonial and postmodern theories can be used jointly to understand Indian literature in a way that does not create competition between these two theories nor diminishes the authenticity of its authors—can be further applied to any examination of caste literature, women’s literature, or children’s literature of India. Every writer needs a starting point, especially when tackling a topic as broad and deep as Indian Literature. Artificial “beginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to enable what follows for them” (Said 1878). These texts by privileged male Indians were the artificial beginning for this paper, not the exhaustive mouthpiece for all Indian literature. At the risk of creating an equally damaging imperialistic norm, this narrow scope of authors and their novels will be used to open the conversation on postcolonialism and postmodernism in order to provide a basis from which other, less internationally accessible works of Indian literature can be brought to erudition.

Similarly, I refer to Rushdie, Mistry, and Chandra as Indian authors even though none of them permanently reside in India. They were all born on Indian soil and write about India in these three novels discussed: *Midnight’s Children*, *A Fine Balance*, and *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, so for these purposes they will be considered Indian novels. Even Forster, who was not born Indian, travelled to and wrote about India in a convincing way which affords his novel a place in the Indian literary corpus. As the geographical and political limits on India have changed with history, the Indian literature and authors considered here are understood in the broadest sense as having some heritage grounded in the Indian subcontinent—that which is today understood as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Kashmiri valley which is currently being disputed by India, Pakistan, and China. In this case, nationhood is in the imagination.

One potential pitfall of using the diasporic Indian author for determining the relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernism in Indian literature in English is that only a very specific, privileged community of Indian authors are being examined. All of these authors are men who have received higher education in the West and had the means as well as option to live abroad. However, they have been chosen for this discussion as they are the most internationally recognized contemporary Indian authors, all having received international recognition for their works on India. It is due to their international success that they have largely been taken as authoritative voices on the Indian literary scene in academic and critical circles. As the world is paying these authors attention, calling them authoritative voices on Indian literature, so do they deserve to be examined and critiqued as such.

Besides sharing international success, these Indian novels also carry similar themes—those of national identity and independence, Indira Gandhi's state Emergency and Partition. Their popularity and the fact that they are all written originally in English is a phenomenon which deserves further attention. By examining these novels, it is possible to not only define the Indian novel in English but also to clarify as to where these novels fit into the global literary canon and how they reflect changes in literary theory. That is to say that progression in the understanding of postcolonialism and postmodernism can lead to a clearer view of Indian literature.

For the reader who is outside of the world of literary theory, this study still warrants notice in that it examines the development of a national literature. This critical review is a needed celebration of the globalized world and the unique place Indian literature plays in the globalization process. While globalization certainly has its flaws, the trend has made it feasible for a scholar in Ohio to begin to untie the knot of the literature of the Indian subcontinent.

Indian novels in English show true progress: that literature and global readership are moving to an openness which not only allows difference in culture and peoples but embraces it. This is not to say that all obstacles have disappeared which seek to subordinate Indian literature, but real progress is being made. As long as scholars are willing to examine the reality of the Indian novel—including the political obstacles which still stand in its way— as long as western scholars are critically evaluating and understanding Indian literature without a Euro-American bias, and as long as people of the West are open to seeing themselves in literature from the other side of the world, then the East/West divide will continue to disappear so a purer intellectual engagement can commence. For India, the Occident and the Oriental are disappearing into abstraction.

One danger these claims of globalism leads to is the temptation to lend these theories to all Asian literatures. This paper can only prove a growing openness to Indian Literature in the Euro-American corpus as the Indian subcontinent and her culture are distinctly unique from the rest of Asia; as Didier Coste points out, it is exactly the openness to diversity that is characteristic of India which makes her literature the quintessential starting point to open the discussion of world literatures, not just East and West narratives (39). Other countries, however—China, Pakistan, and Burma for instance— are still stuck in the position of being labeled “Other.” The release of Indian literature from the Occidental/Oriental paradigm is an optimistic cue that may usher in the rest of the Orient into enjoying intellectual understanding on even ground with the West.

Open humanitarian study of the literatures of the East has the ability to transcend political pressures and discover core truths about the human family and the world. It is never invaluable to come to know a people of different heritage and custom; it is in coming to know the Other that

we come to know ourselves. This is not to fall into the trap which Joseph Hillis Miller warns against of making “otherness into sameness” (qtd. in Coste 38). Scholars learn more about the diversity of humanity—the common ground we all share and the variances which balance human interaction—in the comparison of literatures, in studying aspects of humanity which are familiar and those that are foreign. For this reason, works which seek to understand a national literature and to open that literature to the rest of the world will never be without a place.

Knowing that the entirety of the Indian culture, or even the entirety of Indian literature, cannot be unwound in one paper, it is the American’s turn to tackle the knot of India and attempt to understand her mysteries. With the curiosity of Vikram Chandra’s Ram Mohan and Arun, the monument of Indian literature can be examined through the sister lenses of postcolonialism and postmodernism.

Chapter 2

Where it All Started: E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* as the Last Colonial and the First Postcolonial Novel

Judith Schere Herz asserts in her book *A Passage to India: Nation and Narration* that Forster's novel is "at once, the last colonial and the first postcolonial text" (31). *A Passage to India* is the last British novel to examine the life of Anglo-Indians² and the Raj form of governance. Meanwhile, it is also the first novel that has become widely popular in the West which dares to examine the life and mind of native Indians. By turning the view of the Indian people from one of fascination and study to the inward dialogue of an Indian's mind—that of Dr. Aziz—Forster facilitated the epiphany in the Western mind that Indians think and feel and are fully intellectual beings just as the British are. Thus, Forster's novel is also the first postcolonial text because it attempts to understand India from an Indian's perspective—a point of view that may very well contradict what the British feel is right for the country.

There will be those scholars who object to any assertion that Forster's work is an Indian novel. Simply because Forster was British—thus a member of the colonizing power in India—some scholars may be politically sensitive to including his work among those who are "more authentically" India or were born of an Indian race in India, as calling a British novel Indian could further the colonial agenda of overpowering the indigenous culture. Any delineation of Indian literature, however, that ignores an authentic British voice simply because it is a voice of the colonizer would be equally unjust.

In order to fully understand the development of Indian literature as a genre, the British voice is as equally a historical part of the country's literature as the indigenous voice is. What's more, Forster's novel seeks a sensitive and sympathetic view of India, a view that at the time was

uncommon in British literature. It was this motive of Forster to actually understand the native Indian that made his work so radical at the time it was published and which qualifies the novel as the first postcolonial work—the first novel to see the colonial project through the eyes of the colonized.

It is certainly risky to ask scholars to accept Forster, as a British author, in the pantheon of Indian writers. And yet, postmodernism seeks to question the hegemonies which have been used to define literature, and that postcolonialism is likewise concerned with giving stage to those voices that are otherwise ignored. Thus, Forster's *A Passage to India* can be accepted as an authentic Indian novel as it fits in this relational paradigm between postcolonialism and postmodernism. While the novel is not by an Indian, it was written based on Forster's trips to the country and provides a perspective of doubt in the colonial project by one of the British—a perspective that proves valuable to understanding the relationship between Indian and British literature. Vikram Chandra asserts in an interview with Ranjan Ghosh that he is more than just a postcolonial writer, he is also a “post-Mughal, post-Abhinavagupta, post-Vedic, and post- a thousand and one things” writer (327). So too, can a British author such as E. M. Forster be more than just a British author or a member of the former ruling class.

Before Forster's novel can be fully understood as postcolonial, one must have an understanding of postcolonial theory. While there are many postcolonial scholars with countless theories and opinions on the intellectual emancipation of the nonwestern world, to examine all of these individually would be tiresome and too long a digression for our purposes. For this reason, a simple introduction into the theories of Chinua Achebe, Edward Said, and Gayatri Charavorty Spivak will suffice.

In the opening of his essay “An Image of Africa,” Chinua Achebe describes listening to a couple of American students discussing his novel *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe overhears one of the students remark on his delight in learning “about the customs and superstitions of an African tribe;” it is clear that the student recognizes his place only in local terms where his American tribal customs and superstitions are an assumed norm, not in a global context (Achebe 1613). Achebe goes on to describe how Africa is commonly used as a foil against which to measure western progress (1613). He examines the effects of historical racism and colonial images on the modern psyche through his discussion of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Specifically, Achebe charges Conrad for not giving voice to the subjects of his novel—the African people—and instead affording them dialects, as though they did not possess the lingual prowess to have a fully developed language that is distinctly their own (1623). Achebe goes further to charge an article written in 1974 for likewise oppressing the voice of the “other;” the article states that “In London, there is an enormous immigration of children who speak Indian or Nigerian dialects, or some other native language” (1622). Yet again, Indian culture and literature is being posited as “other” and somehow inferior to the Western language hegemony.

Through postcolonial studies, scholars come to reconcile this labeling of the Occident, or western, and the Other. Scholars have historically differentiated authors into a hierarchy of who is known, thus superior, and who is other, thus inferior; this assumption is usually presumed to be a “reflex action [rather] than calculated malice” on the part of the scholar (Achebe 1622). Postcolonialism highlights the effects of the colonial process on human development. In literary studies, postcolonialism examines the change in self representation by authors from the period before foreign rule, through the colonization process, and finally examines the local reality after a colonizer leaves. Postcolonial scholars such as Chinua Achebe, Edward Said, and Gayatri

Chakravorty Spivak seek to give voice to those who were silenced by the apathy of the colonizer, to recognize language where their forbearers heard only dialects.³

In many ways, it is the ethnocentrism of a couple of students who fail to see that they have a culture which is foreign to some that Achebe warns against in his postcolonial discourse. He allows in writing *Heart of Darkness* that Conrad wrote from a specific historical time that had a dominating image of Africa, yet Achebe does not back down; regardless of time, racism is still racism and has certain social ramifications (1619). What's more, when scholars perpetuate the study of a racist work which dehumanizes a culture an equal injustice is done, not matter how beautiful the author's prose (Achebe 1619). For Achebe, the importance of postcolonial studies lies in recognizing the social ramifications of studying racist works; he recognizes the great plurality of humanity without any stratification and warns against any presumed ethnocentrism or racism which could still be implicit today.

Similarly, Edward Said examines the dichotomy between the Occident and the Oriental. For Said, the issue of the dehumanization of the East in Occident literature is acute in the commodification of the Orient. Said purports how the East, with her exotic spices and cultures, served as a space for adventure and thus served to influence European material culture as a sort of factory of the exotic, if you will (1866). What is key to him is that there is still a similar dichotomy between the East and West which designates difference between the two rather than a general recognition of the plurality present in all humanity— East, West, South, and North (1867). The Orient, much like Achebe's Africa, was used to define the West by what it was not. The Orient was used as a foil to set the West apart in a superior way (Said 1868).

