UNMASKING THE MASCULINE IN SELECT INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELS

Ph.D. THESIS

by

SURAJ GUNWANT

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ROORKEE
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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled **"UNMASKING THE MASCULINE IN SELECT INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELS"** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy and submitted in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee is an authentic record of my own work carried out during a period from July, 2013 to June, 2017 under the supervision of Dr. Rashmi Gaur, Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee.

The matter presented in the thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other Institute.

(SURAJ GUNWANT)

This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my knowledge.

(Rashmi Gaur)
Supervisor

Dated: ____________

Abstract

The study of identity in general and gender identity in particular has been one of the key concerns in the humanities and the social sciences over the last five decades. This is true for literary studies in the context of India where debates surrounding the construction of gendered subjectivity in and through literature are regularly raised. From a Foucauldian standpoint, such projects or theses in the process of talking or writing about gender effect gender. This thesis does not intend to create a new construct of gender or masculinity, a new definition, as it were, which may find its significance and signification in relation to its difference from other constructs. Rather, it proposes that the popular constructs of masculinity, in which it is a natural, unalterable phenomenon, when explored in the Indian Novel in English lacks any inevitability or (natural) essence.

As one may be aware, the traditional conception of masculinity advances it as a collection of actions and attributes that lack any historicity because they emerge from the unchanging natural male body; the reproductive organs become, in such a scheme, the source of unique, stereotypical masculine traits. However, recent social scientific studies have called into question such entrenched notions by foregrounding the overarching role of the social sphere in the construction and perpetuation of rigid boundaries around gender identity. Yet, even such novel ways of thinking about gender, or masculinity, remain macro-structural and modernist in orientation, in that masculinity retains its description in connection with negative power, independence, coercion, violence, competitiveness, risk-taking, resourcefulness and action orientation, etc. In so doing, both popular and academic discourses fix masculinity by seeking unification, deep structures, or what Anthony Easthope would call a ‘sense of totality’, ‘an imaginary wholeness’ in men’s internal variability.

The central argument of this thesis envisages to be a necessary corrective to the continued reliance on essentialism that men and masculinity are regularly marked by both in the academic critical study of men and masculinities as well the Mars and Venus type popular books on inevitable and unresolvable gender differences. Although, over a period, in an attempt to avoid charges of essentialism the academics producing scholarship in the field of men and masculinities have put forth the thesis of the plurality of masculinity even as they continue to reify and solidify

the categories with some additional sub-divisions; there is a dearth of accounts of vulnerability and 'undecidability', to use Butler's term, in men's actions.

Theoretically, the project is informed by the postmodern approach to identity which postulates the 'self' as hybrid, contingent, and discursive. It proposes that masculinity is characterized by plurality, indeterminacies and internal fractures. The logical extension of this is that the notion of a stable oppressive masculine subject, which is transcendent, capable of making independent, rational choice is untenable. In other words, this thesis explores the interface between post-structuralism/ postmodernism, gender (masculinities), and the Indian English novel by analyzing four literary texts and attempts to destabilize the Enlightenment notion of a unified, ahistorical masculine subject which recurs in more orthodox second-wave feminist (literary) criticism by exploring and articulating the indeterminacy, plurality, and fractured character of masculine subjectivity

In what follows, I show how four Indian English novels which follow the ethos of social realism with a focus on the domestic private sphere of human relationships complicate received ways of conceptualizing masculinity. The writers and their works are: *That Dark Holds No Terror* (1980) by Shashi Deshpande, *A Suitable Boy* (1993) by Vikram Seth, *Ravan and Eddie* (1995) by Kiran Nagarkar, and *Custody* (2011) by Manju Kapur. I show how men's consciousness is not unified; rather it is characterized by an intense sense of fracturing and hybridity which corresponds with the Bakhtinian notion of 'unfinalizability', indeterminacy and open-endedness of the novel. Men's being follows closely the inherent polyphony of the novels which renders it plural and brings everyday masculinity into attention. This is important because most studies employing the influential concept of hegemonic masculinity have a tendency to highlight men's toxic coercive power and relegate other mundane aspects of everyday masculinity to the fringes.

In addition to this, the historical, shifting reality of masculinity becomes apparent when chosen fictional texts are historicized, read against the dominant national discourses of the time in which the realist novel are set. Here, desirable masculinity finds consonance with the shifting discursive reality in the two important decades of postcolonial history of India; namely the first decade of post-independent India vis-à-vis the post-liberalization decade, the 1990s. Such a closing reading of the novels destabilises the ahistorical and static configurations of masculinity in

the popular imagination by unfolding the inherent flux, or temporal mutability in the imagination of the desirable in men and their masculinity.

In another instance, masculinity and its easy association with the male body is troubled by unfolding the ways in which women characters too in the novels assume those subject positions, such as the position of autonomous, rational subject of Enlightenment modernity, that has historical, epistemological, and ontological links with men and masculinity. The fixing of a set of supposedly masculine actions and attributes in the male body is challenged by showing the fluidity of the phallus, or rendering mobile attributes such as independence and rationality thereby destabilizing any linear and necessary link between men and masculinity.

Another contention that emerges in the course of demystifying the signifying and relational nature of masculinity is that in so far as the domestic realist novels succeed in implying the fluidity of masculinity, the bipolarity of realism-postmodernism also gets called into question. The Indian English realist novel, as analyzed further, otherwise characterized as politically naïve or conservative is shown to make space for a variety of masculinities that are often internally fractured; it automatically follows that it is not only the postmodern/ postcolonial subversive novel that apprehends the postmodern condition of being which is characterized by liquidity. The chosen realist novels from Indian English fiction also depict similar contingencies of subjectivity thereby contesting the old formulation that realism oversimplifies and naturalizes reality.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Masculinities in Theory

The study of identity in general and gender identity in particular has been one of the key concerns in the humanities and the social sciences over the last five decades. This is true for literary studies in the context of India where debates surrounding the construction of gendered subjectivity in and through literature are regularly raised. From a Foucauldian perspective, such studies often themselves effect gender in the process of narrating or critiquing it. This thesis does not intend to create a new construct of gender or masculinity which may find meaning in its difference from other constructs. Rather, it posits that 'masculinity' when explored in the Indian Novel in English lacks any (natural) essence; in fact, it is historically and discursively constituted, and is characterized by plurality, indeterminacies, and internal fractures. The logical extension of this is that the notion of a stable oppressive masculine subject, which is transcendent, capable of making independent, rational choice and is uniformly geared toward domination of its Others for its sustenance is untenable. To be more specific, this thesis explores the interface between post-structuralism/ postmodernism, gender (masculinities), and the Indian English novel by analyzing four literary texts and attempts to destabilize the Enlightenment notion of a unified, ahistorical masculine subject which recurs in more orthodox second-wave feminist (literary) criticism by exploring and articulating the indeterminacy, plurality, and fractured character of masculine subjectivity. The idea behind this undertaking is to capture masculine subjectivity in its complexity and argue against the culturally dominant notion of a unitary and oppressive masculinity.

It is not uncommon to encounter pieces of (feminist/ humanist) literary criticism on the Indian Novel in English which work within the tropes of patriarchy, oppression, and structural inequality predicated on the implicit idea that men share the toxic entity called masculinity which is characterized by domination and oppression of women in a society which privileges men in possession of attributes of stereotypical masculinity. Since critical studies of men and masculinities as an interdisciplinary area relies, epistemologically, on women's studies, and has, as discussed below, evaded the novel ways in which feminist studies have forged alliances with

postmodernism; ‘current scholarship about men's masculinity often describes it [masculinity] negatively as a source of insecurity for the man and of trouble for society, an incitement to violence and bad behavior that arises from deep in the psyche as well as from conformity to social norm’ (Gardiner 610).

In general, feminist criticism before the arrival of post-perspectives, seeks to uncover the ways in which women become victims of forms of violence and oppression in patriarchy, or the uncovering of the methods that patriarchy uses in order to subjugate women to an eternal position of subordination. Socialization of female bodies for discrete sex-roles is looked into, and critiqued. In such writings, men are usually oppressors, uniquely trained by the social forces to perform their sex-role which involves domination of their others. It is also proposed that men in the given social design i.e., patriarchy, enjoy all power, or that there is widespread and historical inequality in the distribution of power between the two sexes. Criticism becomes the method to foreground and then critique this privilege. Men, masculinity, and the power these two entities are associated with become objects of critique.

Feminist Literary criticism not only excavates forgotten traditions of writing by women in literary history overlooked by male or ‘masculinist’ critics, but also exposes the ways in which literature itself becomes a vehicle through which patriarchy perpetuates itself; in which submissive role models of women for women are constructed and disseminated for the emulation of the female reader. Literature as a cultural artifact is seen with suspicion of being complicit with the oppressive regime of patriarchy, a regime which uses this tool to maintain the status quo. The critic is bound by what Paul Ricoeur followed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick call the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (124). Her/ his aim is to detect, like a sleuth in a murder mystery, the deep structures of patriarchal thinking that are concealed in the fictional text.

These structuralist patterns in feminist literary criticism have an embedded notion of a monolithic masculinity practiced by male bodies under the pressure of culture (culture, by the way, is understood to be universally and uniformly patriarchal and deterministic). It is these narratives of totality and universality of gender identity, and in this case, masculinity, is what this thesis calls into question and attempts to negate drawing on the poststructuralist inclination toward what Anthony Easthope calls 'privileging difference'. Positing the signifier 'man' in an endless play

of significations with a fluid referent, I intend to situate multiple configurations of masculinities in the chosen texts and contest Enlightenment tradition of philosophical writings which actively underpins much of feminist theory in its perpetuation of modernist dualisms of a singular oppressive masculine subjectivity placed in opposition to a singular oppressed feminine subjectivity. In other words, I endeavour to locate masculine subjectivity in its multiplicities, its instabilities to render invalid the conception of a fixed agentic subjectivity for male bodies, as expressed in humanist and feminist epistemologies, a consciousness that is apparently transcendent and allegedly manifests in the male bodies' rational and deliberate acts of oppression and dominance against its 'Other'.

Here, it is important to note that the idea of a singular feminist epistemology is also improper, given that feminism itself has come to engage postmodernism and poststructuralism in problematizing the long-established though exclusive character of the 'woman' subject. As Diane Fuss affirms: 'In feminist theory, the idea that men and women, for example, are identified as such on the basis of transhistorical, eternal, immutable essences has been unequivocally rejected by many anti-essentialist poststructuralist feminists concerned with resisting any attempts to naturalize human nature' (xi). The inspiration for this project actually derives from these new horizons in feminist studies in which the primary subject of feminism, the 'woman', for which it fought long battles, no longer enjoys the validity that it did before the arrival of post-perspectives. In its exploration of the category of masculinity within the ambit of post-perspectives, this thesis is a critique of Enlightenment Humanism, or the Cartesian constituting subject enshrined in modernity.

In this study, I show how four Indian English novels which follow the ethos of social realism with a focus on the domestic private sphere of human relationships complicate received ways of conceptualizing masculinity. The writers and their works are: *That Dark Holds No Terror* (1980) by Shashi Deshpande, *A Suitable Boy* (1993) by Vikram Seth, *Ravan and Eddie* (1995) by Kiran Nagarkar, and *Custody* (2011) by Manju Kapur. The contention is that the domestic realist mode of fiction writing resists against the conception of a unified singular oppressive masculinity, in so far as masculinity is the stereotypical attributes shared by men. By allowing representation of masculinities in the plural, the novels in my estimation contest the notion that masculinity as a patriarchal ideology is without its contingencies and specificities and is universally coercive. The

submission is that in the representations of masculinities, the Indian English novel makes space for a variety of masculinities that are often internally fractured, and this feature of the ordinary realist novel complicates the wisdom that the realist novel is complicit with the patriarchal status quo. I posit that the close reading of male characters and the ways in which their being signals the ambiguous political orientation of not only these texts but also by way of generalization, we may posit that such political non-partisanship is characteristic of the realist novel, notwithstanding the long-standing charge of its complicity.

Hence, besides providing a novel assessment of male characters and attendant masculinity, an additional motivation of such a study, if only tangential, is to promote a complicated conception of the realist novel. In so doing, such an endeavour contributes to the burgeoning field of men and masculinity studies which has gained rapid acceleration particularly in the Social-Science community. For instance, using references to the *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (2004) and the *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities* (2007), and many other anthologies, Kalle Berggren in his article 'Sticky Masculinity: Post-structuralism, Phenomenology and Subjectivity in Critical Studies on Men' indicates at the 'consolidation' of masculinity studies in the last decade' (1).

It is indeed true that in the past couple of decades, gender studies, and other forms of identity studies, and representations have become the principle concerns in the humanities, quite notably in literary studies, yet the analysis of the representation of men vis-à-vis women remains under-researched. With special regards to India, while a few attempts have been made to theorize South Asian Masculinities/ Indian masculinities from a sociological, anthropological, psychoanalytical, and historical point of view, chief among which are the collection of scholarly essays in *South Asian Masculinities: Context of Change, Sites of Continuity* (2005) by Radhika Chopra, Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella; *Men and Masculinities in South India* (2006) by Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella, and *Masculinity and Its Challenges in India: Essays on Changing Perceptions* (2013) edited by Rohit K. Dasgupta, K. Moti Gokulsing; any major attempt to transcribe the presence of academic discourse on masculinity in fiction in India appears to be near absent.

Also, studies that do take up the intellectual challenge to engage with masculinity and fiction such as a collection of articles in Mittapalli and Letizia's *Postcolonial Indian Fiction in English and Masculinity* (2009), the only major attempt in book form to look at the interlinkages of the postcolonial Indian English fiction and masculinity have a marked tendency to move along the modernist framework of identity which presumes the existence of depth as opposed to what dominates in influential theoretical accounts of identity as surface. The purpose then is to provide a new and robust narrative of the discursive phenomenon of masculinity that can challenge and perhaps supplant the existing comfortable ways of conceiving unified masculinity and consequently also challenging the dominant mode of positing the realist novel as the repository of traditionalism and orthodoxy.

With regards to the theoretical and conceptual framework of the thesis, it should be made clear that while the thesis is intent on being interdisciplinary in employing ideas from a host of areas such as literary criticism, social theory on gender and cultural studies; it does not draw on scientific studies- Biology, Evolutionary Studies, Sociobiology, Neuroscience, etc. - which often situate the origin and development of masculinity in hormones, genetics, evolution, or the body. It is attentive to the debates on masculinity, femininity, or gender in the social sciences, particularly sociology; it, in a sense, begins with the knowledge that gender in general, and masculinity in particular with regards to this project, a socially situated phenomenon. In the sociology of masculinity, a distinction between 'sex' as a natural and therefore unchangeable entity and 'gender' as a social as well as artificial/ plastic phenomenon is now well-established following the arguments of most social and behaviourial scientists. Yet where this thesis really rests on in terms of theoretical inputs is the postmodern/ post-structural turn in literary/ cultural theory which bloomed in the late 20th century and continues to enjoy following in cultural criticism today. In a sense, it not only draws on inputs from Social theory, like the concept of multiple masculinities from Connell's *Masculinities* (2005), the connection between masculinity and homophobia (Kimmel), or men's contradictory experience of power in patriarchy (Kaufman); but also interrogates the epistemology of masculinity from a post-structural and postmodern perspective which emphasizes relativism and instabilities. The idea is to render problematic many of the sticky or conventional aspects of men and masculinity which are taken as given in traditional modes of thinking, including generic feminist criticism which takes for granted the solidity of masculinity in order to construct a critique against it.

Since the aim of this project is *not* to define masculinity, or to formulate a new definition of manhood in the 21st century, or to show masculinity's natural alliance with power, patriarchy, and privilege, but to attack the very idea that masculinity could be easily thought through, define, or the idea that the messy mass of manly attributes and actions could be put into a safe, secure, solid, conceptual category, I make frequent use of the concepts such as discourse, difference, hybridity, polyphony, temporality, subjectivities, and embodiment which have found conception and use in the works of a host of scholars working within the ambit of postmodernism/ poststructuralism. A sketch of the ways in which these conceptual frames could help theorize the instabilities of masculinity is done later in this Introductory chapter and the successive chapters will supply the evidences from the chosen texts to consolidate the theorization or the main argument as presented in the very first paragraph of the thesis.

Even though, as mentioned earlier, this study draws its perspectives from the social-scientific and culturalist approach toward the construction and subversion of masculine gender identity, I provide here some of the other ways in which masculinity is conceived in the academic establishment, in other disciplines such as the natural and evolutionary sciences, the social approach, and lastly the postmodernist approach which actually informs the writing of the following chapters, in order that a comprehensive understanding of our object of intellectual interest, masculinity(ies), its nature, if it has any, and its formation, across different and sometimes adversarial disciplinary vantage points is brought forth. Part of the reason is that all the scholarship in the study of masculinities takes place in a dialogue with theories coming in from different streams and perspectives, and therefore, it is essential that an introductory assessment of the major themes is undertaken. Given below is a brief incursion into the natural and social-scientific approaches to the varying formulations of masculinity followed by the postmodern approach.

In Biology, the discipline that is interested in solving the riddle called living organisms, the science of life, has been charged with essentialism when it comes to the differences between men and women, and also there is a sense of determinism, as in the life of the male species or the female species is posited to be destined in accordance with the anatomy. Essentialism as described by Diana Fuss is 'a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity' (xii). Most authors propose that there is an essential difference between men and women and the reason behind the differences between the two can be

located in the physiology, in hormones or in the neuro system, which are or work differently in the two organisms. Testosterone, for instance, is often marked as the reason behind the discrete essence of men. More often than not, it is described as the reason behind men's unique physical and sexual aggression. It is not uncommon to witness newspaper or magazine articles routinely quoting scientific studies to show how the difference between men and women lies hidden somewhere in the body, often brain. For example, in his book *The Essential Difference: Men, Women, and the Extreme Male Brain* (2003), Simon Baron-Cohen, professor of developmental psychopathology at Cambridge puts his thesis: ‘The female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy. The male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems’ (1). To put it in different words, the male frame of mind is different from the female frame of mind in the sense that the former is geared toward the analysis of a system, often complex systems of thought such as the philosophical systems, or the physiological systems, that of the body or mind, any particular disembodied area such as the cosmos, the nature, etc. On the other hand, the female approach is connected with readings natural beings such as the humans, their faces or other bodily expressions to analyze what they might be upto. This process helps in making better and deep connection with other human beings. Popular science author and Harvard cognitive scientist Steven Pinker also subscribes to the notion of differences between men and women, on average, in their cognitive abilities and writes that:

> Men are, on average, better at mental rotation and mathematical word problems; women are better at remembering locations and at mathematical calculation. Women match shapes more quickly, are better at reading faces, are better spellers, retrieve words more fluently, and have a better memory for verbal material. Men take greater risks and place a higher premium on status; women are more solicitous to their children (n.p).

Giving examples from other studies he concludes that:

> Men's and women's brains vary in numerous ways, including the receptors for sex hormones. Variations in these hormones, especially before birth, can exaggerate or minimize the typical male and female patterns in cognition and personality. Boys with defective genitals who are surgically feminized and raised as girls have been known to report feeling like they are trapped in the wrong body and to show

> characteristically male attitudes and interests. And a meta-analysis of 172 studies by psychologists Hugh Lytton and David Romney in 1991 found virtually no consistent difference in the way contemporary Americans socialize their sons and daughters. Regardless of whether it explains the gender disparity in science, the idea that some sex differences have biological roots cannot be dismissed as Neanderthal ignorance (n.p).

However still, there is a great amount of resistance from those who adhere to the social-scientific wisdom which posits human beings, in the Lockean tradition, as a 'blank slate' which cultural forces come to format in different designs. According to Pinker, 'during the past century the doctrine of the Blank Slate has set the agenda for much of the social sciences and humanities…the social sciences have sought to explain all customs and social arrangements as a product of the socialization of children by the surrounding culture' (*TBS* 2).

Closely connected to the biological view which rejects the notion of 'blank slate', a notion which is strictly adhered to by scholars in the social sciences, the evolutionary approach, or the argument of the anthropologists on gender derives from their position that human behavior is an adaptation to the natural environment. Human beings have evolved as a species and this process is abetted by natural selection. The evolutionary approach posits that the division of labour in which men belong to the public sphere in contemporary societies has roots in the ancient past; a time before the advent of agriculture. In our attempt to produce more progenies so as to continue our survival in extremely hostile conditions, the tribal cultures used or exploited men's natural disposition toward creating large systems using casual and loose connection among themselves and pushed men to take up dangerous roles such as hunting for food production, while the women were assigned the secure private sphere of food gathering, caring for the babies, and so on. The cultures saw men as disposable since few men are required to impregnate numerous women and keep the production of babies going. The security of the females in the insecure and violent atmosphere remained at the top priority of most cultures, because the more the number of women, the more the reproduction.

This need for a high number of fertile women and a small number of healthy men for cultures to thrive and sustain themselves in a fiercely competitive environment for basic resources allowed for the formation of two discrete sex-roles, in which men were desired to perform life-

threatening work of hunting outside the secure private space of home, and women were retained for the upkeep of the progenies and nominal food gathering within the security of the four walls. Under such circumstances, the loss of young men during the process of hunting was not uncommon; in fact their ability to hunt well, to bring food, was the chief marker of their masculinity. Because the process of hunting requires physical violence, and the better hunter reaped rewards in terms of recognition from his culture, violence and masculinity was interlinked and this linkage remain strong even after the invention of agriculture and later industrial capitalism. When cultures develop, have more resources, and less to worry about from other cultures, the definition of desirable masculinity automatically changes, as there is no longer need of men who have the capacity to perform violence. This could be the case that in the information and technology age, physical violence is receiving an increasing amount of flak in contemporary discourse, however, the baggage of early history refuses to fade. As humanity made progress, cultures evolved in men's relation to other men in the public sphere. In other words, the event of evolution led to men's overwhelming contribution to the development of culture. Culture, therefore, was built upon nature and its progress has been dependent upon pragmatism, upon the need for survival, reproduction, and production, rather than social equality.

The evolutionary theory of sex role posits the females of a species to be the decision maker in matters of sexual selection, which pushes the males of the species to play dominant behavior because of the competition among them to pass on their genes. This is often termed as the male-competitive and female-choosy sex roles. This underpins men's inflated aggression and competitiveness, or their desire to dominate in group situations.