Power plays an integral role in Said's work. In a land where languages were reduced to dialects by thinkers such as Thomas Babington Macauley,⁴ “the scientist, the scholar, the

missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he *could be there*, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient's part" (Said 1871). To combat the possibly destructive affect of this power dynamic, Said calls for scholars to be aware of their own actuality in studying the Orient (1874)—that an American be aware of her own "Americanness" when studying the Orient—as the scholar cannot help but have certain methods and assumptions which are culturally engrained.⁵

By recognizing the placement of power in the field of postcolonial studies—which to Said, is unavoidable in academia (1876)—scholars can acknowledge the effects of colonization without perpetuating colonial subjugation. That is to say, there is a danger in postcolonial studies of labeling a people or literature as postcolonial and thus a danger of looking for all of the ways in which that work is subsequently damaged; however, by recognizing the ways in which colonization has affected a people and their art, scholars can then move onto examining the productive effects of this art (Said 1876-1877). Seeing individuals, not just a broad categorization of the Orient, humanizes any study. By recognizing and particularizing individual customs and people in postcolonial studies, Said hopes to see a disappearance of the divisive Oriental-Occidental paradigm (1887-1889).

Ever narrowing the field of postcolonial studies to India, Gayatri Charavorty Spivak deserves mentioning. She discredits herself as a scholar of South Asian studies and asserts that her concerns for India lie primarily in the accident of her birth there (Spivak 2115). Keeping in mind Said's assertion that the Occident has a choice to study the Orient, whereas the Orient does not get to agree to being studied or not, Spivak boldly asks "can the subaltern⁶ speak?" (Spivak 2117). She address the question of whether or not individuals on the margins even have the option to speak on their behalf, or if, in the power dynamic of the world, they are always spoken

for by the circumstance of their lack of access to education and, when they do speak, whether or not they have any outlets to be heard in “collective arenas” (Spivak 2125).

Ultimately, as is the trend in all of the postcolonial theories discussed here, the subaltern is labeled as “other” and “different” by imperialistic powers, and thus are understood by the Occident to be inferior (Spivak 2118-2119). Where Spivak takes the theory further than her fellow scholars is in her recognition of these imperialistic powers in essentializing and homogenizing large communities of people and slapping them with broad terms such as “Other” (2119). Her critique rests on all theorists who homogenize large groups of people, such as Deleuze and Guattari whose theory of minority literature sets one or a handful of individuals to represent a larger population of subaltern voices in a majority country. She seeks to investigate the plurality of the people who are subaltern and to examine how giving the subaltern a public voice in “mass arenas” through voting or scholarly work can open the field of, not just postcolonial studies, but human studies.

One possible danger of Spivak’s work on the subaltern voice is that such labeling, while unavoidable, carries its own connotations of collectivism, essentialism, and of being somehow politically damaged. Spivak’s work must be read in conjunction with Said’s to avoid the danger of myopically examining the affects of any power dynamic; conscientious scholars must always look for the progress and merit of the communities they study, not just the inhibiting effects of a power dynamic (Said 1877).

Forster’s work can be understood as postcolonial along these lines. As Achebe describes postcolonialism, Forster also seeks to break the understanding of the world that is Eurocentric. He tries to describe India in terms that are not set as Indian culture being antithetical to British culture, but to simply describe the native experience of colonial India. By setting his novel in the

first person perspective of a native Indian, Forster literally gives voice to the subaltern, an individual who has been silenced in many ways by the imperial project. What's more, Forster's novel is also postcolonial as it examines the Oriental/Occidental divide through the intimate exploration of friendships between the British and native Indians.

The basic plot of *A Passage to India* follows the relations of one Indian Muslim, Dr. Aziz, with his British colonizers. Forster provides a pantheon of each type of British mindset in the novel from the surly and suspicious overlords—Ronald Healsop and Major Callendar—to the open minded yet naïve travelers who genuinely wish to get to know India—Cecil Fielding and Adela Quested. Through the novel, readers observe several attempts at friendship between the British and Indians—from the tea party at the Club, the luncheon at Fielding's home, the trip to Marabar caves, and the boat trip to enjoy the festival celebrating Krishna's birth—all of which fail to bridge the divide between colonizer and colonized. The pivotal interaction lies in the trip to the caves where Miss Quested in her search to "see the real India" (Forster 25) believes that her host, Dr. Aziz, tried to rape her and brings him to court over such a charge. The case divides the community—British against Indians—with two exceptions: Mrs. Moore, who is Healsop's mother, and Fielding, an educator and misfit among his British comrades, take the side of Aziz with Fielding publicly defending him and Moore passively leaving the city before the trial out of frustration. Ultimately, Adela rescinds her accusation and Aziz is released. The novel ends with Fielding and Aziz, the two characters who came the closest to crossing the power divide of colonization into being friends, riding through the jungle one last time. But the land itself rises to separate them, thus ending the novel with Forster's prophetic "No, not yet...no, not there" (362).

At the conclusion of *A Passage to India*, Forster leaves his readers with a question, but even the question is not fully articulated. His question lies in the future of Indian and British

relations—whether there will ever be friendship between the two, is independence inevitable, what will it take for India to be an autonomous country, and what is the fate of the Indian people for independence to be gained. Perhaps the lack of a clear question, let alone a clear answer, is Forster's point: the novel is about a passage to India, as in a European's passage to a foreign world and into the mind of the native, Aziz. Yet, even the afforded insight into the doctor's thoughts which Forster grants his readers does not equate with omniscience. Forster does not have the answer; as a European himself, Forster cannot give a fully clear view into the collective psyche of India. The European reader is left with affection for the wronged native, yet no answers to his plight nor a full understanding of him. The novel itself feels opaque as though Forster only has foggy view into the mind of Dr. Aziz. As the author is not omniscient of the Indian's mind, neither can his audience be.

In one of the clearest point in the novel's action— the climax of the novel which is Aziz's trial as the accused rapist of Miss Adela Quested— Aziz is aided by the British educator. The fact that Fielding was able to stand against his comrades and seemed to grant Adela some clarity in recalling the events of that afternoon in the caves cannot be ignored. It is as though through all of the muddles of politics and prejudices during this time of British occupation that the Indian needs his British comrade, and the reverse is also true if both are to fully find their true selves and are able to connect with the world. Fielding was able to find the authentic India he had been searching to serve through his relationship with Aziz and likewise Aziz was able to find a better life outside of the city where he and his children could live together and he could practice his beloved medicine with some authority thanks to the clarity and freedom he gained from his experiences of the trial. They both found the humanity in the other through their

friendship even though all others around them could not do so—Healsop, the Thurstons, and Godbole to name a few.

Yet, after all Fielding did for Aziz in defending him during his trial and the strong bond they both hold through Mrs. Moore, there is not enough for them to remain friends. Aziz does not want to meet Fielding's wife nor talk to Master Moore again. Likewise, Fielding cannot bring himself to push the matter as the friendship seems too inconsequential compared to his ties to his countrymen who would not understand the relationship (Forster 358). India itself is stated as not being ready for the two to be unconditional friends.

This impasse is problematic as the individual cannot transcend the temporal reality in which he lives—there is no escaping the question of colonization. While individualism is a particularly modern ideal when compared to the classical village societies where the community was paramount, it is strongly rooted in how people today view the world. Tales of individuals who cannot transcend their circumstances are numerous in history and literature, not the least of notables including the likes of Romeo and Juliet. So it is not that the modern mind cannot comprehend the inability for two individuals to rise above fate and circumstance to achieve bonds of friendship; instead, the lack of imminent destruction makes this situation in Forster's work questionable and unsatisfactory to the reader. The western sensibility can accept two individuals who are tragically kept at odds when there is an overt force set against them—politics, military, and acts of nature. However, the political forces which are discussed alongside in Fielding and Aziz's relationship do not seem to be directly threatening to their comradeship. On the contrary, as they are both afforded the opportunity to ride through the jungle and openly discuss such politics seems to show that a friendship could indeed be viable under the current political situation in India, but it does not prove so.

Through the complicated relationship of these two men, scholars can come to understand Forster's postcolonial view of Indian and England. He too cannot quite reconcile the relationship by the end of the novel. Forster captures the Indian sentiment for self-rule—"we may hate one another, but we hate you [the British] the most" (Forster 361)—yet he cannot tell the tale of how the country is to get from point A of being under occupation to point B as a place of independence. He can see that once independence is obtained, Aziz and Fielding will be true comrades, but until then their friendship will remain unrealized. At the risk of sounding trite, Forster may be making a greater commentary on the inability of humans to connect until they are at liberty to do so, without political pressures in either direction (such as the desire for self rule or the inertia of a colonizer to try to remain in power).

The very question as to whether or not an Indian and a Brit could be friends under the power dynamic of colonized and colonizer is the root of postcolonial studies. While it is certainly important for any scholar to be able to recognize where a literary work can be served by any current critical theories, it is vital to keep in mind why these theories are necessary to begin with: they reach towards a better understanding of human interaction and potential for growth. Thus, the postcolonial project in *A Passage to India* not only engages in political questioning of the colonial project but reminds scholars the ultimate question of postcolonial inquiry: how does colonialism affect human relations.

The opening dialogue between Aziz and his fellow Muslim friends on the subject of Indo-Anglican relationships (Forster 6-9) begins to frame the question Forster spends the novel trying to articulate: whether or not an Indian and a Brit could become close friends. What's more, Forster personifies this question by setting it into play through the relationship between Dr. Aziz and Fielding. Praseeda Gopinath examines this relationship briefly by comparing

“Fielding’s belief that the values of gentlemanliness are universally applicable, that is to say that they are not racially delimited” (209) with Aziz’s inability to become more English (210). She sees the reason why the two cannot be friends as a consequence of Fielding being inextricably from the ruling class, thus he has an innate right to stretch the bonds of colonial friendship while Aziz lacks such power. Still, she asserts that Fielding’s inclusionist philosophy on the bounds of gentlemanly manners is still limited and can test the bounds of colonization “only at the price of its own unraveling” (Gopinath 211).

Forster thus tests the boundaries of colonial friendship, even though Gopinath’s discourse specifically cites the incompatibility between gender differences where Fielding remains intellectual in the friendship while Aziz becomes too emotional and “infantile” (210). Gopinath does not provide adequate support from the text to support these assertions on Aziz’s character and one would beg the question of how intellectually and with what discipline Fielding would have reacted to false charges of rape against a supposed friend. Still, her framework of describing the power dynamic in a colonial relationship is helpful.

Another scholar who comments on the predicament of friendship in the novel is Alison Sainsbury. She purports that friendship between these two men is not possible because of the implication of women, particularly English women (61). It is as though the sensibilities of English ladies are somehow incompatible with close relations with Indians, so much so that this prejudice taints any relationship with an Englishman who tries to have any Indian acquaintances and retain English female friends.

There is one character not yet mentioned whose role in the novel defies this claim: Mrs. Moore. As Sainsbury’s claims seem to be based on sexual tension and Mrs. Moore is beyond an age where the main characters are viewing her as a viable partner, it may be due to her advanced

age that she was the only character who was able to deeply and irrevocably enter into the hearts of both the Indian and the English camps. One may further argue that the British had to accept her and her friendship with Aziz since Healsop, the local magistrate, set such precedence for the entire community as she was his mother. In this case, it was once the Indian was able to accept Mrs. Moore's clear affection and wisdom that true growth between the nations could occur. However, this analysis falls short as she died on her passage back to England, as though such a connection could only be temporary, not surviving to reach back to Anglo shores. Either way, Sainsbury's analysis of friendship along gender and sexual lines remains precarious, especially in light of the fact that the final debate over friendship in the novel occurs in a discussion where Aziz and Fielding talk about British Imperialism and self rule; they do not argue over women.

Yet, Mrs. Moore does deserve further recognition in interpreting the novel. Like Mrs. Moore who went to India to see her son, Forster was also a British visitor to the country under the patronage of someone with considerable clout: his dear friend Syed Ross Masood. Forster was also much like Mrs. Moore in that, all in all, he was a humble visitor to the country and he was open to meeting India on her terms, even perhaps delving into deep relationships with some locals. This is not to say that Mrs. Moore is a direct biographical representation of Forster on his trips to the subcontinent; instead she is a clear reflection of what his situation was like as a member of the colonizing country who deeply wished to form bonds of friendship. Yet, Forster and Mrs. Moore were ultimately outsiders who could not fully grasp what it meant to be Indian, nor could they completely understand the way Indians thought or felt, which could largely be why Forster's novel seems like an opaque question.

Forster could not write a novel from the viewpoint of Dr. Aziz as a British man without some foggiess as to the Indian hubris. In fact, it was this daring that at the time of its release so

shocked yet delighted Indian readers: “the most astonishing aspect of the book for many Indians, was that it had the courage to talk and think from inside of the Indian mind (Herz 31).” It is in trying to clarify what lies in the disconnect between what outsiders looking into the colonized state to try and come to know the colonized find and what the colonized people actually experience and think that drives postcolonial studies. It is Forster’s reaching for empathy—his *rasa* of compassion— that epitomizes *A Passage to India* as a postcolonial work.

The indeterminate nature Forster’s novel further works to provide a postmodern dialogue on friendship. When looking at the basic plot of the novel, the structure and play of events are relatively plain. There is the trial in which the first section of the novel builds to and the second portion which seems to only comment briefly as an epilogue of what occurred with all of the main characters once the trial dropped off. Very little happens in terms of narrative action. And yet, Forster spends ample time describing the state of individual relationships and emotions. For example, Forster describes Fielding’s reactions in travelling west, back to England in such precise detail, as though his passage through Egypt and into Venice as a rediscovering of himself, as though he was coming home metaphorically in his identity as well as literally returning to his nation (313-314).

These subtle currents of the novel continually take the reader internally to the characters’ thoughts and emotions, thus making the novel less about plot and instead forces readers to focus on the question he is continually trying to form. This reflective turn of the novel epitomizes what Lyotard expresses: that every postmodern project must do more than break down and examine a way of thinking. Scholars must also reflect on their findings in order for any growth to occur (1468).

Forster is trying to continually examine the possibility for Indian and English comradeship under the conditions of colonization. Yet, he always does so with the future in mind as the various characters of the novel imagine and discuss the future of the country and the possibility of Independence. Forster examines the past in terms of how Indian-Anglo relations have failed due to the colonial project. He does so by providing complimentary conversations on the subject including Mrs. Callendar's remark at the English club that "the kindest thing one can do to a native is to let him die" (25) which is paired with the parallel discussion between Dr. Aziz and his friends at dinner where they comment on the seeming training the British give one another upon arriving in the country so as to not be gentlemen or gentlewomen to the natives (7). Forster delivers both sides to the discussion throughout the novel, that of the British and the Indians, so that the question of colonization and human relations can be dissected but also reflected upon for the future of the state.

Besides the question of friendship, *A Passage to India* also can be read through the interplay of postmodernism and postcolonialism in Indian novels in the way Forster uses India to communicate in his work. In particular, Forster gives the land a mystical feel of personification. That is to say that he describes the land so intimately at times and even uses intonations on behalf of the land or pronouns to describe "her" to the point that the reader expects a full simile or metaphor to form relating the land to a woman, but Forster, while tantalizing close, never makes the full jump into personification. Alas, the land of India remains just land, but the reader is left with a sensation that "she" could be more.

For example, Forster opens his novel by a close description of the Ganges River by Chandrapore then moves into describing the land and buildings then the sky (3-5). By the time

he is in the throes of describing the imminent power and beauty of the sky, he reverts into humanizing the land:

The sky settles everything—not only climates and seasons but when the earth shall be beautiful. By herself she can do little—only feeble outbursts of flowers. But when the sky chooses, glory can rain into Chandrapore bazaars or a benediction pass from horizon to horizon...Only in the south, where a group of fists and fingers are thrust up through the soil, is the endless expanse [of the sky] interrupted. The fists and fingers are the Marabar Hills, containing the extraordinary caves. (5-6)

It is in this way that Forster grants human aspects to the land—fingers, fists, and female identity—yet India remains largely frozen, with little power to act on her own accord except by “feeble outbursts of flowers.”

Later in the novel, Forster gives India a voice: that of the indistinct “baum, baum” in the Marabar caves (163). It is a reverberation that is to haunt Mrs. Moore and Adela until they form some sort of reconciliation with the land either by leaving (233) or by revealing the truth in the courtroom (265). And yet, although Forster gives the land this indefinite voice, he is to leave it without a distinct language. It is not until Mrs. Moore is leaving that the land is given language by telling her as she imagines palm trees to wave her good bye:

‘So you thought an echo was India; you took that Marabar caves as final?’ they [the palm trees] laughed. ‘What have we in common with them, or they with Asirgarh? Good-bye!’
(233)

This imagined assertion of Mrs. Moore’s reflects Forster’s own warning about his novel: “The reader of any book about India should remember as he closes it that he has visited only one of the Indias” (qtd in Das 75).

The final say in the novel is likewise granted to the land. As Aziz and Fielding go for one last walk through the jungle to try to resurrect their friendship, the very land rises to literally separate them, thus India has the final answer to the question of any imminent friendship between the Indian and the British:

‘Why can’t we be friends now?’ said the other [Fielding], holding him [Aziz] affectionately. ‘It’s what I want. It’s what you want.’

But the horses didn’t want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn’t want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion...they didn’t want it, they said in their hundred voices, ‘No, not yet,’ and the sky said, ‘No, not there.’ (Forster 362)

The postcolonial/postmodern question of friendship is too great to be answered by Forster as an omniscient narrator or to let the characters answer. Forster had to have the very land of India respond and leave the answer to the future. The question of friendship cannot be answered until the colonial question is answered, which regards the second of Lyotard’s connotations of understanding postmodernism: that “institutions are legitimate only insofar as they contribute to the emancipation of mankind” (Lyotard 1467).

Even though Lyotard views postmodernism as a reaction to the atrocities of World War II which were carried out under the modernist assertion of progress (1467), the postmodern agenda cannot be so historically and chronologically tied. Although Forster published *A Passage to India* in 1924, it likewise calls into question the ideal of human progress in the face of the effects of imperialism. Theories must be elastic so scholars can see where they overlap and interact in literature—such as postmodernism and postcolonialism; so too must scholars avoid setting theories to strict historical timetables. Forster is interested in the progression of human relations

between the British and Indians and he expresses this through his exploration of the postcolonial question in *A Passage to India*, which makes the novel a clear postmodern endeavor.

It is unclear as to whose passage to India Forster is writing about. Is it Fielding's, Mrs. Moore's, Miss Quested, or a passage for all of the British? Is the novel about Aziz's growth and his passage in coming to know India more clearly through his relationships with the British? Or is the passage to India one which is granted by the author to his European readers; is he acting as a porter facilitating passage of his countrymen through printed words and imagination. As a dynamic author, this novel could well prove to be all of these.

The reader must call into question how accurate this account is about India as it is written by a British man, if for no other reason than because others certainly will take up this critique. As a British man who himself visited India during occupation, this novel should be taken as authentic in that he directly deals with issues of the British in this foreign country. However, the narration is all told from the perspective of Aziz, a Muslim Indian doctor, three things which Forster is not. Yet, it is the care with which Forster tries to do India justice in his representation of a people and culture that are not native to him that speaks volumes as to why he continually felt the need to give the very land a voice in this novel. Forster clearly wished to present an accurate yet concerned view of India in his work that would speak to an English and an Indian audience, an account which is careful to avoid the presiding racial prejudices of his day, thus avoid in the fatal flaw Achebe charges Conrad with (1619).

By successfully doing so, Forster challenges the idea of an Indian novel by proving that talented writers are able to write from the perspective of anyone—man, woman, child, nationalist, expatriate, alien, or foreign—regardless of who they are or where their desk sits. Writing about humanity as a member of this greater identity is what produces the truest of art; all

else is politics. All in all, *A Passage to India* portrays an equally postmodern and postcolonial tale of humanity which is a precursor to the later development of postcolonial and postmodern themes in the modern Indian novel.

Chapter 3

Postmodern and Postcolonial Developments in Indian Literature

While Forster's novel set the stage for the development of the postcolonial novel in India, it is not until the 1980s that Indian literature breaks into the international literary scene. Works by Indian authors such as Salman Rushdie caught international attention and created a new awareness of the Indian novel. This outpouring of Indian literature can be understood as a progression from the postcolonial work of Forster to contemporary works which engage in postcolonialism and postmodernism, thus redefining what previously was understood as the Indian literary genre. Before the 1981 publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Indian literature was read only under the umbrella of postcolonialism. After Rushdie's novel's release, postmodernism has likewise been used to understand and define the Indian novel in English—however, postcolonialism cannot be set aside as a tool for understanding Indian novels. Together, postcolonialism and postmodernism can provide clarity as to the complete character of contemporary Indian literature in English—particularly in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

A chief postcolonial aspect of *Midnight's Children* is in the language it is written. Being born and raised in Mumbai with strong familial ties to Pakistan, it seems as though there are several bhasha languages which would be open to Salman Rushdie in writing a novel on his country—Urdu, Hindi, or Marathi for example. However, due to his economic status and education, Rushdie was raised in the English education system; he consequently admits that he writes in a language of which only 10% of his homeland is literate (“Suffering...” 580) because it is an impossibility for him to write in anything except English (“The Literary Rushdie” 30). He never learned the grammar structures or full vocabulary in any bhasha literature to be considered literate in a home language.

It is impossible to ignore that an Indian novel written 34 years after Independence is still participating in the colonizer's language. What is even more intriguing is Rushdie's unabashed reverence for English over any bhasha literature. Either Rushdie's enthusiastic participation in the British stronghold over Indian education is evidence that relations between the two countries have come to a place of comradery and much of the ill will between the colonized India and imperial England has been reconciled or that the colonial power is still deeply rooted in Indian society thus leading Rushdie to unquestioningly accept the purported superiority of English.

To accept the first option as reality would be too naive and ignore the complications of the English hegemony across global economies and in the literary world. However, to accept the later understanding as a freestanding reality would discredit Rushdie's intellect as being one who blindly follows where he is led and unknowingly is turned into a colonizer's mouthpiece in a postcolonial world. It would be to say that the British never really left India. Instead, it is necessary for scholars to be conscious of lasting effects of British imperialism on the Indian psyche but also to keep one eye on the progression of relations between the two nations.

In literary terms, this is to utilize postcolonial theory to understand how Rushdie's work has been affected by a history of British colonization while also using postmodern theory to question any assertions of stasis between British influence and Indian submissiveness. This way, Rushdie's novel can be read in its proper place with a colonial history while the novel also recognizes India's social growth as an independent nation outside of the British. The novel can do both— be historical and progressive, be postcolonial and postmodern.