Yet, as for the sociological approach which dominates in the social-scientific community, the sex-role theory of Margaret Mead and Talcott Parsons posits the construction of gender as a social event in which masculinity and femininity as gendered binaries are created in response to the expectations of the society. The process of socialization pushes its subjects to shape their behavioural characteristics according to the demands of their social and cultural contexts. The use of social constructionism to discuss masculinity was analogous and in fact drew from Simone De Beauvoir's often quoted argument that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (301). However, many of the later works in the sex-role theory direction did not contain themselves to the repudiation of the hitherto dominant idea of nature playing midwife to gender production. In books such as *The Myth of Male Power* (1993) and *Why Men Are The Way They Are* (1986), for

example, Warren Farrell has suggested the aspect of powerlessness in men's perceived power and the need for liberation from men's oppressive sex role which mitigates against their leading an emotionally fulfilled life. Farrell also argues that similar to the case of women, the role men have to act is extremely dangerous to their sense of well-being and often causes grave injuries (physical and emotional) and in many cases their premature death. But in his books he also attacks what he perceives to be the shortcoming of the socio-political and literary movement of feminism as it often 'articulated the shadow side of men and the light side of women. It neglected the shadow side of women and the light side of men' (Farrell 15). Structurally, the argument proposed by Farrell draws on and is in correspondence with other major popular works of Herb Goldberg, especially his accounts of the limitations imposed by the provider/ protector male sex-role on males to achieve greater life-satisfaction. In works such as *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege* (1976) and *The Inner Male: Overcoming Roadblocks to Intimacy* (1987), Goldberg, like Farrell, attacks the materialist feminist discourse of the 60s and 70s in which heterosexual, white, Western women have been and continue to be oppressed by men, and Goldberg describes, for instance, patriarchy as a mythology as well as how violence against men is alarmingly more pervasive, compared with the case of women. While much of these writings can be contextualized as a reaction against supposedly misandrist outlook of feminist politics and treatises, both Farrell and Goldberg do not describe themselves as anti-feminists. Writing what he is ultimately in favour of, Warren Farrell claims in *The Myth of Male Power*:

> I am a men's liberationist (or "masculist") when men's liberation is defined as equal opportunity and equal responsibility for both sexes. I am a feminist when feminism favors equal opportunities and responsibilities for both sexes. I oppose both movements when either says our sex is THE oppressed sex, therefore, "we deserve rights." That's not gender liberation but gender entitlement. Ultimately, I am in favour of neither a women's movement nor a men's movement but a gender transition movement. (24)

Thus, Farrell's and Goldberg' works attempt to bridge the antagonistic chasm between what they perceive to be men's reality and feminist insistence on men's power by showcasing the powerlessness in men's alleged power and women's power in their alleged powerlessness. So instead of the world being completely patriarchal as in the readings of the feminist and the pro-

feminist discourse; for Farrell, 'the world is both patriarchal and matriarchal, both male and female-dominated' (18).

Another major work in the same tradition which surfaced and created waves in the 90s is *Iron John: A book About Men* (1990) that remained at the top of the New York Times' sales and popularity chart for weeks. This stylistically poetic account of the crisis of masculinity by Robert Bly, who is a poet and later on becomes the founder of the mythopoetic movement for men, essentially contextualizes the softness of modern masculinity in its distance from the ancient, uncontaminated, wild, warrior, universal and ahistorical Jungian archetypal masculinity. To posit what he maintains to be the 'deep masculine' traits developed by conventional men before the arrival of the modern metrosexual male; Bly makes use of ancient myths, legends, stories, folktales, etc. to arrive at those attributes. He also insists on the relevance and importance of taking recourse to the same rituals and traditional methods in order to bring back the early modes of being men to negate the ill-effects of modernity on masculinity.

The success of these male privilege-skeptic narratives, written by academics at the mass level at a time when women's studies departments had begun to take concrete shape in the Euro-American context, appeared, to the pro-feminist academic lobby, as reactionary and status-quoist, lacking sexual politics. It is in attacking these writings that hark back to a golden era which is long past and where both men and women knew their respective places, duties, traits and responsibilities; the sociology of masculinities as an enterprise emerges to confront conventional ideas of gender and history.

The Australian Sociologist who revolutionized the study of manhood through her book *Masculinities* (1990) and the concept, 'Hegemonic masculinity', which supported much of later studies in the area, defines masculinities as 'configurations of practice structured by gender relations' (44). The book discusses how masculinity as a category can only exist or stand in relation to femininity, an idea which is redolent of the basics of Structuralist Semiotics, where the meaning making of a sign is contingent upon its difference from other signs. The book also proposes the thesis of the presence of socio-culturally constructed plurality of masculinities in a world which otherwise likes to see it as if it were a monolithic entity having the same characteristic features across the world.

Masculinity, according to Connell, is also historical in the sense that it is not static in nature and its dynamism makes it susceptible to respond to social, cultural and historical shifts. While destabilizing, deconstructing and refuting biological (endocrine), psychoanalytical, social, sociobiological narratives' claim to produce a coherent science of masculinity because masculinity in itself does not 'constitute a coherent object of knowledge,' Connell proposes that what we need to study is not a particular gender but gender relations as a whole as 'masculinity arises within the project of knowing gender relations'. Thus, masculinity as a gender category does not arise from one's body or from one's sex. Borrowing the concept of 'hegemony' from Antonio Gramsci which stands for the idea of domination by consent, hegemonic masculinity is a way of being or demonstrating/ acting those characteristic qualities which are considered desirable in a man in a heteronormative patriarchal society. Hegemonic masculinity then is a form or style of masculinity which is seen as the standard, the normative, the original, the timeless, the universal or in Robert Bly's words, the archetype. It is this standard, against which other ways of being for men are appraised, usually negatively, and the possession and maintenance of hegemony requires domination of others.

By formulating hegemonic masculinity, Connell not only points at a system of domination of women by men in discourse and practice, but she is also explicating the entrenched social hierarchy among men where only certain modes of masculine conduct (for e.g. physical violence and success at work) are at the top end of the value chain pushing down other modes to subordination and/ or forced complicity. What is also interesting is that hegemonic masculinity 'is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable' (Connell 76).

Added to the conception of hierarchy in masculinities where the top floor is reserved for the hegemonic mode, there are other forms aptly described by Connell later in *Masculinities* (1995). These are the classifications into which the sociologist has relegated other types of masculinities. First among them is 'Subordination' which Connell has associated with the situation of homosexual men. Within the existing gender relation in the Western society 'gay men are subordinated to straight men by an array of material practices' (76). But what is even more important is that 'gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity…[it] is easily assimilated to femininity' (78). So we learn

from Connell that the prime reason behind the prevalence of homophobia and the dominance of compulsive heteronormativity in the Western social order is the arbitrary and artificial association between male homosexuality and effeminacy.

Although, as the world has become increasingly liberal toward the otherwise oppressed minor community of gays and lesbians, the pervasiveness of the supremacy and desire for hegemonic masculinity does not appear to dwindle against the rise of emancipatory narratives and practices partly because of the gradual nature of change and overwhelmingly because of the complicity of those who benefit from the current order. Complicity with the hegemonic order, eating the fruits of the patriarchal dividend 'without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy' is another way of being for many men who have 'some connection with the hegemonic project but do not embody hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 79). As most men are not manifestations of the explicitly oppressive code of manhood, and yet receive the benefits for being men in a male-dominated society by conforming to the social mores, they fall under the term 'Complicit Manhood,' which implies their complicity with the domination of hegemonic masculinity for what Connell calls the 'patriarchal dividend'.

The last component within the paradigm of plural masculinities as proposed by Connell is the 'interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race' (80) which forms what she calls the Marginalized masculinity. In the context of the West, these would be Black men.

Politically, critical studies of men and masculinities whose inauguration, as it were, happened under Connell, and which superseded the apolitical sex-role theory, is pro-feminist and attempts to integrate the paradigms of power, patriarchy from women's studies merging with the notion of 'hegemony' from Gramsci, finds endorsement and echo in the works of many sociologists such as Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, Stephen M. Whitehead, Michael A. Messner, who are interested in looking at the power dynamics in both inter-gender and intra-gender relationship with respect to masculinities. As Beasley informs us:

> The focus of the field of gender/ sexuality and its subfields, including Masculinity Studies, is upon critical analyses of gender and sexuality in social life. This entails a search for justice in relation to gender and sexuality arrangements and indeed frequently involves a concern with social justice more generally. (177)

According to Tim Edwards, the sex-role theory and the critical masculinity studies encompass the first two phases of masculinity studies in the academia, which in a strong sense follow the route of knowledge production of femininity in women's studies, 'given the immense degree of indebtedness that studies of masculinity owe to feminist theory' (2). Further:

> like in the case of women's studies, the third wave of studies of masculinity, rather like the potential third wave of studies of femininity, is clearly influenced by the advent of post-structural theory, particularly as it relates to gender in terms of questions of normativity, performativity and sexuality…as is also the case with feminism, it is less easy to define…a common theme is…with wider questions of change and continuity in contemporary, and in some sense historical, masculinities and identities. In addition, many of these studies of cultural texts are relatively positive in their emphasis, whether more over or covert, on the sense of artifice, flux and contingency concerning masculinities. (Edwards 2)

Edwards also points out 'lack of integration of post-structural analyses of masculinity with those perceiving themselves as pro-feminist, structuralist or empirically driven…[i.e.,] between the second and third waves of studies of masculinity' (3). While there has been incremental progress in the engagement between postmodernism/ post-structuralist theory and feminism in the last couple of decades, notwithstanding the attendant apprehension with regards to French theory's capacity to prevent progressive political action, a similar trajectory in the interlinkages between masculinities and post-structuralist theory is sorely missing. As Chris Beasley affirms:

> Masculinity Studies remains largely Modernist in approach and has only just begun to entertain the fraught associated with challenges to this frame of reference that are now almost 'old hat' in Feminist and Sexuality theorising. Writings in Masculinity Studies are also more likely to share a disciplinary framework. Many are sociological in approach. The subfield is dominated by Social Constructionist writings (a theoretical direction much diminished in Feminism and under serious attack in Sexuality thinking). Moreover, Masculinity theorists very often express Socialist pro-feminist commitments. (183)

In another article, Beasley tells us that 'CSMM [Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities] *theorizing* remains, for the most part, comparatively untouched by the waves of postmodern

critique that have so heavily influenced the theoretical trajectories of other areas of the Gender/ Sexuality field' (750). This is echoed by Kalle Berggren who writes that 'Post-structuralist perspectives have been enormously influential in gender studies over the last twenty-five years, with their characteristic ideas about gender being inessential and performed (e.g., Butler 1990). However, they have been much less used in critical studies on men' (236). It is in order to fill this gap that these study makes a reading of the chosen texts informed by post-structuralist notion of difference, fracturing, hybridity, and the following section maps, theoretically, the ways in which poststructuralism can underpin a complicated vision of masculinities as opposed to its pre-structuralist or structuralist avatars.

The postmodern/poststructuralist approach contests the unity of the subject in order to locate and study male gender identity within the comparatively more recent modes of thinking about the effects of language and discourse on the constitution of subjectivity/ identity and reality.

Even though it is true that male body and the gender identity it usually assumes has only recently become a subject of studies in the academia in an explicit and direct mode; men, it has been noted by feminists, have always had the privilege to subsume the whole of humanity, that is, both the sexes. This can of course be observed in the manner in which the English language uses male-gendered pronouns or other masculine generics to refer to all individuals irrespective of their sex or gender. The common examples are that of the use of the word 'mankind' to refer to the whole of 'humankind'; and how 'he' is used as a generic pronoun to use in the place of both 'he' and 'she'. It is another thing that such archaic sexism in the English language may be giving way to non-sexist alternatives due to feminist consciousness raising such as Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* (1980).

While sex-role theory and structuralist theory of hegemonic masculinity have had a significant influence on the topic of men and masculinities in the last few decades as discussed before; men's studies is yet to fully embrace the poststructuralist and postmodernist perspectives on gender which have been very influential in women's studies in the last few decades. Drawing attention to the lack of engagement with these modes of thinking, Alan Petersen writes: 'Male scholars seem unwilling, in the main, to engage in the kinds of interdisciplinary and critical enquiry undertaken by feminists…postmodernist feminism…have been largely neglected by men's studies scholars' (2). Tim Edwards, as discussed earlier, points to the inclusion of these

perspectives as the third wave in masculinity studies and characterizes it with an ‘emphasis, whether more overt or covert, on the sense of artifice, flux and contingency concerning masculinities’ (2). Edwards also points out in the tone of Alan Petersen the ‘lack of integration, of more culturalist, poststructural or media driven analyses of masculinity with those perceiving themselves as pro-feminist, structuralist or empirically driven…waves of studies of masculinity’ (3). Kalle Berggren in his attempt at exploring linkages between poststructuralism, feminist phenomenology, and masculinity consolidates the position of Petersen and Edwards by adding that ‘gender research on men is still dominated by critical structuralist perspectives’ by which he alludes to the dominance of the second phase of masculinity studies even after the arrival of post-perspectives (233). Not only the poststructuralist interventions in the theorization of masculinity come past the sociological debate on the alleged ‘crisis’ of masculinity or gender inequality faced by women in terms of power; there is a difference between the concerns of the two modes even though they both emphasize the constructionism of masculinity and oppose the notion of a natural dimension behind masculine behaviour. The division occurs in the kinds of the questions asked and conceptions of identity; their approach toward human consciousness, their imagination of the individual subject.

If the pro-feminist or critical studies of men and masculinity dominant in the second phase of masculinity, manifested in the works of Kimmel, Connell, and Hearn, assume a deep structure and essence shared by both men and women; the anti-humanist, post-structuralist perspectives attack such alleged stability in the formulation of gender identity assumed by masculine or feminine subjects. While the second phase of masculinity studies is firmly committed to the politics of progressive social change in terms of gender egalitarianism by pushing for more agency to women; the poststructural turn in social and gender theory stalls this movement by positing an extreme form of discursively constituted object for which no emancipation can be sought as it is internally unstable and not a whole.

There is another division in the two approaches mainly deriving from their use in two different disciplines. If the second wave, the critical study of men and masculinities was, and still is, more dominant in the social sciences, namely the disciplines of Sociology or Social work; the post-structural approach finds home in the Humanities given its methodology is not based on ‘experiments, interviews, studies, statistics, or facts and figures’ but ‘language and signs as the prime object of analysis…reading critically between the lines and behind the signs’ is what this

approach attempts to bring to the table (Reeser 10). These post-structural perspectives can help in resolving the contradictions which the earlier theories or phases on men abound. For instance, the concept of hegemonic masculinity, perhaps the most influential idea that floats in the theorization of masculinities, and a key term in the second phase, suffers from a fundamental inconsistency, which, describes Stephen Whitehead, that 'while it attempts to recognize difference and resistance, its primary underpinning is the notion of a fixed (male) structure' (Whitehead 93-94). The concept of hegemonic masculinity, even though it does embrace plurality in its conception of masculinity, is still governed by notions of modernist essentialism structuralist principles.

Therefore, before literary analysis is undertaken in the following chapters, I sketch the trajectory of the postmodernist 'self' which inform the reading of the novels for which it is imperative to understand the ways in which the ontology of the subject has developed or shifted in Western philosophical traditions. In what follows, I show how the subject in modernity was assigned autonomy, rationality and stability, which in itself was a development from a dominant medieval perspective in which supernatural entities were conceived to control human consciousness. However, in the latter half of the 20th century, a number of critics emerge to problematize the idea of transcendent human subjectivity by positing a discursively constituted subject who is historical and is internally unstable. At the end, I bring to bear these postmodern ideas of a fractured subjectivity on masculinity to explore a case for not only multiple but internally unstable masculinities.

The notion of postmodern masculine subjectivities implies the existence of a modern masculine subject which the post in postmodern has superseded. In order to construct a framework for masculinity in the postmodern, of how we can think about masculinity 'now', it is imperative to sketch an outline of the epistemology of the subject which remained dominant in the modern period, because the developments in the formulations of the subject over time in philosophy allow us to imagine and conceptualize the complexity of masculinity in ways that are counterintuitive. So the question to be asked here is: what are the ways in which ways subjectivities were conceived and constituted in the modern world that could not sustain themselves in the world after the demise of Enlightenment ideas and ideals? How did we think about consciousness, its capacities and limitations in modernity and what happens to that in postmodernity?

Before I begin, it must be stated that there is a significant amount of debate on whether the sociological or philosophical claims of postmodernism, its proposed distinguished ontology of the present from the ways of being and doing in a certain modernist past is legitimate. For instance, Rita Felski emphasizes this aspect while exploring the relationship between notions of Time and feminism in her book *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (2000). She writes that:

> there is a real problem in using "postmodern" to describe the work of authors such as Foucault and Derrida who do not talk about postmodernism and who are, for the most part, deeply suspicious of the term…French intellectuals have lined up in droves to distance themselves from what they see as the bizarre English-speaking obsession with postmodernism. (4)

On the one hand, we have Jean Baudrillard 'who believes that a radical break has occurred with modernity and that we are living in an era dominated by rootless, circulating fictions' (Mestrovic x); Scott Lash who uses postmodernism to refer to a 'cultural paradigm' which maps cultural change, cultural type and social stratification in contemporary society and this phenomenon in the culture is characterized by a set of 'de-differentiations', say, for example, between the cultural and the social which were differentiated in the modern era. We also have Frederic Jameson who uses the category of postmodernism to refer to 'the cultural logic of late capitalism'. Jameson makes a strong case for the existence of the postmodern by making a clear distinction between the modern and the postmodern and this distinction is rendered in a clear manner in the passage that I quote below:

> In modernism…some residual zones of "nature" or "being", of the old, the older, the archaic still subsist; culture can still do something to that nature and work at transforming that "referent". Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which "culture" has become a veritable "second nature". (ix-x)

On the other side, there are critics who read the contemporary as merely the extension of the modern ethos and resist using the term postmodern as a word for 'the way we live now' (Ferguson and Wicke 1-2). Hence, we see Zyugmunt Bauman and Anthony Giddens using 'Liquid' and

‘High’ Modernity to refer to the idiosyncrasies of the contemporary and clearly avoiding the ‘post’ to prevent giving a sense of the complete obliteration of Enlightenment values in the late 20th and 21st century. For instance, Giddens posits that ‘rather than entering a period of post-modernity, we are moving into one in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalized and universalized than before’ (3). If modernity is aligned with capitalism, as many modern social institutions have come up synchronously with Western industrial capitalism, then it is very difficult to sustain the case for postmodernity as we are not yet post capitalism, though it could well be argued that we are past industrial age of capitalism in this era of information technology. In such a context, the dichotomy of the modern and postmodern does appear an artificial historical and epistemological category providing the idea of a neat linear and somewhat teleological journey of history in which one age supersedes the other. However, even in the presence of such convincing criticism of postmodernism as a category that encapsulates the vagaries of the present, it can be of value to note the ways in which the values of the modern find rejection or resistance in the contemporary. Jane Flax has enumerated a comprehensive list of enlightenment tenets which find mention in Rosemarie Tong’s account of existentialist and postmodernist feminism. I reproduce some of the relevant ideas here in a different sequence and phraseology:

The first is the idea of a “stable, coherent self” which is autonomous and possesses the ability for independent thinking and chooses rational actions accordingly and deliberately.

Second is the emphasis on rationality and the submission that the employment of rationality yields objective results which can be relied upon and be universalized.

Third, reason leads to the kind of knowledge that has the validity of truth. It tells us something that is unchanging, whether it be about our minds or the natural world.

Fourth, reason is transcendental and universal and is not shaped by spatial or temporal specificities. The popular phrase ‘common sense’ refers to this view of rationality being something that is possessed by all universally and at all times.

Fifth, there is an ‘isomorphic’ relationship between word and thing. In other words, the word ‘tree’ refers to a physical entity that resides in the material world.

Sixth, it follows the logic of the previous idea, and posits the idea that language represents the real world, or in other words, language is only a medium through which reality finds expression.

Seventh, science and history is objective and neutral because they are the fruits of the labour of reason which in itself is beyond the control of power. Science is the best method in the production of knowledge because it is based in rationality. Also, there is an interconnection between reason, science, progress, and happiness.

These tenets that posit a modern stable self which is capable of producing objective knowledge and interpretations of the world with the help of universal rationality find expression in Enlightenment philosophy beginning from Descartes' declaration of individual consciousness being the producer of all truth and knowledge 'when he makes the 'I think' the main point of certainty upon which philosophy can build' (Bowie 1). This tradition of foregrounding individual consciousness responsible for the creation and validation of truth is carried on by a host of other philosophers such as Rousseau and Kant. These formulations emphasize the 'I' in the creation of that inform the modernist epistemology in which the idea of an autonomous rational human subject becomes the centre of all discourses superseding the central role that the concept of God or supernatural powers played in the mediaeval world. In the words of Andrew Bowie:

> Modern philosophy begins when the generally accepted basis upon which the world is interpreted ceases to be a deity whose pattern is assumed to have already been imprinted into the universe. The new philosophical task is therefore for human reason to establish its own legitimacy as the ground of truth. (1)

The Enlightenment thus makes a case for secular knowledge which is not dogmatic; therefore, such knowledge is necessarily provisional and is liable to change in the presence of new data. This feature of post- mediaeval humanism makes it remarkably different from theology which does not change its position even in the light of new insights.

The producer of this scientific rational knowledge, the agentic subject of the Enlightenment, the protagonist in the works of Descartes, Rousseau, and Kant who possesses powers of logic to decipher patterns and meanings of the world out there through the deliberate application of his mind and lives in an almost transcendental atemporal ahistorical universe becomes a subject of critique in the latter half of the 20th century. As Nick Mansfield asserts:

> the theories of subjectivities that have dominated the last thirty years of literary and cultural studies all agree on one thing. They reject the idea of the subject as a completely self-contained being that develops in the world as an expression of its own unique essence. Uniformly, they identify this image of subjectivity with the Enlightenment. (13)

Repeatedly, the subject of postmodernism appears to be decentered lacking what Jameson calls the 'cognitive maps', he is 'adrift in the world without the reference points that nineteenth century and modernist humanism provided' (Mansfield, 164). Rosemarie Tong presents the tenets of postmodernism that are radically different from the dominant values of modernity:

> There is neither a stable self nor rational powers capable of yielding universal knowledge. Truth is whatever power proclaims it to be. Freedom is the power to do as one pleases, however irrational or nonbeneficial one's actions may be judged. Science is no more objective than politics or ethics, both of which are subjective, contextual, historical, contingent, and almost always deployed to serve self-interest. And language does not represent reality, because there is no reality for it to signify. On the contrary, language constructs reality- a reality that depends on words for its existence. (Tong 207)(Tong 207)

In the recent past as suggested above by Tong, the linguistic and discursive constitution of individual identity has come to be the focus of most postmodernist/ poststructuralist theorists. In common sense parlance, which is shaped by modernist ideas, individual consciousness is natural, unified and sovereign. However, this common-sense discourse of the 'knowing-subject', an individual who is in command of language, who shapes meaning, is contested by Louis Althusser in his essay 'On Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1971). In this essay, Althusser uses a very concrete example from everyday life to bring into conflict the dominant and un-theorized cultural discourse on identity. He conjures up a policeman who hails an individual passing by a street calling out 'Hey, you there!'. In such an event, usually, the individual responds to the police officer by turning around. Althusser uses this phenomenon and proposes the constitution of the subject within language and ideology. As Weedon summarizing Althusser's position affirms that the 'the process of recognition by the individual of herself or himself as the one addressed by the call to recognition interpellates the individual as a subject within ideology' (6). Interpellation, in

Althusser's theory is the process through which an individual is (re)positioned in relation to ideology. Althusser also posits the concepts of Ideological and Repressive State apparatuses in which he assigns institutions such as education, religion, the family, culture as well as media the tag of ideological apparatuses 'within which we assume identities and become subjects' (Weedon 6). Because individuals are born in a family, usually receive education at school and college and consume different forms of cultural products, we can submit that there is no individual who can be outside the boundaries of discourse.

The social and cultural institutions of marriage, family and education produce discourses within which the individual is linguistically assigned subject position when the individual responds to the 'hailing' of the discourse. Discourses are always there before the arrival of the body and the subject positions the body takes happens within the discourse. If Enlightenment posited the individual as a transcendent subject who remains up above the realm of the culture; following Nietzsche and Foucault, the perspective on the constitution of the subject gets a dramatic shift in postmodernism, and the subject comes to be seen as constituted by social forces, a product of a multiplicity of discourses. Joan Scott instructs that 'Subjects are constituted discursively, but there are conflicts among discursive systems, contradictions within any one of them, multiple meanings possible for the subject…' (409). This tradition of putting the subject firmly within language, discourse, and power finds mention in the works of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. Butler's notion of gender performativity, for instance, attacks the modernist tradition so much so that the category of 'woman' which the feminist theory and politics endeavour to emancipate from oppression is deemed empty.