The plot of *Midnight's Children* reads as a postcolonial narrative of India from the events leading to Independence, the moment the country was "born" and divided by Partition, through the Emergency,⁷ to the unknown future that is India today. Rushdie tells the story of India as a

nation while simultaneously following the life of Saleem Sinai—a fictional biography that is both mystical and realist in nature. Saleem is born on the minute with the Independent nation, and consequently has a gift of being able to read the thoughts of others. Quite by accident, Saleem becomes aware that he is able to commune with the 580⁸ other Midnight's Children who all have varying such mystical talents (*MC* 227).

As he grows, Saleem's life as an individual is inseparable from the life of the nation. When he is gaining control of “the conference” of midnight's children and is building a community among them for the future of the country, Saleem's family moves to Pakistan where his sister becomes the face and voice of the new Islamic nation. Just as India and Pakistan are by metaphor sibling countries, so too are Saleem and Jamila. Directly after birth, the nurse at the hospital switch Saleem with a boy named Shiva, thus placing Saleem as a perceived brother of Jamila, yet not actually out of blood. Likewise, as Pakistan was conceived to be a place of refuge and autonomy for India's Muslim population, the people of Pakistan were born of the same soil as India but belong to a different household in terms of religion.⁹ They are siblings but they aren't.

Unknowingly, Saleem is a Hindu according to his bloodline, but he sees his reality as a Muslim since he was raised in the Islamic faith according to the household he was switched into. When the truth of his parentage is accidentally revealed, Saleem discovers that his brother of midnight is the cruel Shiva, a fellow Midnight's Child and rival in their community of imaginary space in Saleem's head. Saleem must reflect on what it means to be a member of his family, and also what his place is as leader of what he has tried to establish as the Conference of Midnight's Children. Once his family moves to Pakistan, Saleem is further challenged to examine what it means for him to be an Indian Muslim, particularly as he feels that Mumbai is his true home.

As Partition was a direct result of England's political agenda in withdrawing from the subcontinent, Saleem Sinai's question of Pakistani or Indian Muslimhood is indeed a postcolonial question as it is a ramification of India's colonial history. It is uncertain whether Pakistan would ever have been created had the British not created a religiously conscientious political system and supported Muhammed Ali Jinnah's fervent desire to be leader of the subcontinent.

Saleem's tale contains narratives on India and Pakistan, but also that of England as it pulls out of her Oriental jewel, the colony of India, and the lasting effect the British had on the country. Specifically, Saleem's parents buy a portion of the Methwold estate in Mumbai. Upon sale, William Methwold insists that until exactly midnight on August 15th, the scheduled day of Independence, the families buying his estate leave everything exactly as he has it; he required that they buy the property furnished and live in his British style until the moment of Independence. His justification simply was that this was "a whim, Mr. Sinai...you'll permit a departing colonial his game? We don't have much left to do, we British, except play our games" (105). So for two months, the Sinai family lived with the Brit and his eccentric request, all of the way down to his daily six o'clock cocktail hour.

Rushdie's novel is so important to postcolonial studies because of its postmodern insistence of reflection on the country's colonial history. Leela Gandhi points out that the desire to define a national identity—such as Saleem Sinai and Rushdie try to do in *Midnight's Children*—is to try to forget that colonization ever occurred through a "will to forget" (Gandhi 4).

Instead of simply forgetting about the colonial in India, Rushdie's novel examines it intimately through the exploration of Ahmed Sinai's alcoholism. Practices which were instituted

by the leisure of the departing colonial became Indian household practice, although, in the novel, they grew distorted in the Indian image. For example, the happy hour which brought the community of buyers of the Methwold complex together every afternoon continued after he retired to England, but soon it directly lead to Saleem Sinai's father to fall deeper and deeper under the control of alcoholism, his bottled djinns (324). Ahmed Sinai's drinking was nonexistent until the scene where he and Methwold broker the real estate deal over cocktails. His wife even warns as he retells the transaction to her that "drinking so much, janum...that's not good" (MC 106). Even after moving, Ahmed's exposure to alcohol is still influenced by Methwold as he finds a cabinet in their part of the manor full of scotch whiskey (109). Saleem notes that the inhabitants of Methwold manor, in playing William's eccentric game:

have failed to notice what is happening: the estate, Methwold's estate is changing them. Every evening at six they are out in their gardens, celebrating the cocktail hour, and when William Methwold comes to call they slip effortlessly into their imitation Oxford draws... and Methwold, supervising their transformation, is mumbling under his breath... All is well. (109)

What began as the Sinais' innocent "tolerat[ing] the curious whims of the Englishman—because the price, after all, was right" to live there (108) turned into a tradition which broke the family structure as Ahmed Sinai devolved. When Ahmend's business transactions proved fruitless, what Methwold began in the garden turned into a destructive retreat:

At six o'clock every evening, Ahmed Sinai entered the world of the djinns; and every morning, his eyes red, his head throbbing with the fatigue of his night-long battle, he came unshaven to the breakfast table; and with the passage of years, the good mood of

the time before he shaved was replaced by the irritable exhaustion of his war with bottled spirits. (150)

While Ahmed's drinking grew gradually, so too did the effects of colonialism only become apparent gradually until they were to be seen as the new Indian reality. This is to say that just as Saleem's father began the transformation by enjoying one drink in the garden, then participating in a daily cocktail hour, until slowly devolving into night-long drinking spells when he finally never left his office or the bottle (233), so too did effects of British Imperialism only become apparent over time—as is seen in the implementation of English as the national language of education which has led to the illiteracy of most of India's elite in bhasha language. One must note that Rushdie belongs in this category.

Ultimately, Rushdie's tale is of the many and the one. In a country whose population was recorded at 1.2 billion people in 2010,¹⁰ it is impossible to write a national novel that is concerned only with its protagonist. Throughout the novel, Saleem is trying to tell simultaneously his personal history and that of the country before he breaks apart, literally. He sees his place as a child of midnight, of the moment of Independence, as his life is not his own:

It is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace (533).

In living and trying to define himself, Saleem has had to define, live, and be India. Rushdie ultimately leaves Saleem with his cracks in a state of uncertainty at the future. While he has made plans, such as a joyous matrimony with Padma to whom he tells the story, he still leaves with a pessimistic view that he “shall die with Kashmir on [his] lips” and his nuptial unfulfilled (533). The uncertainty of a burgeoning postcolonial nation seeking an autonomous identity—

with no Constitution or formal government established until months after the British officially left—is reflected in Saleem’s constant search for purpose as a *Midnight’s Child*. He continues with this search even at the end of his life, once his mystical power of telepathy and his family have all been taken away, as he desperately writes his personal history and recounts it to Padma. The future of this postcolonial nation in a land with thousands of years of history— “India, the new myth—a collective fiction in which anything was possible” (MC 125) — is still up in the air at the end of the novel. So too is Saleem’s future.

While this novel is certainly postcolonial—in its participation of the colonizer’s language, its preoccupation with individual and national identity, and its exploration of the effects of the British after Independence through Ahmed Sinai’s demise—there is more going on than just a postcolonial reflection. This novel also participates fully in postmodernism.

According to Jean-François Lyotard, postmodernism is marked by a rejection of the idea of progress (1468). Progress is arbitrary because it is not clear where or what a people should be progressing to or according to whose standards any progress should be measured. For example, many in America measure progress as the national implementation of democracy and capitalism; however these two paradigms as human institutions are flawed and do not always exemplify human ethics for a global stage. Lyotard stresses that any postmodern venture must turn to a reflection of where we have come and who we are (1468); otherwise, we will make the modernist mistake of repressing or forgetting the past, thus repeating it rather than learning from it (1466).

Leela Gandhi takes Lyotard’s evaluation of postmodernism further by examining it as a reaction to Cartesian epitomizing of high reason and thought. Gandhi examines how humanism that is based on the belief that “the common language of rationality” can be used to quantify

universals of humanity in any human experience. She contrasts this notion with postmodern “antihumanism” which sees such homogenizing of human nature to be “totalitarian and hostile to the challenges of otherness and difference.” (Gandhi 27)

This leads to the discussion of universalism as opposed to differentialism in cosmopolitan literary theory. Cosmopolitan literary theory purports that in a world where authors are harder to define by nationality, such as Rushdie and Mistry, literatures demand readings that are not so defined by nation but instead have a global audience in mind. John C. Hawley examines this phenomenon in his article “Can the Cosmopolitan Speak?: The Question of Indian Novelists’ Authenticity.” His article comments how many expatriate authors from around the world are facing the question of authenticity that Rushdie is. He goes further to state that “questions of representation and performativity in globalized narration have not yet been settled in much of the postcolonial world” (Hawley 26). Authenticity is thus so important as many critics are concerned that these cosmopolitan narratives are serving as holistic representations of their respective countries to the world or that the authors are serving as global court jesters who offer dramatic renditions of reality for the entertainment of the world. Clearly, some of these critics have forgotten that reading is supposed to be enjoyable.

Hawley remarks how Meenakshi Mukherjee charged writers such as Vikram Chandra for using Indian themes and terms in their works as a way of “exoticizing the Indian landscape” and to “signal Indianness [of the work] to a Western audience” (28). Just as critical theory has produced the illusion of a binary relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernism, so too has the question of cosmopolitanism created a dichotomy between “pure” national writers and expatriate hybrids where, instead, scholars should be embracing the meeting and blending of the East and West in literature. There is an intimate, truly fraternal bond between the native

bhasha writer who is so dear to scholars such as Meenakshi Mukherjee and cosmopolitan writers such as Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, and Vikram Chandra.

The theoretical dichotomy that stems from the cosmopolitan question is that of universalism versus differentialism. Universalism in comparative literature is concerned with defining “invariants” across global literature. These “invariants” are discernible in any literature from anywhere or time period and ultimately reach for an understanding about what is universal to humanity (Coste 41). Differentialists focus on what makes a literature particularly unique in light of a global society. Differentialist scholars tend to focus on the categorization of literatures along national lines and they pay attention to how certain culturally engrained worldviews produce unique perspectives in national literatures. For example, Meenakshi Mukherjee is so critical of Vikram Chandra’s invocation of Hindu vocabulary in his works; to differentialist scholars, his play with dharma and maya reflects a uniquely Indian hubris that is valuable in cosmopolitan studies.

Cosmopolitanism is important to any discussion of postmodernism and postcolonialism in Indian studies because so many Indian authors are of this new categorization: that of Non Resident Indians. Cosmopolitanism examines what nationhood means in defining authors and reflects on the genres such authors are placed in—a true postmodern feat that examines the postcolonial relationship between these authors, the Indian subcontinent they represent, and the Western world they live in.

What is even more striking is Gandhi’s turn back to nineteenth century British theorists who posit India and her languages as inferior to the English. To Gandhi, postmodernism opens the door to postcolonialism because it rejects the same “Western humanism [that] produces the

dictum that since some human beings are more human than others, they are more substantially the measure of all things” (Gandhi 30).

Gandhi, like Mukherjee, overturned the humanist reasoning of Macaulay and Reverend J. Tucker who asserted that the Indian educational system necessitated the establishment of English as a major language because India’s “dialects” were inferior. This postcolonial examination of language, which directly caused Rushdie’s writing to be in English, engages in postmodernist “antihumanism.” Macaulay and Tucker posited the primacy of Western reason over the intellectual system of India under the guise of humanism; the overturn of their theories is postcolonial as it is a rejection of the colonizer’s skewed view of Oriental reality, and it is postmodern by finding the lost voices of the colonized, thus proving human reason in terms other than Western humanism. “The poststructuralist and postmodern intervention into this field [humanism] delivers the *possibility* of knowing differently—of knowing difference in and for itself” (Gandhi 41).

Postmodernism can be seen as complimentary to postcolonialism in the examination of subaltern voices. Postmodernism seeks to examine the voices which the grand historical narrative left out, those that were deemed inferior to the Occidental paradigm. As described by bell hooks, postmodernism calls for those who have been deemed as other or different to find public voice, as only a plurality of voices can provide the clearest view of reality instead of one population’s view of reality (2510). While hooks’ essay focuses on the absence of black women’s voices in the postcolonial conversation, her call for all studies—including postmodern studies—to be more conscientious of those voices that are missing sounds dramatically similar to Spivak’s call to hear the subaltern voice and Mukherjee’s argument for bhasha literature. All of

these women are after the same thing: they wish to give public voice to the historically and internationally voiceless, postcolonial and postmodern alike.

Midnight's Children reads simultaneously as a postmodern and a postcolonial work because both of these theories share a deep questioning, examination, and reflection on what has been accepted as the status quo (usually the Occidental norm). Rushdie's novel examines questions of nationhood and how the individual's life is tied to the history of his country; both of these endeavors are postcolonial and postmodern in nature. Although Saleem is delivered into a wealthy family, the subaltern voice is still considered as Shiva's life is used as a foil to Saleem's own upbringing and adulthood. As Shiva rises in power and wealth during political corruption and the Emergency, so does Saleem Sinai fall into poverty by being abandoned by all of his family, and ending up living in a slum which Shiva himself comes to destroy as part of the Prime Minister's Beautification and sterilization program. These two men are parallel beings whose corresponding lives reflect the rises and falls of all Indian people during this time. At any time in the novel, readers can follow both the Indian elite of the time and have a pulse on the lower castes of society.

Furthermore, *Midnight's Children* explores the complications of defining a nation. By providing time for Saleem in both India and Pakistan, Rushdie offers a chance to not only examine the postmodern and postcolonial realities of the two countries, but of the Indian subcontinent at large, thus proving nationhood to be secondary to the historical relationship of these two lands— a relationship that extends beyond midnight on 14 August 1947.

Rushdie poignantly explores the effects of Partition through Saleem's gift of "hearing" the other *Midnight's Children*. Once he crossed the border into Pakistan, Saleem was no longer able to commune with his fellow Children (325). Geographically and political severed from

India, Saleem is forced to confront which country he considers to be his home and how he identifies himself, first by his nation or by his religion.

Using Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Ashutosh Varshney examines Rushdie's claims that Pakistan was an insufficiently imagined community (58). Varshney explores the way Pakistan was initially imagined— as a state for Muslims to be free of rising Hindu nationalism, not as a religious Islamic state that is fundamentally run based on interpretations of the Koran and Muslim piety. The consequent hostilities between the two countries, hostilities which are evidence that the people of Pakistan are not secure enough in their own identity that they, like Conrad in Achebe's essay, feel the need to set India apart as the other in order to define themselves (65). According to Varshney, the aforementioned insecurity in identity and a continual oscillation between civil and military rule prove that Pakistan was insufficiently imagined (71). Pakistan's precarious national identity led Rushdie to sever Saleem from the rest of his midnight community, even though Pakistan was likewise born as an independent nation at midnight on 14 August 1947. Rushdie's choice begs the question, in a novel that otherwise is very open to postcolonial and postmodern dialogue, as to why Pakistan is silent where India is teeming with magical voices.

Furthermore, Rushdie's narration is postmodern as it is continually reminding the reader of the narrator's place in the formation of the imaginary world of the novel; Saleem pulls back in every chapter to question the validity of the timeline of events and his perception of history which pulls the reader to likewise reflect on her perceptions of reality in the narrative. For example, Saleem pulls out of describing the 1957 elections of the All-India Congress as corresponding to his tenth birthday:

But now Padma says, mildly, ‘What date was it?’ And, without thinking, I answer: ‘Some time in the spring.’ And then it occurs to me that I have made another error—that the election of 1957 took place before, and not after, my tenth birthday; but although I have racked my brains, my memory refuses, stubbornly, to alter the sequence of events. This is worrying. I don’t know what’s gone wrong. She [Padma] says, trying uselessly to console me: ‘What are you so long for in your face? Everybody forgets some small things, all the time!’ But if small things go, will large things be close behind? (254)

In a fictional tale of a man and his country, Rushdie calls into question the accuracy of memory and personal perception, thus calling for reflection on his own work while it is being read.

Rushdie additionally pairs a historical event, the 1957 elections, with this lapse in memory to call into question the validity of history—which is in itself the telling and retelling of one person’s perspective of the sequence of events as seen by the old adage “history is written by the winners.”

While this is not an exhaustive rendition of all of the postcolonial and postmodern aspects of Rushdie’s novel, it does open the conversation for the further evaluation of postmodernism and postcolonialism in one work. The question is not whether or not *Midnight’s Children* is a postcolonial novel—which it is—or a postmodern novel—which it is; but it is a question of whether these two theoretical paradigms can be seen for what they truly are, sibling theories just as Pakistan and India, or Saleem and Janvi.

Ranjan Ghosh’s (In)fusion approach to literary theory offers new light on the close relationship between postmodernism and postcolonialism. Ghosh explains that any scholar must approach a literary work cognizant of a wide range of critical and secondary perspectives. For example, he explains reading Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* while keeping in mind the Hindu

value of maya¹¹ and the works of Sartre and Kierkegaard (4). This approach highlights that any literature is not produced in a vacuum, thus historical and political forces must certainly be recognized in literature—such as the effects of colonialism, but neither is literature produced with a specific theoretical paradigm in mind which it seeks to conform to perfectly. Thus, all literature must be read as the object of literary theory, instead of theory being created for theory's sake.¹²

There is a danger here of forgetting the important role that theory plays in understanding and evaluating literature. As Gerald Graff explains, theory is meant to provide a space where scholars and students alike can talk about and debate literature; it is a space for understanding (1963, 1970). There is a fine line to be had between Ghosh's goal to keep literature at a primary place for evaluation—thus avoiding the trap of having isolated scholars whose only focus is theory while other scholars avoid theory all together (1969)—and Graff's goal to keep theory as an integral role in reading and understanding literature. Just as postcolonialism and postmodernism are not mutually exclusive, neither are Graff and Ghosh's assertions on literary theory. They both want to see a higher caliber of literary discussion in scholarly circles and among students and both see a balanced relationship between literature and critical theory as the proper method.

The (in)fusion approach to reading especially speaks to the matter at hand where Indian literature has overwhelmingly been read as postcolonial, thus often blinding scholars to the fraternal relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernism. Ghosh comments to this effect that:

Any book on Indian English novels (like this one) gets cocooned 'postcolonially' as the postcolonial sky is seen to band over all. The question is: can't we bring 'transcendence'

to our stereotypicality of reading without sounding iterative or repetitive? Can we bring such an approach [the (In)fusion approach] to our reading of Indian English novels imprisoned within the iron casket of ‘postcoloniality’? (9)

While Indian literature will probably always have close ties to postcolonialism (which is not a bad thing), the whole point is to free literature from the bondage of the exclusivity of theory—a myth that theories are mutually exclusive to one another rather than innately cooperative. Postcolonial theory serves a purpose in understanding Indian literature, but it is not the only theory that helps to explain these novels.

Chapter 4

Challenging The Homogenization of Indian Literature in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

Similar to the hegemony which postcoloniality has over Indian literature today, Prana Jani warns that on the global scale Salman Rushdie is seen as the literary voice of India, and his postmodern narratives featuring magical-realism have set the standard of what is internationally considered to be how an Indian novel in English should be (19). Critics and scholars who use one author's narrative style to define the entire genre is problematic, to say the least. Rohinton Mistry's novel, *A Fine Balance*, can be read as the perfect foil to Rushdie's work. It is both easily understood within the postcolonial/postmodern paradigm, but it's more realistic style and myopic focus on human relationships provides a new insight into Indian literature which challenges any measuring of all Indian literature according to the work of Rushdie.

It is this myopic view of contemporary Indian literature—that all Indian novels should be fantastical like Rushdie's work—that led many to be critical of Rohinton Mistry as an Indian author. It is true that his novel *A Fine Balance* lacks any of the magical or mystical elements which are featured in Rushdie's novels and while this novel does deal with similar issues such as the national sterilization project and the Emergency as *Midnight's Children* discusses, it does so through the intimate lens of a handful of realistic characters and their relationships with one another. The consequences of these two events—the Emergency and sterilization project—in *Midnight's Children* are described largely in metaphor and the nightmare of the green and black woman; in Mistry's novel the ramifications are as personal as infection, amputation, and poverty. By reading excerpts from Rushdie and Mistry's novels side-by-side which describe the same historical event, it is easier to understand the different effects these two approaches to writing have and to see that both styles hold equal yet different places in the Indian literary canon.

Rushdie explains the sterilization project of Indira Gandhi in a way that is continually distancing the event from the lives and emotions of his protagonist, Saleem Sinai. Saleem narrates that:

Yes, Padma: Mother Indira really had it in for me. No!—But I must. I don't want to tell it!—But I swore to tell it all...I might be able to tell it as a dream. Yes, perhaps a nightmare: green and black and the Widow's hair and clutching hand and children and mmff and little balls and one-by-one and torn-in-half and little balls go flying flying green and black her hand is green her nails are black as black. (484-485)

There is no doubt that Saleem deeply mourned his and the other *Midnight's Children's* forced sterilizations. However, the actual procedure is paired with abstract renditions of this nightmare and after the fact, the greatest repercussions of the surgeries were mostly psychological and none are fully examined except for Saleem's flippant remark about Padma's frustration with his impotence (506). What is more important to Saleem in this passage is Indira's burning of all of her files on *Midnight's Children* (505-506), his talk about gods and the nation's piety for Indira (503-504), and his subsequent loss of optimism (507).

None of these effects from the sterilization are nearly as concrete and severe as those experienced by Om and Ishvar in *A Fine Balance*. Their sterilization is described much more personally and realistically as Ishvar begs:

'Doctorji, you are like mother-father to us poor people, your good work keeps us healthy. And I also think nussbandhi is very important for the country. I am never going to marry, Doctorji, please do the operation on me, I will be grateful, but please, leave out my nephew, Doctorji, his name is Omprakash and his wedding is happening soon, please listen to me, Doctorji, I beg you!'

They were pushed out onto the desks and their pants were removed. Ishvar started to weep. ‘Please, Doctorji! Not my nephew! Cut me as much as you like! But forgive my nephew! His marriage is being arranged!’