It is important to differentiate here the meaning of performativity, in the parlance of Judith butler's use, from the English word 'performance'. The word performance with which the idea of performativity is regularly and rather mistakenly conflated stands for, in the general sense of the term, an artificial show. For instance, you 'perform' the role of the protagonist or the antagonist in a play. In such a case, performance implies the presence of a priori 'real' self which is distinct or separate from the show one is artificially putting on. For example, one could be an intelligent person acting stupid before an audience for self-interest. The theory of performativity is against such dichotomy between the performer who has a real distinct hidden essence different from the performance he is giving. Butler's paradigm is essentially a radical extension of the social constructionism present in the works of earlier gender theorists and renders all acts of human

interaction, irrespective of how 'normal' or natural they seem, as a form of performance in which the performer is not all that different from performance as everything is performative.

This notion of performativity is of course derived from a tradition of philosophy of Nietzsche, Foucault, and J L Austin which firmly posits the construction of subject positions as a discursive act and in which the subject does not exist before and beyond the discourse on it. As Nietzsche affirms in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1967) that there's no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed-the deed is everything (26). The 'deed' in Nietzsche is appropriated by Foucault as discursivity, which stands for 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 54). Foucault puts discourse at the centre in his new history of ideas wherein it comes to shape our perceptions about the world and thereby participates in its construction. For Foucault discourse refers to 'ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity, and power relations which inheres in such knowledges and reactions between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern' (Weedon 108).

The power of discourse gets amplified with the notion of the linguistic performative derived from J L Austin's speech-act theory proposed in *How to Do Things With Words*. In this 1962 book, which is basically a compilation of the professor's lectures at Harvard, suggests the ways in which language is not always descriptive or denotative of the material world, but actively intervenes in it. In traditional Western philosophy, mainly the Anglophone school of 'logical positivism', the purpose of language was always thought to describe or reflect real world events by making statements such as 'it is snowing' or 'John is playing basketball with his friends'. Like a realist novel, these statements, within such a paradigm, are to be qualitatively assessed in terms of their consonance with truth or falsity of the event they are describing, something which was believed to be outside language. Austin considers this assumption fallacious, wherein the primary business of language is to be 'constative', and sets out to show how often utterances which follow the grammatical structure of a constative, i.e., a descriptive utterance, are not constatives by virtue of their different features in terms of their ability to perform actions while being at surface level simple linguistic utterances. Austin names utterances such as 'I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth' or 'I bet you six pence it will rain tomorrow' *performatives* , because these utterances do not describe a world event outside the domain of language; on the contrary, these utterance are

doing the very thing they are talking about, they are performing actions. As Austin confirms, 'The name is derived, of course, from 'perform' the usual verb with the noun 'action': it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action- it is not normally thought of just saying something' (6).

Butler's theory of gender performativity, hence, is drawn on the notion of language performativity by Austin and Foucault's discourse as 'a form of power that circulates in the social field' (Diamond and Quinby 5), as a way of understanding human experience or as a medium for the construction of reality. She questions the appearingly stable category of 'woman' which feminist politics claims to speak for and attempts to liberate. Each woman as an individual is unique and there are a number of differences between them along the axes of class, race, and ethnicity, hence it would be a falsity to put them all in one box because of their sex, or because of their ability to give birth, as such a process shall lead to the exclusion of a number of women who cannot or are unwilling to get pregnant. Therefore, 'the very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding term' (Butler 1). The gender politics that feminism as a movement initiates involves the creation of a unified singular category called 'woma/en' posited in opposition to its polar other, the 'man'; it situates women in a binary and such a process attempts to put a stable subject called 'woman'. She writes that 'by conforming to a requirement of representational politics that feminism articulate a stable subject; feminism thus opens itself to charges of gross representation' (5). This ontological fallacy, according to Butler, calls for a new epistemology in which the very category of woman is destabilized or deconstructed to fight the same 'ideological regimes of power' that have brought 'woman' into being and has situated it in binary opposition with 'man'. According to her, feminist politics itself is half responsible for creating 'woman' which in reality does not exist, and 'the task is to formulate…a critique of the categories of identity' (7). As Loxely confirms, the identity of women 'has been forged both through the intellectual and political work of feminism itself and also- more troublingly- through the regimes of power and ideology [feminism] opposes' (114). According to Butler:

> Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political geneology of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory

> frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. (45)

Further:

> Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. It seems fair to say that certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity, and that these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way… If gender attributes, however, are not expressives but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. (Butler 278-79)

For Butler, gender and desire do not emerge in a linear fashion from one's sex. The idea that gender gets socially inscribed on naturally sexed bodies is problematized by Butler in a way in which sex itself is posited a cultural category which is governed by gender. If sex is a cultural category, unlike the vision of previous theorists such as Simone De Beauvoir, who had maintained Enlightenment dualism between sex and gender, in which the former was natural and the latter cultural, then the ontological stability enjoyed by 'woman' in the feminist and the commonsensical discourse gets exploded. Butler's extreme culturalism keeps both sex and gender within the paradigm of cultural and discursive constructionism and deems woman's being problematic. She writes that 'if there is something right in Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, it follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot right- fully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification' (45).

This hesitation with regards to the stability of female gender identity in Butler's postmodern configurations: its characterization as incomplete, always in a flux, the emphasis on its instability is remarkable in its opposition to the ways in which femininity or femaleness had been taken for granted in previous feminisms. According to Dolan 'Radical feminists propose that female identity is coherent and whole, and defined in opposition to male identity. The politics that stem from this position carve out a place in gender, race, class that is solipsistically unified and that elides the differences within and between women' (60). This has indeed created a rift between

generic feminist politics which is a form of identity politics rooted in 'woman' as its locus against poststructuralist interventions that threaten to put the very idea of a separate feminine self in question. As Jill Dolan puts it very succinctly in her article 'In Defense of the Discourse: Materialist Feminism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism…And Theory':

> Over the last several years, the popularity of poststructuralism and the prevalence of identity politics in feminism has prompted the development of opposing feminist theories of the self. Identity politics claims to define women's subjectivity by their positions within race, class, or sexuality, positions which the dominant culture- and often, the dominating voices in feminism-have effectively squelched. Poststructuralist practice suggests that such coherent conceptions of identity are specious since even race, class, and sexuality, as well as gender, are constructed within discursive fields and changeable within the flux of history. According to post-structuralism, subjectivity is never monolithic or fixed, but decentered, and constantly thrown into process by the very competing discourses through which identity might be claimed. (59-60)

It is indeed true that poststructuralism has rendered the female self a fiction, not only unstable but also empty, and this has attracted a wide amount of critique and discussion which is evident sometimes in the very title of essays such as Laura Lee Downs' 'If "Woman" is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night? Identity Politics Meets the Postmodern Subject' (1993) and often

> many feminist theorists have been attacked as jargon-wielding elitists who have no political project and who trivialize years of political action organized around radical feminist epistemology…because feminist poststructuralism acquiesces to the death of the author, it's complicit with a reactionary silencing of women authors. (64)

Nothwithstanding such critique, this influential post-structural perspective which does away with the stability of sex, gender, and desire and posits 'woman' as a subject always in the process of becoming has significant implications for the reformulations of conceptual boundaries within which the concepts of men and masculinities can be conceived. If the category of woman

can be rendered empty, then the same can be said of men. Indeed, if looked at closely, it can be easily submitted that the idea of what a man is or should be changes from time to time and from culture to culture and any strict definition would lead to the exclusion of many male bodies that do not subscribe to that notion. Ruth Vanita draws our attention to such shifting contours in the perception of masculinity using her work on Urdu poetry from the late eighteenth century to the nineteenth century in which she identifies a 'shift in perception and practice of masculinity [in] urban Indian men's transformed relationship to dress' (1). Dressing up in heavy jewellery and brightly coloured embriodered clothes, she writes, did not appear a sign 'for effeminacy or any particular sexual predilection' in pre-1857 North Indian culture. In fact, 'noticing and commenting positively on another man's looks and dress was both common in both poetry and prose at this time', however, these ways of being for men witness a remarkable change with the experience of British colonization. The fondness for bright colours and extravagant jewels among men fades out along with 'certain attitudes to pleasure, play and sexuality' and gives way to drab Western dress. Vanita's attempt to display masculinity's contingency according to temporal frames is successful; and it is also worth noting that the ubiquitous practice of holding hands among Indian men is seen as a homoerotic gesture by their counterparts in the West. Even though Ruth Vanita implicitly and unwittingly promotes the notion that men in a particular culture and a given/ set time frame act and behave in a singular manner, and the possibilities of signaling the fluidities with a singular culture or time are somewhat lost; yet her reading does relativize the performance of masculinity according to space and time and is also skeptical toward the metanarrative of a natural unitary masculinity, and therefore directly adheres to the ethos of postmodern cultural theory which emphasizes on relativism and a cynicism toward grand narratives. Echoing Ruth Vanita, Todd Reeser also presents cases where

> students of the European Renaissance... are often struck when they read heterosexual men's writings about their intimate love for other men. They are even more struck when they learn that this writing does not make male writers seem effeminate or homosexual in their socio-historical context, but that, quite the contrary, expressions of male-male intimacy are more likely to reaffirm their masculinity...[and]... while some French men might appear effeminate by other cultures' standards, in context this is usually not the case. (2)

While such examples from these authors consolidate a case for multiple configurations and across cultures and across time, it is also important to point out how such knowledge of masculinity militates against the notion of a uniform oppression of women by men. As Berggren affirms that 'there are difficulties in reconciling an attempt to capture historical variability [of masculinity] with the presumption of a transhistorical structural notion of men's power over women' (234). So the nature of gender and desire cannot be pinned down with an absolute surety given the fluidity of both categories, but what about sex? Sex as a gift of nature and its distance from culture has been a dominant notion in traditional materialist feminist theory, and because critical studies on men and masculinities have come to happen under the intellectual shadow of feminist theory, this binary between sex as naturally stable and gender as culture finds implicit replication in much of theorization on masculinities. As Reeser writes to show how conventional ideas on sex assign it stability even if gender may be posited as historical: 'masculinity might be open to change, but maleness remains fixed. A man can change his relationship to violence or homophobia, it may be imagined, but biology cannot change' (72). Part of the reason why gender as well as sexuality is seen in stable terms is because of the notion that both gender and sexuality emerge directly from sex; hence any radical destabilization of sex as a natural and stable category will automatically lead to the explosion of normative and solid ideas of gender identity and sexuality. In such an endeavour postmodern theory is greatly applicable, as 'the primary shibboleth of postmodern theory...is its deprecation of "identity" in any form, whether conceptual or logical self-identity, referential identity, or the singular identity of the subject' (Ferguson and Wicke 11-12).

When Butler declares, following Derrida and Foucault, that discourse constructs the subject it speaks of and that the subject never really reaches a point of being, this trajectory of theorizing can help us construct a masculine subject that never is, but is always in the process of becoming. In such a scenario, the idea of the complete, unified, socially constructed masculine identity is untenable; therefore, the notion that men, the container or the possessor of masculinity, an oppressive identity that is solid, can be discredited. Men perform masculinity in multiple ways, and they are always in the process of being masculine, but never are, and therefore this fluidity, this instability cannot allow for the creation of men as a category that is unified and uniformly oppressive.

Whereas this chapter weaves a postmodern trajectory of masculinity theoretically, the following chapters of this thesis provide evidence from the texts to strengthen the main argument

of the thesis. For instance, following these notes on the deconstruction of masculinity, **Chapter II** of the thesis titled 'Fractured Masculinity: Polyphony, Hybridity, Difference' foregrounds the ways in which masculinity is both internally fractured as well as hybrid. The chapter is a direct assault on conventional thinking which promotes the notion that masculinity is unified, stable, and monolithic. It shows the ways in which there are multiple configurations of masculinities, and that rather than in the singular, masculinity should be perceived in the plural. Additionally, even those models that may initially appear to be normative are, in the final analysis, internally fractured in the sense that they show attributes that fall in the ambit of masculinity's alleged Others, i.e., femininity and homosexuality. All the four novels are analysed in the descending order of their publication year to achieve the desired objective.

Chapter III titled 'Time's Arrow: Masculinity as a Historical Phenomenon' looks at the ways in which masculinity is a historically contingent phenomenon; that it is neither inevitable nor static. It contributes to the main thesis of the project by showing the shifting, changing, mobile nature of desirable masculinity in the chosen texts, specifically locating the major discourses at play at the specific historical frames in which the novels are set and to foreground linkages between the nature of the dominant discourses and how they may have shaped the notion of desirable men. This helps in situating masculinity as discursive, and as discourses change from time to time, the chapter consequently supports the idea of mobility and fluidity in masculinity.

Chapter IV titled 'Dislocating Masculinity: Emasculated Males, Manly Females' shows the fluidity of masculine subject position in the discourse of Enlightenment humanism. It resists against the notion that only male bodies are the repositories of masculinity, in so far as masculinity is closely tied with reason and autonomy. Because females too in their day to day lives exercise independent choice, power in the reified sense, and rational action, it can be put forth that attributes that are regularly attached to stereotypical masculinity and men are regularly performed by women too, and this allows to contest the notion that masculinity's natural home is male bodies. This supports the main argument of the thesis by foregrounding the mobility of the supposedly manly attributes and actions and shows the binary between masculinity and femininity is false.

The last chapter of the thesis titled '**Conclusion'** wraps up the discussion highlighting main points of the thesis.

Before forging ahead with the analyses of the novels in the following chapters, I provide in the following passages, a lowdown on the authors and their texts, their oeuvre, their style, and thematic preoccupations, and lay bare the context in which they have been selected.

The texts that have been chosen to promote the case for unstable, plural masculinities have all been published since 1980, the first being Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980) followed by Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993), Kiran Nagarkar's *Ravan and Eddie* (1995), and Manju Kapur's *Custody* (2011). Because the 1980s is considered in literary history as a decade of the second coming of the Indian English novel, the chosen texts are often juxtaposed vis-à-vis the watershed moment of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) to make sense of their politics, style, and also their worth. The influence of Rushdie in English fiction writing in India has been of great scholarly attention in the recent decades and there is a significant amount of consensus that the tone and texture of much of the post-1980 Anglophone fiction ushered into 'a certain postmodern playfulness, the turn to history, a new exuberance of language, the reinvention of allegory, the sexual frankness, even the prominent references to Bollywood, all seem to owe something to Rushdie's novel' (Mee 358). Yet alongside the Rushdie ilk, which includes such names as Shashi Tharoor, Rukun Advani, Upmanyu Chatterjee, Anurag Mathur, Mukul Kesavan, Amitav Ghosh, etc., many of whom have come from the elite St. Stephen's College, Delhi, there are other authors who have wittingly resisted the charms of postmodern storytelling and have continued to write in the realist mode of the 19th century novel.

These authors can form an alternative canon of sorts which does not align with the dominant mode of linguistic playfulness, conceives reality and temporality from an unproblematic vantage point and keeps issues of plot and characterizations at the centre. All the four authors and chosen texts for this study come from this subordinate milieu of writers who have continued to write in the old-fashioned realist mode with some miniscule stylistic adventures here and there. The authors use a transparent language to write a story about the social reality of India, and there are no major experiments undertaken, and for this very reason the chosen texts are at times conceived of as middle-brow or readerly, to use Roland Barthes' distinction.

All novels have been written in the third-person omniscient objective reliable narrator, barring Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* which has both the first and the third person narration; while the third person narration allows for a smooth unfolding of the narrative, the first-

person narrator creates in the reader's heart a sense of connection and empathy, the experiences of the protagonist become more reliable. Language that is used by all the authors is transparent and accessible; there is no space for aspects of magic and supernatural elements in their works, the subject matter deals with the mundane reality of the post independent middle class. All these novels are invested in foregrounding the personal and the familial, and are not explicitly narrations of the nation, and therefore can be loosely termed, for want of a better terminology, domestic realist novels. This non-alliance with the dominant mode of rewriting national history and literary intervention in politics, the texts under consideration paint the portrait of the postcolonial middle class Indian family and therefore become useful sites of locating issues of masculinity. This is not to say that the dominant post 1980s Indian experimental novel cannot be used to theorize problematic aspects of stable manliness; yet given the fact that the realist mode forms the major chunk of overall Indian English writing and that this mode entails the documentation of the everyday life of the ordinary middle class, their drawing-room conversations to their future aspirations and common vicissitudes, it must serve as a consequential reservoir or corpus of gender performance.

Among other parallels, all of the authors were born and brought up in India in the urbanized middle classes and have had anglicised, Westernised upbringings, which deeply affect their politics. This aspect is very crucial to flag up and even establish, because masculinity or gender is not only a lived reality but also very much a political issue and here we can turn to Makarand Paranjpe to understand the overall political leanings of the Indian English fiction. He posits that:

> overall, the post-independence IE novel remains pretty bourgeois in both form and content, liberal in outlook, but implicitly accepting the social and political status quo. In all cases, the form- placid, more or less in the realistic mode, with round or flat middle-class characters, and written in a proper non-deviant, pretty English- is the best proof of the conservatism of IE fiction. (39)

Paranjpe's assertion is perhaps supported by the well-established linkages between realism and conservatism, as apparent in these lines from Catherine Belsey's influential book *Critical Practice*:

> The strategies of the classic realist text divert the reader from what is contradictory within it to the renewed recognition (misrecognition) of what he or she already 'knows', knows because the myths and signifying systems of the classic realist text re-present experience in the ways in which it is conventionally articulated in our society. (116)

Also, as Pam Morris would suggest:

> Far from producing new understanding of the world, realist novels are accused of colluding with functional reason to produce philistine readerly narratives. These give comfort to the reader's moral and cultural expectations of what life should be like rather than challenging the existing conceptual and socio-political status quo. Even when graphic accounts of suffering and injustice are represented, the effect of the surface verisimilitude of the realist form is to naturalise such happenings as part of the inevitable condition of human existence. This universalising tendency has also functioned to underpin European bourgeois morality and individualism as timeless values to be imposed upon the rest of the world. (37)

And that:

> One recurrent theme in the developing critique of realism, from modernism to a postmodern present, has been the accusation that realist writing supports a comforting conservatism: its form and content matches the naïve reader's conventional expectations about the way things are. (41)

If realist texts endorse the status quo because they employ conventional methods of representing or apprehending reality, it could well be hypothesized that notwithstanding the stated politics of the chosen works or of the novelists, which could very well be progressive, liberal, attached to the secular Nehruvian vision, the works under consideration are aligned not with any radically novel ideas on gender or masculinity, proposing new shapes and developments of its contours, but remain guards of the existing ways of being. Yet, the very act of foregrounding fluidity in the conception of masculinity in the novels through the application of Bakthinian and poststructuralist assumptions with regards to language, discourse, identity, and the novel, tools of reading the realist texts as dialogic and containing subversive voices, which otherwise, in a reading assuming modernist foundations of identity, would overlook. Therefore, such a reading allows to complicate

the aforementioned consensus of the realist text as complicit with the existing social formations, because the thrust of dialogics, for instance, 'is to open discourse to the alien and subordinated, and thus to unsettle and discountenance authority' (Brooker 73). A foregrounding of this ability of the realist novel to offer complicated formulations of masculinity even though at the surface it may appear to be soothingly conservative would be done in the three chapters post this Introduction.

Shashi Deshpande: Shashi Deshpande is an extremely prolific writer, who has tried her hand in other genres as well, such as the short story, children's books, and non-fiction, especially literary criticism. Born before the nation, in 1938, in Dharwad, Karnataka, to the famous Sanskrit scholar and playwright Sriranga, she received her education in Bombay and Bangalore, an MA in English Literature; she also worked as a journalist for the magazine 'Onlooker' in the early 1970s post her journalism diploma from Bhartiya Vidhya Bhawan. She is also the recipient of the prestigious Sahitya Akedami award in the 1990 for her novel *That Long Silence* (1989) as well as the Padma Shri in 2009. Beginning her journey of writing with the publication of a collection of short-stories, Deshpande's first published novel is *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980). Among her other prominent novels are *The Binding Vine* (1992), *A Matter of Time* (1996), *Small Remedies* (2000), and *In the Country of Deceit* (2008). Given her status as a socially conscious writer, Deshpande generates a lot of interest among the Indian academic literary critics, who regularly project her as a progressive, as an author who is committed to working towards betterment of the abject position of women in India by writing stories that generate recognition, knowledge, and empathy towards the state of gender inequality between the two sexes. However, the author herself has often stated that far from being a feminist writer, she does not adhere to any special progressive project, and writes for the entire humanity rather than for *a* particular sex, even though at a personal level she may be an advocate of feminist politics. As in this interview, she acknowledges that:

> My novels are women centered and I am not a feminist. You find contradiction there. In my personal life I am a feminist. As a writer I do not have to write about feminism and I can write about many things. I am a writer is separate and I am a feminist is separate. They are two different compartments in my life. (interview with K. Sirisha, p.222)

With regards to Deshpande's commitment to realism the critic Ayelet Ben-Yishai makes her position clear when she writes that:

> Deshpande's writing is but one of many and varied examples of the ways in which the Indian novel in English has continued to rewrite, rework, and yet ultimately maintain a dominant realist capacity, making an important contribution to the ongoing construction of this tradition in Indian literature… She offers realism as a contemporary alternative to the dominant postcolonial aesthetic by foregrounding a communal, rather than referential understanding of realist fiction, bringing the philosophical to bear on the quotidian and the conventional. (12)

Also:

> Rather than rehearsing a narrow understanding that casts realism and complexity as mutually exclusive, her embrace of the mundane and the commonplace situates literary realism as a social, communal endeavour. Deshpande employs the conventions of realist form to construct a contemporary, local, middle-class commonality, whose strength and value accrue and inhere in its common recognition of quotidian details and not in its imagined philosophical foundations. Indeed, the sought-after philosophical foundations are immanent to the commonality which is constituted through its quotidian details (12)

The interest in the quotidian life of the affluent middle-class, of which the author herself is a representative, and the resultant use of the language of the common man, and other realist practices is also affirmed by Atrey and Kirpal who writes that:

> Deshpande's primary stress is upon the middle-class ethos and her language reflects this concern. She uses English the way an average, middle-class individual educated in both the vernacular and English would use it-that is, unaffectedly, a little "incorrectly" at times, by the standards of British English. This "middle-classness", in fact, proves to be a characteristic quality of Deshpande's work. Like, for instance, the protagonists themselves who are no heroines with extraordinary qualities…their lives are without adventure, punctuated and relieved by births, weddings and deaths (115-16)

In comparing Shashi Deshpande with Gita Hariharan, noted critic Jon Mee also attests to Deshpande's realism by writing that 'Gita Hariharan has not adopted Deshpande's realist mode, though there are thematic similarities in their fiction' (373).

Vikram Seth: Born in 1952 in Calcutta to a father who was in the shoe business and a mother who was a court judge, Seth is the eldest of the three siblings and did his formal schooling in Patna and The Doon School. Seth then went to Corpus Christi College, Oxford to pursue a bachelor's in PPE (Philosophy, Politics, and Economics), and then to Stanford to get a master's degree in Economics. It was during his Ph.D in Economics at Stanford, he took a two year break to join Nanjing university in the early 80s, China for field research as his Ph.D. topic itself was connected with demography and Chinese villages. It was during his days at Stanford and later China that Seth began to take acute interest in poetry in general, and later classical Chinese poetry in particular. The author received his first literary success by writing a travelogue titled *From Heavens Lake* (1983) which chronicled his hitchhiking from Nanking to New Delhi via Tibet. Some collections of poetry which were written both before and after *Heavens Lake* were *Mappings* (1981), published by the Writer's Workshop and *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985), however, the author's love for rhyming and metre comes forth in his verse novel *The Golden Gate* (1986) which was inspired by a reading of Pushkin's verse novel *Eugene Onegin* and became what Gore Vidal called the great Californian novel and also made him the winner of Sahitya Akedami and Commonwealth Poetry Prize. Post this event, Seth came back to India and wrote the most popular and perhaps also the most ambitious *A Suitable Boy* (1993) which took him many long years to finish and became a literary sensation, was compared favourably with the world's greatest writers of all times such as George Eliot, Leo Tolstoy, Marcel Proust, Balzac, etc. Besides this he also kept on writing poetry and got published collections of poetry such as the very popular *All Those Who Sleep Tonight* (1990), *Beastly Tales from Here and There* (1991) and a volume of translations *Three Chinese Poets* (1992).