Om said nothing. He blocked out the humiliating appeals, wishing his uncle would behave with more dignity. The canvas ceiling undulated slightly in a breeze. He stared numbly as the guy ropes creaked and the electric lights swayed. (524)

This description of the sterilization is more realistic and personal. Mistry takes the reader into the thoughts, pleas, and emotions of the two men. Furthermore, this description is closer to readers as they experience it in the real time of the novel whereas Rushdie’s account is tempered by time and told many years later from memory. Rushdie distances his audience from the action through the use of mystical metaphors and layers of narration while Mistry confronts his audience very personally. Both of these authors address a historical moment which is distinctly Indian; yet, they do so in two very different ways.

The whimsy of Rushdie’s work further works to obscure the tragedy of the historical moments he writes about. It is harder for readers to mourn the downfall of Saleem Sinai because he is so clearly make believe. No matter how readers feel about the authenticity of clairvoyance, a tale about a “Wicked witch of the West” character who forces vasectomies on men who hear voices in their head because of a nasal condition is not nearly as poignant as an uncle pleading for his nephew’s future family prospects.

Similarly, Saleem Sinai did not end in his novel in as dismal of a situation as Om and Ishvar did in theirs. Saleem, who was born into privilege while Om and Ishvar were not, ends in *Midnight’s Children* having a son, of sorts, a woman who loves him and wishes to marry him, and a pickling factory. He even has the time to sit and write out the narrative of his life. Even the

ending of the novel, where Rushdie describes Saleem's final breaking apart into thousands of pieces which are crushed by the teeming population of India, is left in obscurity, with this account of his cracking a mystical guess at the future, "set down with the absolute certainty of a prophet" (MC 532). Throughout the novel, Saleem was able to fill all of his pickling jars as he completed chapters to his story. Yet, at the end he repeatedly mentions his having to leave one jar empty for the future. No matter what questions or dreams he posits for the future, the fact remains that he is unable to provide a truthful narration of the future, so his imagining of dying "with Kashmir on [his] lips" (533) is purely speculation.

The fate of Ishvar and Om is strikingly real when compared to Rushdie's rendition of Saleem's fate after the Emergency. Ishvar ends up with a deep infection, leading to the amputation of both of his legs. Both men are unable to return to the city right away, causing Dina to not keep up with her sewing orders, not afford her rent, and lose her prized independence by having to move back in with her brother and his wife, thus living as a glorified servant to them. When the two men do return to the city, it is not with marketable skills as they can no longer sew, but instead must survive by begging in the streets.

The tragic events of the Emergency and Sterilization project on individual life are impossible to ignore with Mistry's clear and realistic writing style. The work is also more believable as "there is no single source of evil responsible for the myriad difficulties Mistry's characters suffer," ("On Re-Orientalizing" 206) such as the green and black witch or Shiva in *Midnight's Children*. In a way, Mistry's novel is more tragic; since there is no singular or easily identifiable foe, there is no easy answer to solve Om, Ishvar, or Dina's suffering.

While this description of *A Fine Balance* paints a bleak picture of the novel's plot, it is important to note that the novel is not entirely a modern tragedy about India's postcolonial fall

from grace. It is also a novel about the enduring power of relationships which give people strength and joy through community, especially amongst the most dire of situations. Another of the main characters of the novel who I have largely ignored—a young man named Maneck who as a student lived with Dina while Om and Ishvar worked for her— certainly contributes to the tragic feel of the novel. In his Tolstoyan jump in front of the train, Maneck who had the best prospects for success out of any of the characters in the novel chose to end his life.

Yet, Mistry does not end the novel with this event. Instead he gives the reader a glimpse into the new balance Dina, Om and Ishvar have found in their new lives— Dina living at her brother's home and Om and Ishvar in a life of begging. Mistry paints the picture as Om and Ishvar drop in on Dina for a daily visit where she gives them cool water and a hot meal and they provide her with company (602-603). The novel ends with the two men's teasing antics:

Ishvar made a clacking-clucking sound with his tongue against the teeth, imitating a bullock-cart driver. His nephew pawed the ground and tossed his head.

“Stop it,” she scolded....

“Come on, my faithful,” said Ishvar. “Lift your hooves or I'll feed you a dose of opium.”

Chuckling, Om trotted away plumply. They quit clowning when they emerged on the street. Dina shut the door, shaking her head. Those two made her laugh every day. (603)

While Mistry could have ended the novel with Maneck's suicide, ultimately giving the tragedy the last word, he instead chose to end with a scene of joy.

The joy in community which these three characters find through the novel epitomizes the postcolonial agenda. Despite political pressures which create a myriad of situations to drive Om, Ishvar, and Dina apart, the three remain strong in friendship and find happiness within the unjust political situation (“Re-Orientalizing” 211). When the politics of the Emergency create more

distinct levels of economic and social stratification, Dina as an independent entrepreneur is seemingly better off to ignore the plight of her homeless tailors. Instead, she takes them in, feeds them, and befriends them, thus breaking the cycle of alienation. Just as Forster questioned the limits of friendship under political pressure, so too does Mistry challenge human relations under intense strife. In the end, Mistry has found that friendship is not only possible in a postcolonial situation, but also holds great power for surviving the tough times.

Even with his beautiful narration on human relations that is at once postcolonial and postmodern, Mistry is deeply critiqued and his authenticity questioned while Rushdie is revered as the literary voice of India in critical circles. Critical dissatisfaction with *A Fine Balance* is exemplified in the comments of Germaine Greer, an Australian writer. She comments that:

I hate this book. I absolutely hate it... I just don't recognize this dismal, dreary city. It's a Canadian book about India. What could be worse? What could be more terrible? (qtd. in Ross 240)

The reality is that Mistry did emigrate to Canada, but only after living in India for 23 years. Likewise, Rushdie has not lived in India as a permanent resident for decades; it is not fair to claim that Rushdie is a “more Indian” author because his emigration was partially due to the fatwa while Mistry left for more personal reasons. Greer's critique of Mistry and his work reflect how closed minded many critiques and scholars are about what constitutes an authentic or successful Indian novel.

Eli Park Sørensen comments that Mistry's realistic writing style is problematic for many postcolonial scholars because:

It seems to promote the naïve illusion of an unmediated, thus “authentic” or “original” (re)presentation of the experience of otherness, while hiding the ideological

underpinnings of Western capitalist and imperialist discourse. Many postcolonial critics hold the notion that it is demeaning to read postcolonial literary texts in terms of a realist aesthetic. (343)

Any realist novel that takes on postcolonial themes is seen as unauthentic.

Since Mistry tries to simultaneously discuss “the forces of history on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the toils and struggles of everyday life” (Sørensen 348), it is seen as though he is trying to create a metanarrative of India in the small space of Dina’s flat. This is indeed what Mistry’s novel attempts, and succeeds in doing. This is not much different from Rushdie’s use of one man’s life, Saleem Sinai, to define and describe the coming-of-age of the nation.

The problem lies, not with Mistry’s novel, but with scholars who find this postcolonial narrative inauthentic because it is presented as a reality for fictional characters. The only way that an Indian postcolonial novel that is realist can be deemed so ineffectual is if it is not living up to critical expectations of what an Indian postcolonial novel should look like. Mistry’s novel is so similar to Rushdie’s in themes and postcolonial critique, that the absence of mystical elements in Mistry’s novel is the only harbinger to the otherwise puzzling contrary reception of the two novels. This points to the larger issue that is occurring in Indian literary studies where one voice, Rushdie’s, is being used to define the genre, thus shutting out any varying voices, such as Mistry’s.

If critics are going to use Salman Rushdie as the benchmark against which to measure all Indian literature, than many talented authors who write in a different style—such as Rohinton Mistry— are unjustly going to be ignored for not being “Indian” enough. This prejudice is synonymous to any global scholars and critics who would expect all American literature to be in the same style as Jonathan Safran Foer. Foer is a very talented and whimsical writer—just like

Rushdie—but he is by no means the decisive voice of all American literature. In this scenario, equally talented writers who use different styles would be discredited for not being Foer-esque, such as Herman Melville or Kate Chopin. Quite frankly, it is a good thing that there are Indian authors who are not Rushdie-esque.

Scholars need to be aware of this Rushdie-bias as it affects critical theory. Since Rushdie is known for employing magical-realism and postmodernism in his novels, so too are critics expecting other Indian authors to fit in these two paradigms. Any works which do not do so are deemed subpar even though the novels are equally insightful and crafted well, although differently from Rushdie's style. Just as scholars must be aware of the "cloud of postcolonialism" over Indian literature, as Ghosh terms it, so too must they be aware of the "cloud of Rushdie" and postmodernism which hangs over Indian literature in English today. Postcolonialism and postmodernism are not mutually exclusive paradigms nor are they the only two ways of reading the Indian novel in English.

Chapter 5

Reading Postcolonial and Postmodern Narrative Structures in Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*

Published in the same year as Rohinton Mistry's realist novel *A Fine Balance*, Vikram Chandra's novel *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* reflects much of the magical realism which is prevalent in Rushdie's work. Unlike Rushdie, Chandra presents mystical elements to the novel which are considered commonplace in Hindu mythology—such as Chandra presenting the reincarnation of a man as a monkey instead of a boy who due to sinus trouble can hear others' thoughts. Sitting in a liminal space between the over-the-top magical realism of Rushdie's novel and the often somber emotional realism of Mistry's novel, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* provides a unique look at Indian literature that can be both mythical and realistic.

The unique realist and mythic narrative Chandra creates can be better understood by reading the novel as both a postcolonial and a postmodern text. Reading the text as simultaneously postcolonial and postmodern is particularly helpful when wrestling with the novel's unique narrative structure, particularly when scholars seek to clarify the elements of Indian oral tradition and “crowded writing” in Chandra's novel.

In the beginning of Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, a monkey who is the reincarnation of a man named Sanjay is shot by a young man named Abhay. Abhay was furious that Sanjay steals his family's laundry—particularly his jeans that he brought back from college in America—in exchange for food; so he plotted his revenge to shoot Sanjay. In order to save his life and a chance at reincarnation as a higher being, Sanjay is given the opportunity to tell a story, with the help of Abhay when he tires, to Lord Rama—the Hindu god of death who ultimately decides Sanjay's fate. However, there is a catch: Sanjay and Abhay must also

continually captive an audience on the maidan outside Abhay's home by their stories, or else Lord Rama may take the monkey's soul at any time. From the beginning of the novel, Vikram Chandra makes the act of storytelling one of life and death—thus creating a metanarrative on narration.

In *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, the novel reads as an oral transmission of Abhay and Sanjay telling stories to a crowd, thus participating in the tradition of communal storytelling in India. Even though the characters “tell” the stories, it is in reality Chandra who must be considered as the one physically relaying the tales through the novel medium. With the continual critique against nonresident Indian writers (NRIs) that they are not true Indian authors, this participation in oral tradition connects Chandra to his Indian roots—a reaction which in a way validates him as an Indian author through his knowledge and recognition of the Indian primacy on the spoken word.

Chandra sets himself as an active participant in the metanarrative as though he were sitting in person with the readers, reminding them to pay attention and listen. One of the ramifications of any oral tradition is the way a story changes with each retelling, a transformation based on the narrator's intentions and memory. According to Alexandru, it is this possibility for change—change in the narrative story as well as the possible social changes which a story can enact— which is paramount to Chandra's novel (“Performance” 29). In Indian tradition, the ability of an oral narration at physically captivating an audience through the use of sound is what makes oral transmission preferable to the written word as a form of narration (“Performance” 30), thus reflecting the Indian tradition that “speech prevails over written language” (“Performance” 27). It is easier to ignore a silent book than a person who is in the room speaking.