Seth's style of writing, his transparent and languorous prose, his adherence to metre and rhythm at a time when such rigidities and conventions have fallen into disuse or disfavour brings to him a lot of attention both from the critics and the average reader. He reminds the reader of a bygone past when realism reigned supreme, a past era of simplicity and linearity, when the authors engaged explicitly with an unproblematized social reality, an act of anachronism. As Mohapatra and Nayak attest:

> the distinguishing feature of *A Suitable Boy* is its recasting of nineteenth-century English novelistic conventions as popularized by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and George Eliot…Language Seth feels, should work to supplement the story, as is the case in an Austenian novel, rather than to distract attention from it, as in a postmodern narrative…the reigning paradigm of Indian English fiction is postmodernism. The magical realism that Salman Rushdie has made immensely popular is also a variant of it. To write a realist novel about people and places, as Seth seems to have done, is…nothing short of revolutionary. (27)

In an age when a great number of new authors are coming out of creative writing schools, armed with the latest critical theory in fashion in the politicized departments of English of Anglo-American academy, Seth, not being part of such a milieu, could not have written a stylistically contemporary novel. This is also evident in his poetry which uses rhyme and meter. In an interview with Stanford Magazine, Seth described the alienation he had to encounter on his different or anachronistic approach to writing: 'Since I was studying economics, not English, I stood outside the orbit of the latest critical theories and did not realize that writing in rhyme and meter would make me a sort of literary untouchable' (Interview with Cynthia Haven in Stanford Magazine). Seth himself accepts that 'the kinds of books I like reading are books where the authorial voice doesn't intrude too much -- 19th-century novels, and some 20th-century novels as well…They don't try to pull you up with the brilliance of their sentences as much as pull you into a world'.

Kiran Nagarkar: Kiran Nagarkar is an author who most critics suggest should attract more attention than he does, both in India and outside. It is strange to see a writer of the caliber of Nagarkar not garnering much accolades or attention. In the very introduction to her edited book *The Shifting Worlds of Nagarkar's Fictions* (2004), critic Yasmin Lukmani asks pertinent questions with regards to the under-rated-ness of Kiran Nagarkar's works:

> How does one explain why *Cuckold* is not far better known, both in India and abroad? Why has it not attracted the kind of interest and readership that it richly deserves in spite of being so highly rated by literary connoisseurs, and in spite of having won the Sahitya Akademi Award, India's highest literary award? (vii)

Echoing this sentiment, Meenakshi Mukherjee also asserts that 'Kiran Nagarkar is a writer who deserves to be known, read and discussed far more widely than has happened so far' (25). Another acclaimed author/ critic Makrand Paranjpe, while limiting his discussion to Nagarkar's *Cuckold*, wrote in an article in *The Pioneer* that 'Kiran Nagarkar's *Cuckold* is a most extraordinary novel. Alas, I doubt whether we have the means and the ability to appreciate it, applaud it, and promote it in a fitting manner. Our book industry or culture of reading is just not equipped to recognize what a splendid achievement it is' (The pioneer n.p) and further in another essay titled 'Kiran Nagarkar and the Tradition of the Indian English Novel' he writes that, 'There are few living Indian writers whom I admire as much as Kiran Nagarkar and, perhaps, none that I'm as fond of' (n.p) This lack of recognition, according to Yasmeen Lukmani, may have to do with the way in which the Orientialist doctrine has been imbibed by Indians, in which only when an author has earned a reputation in the West becomes palatable to our eyes, and because Nagarkar's fiction does not aim to please the Western reader, and takes for granted the ignorance of the outsider of Indian history and cultural traditions, he does not succeed at signing multi-million dollar deals with foreign publishers like Pankaj Mishra or Vikram Seth or Arundhati Roy. As Meenakshi Mukherjee asserts: 'Nagarkar's novels are so intensely and unselfconsciously located in their milieu…that for readers outside the cultural context of India, it may not be easy to respond to the humour in one, or decode the allusions and references woven into the texture of the other' (27).

Born in a Chitpavan Brahmin family in Maharashtra which swore to the ideals of egalitarianism through its membership to the Brahmo Samaj, and were considerably more Anglicized and Westernized from their other Hindu brethren, Nagarkar had had an Anglicized upbringing. Having studied English Literature at Ferguson college Pune and another degree from SIES college Mumbai. He worked for some time as a copywriter in an advertising agency along with fellow writer Dillip Chitre wrote however his first novel titled *Saat Sakkam Trechalis* (1974) was written in Marathi, and was later translated into English with the title *Seven Sixes are Forty Three* went on to earn flak from the traditional Marathi literary community but later won accolades from English critics for bringing modernism in Marathi literature. Nagarkar's next work *Ravan and Eddie* (1994) also started off as a Marathi novel, however, later on Nagarkar changed tracks and wrote the novel in English. It is a story of two boys, one Hindu and one Christian, who live alongside like parallel lines in a Bombay chawl. It is their journey, their growth which is chronicled by the novel in a third-person narrative along with plenty of authorial intrusions to

enlighten the reader on the vicissitudes of working class life in India. The journey of Ravan and Eddie continues in the publication of *The Extras* (2012), and ultimately comes to an end in *Rest in Peace* (2015). Apart from this series, the author has also written a meditation on Jihadi terrorism, a topical novel, in *God's Little Soldier* (2006), along with a number of plays such as *Bedtime Story* (1978) which was written using the Mahabharata as the background, though because of the strong opposition against its theme by the Hindu Right, it was banned for 17 years. Other important plays are *Stranger Amongst Us*, and *Black Tulip.* Most commentators agree that a discussion on the stylistics of Kiran Nagarkar is very difficult given that the author has not adhered to a singular mode of writing. Not only his thematic interests, but his mode of dealing with such diverse interests is also uniquely diverse. As Shobha Vishwanath affirms:

> What struck me most about Nagarkar's work is the fact that the reader is unable to pin him down to a single style. The autobiographical and staccato tendency of his first novel *Seven Sixes are Forty-Three*, which moves between the past and present has little to compare with the breathless narrative of *Ravan and Eddie*. And in *Cuckold*, Nagarkar treads an entirely different ground, with a style that is so deft, defiant of tradition and so well able to capture the matter…It does so to such an extent that it bears no apparent resemblance to his previous works, or for that matter any work of fiction that I have read. (192)

While it is true that Nagarkar in *Ravan and Eddie* has a playful tone; his bawdiness and ribaldry is distinct from the subtle Austenian irony of Seth, and is very much in opposition to the sombre nature of Kapur's and Deshpande's novels, and which may posit him closer to Rushdie than with George Eliot, it does not take away his position as a practitioner of unalloyed realism.

Manju Kapur: A retired professor from the University of Delhi, Kapur is the only author among the others in this study who also has had a long stint as a teacher of English literature. Kapur was born in 1948, studied at Miranda House, Delhi university for her BA after which she went to Canada to complete her MA in English at Dalhousie university and came back to join her alma mater as a lecturer. Like Shashi Deshpande and Kiran Nagarkar, she began her journey as a writer much later in her life, in her 40s, and her first novel was *Difficult Daughters* (1998) which got her the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for best first book. This was followed by *A Married Woman* (2003) which again revolved around the travails of middle class womanhood and even touched

upon lesbianism. Kapur's next novel *Home* published by Random House India in 2006 followed by *The Immigrant* in 2008 in which she used her experience of alienation of her days as a graduate student in the US. *Custody* (2011) is her most recent novel. Kapur has not experimented with other genres of writing such as non-fiction, poetry, or drama, and so the variety in her oeuvre is rather limited. The only piece of non-fiction is an anthology compiled and edited by Kapur on a host of women writers from the Indian subcontinent, their insecurities and triumphs, which goes by the title *Shaping the World: Women Writers on Themselves* and came out in 2014.

Kapur has been called the chronicler of the Indian middle class of which she herself is a representative figure, and her simple, clear prose, stands defiant against the magnetic and influential appeal of Rushdie's verbal pyrotechnics. On this she has admitted to having tried using the formal technics of Rushdie but later shifted to writing simple prose. In an interview to The Telegraph Kapur affirms that:

> In the '90s when I started, I used to write differently. I experimented with magic realism. After all, we all like to think of ourselves as Rushdie's heirs…then along the way I realised it didn't work for me. I started writing simply, so that it wasn't attention-seeking. (Basu)

Kapur is also seen as a writer whose canvas is small; the family remains very much the centre of her narratives and within that frame she also likes to introduce to the reader issues of gender which do not come to the fore explicitly, but are woven implicitly within the narrative. In the words of Arundhati Basu:

> A lifetime of reading and more than half of it teaching English literature comes through in Kapur's books. She traces the social and economic forces of the times and juxtaposes them with gender relationships within the frame of a family. In fact, the family is the centrepoint around which her stories revolve.

The author on this aspect herself affirms that her 'imagination works around the family. There's so much to say about it. Issues of gender, power, and social values are all played out in the sight of the family'. In this manner, Kapur, like other chosen authors and texts, keeps the domestic, private space at the centre, and weave narratives which correspond to the Indian social reality, and therefore provide adequate space to locate the dynamics of gender, and from the perspective of this study, masculinity.

The choice of two male authors and two female authors who write in the realist mode and limit their canvas to the domestic sphere has been done to make space for equal representation of the two sexes and to apprehend, if possible, any divergence or convergence in their representation or politics. The choice of fictional texts from the pantheon of Indian English fiction has been done because of more familiarity and interest in locating the point of interlinkages between gender and cultural artifacts with special reference to the Indian context. Additionally, the Indian English novel has over the past few decades become a force to reckon with both in the market, the publishing industry, in India and outside, and the academia, in the discipline of English studies, where post the arrival of postcolonial theory, the fetishization of literature written in the Anglo-American world has ceased to be the only object of interest and analysis. An average Indian student interested in taking up a research degree in English studies today might not be informed that choosing the odd subject of Indian English writing for research could, at one point in time, cost one his/ her academic career. This is what one gathers while reading the preface to Meenakshi Mukherjee's seminal work on literary criticism of Indian English writing, *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English,* published first in 1971, and which really started off as a Ph.D. dissertation in the late 1960s. As per Mukherjee:

> when I was writing my dissertation, I had to constantly defend my choice of topic to many well-wishers who expressed grave doubts about the research worthiness of this body of writing. The misgivings were of several kinds: 'Who are these novelists you are working on? Never heard of them,' was the most common reaction. 'Can Indians really write good English? Why are you wasting your time on these mediocre writers?' was another. More serious, and prophetic as it turned out to be, was the warning that professionally my topic would go against me. 'Which respectable English Department would give you a job if your Ph.D is on something so peripheral?' In later years I was indeed to be rejected at several job interviews precisely on that ground (Preface)

However, apart from this, the choice of the fictional texts has been made because of their continued reliance on the realist model of writing at a time when the dominant practice of writing in Anglophone fiction had taken a postmodern turn and which had cast its long shadow both in the transnational book market as well as in academic criticism. While the older realists, the big three, i.e., Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R. K. Narayan, have been provided adequate attention by

influential critics; the arrival of magical realism, other forms of avant-garde experimentalisms, the 'resistance', the emphasis on 'oppositionality' of the post-colonial aesthetic brought writers such as Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and Arundhati Roy onto the global literary map subsequently pushing the localized realism of writers such as Deshpande, Nagarkar, and Manju Kapur to the critical fringes of the metropolitan English departments. As Arnab Chakaldar writes 'Routinely writers, and texts by writers, that do not locate their narratives in relation to national allegories or "East/West" encounters or a transnational subjectivity, are marginalized or ignored' (84).

The significance of this thesis lies then in proposing that such a selection of texts is misplaced taking into consideration the myriad possibilities within realism. Apart from allegorizing the nation in implicit ways, as explored in the third chapter, the realist novel also has the capacity to provide ample space to problematize not only the idea of essential masculinity but also the notion of the naturalizing tendency of realism itself.

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Chapter 2

Fractured Masculinity: Polyphony, Hybridity, Difference

'If you stare long enough at serious people they will begin to appear comical'

- Manu Joseph, *Serious Men*

This chapter attempts to provide support to the main argument of the thesis, as discussed in the previous chapter, which postulates that masculinity is inchoate and incoherent given the difference, the polyphony of men's attributes and endeavours, and that any coherent attempt at describing masculinity is fraught with internal fracturing and inconsistencies.

To consolidate this position, to foreground this unpindownability, the multiplicity, the contradictions, and the fluidities of men's performance of masculinity through the reading of the chosen fictional texts, to rescue masculinity from essentialism and singularity, Bakhtinian notion of 'dialogism' and 'polyphony' as well as the poststructuralist notions of 'hybridity' and 'difference' come to aid. Assuming all the chosen novels' nature as dialogic, as something which is 'constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses' (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 18), this chapter reads the novels as constructed via dialogues among disparate images on masculinity.

In other words, this chapter seeks to establish that male subjects within these narratives assume very different subject positions, and more often than not, their position is not aligned with the dominant conception of masculinity. In addition to that, their position, their being, is always unstable as a masculine subject because of internal contradictions and radical fluidity. In fact, even those masculinities which may register more easily as embodiments of 'hegemonic' masculinity can be problematized by foregrounding their inherent instabilities. This kind of foregrounding is missing in most critical studies on men and masculinities given that most studies employing the influential concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' have a tendency to highlight men's toxic coercive power and relegate other mundane aspects of everyday masculinity to the fringes. This aspect is

very strong in both Raweyn Connell's ethnographical accounts to Michael Kimmel's sociology of masculinity.

A great deal of critical studies on men and masculinities are indebted to the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' proposed by Raweyn Connell in his critique of the then dominant sex-role theory of the 1950s; the role theory's blindness to the questions of power in both inter-gender and intra-gender dynamics. In Connell's view, sex-role theory stemmed from a sense of biological determinism and failed to theorize the relationship between structure and agency (Demetriou 338). To come out of the impasse, his concept of hegemonic masculinity was to encapsulate not only the changing nature of the sex role which the earlier sex role theory was unable to grasp, but also to show that the deviance from the expected sex role was the only way in which other forms of manhood manifested themselves. This allowed for the articulation of the idea of multiplicity, of dynamism and change, of hierarchy, of power within the context of masculinity, which the earlier theory of sex role had failed to notice. Yet, with the passage of time, a critique of the concept of hegemonic masculinity has developed which accuses it of disregarding a few grey areas and providing a narrative of masculinity which is too coherent and infected by modernist dualisms. For instance, Michael Moller informs that:

> the concept of hegemonic masculinity conditions researchers to think about masculinity and power in a specific and limited way: that masculine power is possessive and commanding and that it is exercised by an identifiable few who can then be rightly (even righteously) criticised… a rather formulaic mode of thinking about power with which most of us are very familiar. Thus a central strategy in the literature which draws on Connell's work is to identify which groups of males possess a hegemonic masculinity, and to then elaborate how their masculinity subordinates women and other men. (269)

In a similar vein, Demetriou contends that

> The secondary literature that employs the concept of hegemonic masculinity tends to reproduce the dualism constructed by Connell. Hegemonic masculinity is presented as a "thoroughly heterosexual," violent, or even criminal configuration of practice. It is always seen, as Patricia Mann noted, as a substantially negative type

> that is unified and coherent…hegemonic masculinity is thus a closed and unified totality that incorporated no otherness. (347)

In other words,

> Connell's model of masculinity imposes – or as Jefferson (2002) puts it, attributes – a preconceived model of power and identity to the messy complexity of real people's lives; an attribution which has the effect of obscuring the complexity of how people experience and perform both gender and power, and much else besides…we need to explore the plurality, complexity and contradictions of masculine experiences and feelings rather than seek only to locate their respective positions in relation to a single, coherent pattern of masculinity. (Moller 270-275)

Notwithstanding such criticism, this structuralist matrix of masculinity is employed quite regularly in the landscape of literary criticism which aims to explore the construction of masculinity in literature. For instance, as recent as the year 2015, Peter Ferry has published *Masculinity in Contemporary New York Fiction* which explores the counter-hegemonic models of masculinity offered by three major contemporary fiction writers hailing from New York. In a similar vein, Angelina Subrayan's engagement with the concept is evident in her article 'Complicity to Hegemonic Masculinity in D H Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*' (2016). There is no dearth of critical articles and books that apply the influential structuralist concept of hegemonic masculinity to the reading of both contemporary and classic fictions. While the attempt at coherence predicated on the structuralist principles of taxonomy of masculinities does allow for the production of generalizable and accessible knowledge; it overlooks the complex ways in which much of different subject positions within the matrix of masculinity are hybrid, and often defy attempts at clear-cut definition and understanding as this chapter posits.

So, in order to break away from this excessive reliance on tools of structuralism and modernism which are focused on bringing forth a singular and coherent narrative of masculine domination through critical reading which suppresses the plurality of men's voices in the novel, the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bhaktin comes to rescue with his concepts such as 'polyphony', and 'heteroglossia'. Bakhtin's formulation of the discourse of the novel deeply

complicate the idea of the narrative having a single meaning and promotes the idea of plurality of voices in the novel. In his assessment of Dostoevsky's novels in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* (1933) which was later published with some additions as *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bhaktin posits that 'Dostoevsky is the creator of the polyphonic novel…a fundamentally new novelistic genre' (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 7).

According to him '*a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characterisitic of Dostoevsky's novels*' *(Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 6). What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather *a plurality of consciousnesses…*' (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 6). Therefore, what is special about the art of Dostoevsky is that he actively resists the monologism of other genres of literature, be it lyrical poetry, tragedy, and, especially epic and his work is characterized by the quality of polyphonic music. Bhaktin sees the novel, not just the novels of Dostoevsky, as a distinctive genre 'the sole genre that continues to develop…still far from having hardened…as yet uncompleted' as opposed to the epic 'that has not only long since completed its development, but one that is already antiquated. With certain reservations, we can say the same for the other major genres, even for tragedy' (*Dialogic Imagination* 3). In the words of Michael Holoquist: 'in monological literature of any kind-poetry, drama, or novel- the author is the sovereign subject of discourse, while his or her characters are merely objects of that discourse' as opposed to the dialogic, or the polyphonic novel 'which indicates the presence of many voices' (*Dialogic Imagination* 74). The novel is also stylistically unique in that in it

> the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities, often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different linguistic stylistic controls…these heterogeneous stylistic unities, upon entering the novel combine to form a structured artistic system, and are subordinated to the higher stylistic unity of the work as a whole, a unity that cannot be identified with any single one of the unities subordinated to it. (*Dialogic Imagination* 261)

Not only 'the novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice' (*Dialogic Imagination* 261), but also a forum to 'show…that internally unfinalizable something in man' (58). According to Peter Neville Rule:

> Bakhtin was not a systematic philosopher in the tradition of Hegel and Kant. He was strongly drawn to thinkers such as Buber, Kierkegaard and, in the world of fiction, Dostoevsky and Rabelais, who reacted against systematicity and emphasized the variety and multiplicity of lived experience…this links to his insistence, like Friere, on the unfinalizability of human being, which is a precondition for selfhood and ethical responsibility. (Rule 30)

This notion of unpindownability and unfinalizability of consciousness, of man, as the prerequisite of the polyphonic novel when excavated in *The Dark Holds No Terror* by Shashi Deshpande allows for listening to the multiplicity of masculine voices which militates against the monologism with which masculinity in the conventional discourse is subsumed with.

In this debut novel Shashi Deshpande is navigating contradictory experiences of men and the terrain of multiple masculinities. Given that her fictions invariably deal with middle class family dynamics and by so doing keep the interrelations of men and women sharply in focus, it automatically allows an analysis into the ways in which the texts contain the spirit of dialogism and contradictions in manly behaviours and attributes. The following exposition will make a case that the chosen text's attempt to maintain its readers double-consciousness, i.e., the readers' belief in the characters' independence and reality with whom they connect at various levels and the simultaneous awareness that the piece of writing they are engaging with is essentially fictional, the characters unreal, constructed, merely puppets in the hands of the author is what leads to her creating ambiguity and contradictions in the representation of masculinity. This goes well with the Bakhtinian notion that the novel in its capacity for open-endedness is special from other literary forms, mainly the epic, as it can correspond well with the open-endedness, confusion, ambiguities of actual reality of the material world. In other words, Deshpande's fiction has an investment, though not easily noticeable, in presenting masculinity in all its ambiguities, contradictions, and hybridities, in its innate capability as a piece of realist fiction to capture the 'unfinished, still-evolving' characteristic of everyday life.

Given a predilection for complexity in both narrative strategy and characterization, Deshpande refuses to divulge concrete, comprehensive details of exact motivations behind actions of its major characters, and frequently uses speculation rather than authorial certitude. It is as if we the audience and even the narrative itself has limited access to characters, their actions and

motivations. In so doing, Deshpande resolves what Maria Su Wang calls the operative paradox of realism, i.e., ‘the representation of character autonomy in authorial construction’ (293); in other words, how realist texts ‘sustain their readers’ belief in the autonomy of the fictive world,’ (291) how they achieve the much important reality effect by making the reader ‘simultaneously knowing and disavowing, believing in the autonomous reality of fiction, and yet acknowledge it as illusory’ (292).

Sung demonstrates in her essay ‘the vital role that partial knowledge, uncertainty, and ambiguity play in forging the double-layered structure of realist narrative… that one way realist authors hide authorial control is through the use of uncertainty and ambiguity in the depiction of characters’ actions in crucial scenes’ (295). Sung’s attempt to construct a theory of how realist novel resolves its operative paradox is a continuation of a long- standing debate on the nature of the novel between Bhaktin’s and George Lukács’s theorization, their opposition with regards to the realist novel’s narrative strategies, especially its correspondence or the lack of it with the epic. For Bhaktin, the novel, as opposed to other closed antiquated genres such as the epic and tragedy, is

> characterized by an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present) …the novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding. (*Dialogic Imagination* 7)

To Sung ‘Bakhtin aligns the novel’s representation of lived reality with contingency: it is the novel’s capacity for expressing uncertainty that fosters the sense of a plausibly autonomous fictional world’ (293) and so it can be argued that Deshpande’s bid to forge ‘the sense of a plausibly autonomous fictional world’ in the reader’s imagination with her use of expressions of uncertainty such as ‘as if’ and ‘perhaps’ while describing narrator’s own and other characters’ actions which consequently make evident the incompleteness, their recalcitrance to the ordering and disciplining on the part of the author. For instance, when Saru asks Baba if he would like to have a look at the photograph of Saru’s son and daughter, Saru’s father shows immediate interest about which the narrator first informs about a certain tone of apology in his tone and then speculates ‘as if he knew he had been remising not showing any curiosity about his grandchildren’

(32). The exact reason for the apologetic tone in his voice is not provided; the use of 'as if' only gives us a possibility. Deshpande compliments this feature of her style with frequent negations to foreground the impossibility of reaching any definite conclusions about anything. For this the author uses the phrase 'and yet'. Consider Saru's monologue:

> There is this strange new fear of disintegration. A terrified consciousness of not existing. No, worse. Of being just a ventriloquist's dummy, that smiles, laughs, and talks only because of the ventriloquist. The fear that without the ventriloquist, I will regress, go back to being a lifeless puppet, a smirk pasted on to its face.
>
> Perhaps my ventriloquist is my profession. For, as long as there is a patient before me, I feel real. Between patients there is nothing. And yet I find myself taking more and more time between patients these days. As if it is restful not to be. (Deshpande 22)

In a small passage such as this the use of 'perhaps', 'and yet', and 'as if,' can be gathered which is meant to keep the reader hungry for order and certainty which could appear like this without the expressions of hesitation and incompletion: My ventriloquist is my profession. For, as long as there is a patient before me, I feel real. Between patients there is nothing. I find myself taking more and more time between patients these days. It is restful not to be.

Deshpande uses this narrative strategy regularly to give her reader incomplete information about the consciousness of the characters including that of the protagonist-narrator who is unable to make any judgement with certainty. The absence of certainty is conspicuous; it gives the reader an experience of real life which is really characterized by uncertainty and contingency, of incompleteness, of the pursuit of fulfilment. Buttressed by this technique, the author helps the reader negotiate the otherwise unnegotiable paradox in which the reader has to dive deep, in full faith, into a world created by the author in absolute knowledge that the world in the novel is only a lie, just a collection of words put together skilfully in order. In the words of Maria Su Wang 'the reader must adopt the uncertain, partial knowledge of the character even as she is certain about the finality of the already-finished text…because an asymmetry of knowledge…crucially facilitates this immersive fictional reading experience' or how 'knowledge differences in both narrative and authorial audiences can shape and create the illusion of character autonomy' (292). In terms of

character construction, the author creates ambiguous characters who display this sense of uncertainty and incompleteness in acute terms. We will start with Baba, the father.

The novel draws reader's attention to Saru's father pretty much from the beginning as we see Saru standing at the door of her natal home invoking the *Krishna-Sudama* story clearly referring to her state helplessness and utter misery, she being the *Sudama* while her father *Krishna*. The very first scene does evoke a sense of a powerful father who could also be generous. Having left her immediate family, a husband and two children, the kind of family which is situated as the ideal portrait for all young women, Saru is uncertain if there would be any space for her in her old home, if the owner of the house, her father would allow her to inhabit a space which she had abandoned once for love of a caste other. The father lets her in without the effusiveness expected of a host. On the contrary, the father appears to be weak and disinterested, in fact significantly emasculated in the first instance, albeit later contradicted with opposite data. We are initially told that Saru's father 'was feeble. No, worse than that, that he was a nonentity and didn't matter…a negative man, incapable of strong feelings' (Deshpande 30). Saru recalls this post her entrance to the house where she grew up, a humble lower middle-class household, with a weak father and a domineering mother in a traditional rural setting. This is strange because as members of a patriarchal culture we are led to believe that the father is origin and source of power and authority in the average Indian family and the mother shows subservience to the whims of the omnipotent father apart from being the reservoir, the embodiment of love, empathy, and tenderness. Clearly, Saru's mother Kamala is not trapped in a feminine mystique, as Betty Friedan would put it.

Here we are led to witness the opposite. Here, the father has clearly switched places with the mother in terms of roles, duties, and embodiment. We immediately feel a sense of pity for the weak and old father and a sense of betrayal for the mother who has not conformed to the role. As we navigate the limited plot further which is really, predominantly, a landscape of memory, about Dhruva, Saru's dead brother, and how his death further expands the chasm in the mother-daughter relationship given that the blame of death falls on Saru's shoulders and the family then becomes and remains forever like 'the three points of a triangle, eternally linked, forever separate' (Deshpande 141).

While the father clearly does not accuse, and malign his daughter to have committed the crime of killing her own brother by drowning; we also do not witness him actively refuting the vociferous accusations by the mother at the daughter, the venom of explicit hatred that the mother constantly spews against the alleged assailant. The father maintains a deafening silence instead of reasoning the issue with the mother or playing the interlocuter between the two to resolve the misunderstanding. His reticence becomes the evidence for his acute frailty. Yet, both the faintheartedness and emotional distance with which Baba is attributed and identified by the reader is only a construct in the mind of the narrator-protagonist, and the reality of Baba's actions and psyche is much more complex, of which we come to know through the omniscient narrator. It also means that in the imagination of the protagonist Baba will continue to remain puny and fragile. We learn that it was Baba who had supported Saru in her endeavour to attain financial independence, even though her dominant mother had ordained otherwise on account of Saru's sex and financial difficulties. While the mother retains her position of not forgiving Saru for marrying outside her caste and displays unwavering rigidity, the father on the other hand not only welcomes her inside the house, shows interest in the protagonist's family life, the husband and the children, but is also the only character in the entire novel which also has space for Saru's close childhood friends whom Saru chooses to open her heart to notwithstanding the unsettling nature of the problem. On occasions 'Baba's figure took on a stature and dignity she had never invested it with' (Deshpande 72). Even though Baba himself was a man of limited means, he did not allow his meagre income to come in the way of Saru's educational and professional advancement and had encouraged her to pursue her passion to become a medical practitioner while her mother had remained sceptical of her own daughter's educational attainments and critical of her physical appearance. It can be affirmed then that Baba embodies both weakness and strength, both detachment and attachment; he is both a non-entity and at the same time the most important entity for Saru, especially with regards to her problems at home with Manohar, who himself embodies contradictions and hybridity, and a sense of incompleteness.

From a normative perspective, it is Manohar who at first appears to embody the traits of desirable, alpha masculinity. Indeed, his masculinity, his heroism, his extraordinariness underpins his magnetism as a romantically desirable male subject to the protagonist who is shown to suffer from a sense of extreme low self-esteem. The dark, unattractive Saru longs to be the 'Harriet' to his 'Shelley', a title and a future of fame bequeathed on Manohar by his literature professor, in full

ignorance of the eventual fate of Harriet. In Manohar's description, the serious literary novel, for a certain length, wears the look of a romance. Consider how Manohar is perceived by the protagonist: 'He was the figure I fantasized about, the person round whom I wove my foolish dreams…always the age old feminine dream of a superior conquering male…it was like having a crush on a movie star. It was not part of real life' (Deshpande 53-54). These could very well be lines lifted from a generic romance novel in which the weak and poor heroine pines for submission toward a strong and flawless male significant other. We are told that Manohar, in retrospect, had

> an aura of distinction…he was a good student academically, he was also the secretary of the Literary Association, actively associated with the Debating Union and the life and soul of the Dramatic Society. And in addition to all this, a budding writer, a poet of promise, with some poems already published in magazines. (Deshpande 50)

In opposition to Manohar's charms, talents, and accomplishments, Saru's assessment of herself is rather negative and reeks of inferiority which is most evident in her monologues, in her rhetorical questions about how she could 'evoke an emotion so strong in anyone…a gnawing disbelief…how could I be anyone's beloved?' (Deshpande 65). Yet, we capture, as the narration moves along, that rather than a hero of epic proportions as he is perceived first, Manohar's self is fluid, variable, contingent, and predicated upon a whole set of things outside the realm of his psyche and body. Because, as times change, it is not only the physical contours that respond to the vagaries of temporality like the loss of that 'keen looking-into-you gaze' but also a subsequent shift in the overall persona, 'no more seems an attractive man…something missing in the eyes, in the face, in the man himself' (Deshpande 48). Manu's epic fall, his failure to continue to remain the man of dream, of unrealized promise of 'he, a man set apart from the others, above the other' (Deshpande 65); Saru's growing condescension on his inability to pull the couple out of the financial morass that they were in post marriage; his meagre salary from a job as a lecturer of English in a private college; Saru's growing reliance on a man (Boozie) outside marriage for financial and romantic satisfaction, all culminate into a possibility of a different, violent manhood which stay side by side with an apparently peaceful self in the daylight.

While there are plenty of links in the narrative which point toward Manu's growing sense of emasculation, his eventual avatar as the monster in the night, his sadism, such as Saru's own

speculation: ‘perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband’ (Deshpande 36); yet we are deprived of the exact reason behind, both in the context of Saru’s regular use of words and phrases signifying uncertainty such as ‘perhaps,’ and the fact that we are not allowed an intrusion into the mind of the doer of the (mis)deed. To the narrator ‘it was part of the same pattern that had mystified her from the day it began...his cheerfulness the next morning, his air of being as usual’ (Deshpande 96).

If there is one character that shows that masculinity is, in and of itself, a non-existent entity, that it is only surface, predicated upon other signifiers of strength and (sexual) aggression, it is Boozie, whose appropriation of codes of masculinity, his mimicry, allows us to conceive masculinity only as a bundle of empty stereotypes which can be co-opted and performed. Boozie initially comes across as an aggressively masculine character who is defined as ‘perilously close to a woman's magazine hero...dark, rugged, handsome, masterful’ (Deshpande 88). Boozie’s masculine aura is enhanced by a ‘faint masculine perfume’ and ‘the caustic humour with which he flayed his staff…his fondness for pretty girls’ (Deshpande 88). However, we later learn that while his ‘masculinity overwhelmed her [Saru]…that behind it all was nothing’ (Deshpande 97).

The narrator is referring to the closeted homosexual status of Boozie, a ‘nebulous aura of feminity’ beneath the veneer of a hypermasculine tenor, his well-carved image of a philanderer, his authoritativeness, his roguish charms. Boozie in his constructued, inflated masculinity is a fine manifestation of drag and parody, two concepts of Judith Butler which make evident ‘the disjunction between the body of the performer and the gender that is being performed, parodic performances such as drag effectively reveal the imitative nature of all gender identities’ (Salih 65). Boozie, it appears, has identified the common markers of stereotypical masculinity and perform it, like in a theatre, in an amplified version. His simulation of rugged, normative masculinity exemplifies the constructedness, the artifice of the heterosexual masculine identity because ‘*in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself- as well as its contingency*’ (Butler 137). As echoed by Bell et al:

> The excessive performance of masculinity and femininity within homosexual frames exposes not only the fabricated nature of heterosexuality but also its claims to authenticity. The ‘macho’ man and the ‘femme’ women are not tautologies, but

> work to disrupt conventional assumptions surrounding the straight mapping of man/masculine and woman/feminine within heterosexual and homosexual constructs. (33)

If Boozie's exaggerated masculinity implicitly attacks the essentialism which gender identity is usually suffused with, there are other male subjects in *The Dark Holds No Terror* who do not conform to the ideals of normative patriarchal masculinity, and while being heterosexual, practice their gender in a way that is aligned much more with the discourse of liberalism than the discourse of sexism. They are unlike the shallow alpha males or female magazine heroes as Manu and Boozie are; they are the understated figures of everyday masculinity who are often forgotten due their lack of spectacularity and apparent heroism.

In opposition to Manohar who was very popular in college due to his vivacity and charm, his poetry being the expression of his creativity and culture, Padma, for instance, is 'poor Padma' because he is 'always so tactless, so unerringly hitting on the wrong thing to say…he was the most unpopular student in the class' (Deshpande 126). It turns out that not only was Padma an outcast, due to his lack of social intelligence but that he had lacked that very thing which in conventional wisdom forms the basis of normative masculinity; the author uses the phrase 'a will to compete and succeed', clearly alluding to Nietzsche's will-to-power. Padma is described by a lack. If success could be read as the phallic signifier of hegemonic masculinity, then those described by a lack allegorically become 'the male eunuchs', to borrow and play with Germaine Greer's phraseology. 'He had always lacked something, a hardness maybe, or a will to compete and succeed' (Deshpande 126). Padma, as opposed to Manohar, also does not expect his wife to restrict herself to perform conventional gendered wifely duties in the private sphere and is in fact visibly perturbed because his wife has internalized the very configurations which he himself has resisted, hence the anger:

> My wife! She can't talk about anything but servants and the children. And prices. I earn enough, but she's perpetually trying to economize. She never has her food until I go home and have mine, she cooks just what I like, and she never calls me by my name. (Deshpande 132)

If the Alpha husbands demand the retention of clear gender boundaries and enforce hierarchy between the sexes as in the case of Manohar and even Mohan from *That Long Silence* (1988), then

the presence of alternatives like Padma militate against the notion of a unified patriarchal male attitude. Male subjects like Padma practice in their intergender relationship camaraderie rather than coercion or straightforward domination, and bring in the plurality in men's actions.

This plurality in men's actions, the constant fluctuations, their being in a constant flux also finds its embodiments in the form of Arun Mehra in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* in whose actions we find not only great divergence from his own brother who encapsulates and represents a different form of masculinity, but also we find that there is no uniformity in Arun Mehra's attitude toward his others, and that he maintains different sets of behaviours for different sets of people. The two brothers of Lata, around whom the novel revolves, Arun, the elder one and the younger Varun, are polar opposites, and while Arun is a sophisticated, accomplished, executive in a corporation Bensten & Pryce, which is populated largely by the white British; Varun is described as the 'meek brother' and a 'nervous shadow'. 'He was thin, unsure of himself, sweet-natured and shifty-eyed' (Seth 11).

Even though belonging to the educated elites, Varun's socializing is limited to his aimless, unambitious, working class 'shamsu friends,' those who engaged in betting on horse racing and drinking locally made alcoholic drink *shamshu*. Arun, on the other hand, is 'twenty-five, a tall, fair, intelligent, pleasant-looking bully who kept his siblings in place by pummelling their egos. He was fond of reminding them that after their father's death, he was 'in a manner of speaking', in loco parentis to them' (Seth 10). Much of the interaction between the two brothers entails the rude rebuking of younger brother by the elder, the constant reminders that Varun was a parasite living off his elder brother's grace and resources, the regular threats of eviction from Arun's abode of which Varun was a mere tenant. We can witness a clear hierarchy between these two males who belong to the same family. According to Scott Kiesling, 'hierarchies are constituted through linguistic practices such as name calling, boasting, and insulting' (255), and in the case of Arun we gather all three in so far as his conversations with his siblings are concerned. If 'masculinity' is a 'bundle of stances, which have in common a claim to authority that puts a person at the top of some hierarchy' (Kiesling 252) then Arun is performing his masculinity by using strategies of authoritative stances. If Kiesling's point were to be considered wholesale, this may easily slide into categorizing Arun as practicing (hegemonic) masculinity, misrecognizing the fluidity of his subjectivity which makes use of a big corpus of gestural/ stance repertoire. Because it is also important to not lose sight of the same but different Arun who appears meek and vulnerable in the

company of his British employers at Benstyn and Pryce. As we are told by the omniscient narrator about the flexibility in Arun's stances: 'This Arun- affable, genial, engaging, and knowledgeable, even (at times) diffident- was a very different creature from the domestic tyrant and bully of half an hour ago' (Seth 411).

A critical exercise which seeks to establish a singular trajectory of masculine domination, or to locate masculinity as a practice of domination by men of women and nature, a history of violence and coercion, may disregard, in order to create a coherent narrative, the ways in which power itself as a phenomenon is fluid and contingent. Even the otherwise meek Varun with 'so little spine and initiative' (Seth 408) is aware of his bully brother's tendency 'to suck up to the British and crawl in their tracks' (Seth 409). This invites a parallel with the Prakash episode in *Ravan and Eddie*, where the tyranny of Prakash runs alongside his desire for approval from his own father, his share of vulnerabilities. In that sense, for Arun, his British employers are father figures, whose approval he is in desperation to win. Arun is also shown to be in thrall of the ways of the British, and even though India has won freedom from the British control and dominance, Arun continues to remain a sycophant, a pleaser of his English employers not only in order to be in the good books of his immediate supervisors for purely monetary or employment-related reasons, but also because to him his own native Indian heritage is something to be discarded in favour of the ways of the colonizer.

Arun is keen on identifying with the British, with the ultimate sign of muscularity and power, rather than his own subjugated people which is perhaps why while he finds the very anglicized Chatterjee family to be nauseating for their individual idiosyncrasies and irritating quirks such as talking to each other in couplets or whiling away their time in unproductive indulgences such as the metaphysical inquiries of Dipankar, dabbling in verbal art by Amit, Kakoli's courtship with a foreigner, or Meenakshi's devotion to glamorous superficiality; Arun nonetheless has decided to be the son-in-law of the Justice Chatterjee family because of its self-evident superiority. This obvious superiority of the Bengali family comes from their access to high culture, their fashioning of themselves in the language and culture of the powerful British ruling elites, their subscription to the ways of being of the erstwhile masculine empire in charge of the affairs of the powerless natives, the effeminacy called India.

Arun enjoys being a part of an influential family which in turn enjoys the familiarity of the who's who of the metropolitan city of Calcutta, and throws glamorous, tasteful parties. His wife is an embodiment of class, taste, and glamour; we do not capture any necessary emotional intimacy between the husband and the wife, Arun maintains a business-like relationship with Meenakshi. By and large Arun comes across as a character which is devoid of sensitivity or moral idealism; his pragmatism and shallowness can be seen in stark contrast to the sensitiveness and commitment to different forms of idealisms practised by many other male characters such as Amit Chatterjee, Maan Kapoor, Rashid, Mr. Mahesh Kapoor, even Haresh Khanna. Because, for instance, if Amit had wanted, he could easily have made a great career in law owing to his degree from one of the most respected universities in the world, and the support of his father who had served as the chief justice in the Calcutta High Court under the regime of the British.

Amit is evidently talented, yet his interest in poetry has led him to discontinue any undertaking in law which could provide him a steady and enriching career; he has decided to submit to the muse of poetry, and plunge into an uncharted territory of verbal art, an approach clearly devoid of conventional practicality. Then there is Maan Kapoor who is courting a courtesan Saeda Bai in full cognizance of the illegitimacy of the relationship and its eventual death; clearly lacking in pragmatism and conventional codes of morality. Maan as explained later in more detail is also a wastrel even though he comes from the family of the conscientious revenue minister who himself in a commitment to idealism is fighting to rid the nation off the *zamindari* system, to help the poor tiller to own land and benefit from his own harvest. Rashid is another idealist who is committed to the cause of the upliftment of the downtrodden and therefore he finds refuge in the political philosophy of socialism.

In the presence of such idealists who are motivated to modes of self-actualisation, Arun appears to be an anomaly with his superficiality and his continued faith in the signifiers of class, prosperity, and good living. Therefore, he has a condescending attitude toward his own family members, particularly his own brother Varun who is proud of his provincialism, his Indian-ness. This is also the reason behind Varun's rejection of the proposed marital alliance

Later on in the narrative we capture the metaphorical emasculation of the otherwise dominant and successful Arun in the form of his wife's erotic dalliance with an outsider named Billy Irani, cuckolding as a stand in for humiliation, weakness, lack of authority, and towards the

end of the narrative, the spineless Varun is shown to succeed at the Civil Services, a significant symbolic marker of power and authority in the Indian context. This reversal within a narrative span of one year speaks well of the fluidity of the common significations of power, and masculinity which is regularly thought to be predicated on the notions of power, authority, and domination, is then equally liquid like.

The polyphony of masculine subjectivities is palpable in Seth's *Boy* as we are repeatedly invited to plurality of men's attributes, often times between brothers who embody very different values and ways of being. It is not only limited to the moral divergence between Arun and Varun, given there is another couple of brothers in Maan and Pran, of the Kapoor family, who could not be more different. If Pran is the desirable 30-something man, who though being 'lank, dark, gangly, and asthmatic' (Seth 4) is of good value on the marriage market because of his government job as an academic in a public university and his sobriety, the steadiness of his disposition, his adherence to normative morality as opposed to Maan who is nothing but 'a good looking young wastrel' who does 'not have any ambition to speak of' and who did not succeed to his workaholic father's 'obsession with hard work'. Maan appears to have 'no sense of responsibility' according to his sister, Veena, and whose dispositionally opposite brother-in-law has 'too strong a sense of responsibility' (Seth 100).

To a certain extent, the Dionysian Maan can be read alongside the directionless poet Amit Chatterjee, a contender in the race and with whom Lata shares flirtatious rendezvous in Calcutta, however, while Amit is incorrigibly decent, indulges in the effete art of poetry, and is evidently not congruent with aspects of what generally goes by the term normative or hegemonic masculinity, given his resistance to an ethic of commercial productivity; Maan and his obsession with the courtesan Saeeda Bai is an embodiment of decadence, wayward masculinity. Yet, both these male subjects could also be seen as representations of being men which are disregarded for the search of hegemonic masculinity that thrives on subordination and domination. To this, we can add the figure of Dipankar, the dreamer, who had studied economics, but spent most of his time reading about the poet and patriot Sri Aurobindo, who has extraordinary religious and mystical tendencies, and whose portrait has been painted by the author in great detail with subtle sarcasm:

> Dipankar is indecisive by nature…left to his own devices, Dipankar treated every decision like a spiritual crisis. Whether to have one spoon of sugar in his tea or two,

> whether to come down now or fifteen minutes later, whether to enjoy the good life of Ballygunge or to take up Sri Aurobindo's path of renunciation, all these decisions caused him endless agony. A succession of strong women passed through his life and made most of his decisions, before they became impatient with his vacillation and moved on. His views moulded themselves to theirs while they lasted, then began to float freely again. (Seth 417)

Dipankar brings in the necessary element of abstraction and philosophical gravity to a narrative which is otherwise accused of wallowing in the concreteness and commonness of mundane domestic concerns, lacking any significance in terms of its thematic concerns. Yet at the same time, Dipankar, owing to his distance from the demands of everyday reality and his condescension or discomfort with what he liked to call 'the plane of contingent actuality' situates him as an idiosyncratic figure, a curious character who appears to lack maturity deemed to be one of the pre-requisites for a man to function and ultimately win in the competitive world.

To see this complexity in action, to apprehend the dialogism between the dominant subject position of action-oriented breadwinner masculinity and those that fail at it, or do not sit comfortably with it, or to capture the landscape of both conformism and subversion and also of that beyond it, the mundane, the contradictory and hybrid, we can move to Kiran Nagarkar's *Ravan and Eddie*. *Ravan and Eddie* is a special case for such a project because it has been regularly described as being constituted by a Rabelaisian spirit; it is often coarse and bawdy. The description of the book pasted on the cover reads: 'Ravan and Eddie is a comic masterpiece about two larger-and truer-than-life characters and their bawdy, Rabelaisian adventures in postcolonial India.' The humour, which is anyway rare in the canonical Indian English fiction, frequently skids into the irreverent risky zone of what Bakhtin would call 'the grotesque body'. Stephen Greenblatt explaining Bakhtin informs us that 'the grotesque body- open to the world in all its orifices, unbounded, abusive, devouring, and nurturing-receives its fullest visual representation in the art of Bosch and Breughel, its most masterful expression in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*' (Nagarkar 85). *Ravan and Eddie,* in its representation of the spirit of the *chawl*-dwellers, the otherwise forgotten underlings of Mumbai, the city of dreams and aspirations, allows the readers of the otherwise prim and proper drawing room conversations of the chiefly middle class characters of the Indian English fiction to experience at a sustained level the lives, the idiomatic

coarseness and bawdiness, the unique vicissitudes that constitute the being of the Indian metropolitan underclass, and foregrounds Bakhtinian notion of Carnivalesque and dialogism.