Instead of completely rejecting the novel as an inferior form to tell stories that is inferior, Chandra participates in it. Just as the novel oscillates between the old, myth-like tale of Sanjay and Abhay's modern accounts as an Indian student in America, so too does Chandra blend "traditional Indian storytelling and modern Internet-inspired techniques" ("Alternatives to the Novel Form" 44). Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru examines the multiple levels of narration in the structure of *Red Earth*... as:

tightly related to the intricate, always expanding web of connections that makes up the Internet. The shifts of the main narrative thread between the various stories or between parallel temporal levels are reminiscent of the use of links to change websites, but also suggest that the story is a living and life-giving entity. ("Alternatives" 45)

This assessment of the story provides a postmodernist view of the novel as examining classical reality (Indian oral tradition) and modern reality (technology such as the Internet). It reconciles the old with the new by breaking the bonds of the traditional linear novel to accommodate such diversity in the same narrative space. What is old and new can be combined in this narrative space so the relationship between the past and present are seen creating something new—which is directly in line with Lyotard's placement of the past as a tool for reflecting on the present in postmodern studies (Lyotard 1466).

As the internet works to provide an infinite number of pathways for people to connect and form communities, so too does Chandra's novel provide a diverse community of characters and narrators—from Abhay, Ram Mohan, and Sanjay to Saira, Rama, and Ganesha—for the reader to join when reading the novel. While this is certainly an imaginary community, it is a community. What with the move from oral traditions of hearing and relaying stories among multiple individuals to reading them in books, modern progress of the novel has taken the arena

of storytelling from an act of the community and internalized it to be an individual, private act. Indeed, storytelling has moved from an audible exchange to a silent one.

Scholars of linguistics have often studied the ramifications of writing on the development of language—that there has been a distinct divorce between the ear, which developed as a strong sense of communication through oral traditions and communications, and the eyes, which since the rise of a literary world and now the television internet age, have taken precedence (Jackson 2). It is no wonder that today's western culture is image-driven since an oral culture moved to a visual one.

This is not to say that the novel invalidates the visual in preference for the audible; Chandra reconciles the eyes and the ears for narration. The novel's repetitive asking of the reader to "listen" calls for active participation on the part of the reader.¹³ Meanwhile, Chandra relies on the visual aspect of the imagination as he continually turns to describing the vibrant colors present in the narration. For example, he describes when Abhay shot Sanjay the monkey, how Abhay stared at the blood with "stunned eyes at the stains on the ground, red on red" (*Red* 8). For anyone who has been to India, a great vibrancy of color is almost as overwhelming as the immense population—from clothing of every color in its brightest form to the warm hues of hundreds of curries made yellow by turmeric. Chandra captures this aspect of Indian culture while reminding readers to use their eyes in reading the novel.

What's more, the use of oral tradition in a modern Indian novel reflects a postcolonial motivation to preserve what was suppressed under British Imperialism and is being lost in modern times. William Darymple provides a modern, nonfiction foil to the portion of Chandra's novel where Sanjay studies poetry in Lucknow (*Red* 373-392). As presented in the novel, Lucknow historically was the cultural center of India in the late nineteenth century. However,

under the British rule, the city and its rich artistic tradition have corroded, leaving only one man in the city today who knows the ancient oral traditions and classical poetic Urdu that was once prevalent in the city (Darymple 39). Instead of breaking with the past entirely or accepting the new reality after British colonization, Chandra seeks in his novel to revive this strong poetic and oral tradition in a postcolonial/postmodern fashion.

In the spirit of Ghosh's (In)fusionist approach to reading novels, Chandra's attempt to reconnect Indian oral tradition to the reading of a novel sets him as a sort of performer to the world as his novel reaches an infinite number of people. He is like a medieval bard or troubadour; Chandra's novel itself supports the connection to the Western bard tradition in his introduction of Ashutosh Sorkar. This print master in Calcutta reconciles colonization by taking the English language "from a foreign jungle and made it [his] garden" by using the Complete Works of William Shakespeare to become literate in English (281-283). "Willy," as Ashutosh calls Shakespeare, the bard of the west serves as sage and teacher to Ashutosh and Sanjay, giving them access to the intellectual world of the West, the world which today Chandra writes from.

Chandra recognizes that some good has come out of the postcolonial relationship between India and England, as can be seen in his introducing William Shakespeare to these men and allowing them to make him their own, their Indian Shakespeare nicknamed Willy. The ultimate purpose of any literary work is a social exchange where stories bring people together and provide a wider perspective of the world. Chandra stresses of the primacy of storytelling throughout *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, thus proving that stories have a transformative power on the world and it is our responsibility to not only listen to them, but tell them as well. Just as it is important for the West to be open to Oriental works, so too is it important to allow the East to read Western works. It is only fitting that as the Indian novel in English receives international

attention, so too does India intersect with the Bard—a truly postmodern and postcolonial way to open the conversation between those who have been silenced (the colonized Sanjay and Ashutosh) and a voice of the Empire (Shakespeare).

The novel's balance of silence and voice, while postmodern by challenging the novel to be audio as well as visual, also furthers the assertion that postmodern and postcolonial go hand in hand in the Indian novel as the multiple voices Chandra makes space for are those which were ignored or repressed by the colonial project. For example Janvi, who was taken prisoner when her Rajput home was invaded and conquered by the English, was forced to marry her captor: Hercules. The children she had with Hercules were raised in the English tradition and when her two daughters were stripped from her, sent by her husband to Calcutta to be raised as proper English women, she took control of her life for only the second time since she was captured: she had a pyre built and threw herself on it in defense of her honor. When he returned to find his wife's ashes, Hercules immediately arrested those who he felt were responsible for aiding in her "crime" (*Red* 255-261). For Janvi, there were worse things in life than death—such as losing touch of who she is and where she comes from as a Rajput, an Indian. This is a contention which the British who witnessed her act would not understand. For Janvi, being able to tell and live her story as it would be without being bullied and ruled by an Englishman is more important than death. Just like Sanjay's agreement with Yama, life and storytelling are indivisible for Janvi.

Vikram Chandra further embodies Indian culture in the novel by constantly reminding the reader that this story is being orated by its members—Abhay and Sanjay to the crowd on the maidan. Chandra continually challenges the novel to be quiet and make space for various storylines so the audience can "hear" and focus on the narrative. Turning the focus of the

narration back to the ears, Hanuman—the Hindu monkey god who is considered to be a “protector of poets” (*Red* 16)—warns Sanjay how to properly tell a story:

Straightforwardness is the curse of your age, Sanjay. Be wily, be twisty, be elaborate.

Forsake grim shortness and hustle. Let us luxuriate in your curlicues. Besides, you need a frame story for its peace, its quiet. You’re too involved in the tale, your audience is harried by the world. No, a calm story-teller must tell the story to an audience of educated, discriminating listeners, in a setting of sylvan beauty and silence. Thus the story is perfect in itself, complete and whole. So it has always been, so it must be. (*Red* 24)

Reviews have critiqued this novel as too confusing with all of the storylines and multiple frame narratives; this passage serves as a perfect defense to such detractors. The rich narration does seek to capture the enormity of the multitude of Indian voices while it strives for a silent and peaceful space, far detached from the material world, in which the tale can live “perfect in itself, complete and whole.” Readers can only experience the reality of the novel when they are removed from the noise of the modern world; once they are detached from a specific awareness of time and place, readers can accept the spatial world of the narration as a temporary reality and then fully participate in the novel. *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* seeks to capture the voices and silence simultaneously, in the postmodern fashion of recognizing seemingly contradictory trends as complementary.

In this interplay between silence and many narrative lines in the novel, Chandra’s novel engages in what Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru calls “performativity” (“Performance” 25). Performativity is the action of a novel that, instead of simply telling a story, actively performs it. One of the key features of this theory is the participation from the reader that the novel demands;

the reader does not simply sit quietly while running her eyes over the text, she actively responds by seeing the yellow of the soldiers' robes (*Red* 422) and hearing the words of the narrator when told to "listen." The novel performs for the reader, thus enacting a physical response and pulling the act of reading from a strictly intellectual endeavor to a physical one as well. Readers are made aware of their bodies and responsibilities to the text even though the reality of reading the novel is literally silent.

This reorientation of the classic novel form is a postmodern endeavor aimed at reflecting on the flaws of the novel and responding by creating something new—a form of narration that is not about the characters, but the story itself. Sandeep, one of the frame stories' listeners receives a similar lesson on storytelling from his aesthetic narrator:

'All stories have in them the seed of all other stories; any story, if continued long enough, becomes other stories, and she is no true story-teller who would keep this from you.'

Then she was quiet, and I imagined stories multiplying spontaneously, springing joyously out of a mother story, already whole but never complete, then giving birth themselves, becoming as numerous as the leaves on the trees, as the galaxies in the sky, all connected, no beginning, no end... (*Red* 103-104)

As the art of telling stories thrives on digressions, so too does a novel that is based on the telling of stories grow in an unexpected and dense fashion.

It is this density of the writing—the many overlapping and interrupting storylines and frame stories Chandra engages in—that is what I term "crowded writing." In writing on the topic of India, using the country as a setting, or even simply writing as an Indian, there comes an attempt to capture features of the nation in the novel. Shashi Tharoor notes that the country of India increases in its population size every year by an amount that is equivalent to the population

of Australia (10). Similarly, Mehta in his book *Maximum City* remarks that Mumbai averages 1 million people per square mile (23). These are immense statistics on the great breadth of humanity which resides in India.

Both Rushdie and Chandra have found a way to capture the great weight of humanity that is the Indian population on paper through crowded writing. This form of writing features a wide array of characters and story lines, all of which seem to jostle and interrupt one another on the page, just like the immense, diverse population of India. *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* layers one frame story on top of the next— sometimes as much as six layers deep, interrupting and framing one another— as if the very novel were an apartment building in Mumbai, trying to house thousands of people in one space. This fluidity of storylines creates a sense that even though the tale is set in print, it could at any moment shift and change depending on how the various voices of narration insist on being heard. Likewise, Rushdie's Saleem Sinai continually comments on the parts of his autobiography that refuse to be ignored any longer and interrupt the flow of events to be read.

Whether this aspect of crowded writing in these Indian novels is intentional or second nature is unclear, and even perhaps irrelevant. The purpose of crowded writing is paramount because of the effect the work has on the audience, not so much what the authors intentions initially were. For instance, it is easy for authors to assert about their recent novel that they sought to write the next great epic, whether the work was a success or a flop. This intention does not matter; what does matter is if they were successful or not. Regardless of his intention, Vikram Chandra captures the incredible population of India in the very language and structure of *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*.

The very structure of the novel is postmodern in how it questions the limits of the novel as a form to represent the population of people it is written about. Indian novels have found a way to write the people at large into the text through crowded writing. This aspect of Chandra's novel challenges the limits of the novel and postcolonial endeavors at self representation.