Generally speaking, a positive attitude toward work in the public sphere remains the pivot around which the construction of desirable masculinity takes place, and a failure in such an enterprise often leads to the loss of masculine identity. This loss of a supposed masculine identity is textual and linguistic, meaning that this alleged masculine identity is not hiding somewhere in men's bodies, in a reified, solid form but is made up through the means of discourse. The dominant discourse on conventional masculinity indeed hails male individuals and constitute them as subjects and the most prominent subject position offered to male individuals is that of the breadwinner masculinity. Indeed, as we can gather from the trajectories of many male characters in *Ravan and Eddie*, a strong engagement in the pecuniary business is crucial for inducing positive reactions in the other members of the society, which indicates playing the breadwinner as a dominant subject position for male individuals. Yet, we can also gather by paying close attention to certain characters that some men still do not conform to this discursive framework of masculinity and decide to choose otherwise, though they have to negotiate such a non-compliance in a fraught and challenging climate. Take, for instance, the situation of Shankar-Rao Pawar, the father of Ravan Pawar. Shankar Rao once 'had had job. He had been a weaving operator in a cloth mill, moved on to an ice-factory as loader, had done a stint as a car mechanic's helper and then been a dark-room assistant in a photographer's studio' (Nagarkar 21). Shankar Rao is one of the important characters in the novel, given his status as the father of Ravan, one of the main protagonists of the eponymous novel, whose growth from birth to adolescence around which the narrative unfolds.

The novel, from the very first page foregrounds contradictions and hybridities, not only in the form of a father, Shankar Rao, who has chosen to stay at home, while his wife, Parvati, is shouldering the responsibility of the household finances, wearing the pants, as it were. Shankar Rao is introduced as an idiosyncratic character to the reader, because rather than working at a factory, like most inhabitants of the Mumbai *chawls* of which he was a member, Shankar spends most of his time lying on the bed, facing the wall: 'If anybody had asked Ravan what his father did, he would have said, "He lies in bed with his face to the wall". He had done that ever since Ravan could remember' (Nagarkar 21). But Shankar Rao does not show any explicit problem with the way his house is set up; there are no evident signs of discontent except that he is not only

presented as a caricature in the text, whose texture induces humour, because of his masculinity an anomaly both in the social world outside the text and the world within the text. When he says to Ravan that 'if it's fees, talk to your mother. If your principal rusticated you, I'm sure you deserve it. Talk to her but I doubt if it will help. Frankly if it's anything important, might as well catch her ear. You know I don't count in this house,' (Nagarkar 22) he is of course suggesting his absence from mainstream action both in his house as well as in the narrative given that it is through the eyes of Ravan and Eddie that the contours of the narrative have been sketched.

What appears strange to the reader is his absolute nonchalance at his idleness. In much of the narrative, Shankar appears as a slothful human being, who does not engage in any activity that requires any form of physical and mental exertion; who shies away from the real world by spending days lying on the bed facing the wall, who would perhaps be more suitable for the sleepy Calcutta novels of Amit Chaudhari as opposed to this Bombay novel, the swift dramatic events, the melodrama, the cacophony, the loudness of *Ravan & Eddie,* with the *chawl* as its microcosm or synecdoche, and both Ravan and Eddie embodying the indefatigable spirit of the city that never sleeps. Shankar Rao, indeed, appears out of place, with his lethargy in a pacey narrative and is accordingly punished for that. Absence of participation in the marketplace, takes away the privileges that the institution of marriage would bestow on his body; the prerogative to exercise conjugal rights. Consequently, Shankar Rao complains to her wife that, ‘You don't treat me like your husband. You don't let me come into your bed' (Nagarkar 21); to which Parvati replies that she would if he ‘were a man and earned a living like one’ (Nagarkar 21). A reading of this realist text, which apparently brings forth the reality of intergender relationship would follow that men’s privileges are inextricably linked with or dependent on their strict adherence to the discourse of normative manhood which weds it with aggression and competitiveness at the marketplace. This is cemented not only by the refusal of sexual privileges but also in other exhortations as in when Parvati asks him, 'Why don't you work like a man?'…and that ‘Everyone man I know works. Nobody sits at home’ (Nagarkar 21), Parvati is using shame to induce in her husband what she deems appropriate qualities for a man which not only aims at destabilising his sense of gender identity but this very utterance also constructs what normal way of being a man is. It achieves, in this sense, two objectives as ‘Shame, in Sedgwick’s view, is equally and simultaneously identity defining and identity-erasing’ (Halperin and Traub 70). According to Sedgwick who foregrounds the performative aspect of shame, ‘in interrupting identification, shame, too, makes identity. In

fact shame and identity remain in very dynamic relation to one another, at once deconstituting and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating' (Sedgwick et al. 36).

In such a scenario, it may appear, at least at the surface that Shankar Rao is very much a failure, a marginal figure, an incompetent and non-competitive loser who has no standing in his own family, but that would be overlooking the overall complexity of the family portrait in the novel; for Shankar Rao, whose name derives from lord Shiva, the destroyer, who is otherwise an unconcerned husband and father figure, but is also capable of action, of drama, of instilling fear, of destruction. In one descriptive passage, we learn that 'he might have been a nail on the wall as far as Parvati was concerned, and she often took him for granted or forgot that he was a member of her household; but come 4.25, and she knew it was wise to make him his cup of tea' (Nagarkar 38). It is equally unbelievable, that Shankar also wins the affections of a female outsider named Lalee, who enters the Pawar household and destabilises, challenges, the formal marital alliance between Shankar and Parvati, through repeated acts of sexual overplay, and contrary to his apparent disposition, Shankar Rao is described using the metaphor of the hungry tiger, in matters carnal. This hypersexuality does not sit well with the overall persona of Shankar and can be used to show that the ability to earn and feed a family is not the only measure of masculinity and that high-risk sexual behaviour in which Shankar is engaged is his method of getting back at the perceived lack of his masculinity, legitimacy, and privilege. However, such a way of conceiving it is also fraught with contradictions, because moderation, and not excess, has had a long history of being an attribute of masculinity since ancient times, as Foucault discusses in his book *The History of Sexuality Vol II*. Rephrased by Karen Kopelson:

> the supreme "virility" that was associated with moderation and self-restraint in ancient Greece, and hence the centrality of these qualities to the constitution of the proper male subject. To properly "rule," man had first to be ruler of his own passions and to take his pleasures only in ways that were considered "right use." When a man was immoderate, he was considered to be feminine: in a state of weakness, passivity, non-resistance, and submission. (Kopelson n.p)

Also, in the repressive hypothesis of Foucault which posits that the repression of passion is a prerequisite for the proliferation of capitalism in modern Industrial culture; especially during and

post Victorian period, sexuality, especially that of the 'deviant' variety, i.e., adultery and homosexuality, has been increasingly regulated as an activity that is incompatible with production, unlike monogamous heteronormative sexuality. Shankar's adultery and hypersexuality, especially in the backdrop of the metropolitan city of Bombay, where the forces of capital reigned supreme, is a contradiction in terms; not only his unemployment does not come in the way of his sexual anarchy, the hegemony of capital is incapable of curtailing his hypersexuality, and he does not match up to the social convention of the figure of the ideal father; he is a deviant; his is a crucial character that delivers a contradictory, and adversarial way of contesting the discourse of ideal fatherhood which is predicated on attributes of wisdom, restraint, exemplariness. Till the end of the novel, we do not see a major shift in his outlook; he does not mend his ways, as it were. He does not gain consciousness of his deviance as a father and husband and remains a challenge to the idea of normative fatherhood. It is difficult to pin down Shankar Rao, for his fluidity and mobility works against any rigid apprehension of his ontology.

The novel is indeed a site to capture contradictions of many varieties, a forum to see a wide variety of masculinities in action; so for instance, in the very first page we come across Victor Coutinho, a catholic, the father of Eddie and Pieta, and the husband of Violet Coutinho, also a Chawl no.17 dweller like Shankar Rao, who is infatuated with Parvati, and describes himself as 'no Victor but a born loser' (Nagarkar 2) because of his cowardice, his pronounced hesitation in approaching Parvati to express his affections. If one of the foundational commandments of Christian Catholicism is not to covet one's neighbour's wife, then Victor is clearly at odds with it; his desire for the neighbour's wife is an open defiance to the ideal of the Catholic gentleman. A recent short film made by a US Catholic bishop titled 'A Call to Battle' has been made to fight exactly this kind of fecklessness, this lack of control on one's passions, this 'crisis of masculinity' in the new age Christian male, and clearly Victor represents this crisis and needs urgent reform. Therefore, his very conception, his variance with the discourse of the ideal Catholic family man, the normative father, is a feature of the novel's dialogism that promises to provide space to the losers, the dissenters, and the non-normative, so much so, that it is extremely difficult to identify a single male character who could be held up as an unalloyed example of hegemonic masculinity. Most characters appear to inhabit contradictions and paradoxes of various kinds. The text is aware of how often nomenclature, i.e., naming as a referential process whose outcome represents an

individual, provides him or her a fixed identity, could actually be a productive site of contradictions and even hybridity.

One of the protagonists' names, Ravan, is also subject to a paradox, given that Ravan (symbolically, the evil) was born Ram (the good), his name was changed to protect him from the evil eye, much to the chagrin of the otherwise unconcerned and distanced father. If nomenclature plays perhaps the most important part in the construction of a unified identity given that it is a signifier of one's sex, gender, religion, caste, and interestingly even class, and it situates one's self along straight, rigid lines, then the embedded contamination, the inherent opposition of what Ravan and Ram stand for in terms of attributes complicates and destabilises Ravan's very narrative of himself, and fosters upon him a sense of incoherence. As the omniscient narrator informs the reader using the indirect style:

> Was he Ram or Ravan? Good or evil? Black or white? He had no idea. He didn't mind being either…he would have liked to have made everybody happy by calling himself Ram- Ravan or Ravan- Ram, but both his parents found the hyphenated conjoining offensive. (Nagarkar 21)

So we have a protagonist whose sense of his own self is precarious, and his openness to a hyphenated or hybrid identity, a place in the spectrum between good and evil, in the continuum of black and white, is resisted by his own parents. This event, among many other, can be read as a clash between two discourses: the discourse of postmodern inchoate hybridity, represented by Ravan's proposal, which promotes and reflects the blurring of the boundary between the good and the bad or black and white against the modernist discourse of unified coherent linear identity forced by his parents on him. But what is more important is the ways in which these two oppositional and adversarial discourses come together within a single text, the inherent dialogism of the text which can be easily overlooked in the search of a single coherent authorial intention by focusing only on the third person authorial discourse disregarding the dialogues among characters, and the free indirect style; and such a humanist exercise can lead to seeking a singular manifestation of the masculine ideal which is in no manner fractured or hybrid. Describing this inherent polyphonic nature of the novel, Jesse Matz writes:

> Since its inception, the novel has been a forum for different voices. Whereas other literary forms have seemed to try for unity of expression- staying with one style,

> one kind of talk- the novel has thrived by throwing different styles of expression together. High styles and low, big talk and small, native and foreign voices have all come together within the novel. They have come together to make novels better registers of social life, and they have come together in order to enable the novel to test the different claims made by different discourses. Other literary forms may stay within a literary discourse – a single way of voicing cultural priorities- but the novel has gone for something more heterogeneous, a mix of priorities, something vocally diverse (59)

This is especially true of *Ravan and Eddie*; not only it is analogous to the vibrancy and cultural/ linguistic/ religious/ ethnic plurality of the city it takes as its background; it, in many ways works, as a microcosm for the cacophony of the *chawl*, the intermingling of caste Hindus, *dalits* and Goan catholics; the salad bowl of Marathi, Konkani, English, and Hindi; the fraught co-existence of the ideologies of Hindu nationalism and liberal multiculturalism. The *chawl*, as opposed to an upmarket residential area, is a striking metaphor of polyphony inscribed in the novel. It is because of this ideological diversity that a character like *Eddie*, born in a catholic family, joins a Hindu fundamentalist organisation, keeps it as a secret and lives 'a double life' (Nagarkar 114), is described as the prodigal Hindu son by the leader of the *sabha*, and is especially paradoxical given the Hindutva organization's hostile stand against the Abrahamic religions, and fear for the fate of the Hindu nation. Again, here we do not have a reasonable answer, a single, monologic motivation behind Eddie's double life, and even the omniscient narrator is at a loss for a singular explanation, Eddie's fascination at Lord Krishna's multiple beings perhaps an analogy: 'Gut feeling, instinct, the atmosphere in his home, his catholic upbringing, call it what you will-and no explanation will ever be sufficient- Eddie kept his secular Hindu incarnation separate from his catholic life' (Nagarkar 114).

We also capture fractures in the persona of two explicitly obtuse and violent minor male characters, that of Mr. Sarang, and Prakash, the school bully; their sharply concealed helplessness and vulnerability behind the façade of strength, vigour, and volatile anger. Take, for instance, the case of Mr. Sarang who has 9 daughters and is perennially anxious about their impending spinsterhood. Ravan is a frequent visitor to their small house having befriended the eldest daughter Shobhan, the one with the deformed feet. Mr. Sarang often implodes with violence on the daughters, especially Tara, because of her erotic dalliance and consequent pregnancy with a dalit,

Shahaji Kadam, and Shobhan's deformity to hide his own incompleteness as a failed patriarch. In one telling instance, post a diatribe against his own daughters, especially Tara, and his forcing Shobhan to show off her physical deformity to an outsider guest he breaks down, and begins to bash his head on the bars of the window and then asks himself rhetorical questions to foreground his own puniness: 'What kind of a father am I? I can't get my daughters married, so I humiliate them to hide my shame. I am going to kill myself. Yes, I am. They'll stay spinsters but at least they won't be tortured and disgraced by their own father' (Nagarkar 91-92). According to Lynne Segal:

> power in the home is often the only prerogative experienced by men daily overworked, humiliated by poverty, facing arbitrary discipline, degrading working conditions…fatherhood can increase a man's sense of his own failure and vulnerability, when he knows or fears he cannot adequately protect or provide for his wife and children, while at the same time creating a setting in which he can pass on his pain by abusing them. (25)

More than an episode of men's unparalleled power over his others, this particular event can be read as an occasion that shows the fractures within the alleged unified nature of men's power. This is complemented well by another character named Prakash who is initially introduced as a villainous oppressor who enjoys unparalleled power:

> Prakash. Tyrant, terror and a youth of prodigious powers…there was only one way to stay out of his orbit. Go and live on another planet…he wasn't particularly large or tall but to Ravan and his peers he appeared a colossus…the world, as Ravan well knew, was divided into slaves and slave drivers. And then there were those who owned the slave drivers. He was intelligent enough to realize that he would never be located on the same side of the fence as Prakash. (Nagarkar 138-139)

However, upon looking closely, the reader may find an identical pattern in the cruelty of some of the male characters; that it is inevitably interlinked with a certain vulnerability on the part of the oppressor. In the case of Prakash, his father the widower, has remarried, and in his obsession for the new wife the father is threating Prakash to 'take up a job and find a place of your own' (Nagarkar 146). Clearly, notwithstanding the apparent power and strength, Prakash is both financially and emotionally dependent on his father; he not only seeks to continue to live in the

same house, but also desires to remain the ‘apple’ of his ‘father’s eye’ (Nagarkar 146). This continued dependence, even after reaching late adolescence is a testament to Prakash’s figure as a hybrid of two oppositional frames. When Prakash learns of the legend of Ravan: that Ravan not only killed Eddie’s father, but also colluded with Godse to kill no less than the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, he immediately proposes a deal to Ravan to kill his own stepmother, who, in his opinion is the source of all evil in his house. Ravan’s notoriety spreads in the classroom and Prakash ceases to be the locus of power. As we are told,

> now all of a sudden everybody knew his past and instead of spitting on him and running away from his very shadow, they were seeking him out, asking him to commit the most terrible crimes and paying him cash, not on delivery but in advance. He felt a delirious sense of power. He also felt like throwing up. (Nagarkar 148)

There are two important points to be extrapolated from this description: First is the slipperiness of power, even of what Foucault would call ‘sovereign power’, the good old understanding of power. Merely a piece of knowledge can swiftly change the equation, and that power, even in the coercive, reified sense, is not a solid entity and that it can quickly change shape, that it is firmly based in knowledge, and those who possess it can never afford to be complacent. If masculinity *is* power, then masculinity is always in a crisis. As Lynne Segal informs:

> many of men’s dilemmas…are not so hard to fathom. Since all the linguistic codes, cultural imagery and social relations for representing the ideals of manliness, or what is termed ‘normative masculinity’, it is hardly surprising that men, individually, should exist in perpetual fear of being unmanned. Masculinity, as historical researchers have been exploring, has always been crisis ridden. (xxiv)

In a crude way, we are witness to a master-slave flip-flop between Prakash and Ravan, and not only this flip-flop permits us to apprehend power in a more complicated way, it also allows Ravan to view Prakash differently. We learn along with Ravan the acute mental feebleness of Prakash; that alongside his physical prowess lurks his intellectual impotence. If rationality and mental acuity is cast in the matrix of masculinity, then Prakash is definitely an outsider. We are told that

> he had to concentrate hard and long to get the drift of the simplest things. He had room for only a couple of thoughts in his head at a time and any new idea made

> him ill-humoured and suspicious… did the source of the power that Prakash had exercised reside in Prakash or in Ravan himself? (Nagarkar 145)

The other important point to note from the Ravan-Prakash episode is Ravan's contradictory experience of power, his simultaneous feeling of elation and disgust. This has implications even for that strand of scholarship that assumes men's singular possession of power and which labels that power as toxic. Ravan's ambivalence with regards to the new-found powerful status narrates men's contradictory experiences and inevitably puts masculinity in crisis.

If in Seth's *A Suitable Boy* we encounter Lata's negotiations with three divergent embodiments of plural masculinities at the dawn of India's liberation from British colonization; in *Custody*, Manju Kapur's latest novel, we engage with Shagun's negotiation with two divergent embodiments of masculinities at the turn of the millennium in an India poised for a major spurt in economic growth and concomitant socio-cultural shift. Thematically, the novel has at the centre a broken marriage, the result of the heroine's infidelity, followed by a long court room drama in which the estranged husband and the unfaithful wife battle each other for the custody of their two children. According to Arifa Akbar, similar themes find preoccupations and recurrence in many of Kapur's other works: 'A marriage preceded or fractured by a heady, socially unacceptable romance has emerged time and again in Manju Kapur's fiction. It re-appears in her latest novel, *Custod*y' (n.p)

In *Custody*, Raman who is brought to us as a man of responsibility, love, and care. He is a loving and responsible father, an industrious employee in a multinational corporation navigating the rough landscape of family harmony in the times of increased labour competitiveness. In Raman we find the quintessential 'nice guy': faithful, dependable, self-less. As the narrator informs: 'Clearly he was a sincere company worker, hard-working, ambitious, obviously talented. The man radiated dependability' (Kapur 25). In opposition to the cloying niceness of Raman, we are presented, through an act of moral transgression on the part of the central female character- Shagun- another male subject, Ashok Khanna, who in his conduct, his allegiance to a separate moral code and ethical standpoint, foregrounds the internal variance in the practice of masculinity. Coming from the United States, Ashok is conspicuous by an absence of ordinariness and mediocrity, is aligned with a savvy street-smartness which disregards any rigid moral uprightness that may come in the way of profit making or erotic pleasure. Ashok and Raman dramatize the

ways in which locations at the level of class and space contribute to the making up of, or the difference, the plurality, of masculinities.

One productive way to apprehend and contextualise this difference in these two male subjects is to situate their position along the axes of class and cross-cultural boundaries; i.e., to explore their particular being in their class and spatial specificities. Raman's upbringing in an ordinary middle class Indian household, in a traditional and secure setting, the parents living in apparent harmony, allows him to conjure up a family portrait emulating similar values and aspirations. Raman, in other words, is born into a family that belonged to the structure of the traditional joint family and its value systems. This form of joint family, interestingly, as it had begun to fade in the face of increasing urbanization had suddenly become a fetishized commodity in the Hindi cinema of the nineties, although that is not to say all the major films had the joint family at the centre. Films such as *Hum Apke Hain Kaun* (1994), *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (1995), *Hum Sath Sath Hain* (1999), etc., were major hits, remain iconic films even today, and revolved centrally around the marriage of the younger generation as the older members of the family looked on with wet eyes. This trend, with the arrival of cable television in India in the late 90s, but which really picked up pace in the early 2000s, moved to the television where overdressed masochist female protagonists in long-winded ten-year tele- series such as *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (2000-2008), *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki* (2000-2008) etc., pretended to navigate the complex in-laws joint business family by-lanes impregnated with internal intrigues. Indeed, there are similarities in the texture and tone of Custody with that of Soap operas of the 90s, especially its preoccupation with the broken family, the seriousness of tone, the prose which lacks any linguistic inventiveness or the plot which is devoid of complex narrative techniques. Barring the very few and weak parodic elements 'the tragedy of divorce and custody is tempered, though never undercut, by her keenly-perceived soap opera of bourgeois Indian society on the 1990s. Shagun's fling has a touch of French farce; Raman is the classic cuckold, intent on a life of mediocrity' (Akbar n.p). Yet the story also deals with the unfaithfulness of the married heroine which, keeping in mind the female protagonists of the prominent serials and also the Hindi cinema of the 90s who always embodied loyalty and obedience, appearing character descendents, as it were, of Sita, the tallest poster image of fidelity hogging the single channel TV screen in the late 80s in the televised version of the ancient Indian epic *Ramayana*. The infidelity of the heroine should be read in the backdrop of the way in which popular television/ reel culture while continuing to glorify the big

happy joint family, where the heroine is the dutiful, ever-smiling, beautiful woman, also began to make space for entertainment in which 'young people's choice' become 'even more central' in the scheme of love, career, and marriage. Talking specifically of the decade of the 90s, Steve D Derne notes:

> Media influenced by transnational standards increasingly emphasize love rather than parental choice as a basis of marriage, and present relationships between husband and wife which are not tempered by competing joint-family demands… Hindi films have, of course, long celebrated love marriages in stories that tell of rebellions against parents, but in recent years, there has been an emerging trend in which these films make the young people's choice even more central. (110)

So there were two simultaneous cross-currents of culture that dominated the popular culture scene in the 90s in which some films glorified the joint family, conservative values, and arranged marriage; at the same time, there were other films breaking away from this fold and putting romantic love, youthful passion at the core. Raman, it appears, belongs to the former, given his upbringing in a joint family atmosphere, and his easiness with which he accepts Shagun as his wife, a marriage arranged by his parents. He keeps his family, his parents at the centre of his life, is sincere and hardworking; romantically uninventive and unimaginative. In his younger days, he had attended an obscure school of no social standing, though his higher education in some of the finest institutions of technology and management in India has enabled him to lead a life of relative comfort and financial security, though the life-style is far from opulence and magnificence. His spectacular performance in academics which qualifies him to earn a place in the new upwardly mobile middle class is fuelled by the consciousness of the value of money buttressed by existent misery.

Throughout his childhood Raman is very well aware of his weak financial situation and admission to the elite institutions of management and technology was the way to get out of the morass. And yet, even after all the drudgery and labour Raman's address is still a signifier of his middle-class existence: 'Indraprashtha Extension, located in East Delhi across the river Jamuna, was an area furrowed with housing societies…Patparganj, here lay the hope of many of the salaried middle classes to own a home of their own' (Kapur 19). Compare this with the foreign-returned Ashok having an address in upmarket South Delhi; his school education at the equally

posh and well-regarded Dehradun academy followed by an undergraduate degree from NYU and an MBA from Harvard. Ashok is clearly a product of a well-heeled milieu, even though we are never provided his family antecedents.

If Raman is insistent on aligning with the happy- family- of- four- member portrait extolled by the advertising industry and apparently dear to the upwardly mobile urban Indian middle class, Ashok comes from a part of the world where the very category of family is increasingly being described as a zombie category: the family is dead but still alive. These differences are at the bottom of the variation in the way both these male subjects approach the problems of both business and life. If Ashok is a ruthlessly competitive figure born and brought up with a sense of entitlement, is open to bending rules to support his growth in the corporate world; 'the trouble with Raman…he lacked the killer instinct' (Kapur 196). The differences at the level of character and disposition between these two key male characters are well documented in the following lines: 'Raman must have struggled to forgive her; how many men would have been so generous? Ashok did not have this gentle, forgiving streak, he would rather kill both her and himself before he let her go' (Kapur 104).

In his description with the metaphor of lack, there are similarities between Raman, the 'miserable, dependent fellow' (Kapur 103), and Padma from *The Dark Holds No Terror* who is also described by a certain lack, and Ashok in his alpha maleness is more akin to Boozie. But while Boozie is gradually figured out by the protagonist-narrator to be only an image devoid of any internal consistency or solidity, his actual humble middle-class roots betraying his cultivated elitism, we do not capture such straightforward crumbling of Ashok's masculine aura. Yet, we are sometimes led inadvertently to the softer feminine side of Ashok, his acute submission to the charm and beauty of Shagun; his abiding love and commitment for Shagun and her children, his deployment of resourcefulness and wisdom to the future of Arjun. Though selfish, he is not an entirely villainous, black, flat character who is bent on wreaking the happy home of Raman, Shagun, and the two children, the way such characters are often constructed in realist narratives of the pejoratively titled *saas-bahu* (crudely translated mother-in-law-daughter-in- law) TV serials consumed often by Indian housewives. In such popular serials, the home wrecker is often a sexualized female, who likes to dress up garishly with heavy make-up, performing acts of feline cunningness against the gullible and victimized heroine, clad in sober and traditional attire; the binary opposition is strictly maintained.

Though dynamic and flamboyant, and in many ways different from Raman, Ashok cannot be cast in a hero-villain binary; so we do not see him plotting a deliberate scheme, and there are clear indications that he is also reeling under the same narrative of love and/ as happiness as Shagun. Ashok is also straightforward and honest in his admission and proposal of a future marital alliance with Shagun. Though we are not introduced much to his humane side in the initial segment of the novel; we do not know, for instance, the whereabouts of his family, and indeed we see him as a Machiavellian businessman obsessed with achieving sales targets through ingenious means and projects, as he 'was always seeing connections where none were obvious' (Kapur 81), bereft of familial and kinship ties unlike Raman. Yet we gradually attain awareness of Ashok's benevolence and care toward Shagun's children when Shagun moves out of India with him. We see Ashok taking the charge of putting Shagun's son Arjun to the boarding school where he himself received his early education, and in numerous other instances he proves wrong the anticipation of both Raman and the morally conservative reader that Shagun would be punished sometime later in the course of the narrative for the moral transgression she committed by renouncing the idea of the stable happy family for passion as clear in the following quotation to which the traditional reader may nod along: 'She would never be happy in her new relationship, never. Ashok had the reputation of being a womanizer, no charms had been strong enough to ensnare him over the last twenty years' (Kapur 208).

Ashok gradually emerges as a complex figure if more attention is paid to his straddling other dimensions of his being and endeavours. The narrative is not only suffused with the internal fracturing of perhaps the most important male character in the form of Ashok and difference from the phenomenon of hegemonic masculinity in the form of Raman, but also a host of other supportive, caring masculinities in the form of fathers such as Mr. Rajora who is keen on having his divorcee daughter realize an independent life for herself. Indeed, much of the disagreement between the old Rajora couple is over the future of their unfortunate daughter Ishita who has been left stranded by her husband and the in-laws on account of her alleged infertility. When Ishita decides to live an independent life and seek meaning instead in social work and an adopted child, it is her father who comes out in her support of her right to choose her destiny. While Mrs. Rajora is keen on a second marriage for her daughter because of which she is a source of relentless pain for her due to the constant nagging, it is Mr. Rajora who comes to Ishita's rescue and advises Mrs.

Rajora that 'If this is what she wants we have to help her' (Kapur 180) and that 'she has been a good girl, now we must be equally good parents' (Kapur 181).

In his article 'Problematizing contemporary Men/Masculinities theorizing: The contribution of Raewyn Connell and conceptual-terminological tensions today,' Chris Beasley points out that 'CSMM [Critical Study of Men and Masculinities] theorizing remains, for the most part, comparatively untouched by the waves of postmodern critique that have so heavily influenced the theoretical trajectories of other areas of the Gender/Sexuality field' (750). As discussed above in the initial segment of the chapter, a great deal of scholarship in men and masculinities has a tendency to demarcate masculinity as a unified entity created in an opposition to its other, i.e., femininity, given the (weak) structuralist leanings of the theoretical apparatus; this chapter, on the contrary, has articulated, with the support of a close study of the male subjects in the chosen texts, the otherwise concealed/ silent fracturing, contamination, instabilities, or simply, crises of masculinity that radically shift the horizons within which the received ideas of male gender identity should be evaluated.

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Chapter 3

Time's Arrow: Masculinity as a Historical Phenomenon

As discussed in the previous chapter, the category of masculinity evokes a sense of solidity which is beyond the periphery of history and change. It is usually characterized with the notion of staticity which finds manifestation in such culturally accepted and regularly used phrases as 'men will be men' or 'boys will be boys'. Such phrases are usually used in the event of certain acts committed by men or boys that are no longer socially acceptable in civilized societies but through such utterances a form of rationalizing occurs which naturalizes the improper acts, a case of those actions being natural to the species of men. The statements also refer to the ways of men and boys that are unique only to them. Such four words, apparently innocuous linguistic utterances, it can be said, can be enunciated in an ideological atmosphere where change in the existing configurations of masculinity cannot be conceived. This is because of the overarching discourse of masculinity being a natural, unalterable phenomenon; emerging from the male body, the reproductive organs often become, in this discourse, the source of stereotypical masculine traits.

As human physiology does not appear to be an entity that is subject to change, the use of a modality in which men's unique qualities are sourced in the body leads to the conclusion that manliness has been and will remain to be in its current shape; masculinity as a synonym for maleness cannot be reformed, for better or for worse. Given that language is conventionally thought to be a medium of expression, a vehicle for the transmission of ideas which exist at an extra-linguistic level, and refer to outside reality; it may also appear that these linguistic utterances such as 'men will be men' refer to a non-linguistic phenomenon called 'men' which exists outside the boundary of language and discourse, and language only does the job of expressing a reality about an unchanging manliness which has existed since times immemorial in a single and unique fashion. Verbal statements such as 'men will be men' and 'boys will be boys' are not just products of an apparatus which effects masculinity as unalterable, or men's acts/ attributes more of a result of their singular unique status or natural being, but also feeds into it, making the powerful discourse of a natural masculinity even more powerful. This pervasive and potent discourse is

manifested in commonsensical thinking about men and masculinity. Yet such a stance on men and masculinity has been called into question by sociologists and historians.

In their book *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class*, 1780-1850, the authors Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff inform us that 'Masculinity and femininity are constructs specific to historical time and place. They are categories continually being forged, contested, reworked and reaffirmed in social institutions and practices as well as a range of ideologies. Among these conflicting definitions, there is always space for negotiation and change although differing interpretations are covered by a seemingly unified 'common sense' (29). Similarly, in their paper, 'Hegemonic Masculinities? Assessing Change and Processes of Change in Elite Masculinity, 1700- 1900', historians Henry French and Mark Rothery bring to attention the 'consensus' which

> has emerged that historical changes in the gender identity of elite men can be conceptualized best as a series of shifts between form of hegemonic masculinities'. Elaborating on these shifts in the changing modes of hegemonic masculinity the authors present the taxonomy which includes the 'anxious, patriarchal, godly masculinity' (mid-seventeenth century); 'libertine' or 'foppish' masculinity (the late seventeenth century); 'polite' or 'civil' masculinity (c.1720- 1780); 'sincere', 'serious' or 'evangelical' masculinity (emerging from c.1790); with the final nineteenth-century displacement of landed gentility by 'middle-class' notions of masculinity based around an ideology of domesticity. (139)

This fashion continues even in popular media, and so, for instance, The Telegraph in a recent article reports that 'Millennial men, as a whole, have 'gotten soft'. The technical skills and staunch can-do attitudes that characterised the manly generations of our past have largely been snuffed out – cast aside as society progressed and gender lines became increasingly blurred. Masculinity, to all intents and purposes, has lost its edge' (Wells).

While there are many other such examples of scholarship and journalistic pieces which look at the shifting aspect of (dominant) masculinity, exposing its contingency; attempts such as these are remarkably absent in locating similar contingencies in the discursive construction of masculinity as far as the assessment of the Indian English novel is concerned. Such an endeavour would readily support the main argument of this undertaking which aims at foregrounding the

liquid nature of masculinity. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to revisit this conventional mode of thinking, to challenge it by making explicit the ways in which masculinity in the select Indian English novel has a fluid character and is subject to historical shifts. In so far as this remains the objective of the chapter, in my reading of the chosen fictional texts, I start with the assumption of historical difference and the absence of transhistorical masculinities. This approach to constructs of masculinity relies on an assumption of historical rupture, an assumption that the past is different from the present, and, consequently, that historicized masculinities are radically unlike those in other time periods. An important definition of masculinity in one period might make no sense in an earlier or later context (and, by implication, a current definition may make no sense in the future) (2010).

An approach to deconstructing masculinity which is informed by such a spirit of historicism, masculine ideals become subject to history and the idea of trans-historical masculinity, the notion that masculinity is before or beyond history, economics and discourse, is untenable. I submit in this chapter that in India's journey from a newly independent, largely feudal and aspiring socialist economy to its embracing of a form of *laissez faire*, of economic liberalization of the Indian market in the 90s, brought about a momentous change in which ideal masculinity was conceived differently. If the first decade of post-independent India put forth a suitable masculinity embodying the ideals of moderation, industry, stability, and egalitarianism; the desirable masculinity by the turn of the century embodies passion, consumption, elitism, and individualism. If there is one thread or a morphology that binds the two, it is industry, although the motivation behind hard-work may be different. If in the former case, work or hard-work is a way to climb up the social hierarchy, to achieve self-reliance; in the latter instance, hard-work is not a means to social mobility, but an end, an axis on which a successful masculine identity, a corporate identity is built.

To elaborate further on this, I present an analysis of the ways in which Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1992) and Manju Kapur's *Custody* (2011) can be read in their historical context to see correspondences between the male subjects who emerge as desirable and the dominant national discourse of the historical time in which the novels are set. I use these two novels because they refer to two very specific and important moments of Indian history. The trajectory of modern Indian history has passed through two major epochs: the first is the moment of independence from the British colonization in 1947; and the second is the moment of market liberalization in the early

1990s whose impact we begin to see within the same decade. For instance, Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, which though published in 1993, is situated in the early 1950s, i.e., 1951-1952, the first two years of the first decade post the formal demise of British colonization of the Indian territory.

As one may be aware, the first decade of Postcolonial India was about the consolidation of Indian sovereignty. The historian Ram Chandra Guha, for instance, informs that at the moment of independence most social scientists and commentators had 'forecast of India's imminent dissolution, or of its descent into anarchy or authoritarian rule' and that many colonialists 'stressed the immaturity of the Indian mind…that Indians could not govern themselves' (xiv). Citing an English commentator who asserted that: 'chaos would prevail in India if we were ever so foolish to leave the natives to run their own show. Ye gods! What a salad of confusion, of bungle, of mismanagement, and far worse, would be the instant result' (xiv). Guha unveils the dialectics of rationality and irrationality, of reason and emotion, of stability and instability, in which India, at the peak of the nationalist movement, occupied the right of the binary. However, the nationalist movement which fought for self-determination ultimately got the country independence from the British and at that historical moment, and because of the relentless efforts of Nehru, India chose a form of nationalism which was to derive its strength from Enlightenment principles of rationality, humanism, scientific and critical inquiry as opposed to the parochial, insular, inward-looking Ram-Rajya approach of Gandhi. Elaborating on this Nehruvian legacy Sanjay Seth writes:

> Some of the central concepts in Nehru's nationalism- the people, democracy, rights, representation- derived from a different sensibility from that which informed the nationalism of Tilak and Gandhi. This sensibility made its first appearance, and was elaborated in the course of the European enlightenment, and it was this Enlightenment sensibility that was at the heart of Nehru's very notion of India…the independent India for which Nehru struggled was one that would be modern. According to Nehru, one of the central aspects of modernity was the sovereignty of reason. (Seth 458)

Apart from the subscription to the ethos of Fabian socialism, the first prime-minister attempted to carve a state that was to be built upon the values of science and rationality, egalitarianism,

secularism, human dignity, and social equality through a model of mixed-economy in which the private sector were to work alongside the public sector. Thus, independent India adopted industrialization and rationality, or its synonym, science, as important tools in its journey toward modernization.

This historical moment is of course one of transition, not only in terms of the transfer of power from the British to the native elites, but also in terms of what the newly formed nation-state would have as its values and aspirations. Taking this time period as its referent, *A Suitable Boy* attempts to reproduce the historical conditions of the time in which the novel is set and the authenticity of the realistic depiction has been verified by reviewers and critics. For instance, in the words of Tarun Tejpal, 'it is clear that Seth has done considerable research to recapture the period flavour and the different settings with accuracy' (Tejpal). Also, The Guardian in its review quoted Khushwant Singh 'the eminence gris of Indian letters' who is reported to have said that, 'I lived through that period and I couldn't find a flaw…It really is an authentic picture of Nehru's India' (Gavron).

The historical novel which takes its subject this historical moment of transition and draws on the academic, cultural, legal discourse both of the time against which the novel is set and the ways in which the historical moment is conceived at the time of the writing of the novel. Accroding to Neelam Srivastava, 'Seth's novel tells the story of the early 1950s in India, in the style of a mimetic historical narrative where the plot appears to be found rather than invented. His mimetic narrative can be seen as a *symbolic* representation of the nation, in the sense that the unity between content and form, or meaning and representation, is unquestioned' (2). Another critic, Jon Mee also reads Seth's *Boy* as a transition narrative in which feudalism gives way to the embracing of modernity, although this arrival of Indian modernity is seen as a 'lack', as derivative, given that this narrative of development has been already scripted elsewhere, i.e., the West.

> It seems to me an irreducible fact of Seth's [*A Suitable Boy*] that it is positioned at a juncture that it defines in terms of the nation's emergence into modernity. Support for the zamindari legislation is identified with the relatively liberal and tolerant values associated with capitalist modernity throughout…beginning a transition to modernity as a nation in the 1950s the novel places India within an evolutionary

> time frame whose outcome its readers are living through…the novel both seems to accept the naturalness of the transition from feudal to modern and at the same time registers certain anxieties about the impossibility of India living up to this narrative. (Mee 115)

In a similar vein, Priyamvada Gopal asserts that: 'Seth's novel attempts a project better undertaken by literature in dialogue with history- an imaginative reconstruction of how the project of becoming modern might have unfolded in the sphere of the personal and the emotional' (109). Being a realist text, *A Suitable Boy*, in its ambition of being truthful and mimetic to the specificities of the times invites an investigation into the ways in which appropriate masculinities were constructed at this particular historical juncture. This can be done through an allegorical, symptomatic reading of the novel in which important events in the novel can be read and placed alongside national history- the dominant discourse(s) and the needs of the nation.

On the other hand, Manju Kapur's *Custody* is situated in the late 90's when the impact of market liberalization on urban Indian culture had begun to become evident. For instance, in cinema in the late 90s, a successful Hindi film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998) has its characters, perhaps for the first time, wearing branded Western clothes such as Polo t-shirts while represented as being grounded to Indian values; Western modernity can be mapped arriving on the chariot of global branded-wear. The economy moves from an emphasis from manufacturing based heavy industries to Information Technology oriented Service Industry. Kapur' novel, though published in 2011, is set in a time when Coke, the popular American soda brand, is making a comeback to the Indian market post market liberalization under the aegis of the Congress government in the early 1990s. It is, to write in other words, set in a time when rapid socio-cultural changes are taking place in India as capital is making inroads into urban centers. The novel makes frequent references to the important events of the 90s, so for instance, it informs its reader in 1990, The Brand, which stands in for Coke, was having its 'second venture into India' and that

> In 1977, the giant company had been ejected due to changed political realities. The Janata party, having won a surprise victory against the Congress, wanted to be seen as protector of both national capital and Indian manufacturers. If The Brand did not

> reveal its secret formula it would have to leave, which it did, and Indian integrity was preserved along with its diminutive bottled-drink industry. (Kapur 3)

The novel then foregrounds the altered economic status and shares that ‘it was the nineties an economic liberalization meant that rules regarding foreign direct investment were relaxed’ (Kapur 3). Such involved narration which binds the home with the world works for the novel which is set in New Delhi, the country's capital and perhaps the biggest beneficiary of market reforms. This novel looks at making sense of the ways in which the structure of the Indian family is shaped by and responds to new market forces, to the new India that welcomes globally successful multinational conglomerates into its fold and takes a leap toward engaging with the rest of the world in an increasing globalized and connected global village. In this sense, this fictional account of a home in the midst of this overpowering economic and cultural change finds a special place given that in non-fiction, the sudden economic growth and its consequent socio-cultural implications has been a much-written and much discussed phenomenon in the last couple of decades. India, especially in the 2000s becomes a subject of major interest for many authors, both Indian and foreign, when it takes a leap from what Pankaj Mishra calls ‘Nehruvian's ethics of austerity and self-restraint’ for the newly independent state of the 1950s to a ‘culture of private wealth and consumption’ beginning in the 1990s.

If Seth’s chosen form is an attempt to write about the nation, as Pico Iyer describes, in a comedy of manners fashion that rejects the aesthetically postmodern ironic twang of Rushdie and his ilk, subsequently keeping the family at the centre; Manju Kapur too is inclined to write in a mode where middle-class life or the private space of domesticity assumes the centre of her literary discourse and language is used as a transparent medium through which reality of the outside world is expressed. Indeed, considering Kapur’s specific thematic fixation with the domestic, Priyamvada Gopal situates her work in her seminal account of Indian English fiction under the title: ‘Family Matters: Domesticity and Gender in the Novel’ along with a set of other writers who are ‘concerned mainly with personal relations, emotional lives, and “affect” more generally…a genre in which women writers are salient’ (Gopal 139). Similarly, Tabish Khair’s assessment of Kapur’s other novel *Home* also sheds light not only on Kapur’s continued preoccupations with aspects of domesticity, but also the ways in which Seth’s preoccupation with home and marriage in *A Suitable Boy* are analogous to Kapur’s. Khair’s commentary on the novel *Home* is very much applicable to Kapur’s *Custody*. He writes:

> Home belongs to what must now be counted as a subgenre of Indian writing in English: domestic fiction, stories of weddings and deaths, arranged marriages and love affairs, cooking and bickering in a joint or an extended family in south Asia or, with signal differences, among south Asian immigrants in the west. This can range from the magnificent breadth of Vikram Seth's A Suitable Boy to the narrowly pulp dimensions of Shobha Dé's novels. It can be put to serious literary use, as in some novels by Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande or Bapsi Sidhwa. It can also become a little too dependent on certain clichés. (n.p)

It can be posed, therefore, that *Custody* and *Boy* should allow us to excavate and emphasize the shifting nature of masculinity in a more cogent and comprehensive manner because they take these two major historical moments of Indian modern history as their background, something which is missing in an explicit form in the other two novels, i.e., Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*, and Kiran Nagarkar's *Ravan and Eddie*.

The Dark Holds No Terror, in contrast to Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and Kapur's *Custody*, does not explicitly inform its reader about the exact time-frame which the novel takes as its background and it can only be inferred, given the publication of the novel in the year 1980, that it invariably refers to the decades before that. In the absence of historical and temporal specificity, it is impossible to locate the ways in which a particular mode of being for men is effected by the material conditions of a time period; or how masculinity and its performance corresponds with the dominant discourses of/ in the nation.

In the case of Kiran Nagarkar's *Ravan and Eddie*, though, it is made evident that the novel is set against the early decades of post-independent India, with Eddie taking birth on India's first Christmas eve: 'Father D'Souza looked straight out of the glass panes of the rear door. The whole of Bombay seemed to be out on the road. There was a festive air about the place. Surely it was not an extension of the thanksgiving puja at that Hindu boy's place below Victor's house. Then it hit Father D'Souza. In the rush of events, it had slipped his mind that it was independent India's first Christmas Eve' (Nagarkar 14). There is also an important discussion on the influence of the 1959 Hindi film *Dil Deke Dekho* on Ravan's psyche which develops and eventually becomes the reason behind his desire to become a Hindi film musician in successive parts of the *Ravan & Eddie* trilogy. Yet, what is noticeably missing is the construction or representation of a specific male

character which manifests, in a pronounced and tangible form, a desirable masculinity that corresponds with the dominant discourses of the historical time.

The novel is primarily about two babies, one born in a Hindu family, the other to a Christian, living in the same space, yet divided by several axes of history and culture. The plot is devoted to the development of these two children and how they see the world from their eyes, and grow up to make a place for themselves in the constrained existential conditions of being poor in an otherwise thriving metropolitan city. The novel, unlike the other two chosen texts, eschews an elaborate confrontation with the material reality of the India of the 1950s and its concomitant role in the determination of how things play out in private domestic space of kinship and the family. Compare it with the description of Kapur's novel by *The Independent* in which the interviewer suggests that 'like so many challenges facing the nation's politicians, the fundamental problem is one of scale: the legal, education and health systems are simply overloaded. Kapur's fiction examines the effect that these almost impossibly vast issues have on the most intimate areas of people's lives: love, sex, work, money, and above all family' (Kidd). This in wholesale accordance with the author's admission that 'at the risk of sounding like a political scientist, *Custody* was inspired by globalisation and economic liberalisation. Who owns you? As far as most Indian women and children are concerned, a man does. But that's changing?' (Kidd n.pag). This incompatibility with regards to a straightforward and neat attempt to ally the material and discursive reality of the nation with the family, the public and the private, buttresses the need to constrict the discussion of temporal mutability of masculinity to only Seth's *Boy* and Kapur's *Custody.*

Coming back to the project of mapping of desirable masculinities according to different temporal zones, after the (important) digression on the formal and thematic common denominators between the chosen authors and the texts, it can be added that Vikram Seth's novel is a suitable site for an investigation of desirable masculinity given that the title itself suggests a preoccupation with finding a male body that conforms to the masculine ideals of the times; a title that itself contains a proposition of sorts, an equation or a formulation of suitable manhood of post-Independent India. While on the outside it is abundantly clear that the protagonist of the novelist is Lata, a girl of marriageable age, who is trying to avoid the 'maternal imperative'(Seth 3), of having to marry a boy of her mother's choice; the novel is equally about, if not less and at least in this reading, its boys as well as men and their adherence/ separation from the paternal imperative

of the times, that is, the socio-cultural impositions of distinguished orientation toward certain endeavours which fashion successful masculine subjectivities at a historical moment in Indian history in which the nation reveled in the euphoria of new-found independence; inebriated with Nehru-Gandhi idealism, the country navigated the terrain of responsibility along with rational and independent decision-making that comes with freedom.

In the text, there are a number of male characters and there is not a single code of being and doing to which they all are responding in the affirmative. In fact, we see many shades of masculinities being performed by these male characters coming from different age groups and dispositions. Therefore, the commonsensical notion of a single masculinity that is allegedly performed by all male bodies can be discarded at even a superficial reading of the novel. However, that is not to deny the ways in which work and success in the public sphere remains a key component in the construction of desirable masculinity as discussed in the previous chapter. What it does tell us is that even within the hegemony of the well-accepted, rarely-contested discourse of a natural and singular masculinity, there are multiple subject positions available to the male subjects, vantage points from which challenges to the oppressive ideology of an overpowering singular brand of masculinity can be carved. Masculinity, then, needs to be understood not as a word, a signifier that stands for an outside non-linguistic concept or signified, waiting for language to arrive for its transmission, but as an *ideology* that constructs a sort of false consciousness through the discourse of the natural manliness and controls male bodies. Ideology here, as a conceptual term, can be described roughly 'as the system of ideas used by the ruling group in society to justify its dominance' (Childs 114) or 'as the largely concealed structure of values which informs and underlies our factual statements…the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in…[or] those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power' (Eagleton 13).