It is imperative to note here that Indian novels do not hold an exclusive patent on crowded writing, nor are Rushdie's and Chandra's works the only examples. Other novels from other authors and nations certainly share in this unique capturing of population, such as Mo Yan's *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* which captures the enormity of China and the Buddhist cosmos. Just as Rushdie's style of magical-realism is not prescriptive of all Indian literature in English, so too is crowded writing not a requirement for Indian literature.

This crowded writing form, which largely seems random in its nature, resembles what Deleuze and Guattari term "rhizomatic" narration. This theory sees the growth of knowledge without any distinct beginning or end, instead springing up seemingly at random and branching off in all directions:

The rhizome is an antigenealogy. It is a short-term memory, or antimemory. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots... In contrast to centered (even polycentered) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system...(1458-1459)

A story that is rhizomatic depends on the digression, not the chronology of events. In evaluating this rhizomatic theory, Alexandru supports that movement in Chandra's novel depends not on linear direction; direction in the novel is determined by pure movement along lines that intersect at will, not by order ("Performance" 28). Chandra furthers this assertion that storytelling—or

writing—is not a clear-cut path to be followed. Instead he offers the two “lessons” on telling stories that are twisting and fluid by Hanuman and the female sadhu in the woods, which are both quoted above.

Towards the end of the novel, Sanjay approaches the end of his task of telling his story. At this point, the storytelling has produced a highly politicized, economically diverse, and energetic following in the maidan. Sanjay knows that his life is fading, and as he grows weaker, he continues with the story, knowing that it will take everything left in him to finish. At this point, living no longer matters. Instead, he feels the necessity to tell what really happened, to recognize that all of the main players of his tales are in him—Janvi, Hercules Skinner, and Alexander the Great included (*Red* 512). Even though he is at the end of his life, the story is not done; he passes the torch onto Abhay saying:

Abhay, when I have finished, I shall lay my head in the lap of Yama and I shall listen to your story, and the story will never end, in its maya¹⁴ and we will play, and we will find endless delight. (513)

This novel would end on a neat note with loose ends all tied, Sanjay’s soul at rest as he dies and the torch of storyteller passed on to Abhay. That is, of course, if this were all to the tale.

Throughout the telling of stories in the maidan, there was a spirited little girl, Saira, who full of innocence and joy gathered the crowds to listen and kept them in check. If Hanuman is the divine protector of storytellers and poets, then Saira was the mortal one. When Abhay finished his last tale, a ruckus broke out in the maiden. Without thinking, Saira jumped down and ran to calm the crowd, unknowing that a small bomb had been thrown overhead. She was the only one to be hurt. Returning home from the hospital, Sanjay weakly tells Abhay to help her, to tell a story. (*Red* 540-541)

As the tale started on the brink of death where only storytelling could bide time from Rama, so too does it end in the same situation. The fatality involved with narration brings a heightened level of importance. Novels must be written, oral traditions must be shared or else something far greater will be lost than just a tradition: life itself hangs on it. Not just the life of two imaginary figures are in the balance, that of Sanjay and Saira; every human life has a story of its own, shared memories with loved ones, and perspectives on the world. The loss of storytelling is the loss of human self-expression.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Postcolonialism and postmodernism are indeed complementary theories. They work well together to help explain assertions of Indian identity in contemporary novels as well as provide a framework in which to examine historical themes. The works of Forster, Rushdie, Mistry, and Chandra all work together to paint a varied yet cohesive picture of modern Indian literature in English that participates equally in postmodernism and postcolonialism, thus showing how integral these two theories are to one another.

Postcolonialism and postmodernism work well together to seek out voices which have historically been lost in literary studies. They also serve to provide understanding about the effects of India's complicated history with England on contemporary works, but the theory is still limited in how much light it can shine on the genre.

India has thousands of years of history before the British ever set foot on her land, and scholars have yet to explore how deeply this rich history that spans well beyond the last century has affected the literature coming out of the country. There is more to the Indian story than just colonialism. Postcolonial theory may very well help to explain the effect of other imperial powers in India on her literature, such as the Moguls, but only a study which tackles this question could tell. Likewise, postmodernism can be useful when applied to the accepted intellectual norms which were propagated under differing ruling powers in India which still persist today, thus shedding light on the caste system and religious stratification in the country.

A further limit to theory lies in postcolonialism's intersection with postmodernism; while the meeting of these two theories is helpful in understanding and debating Indian literature, it cannot be taken as full similitude. Postcolonialism and postmodernism have two different

agendas—postcolonialism seeks voices lost or silenced by imperial history while postmodernism challenges the intellectual hegemonies created by the same imperial powers. While complementary, these two theoretical models should not be mistaken as the same.

It is important to remember that just as theory can be limited in providing understanding to literature, so too is this analysis only a beginning to understanding the varied literary world of India. The international debate over defining the authentic Indian author as well as the demise or perpetuation of measuring all Indian novels against Rushdie's work will both serve to move the genre and affect Indian literary studies. While *A Passage to India* works to open the postcolonial conversation on Indian literature, Chandra's novel is far from closing it.

It is hard to pinpoint what the future holds for Indian literary studies. It is certain that just as the postmodern/postcolonial project continually seeks out new or previously ignored voices to add to the conversation in defining Indian literature, so too do scholars need to keep an open mind about what constitutes the genre. It may well be that Non-Resident Indian (NRI) authors deserve a genre of their own while Dalit, untouchable, literature its own and bhasha literature another. However, until global literary studies are more diverse and ready to make such distinctions in the greater Indian literature canon, scholars must be careful along what lines they chose to exclude voices as "not Indian enough." Whether it is the nationality of the author, such as Forster, where an author lives, such as Rushdie or Chandra, or how the author does or doesn't partake in the new narrative structures of magical-realism or crowded writing, such as Mistry, literary theory can be used to open or close the arena of Indian literature to viable candidates for discussion.

Besides deciding which novels to consider as authentic Indian literature, scholars must also be open to the overlapping and complementary nature of literary theories. The entire project

of the various theories which were discussed—transcultural, (In)fusion, cosmopolitan, universalist, differentialist, and minority— works to explain Indian literature in English. Only a deep understanding of these theories will allow any scholar to understand what the current debates are on contemporary Indian literature in English and thus open the conversation to what the future of Indian literary studies holds.

Yet, there is a grave danger in delving into these theories: just as postcolonialism and postmodernism have often been set as binary opposites, so too do these theories at first seem to be mutually exclusive. However, scholars such as Ghosh with his discussion of an (In)fusion approach and Coste in his discussion of cosmopolitanism reach for a different understanding of theory—one where theoretical approaches can exist in the same space. Ghosh has found that an Irish absurdist is relevant in traditional Hindu philosophy and Coste purports that universal truths about humanity as well as particular differential truths about community can be found in the same cosmopolitan space. As long as scholars remember that theories are not mutually exclusive—such as postcolonialism and postmodernism— then such crossroads in theory will be recognized and serve to open literature to a greater understanding of humanity—in its wide diversity and universal hubris.

Endnotes

¹the inner flavor, soul, or emotion of any work of art, as understood in classical Indian literary theory (Narasimhaiah 1383)

² men and women who are of British heritage but were born and have lived their entire lives in India

³ When I was in elementary school, about fourth or fifth grade, I had one of those pivotal moments in my education which will stick with me always. In English class, my teacher who I have to assume meant no harm tried to explain to the class how there are a multitude of accents which affect the way English is spoken across America. To her, Midwesterners possessed the purest hold on the language and spoke as the words were intended to be said; thus, unlike those in the south, New York, or Boston, we did not have a discernible accent. For whatever reason, her assertion has stuck with me through the years. While as an educator diction is very important to me, I cannot be so brazen as to assert that I have no accent; my accent is simply different from any other-- not better, just different. This episode which occurred not that long ago speaks to the fact that issues of language hegemony still persist and run deeper than just in political or scholarly circles. They are as common as elementary schools.

⁴ As described by Meenakshi Mukherjee, Thomas Babington Macauley served an integral role in the decision to establish English as the language for education in India. In 1835 he remarked that “All parties seem to agree on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover, so poor and rude, that until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them” (Mukherjee 2-3).

⁵ In response to Said's askance for transparency on the part of the scholar, I would be entirely remiss if I did not likewise recognize that I am a young Ohioan from a very small, rural corner of the Earth. Likewise, I have certain assumptions about my place in relation to the rest of the world and my perspective is one that is colored by American heritage, gendered by my very being, and acutely aware of familial concerns as a mother. As an individual, I am as inseparable from my studies as any scholar is.

⁶ Based on Antonio Gramsci's idea of the "subaltern classes" which he defines as the proletariat, Spivak relates the subaltern to those who have been marginalized in society and thus study; more specifically, she notes the lower castes of India and women as her subaltern subjects, but her theoretical understanding of the subaltern individual transcends geography and gender to include anyone on the margins, "the silent, silenced center" of society (Spivak 2116).

⁷ In reaction to charges of electoral fraud, Indira Gandhi declared a state of national Emergency on the 26th June 1975, thus suspending the Constitution and setting herself at the helm of the country to imprison dissenters as she saw fit and to push through programs with little to no repercussion. During this time, Indira was able to aggressively implement her pet projects such as her sterilization program to control population growth and Urban beatification program which sought to eliminate urban slums. On the 21st of March 1977 Ms. Gandhi rescinded the Emergency and in the subsequent elections was unseated. This return of Constitutional power has since served as witness to the strength of the Indian government to remain faithful to the Constitution and democratic process.

⁸Originally 1001 Midnight's children were born, but as time continued and some were killed or died, there were only 581 left, including Saleem, by the time he began communicating with them collectively.

⁹ This statement is partially a lie. Historically, India has been a secular nation for thousands of years which has a rich history of many religious communities including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Buddhists, Jews, and more. However, at the first signs that the colonial project in India was failing, the British set up voting constituencies for partial self-rule which were based on religion. While there are instances of India being ruled in feudal systems of different religions from Hindu maharajas to the Islamic Moguls, this was the first time that the average citizen was defined by the state according to their religion. Muslim candidates were provided for Muslim communities, Sikh candidates for Sikhs, etc. Under the guise of creating equal representation in the government, the British caused the Indian political system to break with its secular history and be thoroughly religious in identity.

¹⁰ To put this in perspective, that means that one in every six people of the world is Indian.

¹¹ Maya is the Hindu term for the illusion that blinds humanity from seeing the reality of the world. Ghosh points out that maya has an innate aspect of human ignorance which perpetuates the illusion.

¹² Ghosh continually reminds that this approach to reading demands a deep understanding of all secondary sources which the scholar observes overlapping in the literary work at hand. This is not an approach for a novice. However, John Hillis Miller reminds Ghosh that this approach is simply his way of working through a text—something that every scholar must develop a method for on their own (Miller 22) while Spivak comments that this elaborate working through of theory while reading is simply how a scholar reads and primacy should be given to “cold readings” where scholars approach a text with an open mind that is ready to make

any connection based on the direction the literature points to (Spivak 25-26). The point is to let the text speak and direct any theoretical evaluation.

¹³ See Chandra 24, 25, 28, 40, 71, 82, 85, 104, 110, 129, 149, 198, 272, 273, 374, and 451

¹⁴ Hindu concept of illusion (Ludwig 99)

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