To see masculinity as an ideology would be to acknowledge the presence of a powerful ruling elite bent on deceiving male sexed bodies into believing the naturalness and superiority of masculinity for the perpetuation of a repressive system, or patriarchy in feminist theorization. However, the apprehension of masculinity as an ideology has its own challenges given that the employment of ideology to explain the nature of masculinity smacks of old-fashioned and vulgar

conception of power in Marxist theory which also finds expression in feminist theory through such concepts as patriarchy.

Indeed much of critical studies of men and masculinities *is* dedicated to exposing the hidden frameworks of patriarchal power relations in social interactions, though postmodernism philosophy has challenged the unitary and negative conception of power which underpins much of feminism and Marxism. This shift can be seen among the poststructuralist/ postmodernist theorists in their preference for the term 'discourse' over 'ideology'. This is opined by Sara Mills as this: 'cultural and critical theorists in recent years, there has been intense theoretical difficulty in deciding whether to draw on work which is based around the notion of ideology or work which refers to discourse' (26). The reason behind the dilemma lies in the different ways in which power is conceptualized in works that use ideology and those that use the Foucauldian notion of power in his discourse theory. As she describes:

> Marxist thought in particular seems to characterise power within what Foucault termed the 'repressive hypothesis', that is it sees power as simply a negative infringement on someone else's rights; here, power is taken or seized from others, and it is viewed as something which one can possess or hold. Foucault tries to move the conception of power away from this negative model towards a framework which stresses its productive nature, that it produces as well as represses. (Mills 32)

While acknowledging the flagrant debates on the categories of analysis of power; their suitability or reliability; for my purpose I use both the more Marxist concept of ideology and the more postmodernist/ Foucauldian concept of discourse to put forward the ways in masculinity can be read as an ideology which strengthens itself through multiple discourses; in this case the discourse of static masculinity acts as false consciousness to conceal the fluidity and historicity of masculinity which has the potential to threaten the status quo. The knowledge that masculinity is historical works against the commonsensical notion that masculinity is natural, and therefore, it also works against the premise on which the superiority of an alleged transcendental masculinity over an immanent femininity is established.

In order to establish the historical nature of masculinities, and the way in which a realist text promotes a certain brand or type of masculinity at a particular historical juncture in the context of this chapter, it has to be reiterated that 'what is particularly striking about [A Suitable

Boy] is the discrepancy between the title, which foregrounds the domestic narrative of the plot, and the breadth of the novel, which ends up covering an enormous amount of political, historical, cultural matters' (Srivastava *Midnight's Children* 52), and that, 'Seth's book is an inquiry into how a country is moving towards an understanding and control of its own fate' (Murari Prasad 101). This interlinking of the family, the individual, and the nation is to be emphasized in order to place the story of the individual in conjunction with the story of the nation. The individual here can be Haresh Khanna, a male subject outside the family tree shown at the outset of the novel. He is trying to establish himself as a major player in the footwear industry, a young industrious man who is trying to carve a niche for himself in the job market.

The reader comes to know him as a self-made man, and the third suitor for Lata's hand. The consumer of the text has already met the other two contenders in the race: the first is a Muslim Kabir Durrani who plays cricket apart from being a college student, the one who has charmed Lata into an infatuation, and perhaps the favourite among the naive readers who are hoping the novel to follow the codes of a romance, a Hindu-Muslim love story of epic proportions. The other is the foreign-returned drifter and carefree though published poet Amit Chatterjee who was supposed to follow into his father's footsteps: a degree in law from London had prepared him for a career in law though he 'won't be admitted to the bar library' because he would 'be happy editing a small journal and writing a few good poems and a novel or two and passing gently into senility and posterity' (Seth 417). Amit who 'appeared to be content to lead a life in contemplation' and would 'do as little as possible' (Seth 1019) and whose 'doing as little as possible by way of breadwinning was accompanied by doing as little as possible in his social life' (Seth 1020).

Haresh Khanna is neither a cricketer, nor a poet, so he lacks the glamour that comes along with being a sportsman, and is also wanting in culture, his philistinism stemming from his predilection for wealth creation, his preoccupation with rising up the corporate social ladder instead of reveling in intellectual acrobatics or the effete art of poetry. But it is not just the absence of poetic and talent in sports, Haresh is quite poor even when it comes to basic dress sense. Consider Lata's first impression of Haresh:

> Her first impression of him was that he was shorter than she had expected. The next- when he opened his mouth to speak- was that he had been chewing paan. This was far from appealing. Perhaps, if he had been wearing kurta-pyjama, a red-

> stained mouth would have been appropriate- if not acceptable. Paan did not go at all well with fawn gabardine and a silk shirt. In fact paan did not go at all well with her idea of a husband. His whole mode of dressing stuck her as being flashy. And flashiest of all were the co-respondent shoes. Whom was he trying to impress? (Seth 617)

Though he has gone to one of the reputed colleges in Delhi and has lived in England for a few years, he still cannot speak idiomatic English, which is a major cause of concern, as the new ruling elite post-independence fashioned itself after the British linguistic and cultural heritage. The narrator informs the reader that while

> Lata had made an immediately favourable impression on Haresh by the simplicity…and her accent was not a heavy Indian accent…Haresh, on the other hand, had surprised Lata by his accent, which traces both of Hindi and local Midland's dialect which he had been exposed to in England. Why, both her brothers spoke English better than he did. She could imagine what fun Kakoli and Meenakshi Chatterjee might have mocking Haresh's manner of speaking. (Seth 617)

Indeed, in one of the letters to Lata, her anglophile brother dissuades her from choosing Haresh as the prospective groom, even as Lata's mother, Mrs. Rupa Mehra herself had begun to have second thoughts about the suitability of Haresh. As he writes:

> despite his having studied English at St. Stephen's and having lived in England for two years, his use of the English language leaves much to be desired. This is no trivial point…Haresh does not, and can never aspire to, move in the same social circles as we do...the smell of leather clings rather too closely. Society matters, and society is exacting and cruel; you will find yourself excluded from certain circles simply by virtue of being Mrs. Khanna. Family, if I may put it plainly, will out. It shows in Haresh's manner of dress, in his liking for snuff and paan, in the fact that, despite his stint in England, he lacks the small social graces. (Seth 1413-14)

It is indeed true that Haresh's lack of sophistication, his inability to coordinate colours and styles of clothes effectively, and the poverty of his diction puts him at a severe disadvantage when it

comes to presenting himself as a or rather *the* suitable boy; therefore, it is not easy for the reader to come to terms with his arrival as the winning figure toward the end of the narrative. In an interesting turn of events, which the reader does not see coming as Seth's narrative style mimics Austenian romance fiction written like a comedy of manners, Lata makes a radical choice by asserting her intention of responding affirmatively to a marital alliance with Haresh Khanna. Clearly, Lata's decision does not arise from passion, as we do not see her responding with passion, or even affection toward Haresh. Lata, as she informs her friend Malati who is befuddled and angry at her friend's decision to turn down Kabir, makes her case using the poetry of Arthur Hugh Clough which talks about two different kinds of human attractions and favours the one which does not unsettle or makes uneasy, but that which allows one to grow where one was already growing.

While a case is made that the rational decision is based on a different kind of attraction, still it is adequately clear that Lata's approval of Haresh is based on his groundedness, on his inability to make her uneasy. 'Haresh's feet touch the ground, and he has dust and sweat and a shadow. The other two are a bit too God-like and ethereal to be any good for me' (Seth 1320). A dichotomy between the prospective grooms is created in which the God-like is juxtaposed with the human; the first two, Kabir and Amit, are unnatural or even supernatural, while Haresh is just another mortal, a product of nature; the first two stand for dreams while Haresh represents reality, warts and all. If the unconscious is the source of both dreams and poetry, then the poet Amit, his creativity and identity is derived from the unconscious, the opposite of conscious, that which is connected with the outer material reality. Amit and his creative pursuits derive, his love for rhyming, wordplay, puns, for instance, as opposed to the dominant free verse, their energy from the protective, sheltered life he has lived, his distance from material reality, his immersion in the sea of language and ideas, his love for Austen and other dead authors. The only scars he has are 'the scars of Middlemarch' (Seth 1371); his lack of earnestness, even when he is gifted, makes him unfit for any serious consideration on part of Lata. In response to his modest proposal, Lata thinks to herself:

> And what would it be like to be married to such a man?…how could she consider him seriously- Meenakshi and Kuku's brother, her own friend and guide to Calcutta, the purveyor of pineapples, the castigator of Cuddles? He was just Amit- to convert him into a husband was absurd- the thought of it made Lata smile and shake her head. (Seth 1409)

If Amit is perennially playful, and has not chosen to align himself with the idea of an ethic of commercial production, and Kabir is still a student, for whom Cricket remains a major preoccupation; in Lata's rational renunciation of passion for an emotionally secure life and Haresh's earnestness, we can see, allegorically, India's movement from an alleged ethos of romanticism, something that is refuted by Amartya Sen in his book *The Argumentative Indian*, toward rational action. Indeed, it is admissible, as Sen proposes, that the dichotomy between a rational West and a magical, romantic India, produced and perpetuated as it was by Western orientalist historiography of India, is untenable given that the subcontinent has had a long though overlooked history and culture of rational argumentation.

It is clear that Lata's formulation of passion is negative, as something that brings only despair, as a form of anarchy. When she says that 'If that's what passion means. I don't want it. Look at what passion has done to the family. Maan's broken, his mother's dead, his father's in despair. When I thought that Kabir was seeing someone else, what I remember feeling was enough to make me hate passion. Passionately and forever' (Seth 1296); Lata's need is symbolically the need of the nation; a nation beset by religious fervor and sectarian violence as early as at the moment of its birth; the newly independent India needed a climate of equanimity, a rational understanding and acceptance of differences, as Lata has for Haresh, rather than a continued absence of order and lawlessness brought about anarchic violence due to irrational anger and hate. Lata's decision is aimed at bringing order to her life, deeply confused as she is among a host of suitors which is evident when she says that 'it's not easy…I hardly know who I am or what I'm doing-I can't study or even think these days-everything is pressing in on me' (Seth 1420). As an additional instance of her disorienting experience of Kabir, she says that 'when I'm with Kabir, or even away from him but thinking about him, I become utterly useless for anything. I feel I'm out of control- like a boat heading for the rocks- and I don't want to become a wreck' (Seth 1419), compared with how she feels about Haresh: 'I don't find him unattractive. And there's something else- I won't feel I'll be making a fool of myself with him- with regard to, well, with regard to sex' (Seth 1419).

David Myers in his perceptive essay "Passion and Prejudice: Deconstructing the Thematic Unity of *A Suitable Boy*" suggests that Lata's passionate denunciation of passion is out of tune with the dominant cultural craze- in romance novels and other popular cultural artifacts- for finding the elusive meaning of life through losing oneself in passion. The text proposes that we

deny passion and remain in control of ourselves. The novel is insistent on its privileging of rationalistic 'sense' over romantic 'sensibility' in which Lata chooses Haresh over Kabir even though she continues to feel romantically passionate about Kabir and her meetings with Haresh are most often situated as failures on part of Haresh's lack of social graces in opposition to Lata's convent education, love for literature and belongingness to a family that puts class consciousness at a premium. By breaking- off with Kabir, a chance at a love marriage based in passion, Lata is also serving the great-god family whose social standing can be threatened by a marital alliance with a Muslim household; given that any form of rugged individualism which is associated with late capitalism has not arrived, let alone given space even in urban middle-class families. As Neelam Srivastava writes: 'The whole novel seems to subscribe to a familial ethics, a privileging of family harmony over the extremes to which individual desire can take us' (*Midnight's Children* 53).

What can also be added is that while Haresh is evidently a workaholic, yet for him, family very much remains to be the centre from which he derives his inspiration and motivation for work, and an alliance with Lata is expected to anchor him even more strongly to the family. It is his family members upon whom his obsession with work and its results are aimed at as when he writes to Lata informing her about his imminent promotion as a Group Foreman, he says that 'my doubting Uncle Umesh has been impressed by my obtaining a job like this one so quickly. My foster-mother, who is really like a real mother to me, is also pleased' (Seth 1410). He also intends to please Lata's family by forsaking his habit of chewing paan as is evident in the following quotation: 'I was warned by Kalpana that your family does not think it attractive…and I have decided to be accommodating in this respect' (Seth 1410). Additionally, the fact that he subscribes to the ethos of Nehru- Gandhi egalitarianism is proved by his invitation to the low-caste Kacheru to his wedding, Haresh's attitude is accommodative, flexible, and egalitarian, a quality that would be required for (religious) harmony in a newly born nation state which embraces modernity through a policy of secularism, and universal adult franchise, and also promises its caste subalterns equal opportunities.

Haresh therefore represents the values which are valuable to Lata, and by allegorical extension, a modern India, which, post the gruesome sectarian violence post- independence, needed secure harmony in the form of prevention from anarchy, rationality in the place of irrational religious fervor and emotional rage, a productive work ethic for the economic growth and self-reliance for a nation committed to eradicate poverty, flexibility and egalitarianism,

moderation and aspiration. Haresh is an embodiment of all these qualities, and therefore emerges as the suitable boy for this particular historical moment.

This kind of reading is of course not without its problems. As it sets down to locate a dominant conception of masculinity at a particular time in India's historical 'progress', as it were, and compares it with a masculine ideal at a different time period so as to promote or posit the idea that masculinity should be adequately historicized and be rendered unstable by showing its relativity; it evokes a sense of uneasiness given the fact that the apprehension of time in this developmental and evolutionarily manner has been rendered invalid with the arrival and consolidation of postmodern narrative theory in contemporary critical practice. In the general sense of the term, as Rita Felski writes, history

> presumes a confident knowledge of what really happened in the past and an imperious urge to organize the chaotic flux of time into a single streamlined story. In short, we can think of history as a modern mirage, an ephemeral fantasy spun out of words that tries to pass itself off as an objective account of how things really are. Postmodern thought shatters this apparently stable ground and radically alters our way of thinking about time. One of the most distinctive features of postmodernism, in this account, is its challenge to linear logic. Time loses its arrow; it no longer has a coherent goal or direction. We are no longer propelled into the future by the purposeful forward march of events. Instead, we find ourselves adrift, floating aimlessly in a sea of temporal fragments and random moments. (2)

While it should be acknowledged that the notion of linearity and teleology of time has been called in to question, and therefore to focus on typology of masculinity moving smoothly from one decade to another in the journey of postcolonial India is tantamount to forging a form of stability by using the conventional breaking up of time in periodization when postmodernism is 'synonymous with the demise of historical time…of time as evolution and progress' (Hekman 2); yet, in order to show that masculinity cannot be thought of in stable terms, to show its relativity, I draw in on Todd Resser who writes that:

> Thinking about masculinities in historical terms contributes to the larger goal of disbanding simplistic or essentialist notions of masculinity. Cross-temporal comparison of our own gendered context with that of previous periods has the effect of making our own notions of masculinity appear historically situated and not transhistorical. Our own presentness is framed as we see our gender constructs

as relative…[and] while styles of gender may change from minute to minute, or from second to second, methodologically speaking, some temporal coherence has to be assumed in order to study these cultural attitudes or behaviors. (218)

Also, as pointed out by Chris Beasley, rather than looking at modern and postmodern from the lens of oppositional binary, they should be approached as 'broad theoretical projects located on a continuum, rather than as distinct- much less necessarily oppositional' (*Problematizing* 748) and wherein postmodern is a 'coverall term to include the more specific connotations of poststructualism' (*Problematizing* 748). For a detailed representation of the same, follow the figure below:

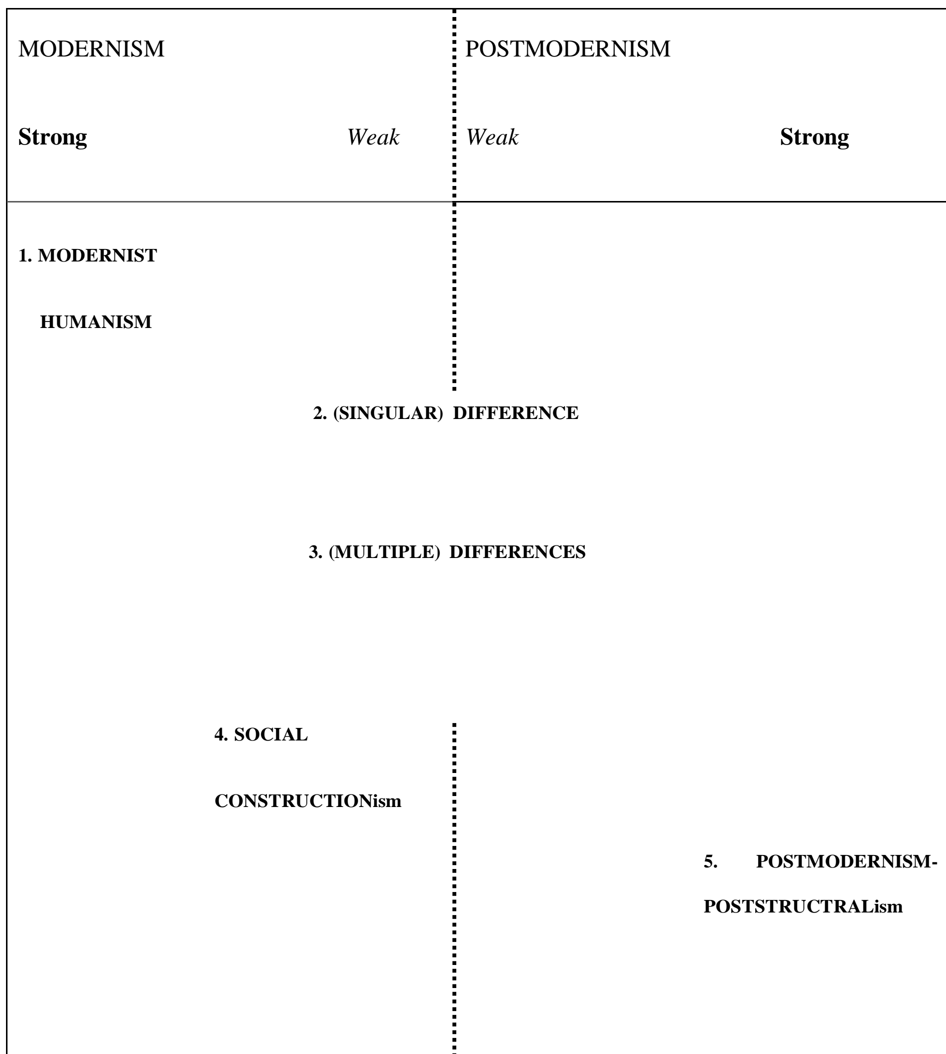

Figure 1

Map of the gender/ sexuality field: continuum and directions

Under this continuum, which has been showcased in the form of a map above (see Fig.1) borrowed from Chris Beasley (*Mind the gap* 112), study of men and masculinities derives mainly from the strong modernism and social constructionism which fall at different locations within the continuum, and while my own venture usually situates itself at the right end of the spectrum, there are instances in which singular difference is used to make the point. With regards to the formulation of time in the analysis of masculinity, in order to show the temporal mutability in masculinity, I allow some stability both to time and masculinity by drawing on singular difference rather than multiple differences.

Therefore, while Lata's choice can be read allegorically and be posited as the voice of the nation; it is important at this juncture to express or may be to reiterate the fact that even when a certain variation of masculinity may be more desirable or dominant at a particular time, there are plenty of many other subject positions available to male subjects which can be chosen to forge a counter-hegemonic, alternative domain of masculine practices within a single time frame. This means that the agency of the subject is not severely compromised even in the presence of overpowering discursive framework of desirable masculinity. Indeed, it is admissible that the category of 'masculinity' or 'proper' masculinity, is an inherently violent linguistic category as it relies on violent expulsion and exclusion of difference and deviation, however still, there are many other discursive spaces available to perform other variants, and that change and difference should not only be thought in terms of time leaps, i.e., diachronically, but also needs to be situated synchronically. Yet, given the scope of this chapter, the motive is to map difference along time's arrow, as it were, to relativize and problematize the cultural configuration of stable masculinity. This process of relativization of masculinity would require the exploration of another model of desirable masculinity situated in a different era of Indian politics when the Indian market is set to take off and open its doors to the entry of consumer capitalism and 'globalization- the removal of barriers to free trade and the closer integration of world economies' (Stiglitz ix). Here I investigate the nexus of love, desire, happiness, and capitalism to propose the contingent nature of emotions, and the cultural politics such allegedly apolitical emotions play in the discursive context of consumer capitalism.

Generally speaking, the emotions of love and happiness, like the performance of masculinity, are also seen as ahistorical, however, in this exercise of rendering masculinity historical, I locate the concepts of love and happiness as historically shifting, and propose that the

desires of the central female character in *Custody* for a specific male subject is a product of a particular historical juncture in Indian history; i.e., the consolidation of capitalism in India in the 1990s. Also, as an aside, it is important to note that masculinity as a category cannot be understood in isolation, and that it is intricately connected with femininity, and therefore any discussion on masculinity or masculine identity would inevitably be done by following the trajectory of the feminine subjects.

In *Custody* (2011), Manju Kapur, writes the story of a married woman Shagun Kaushik who is no longer interested in keeping the title Kaushik because she is intent on happiness. This happiness is constituted by will, desire, and passion, and she feels that she can achieve a life of happiness by being with a person who awakens passionate love in her, a person who happens to be her husband's boss. Shagun wants to quit her banal and dreary middle class housewife role which came to her in the form of an arranged marriage with Raman Kaushik, an IIT- IIM graduate who works in the Soda industry, and takes a leap toward the promise of happiness and good life. There is a separate story of the girl-next- door, Ishita, who has been divorced by her husband on account of her infertility, who past the divorce between Raman and Shagun, and during the custody battle between the estranged pair, forges a romantic liaison with Raman who then marry.

In her book *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Sara Ahmed, talks about a certain turn toward happiness in contemporary culture which is evident in the soaring market of self-help books, in the increasing interest in happiness in most disciplines within academia, the development of Happiness Studies as a separate discipline, as well as the cropping up of journals that are dedicated to studying and disseminating the latest research in happiness. In such a scenario, Indian popular culture cannot remain insulated, and so, for instance, in a scene from a recent critically-acclaimed film *The Lunchbox* (2014), the heroine of the film, afflicted as she is from melancholy and betrayal, shares with a stranger her desire to go and settle down in Bhutan, a nation-state which does not measure its economic well-being by using the conceptual tool of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but something as quaint as Gross National Happiness (GNH). In this case, a landscape becomes a promise of happiness, something concrete and 'out-there', awaiting social beings with the promise of well-being. Happiness, in this instance, becomes, not something anterior to the body, a matter of soul, but outside of it, but also mappable, measurable, empirical. In *Custody,* happiness, or the search, the dream of happiness is connected with the body, with passion, with desire, with love, with the practice of ruthless individualism. So, for

instance, when Shagun says to Ashok- ‘To leave him, to live with you, to be happy’ (Kapur 84)- she is referring to happiness as an effect produced by the presence of Ashok’s body. What is crucial here is that, if compared with Lata from Seth’s Boy, Shagun is not seeking happiness in a prosaic life built on the practice of the routine or the commonplace, in simpler terms an ordinary married life. She is doing just its opposite. Her decision is not a rational decision aimed at bringing ease to her mind and life; Lata as we know distances herself from Kabir because he is too Godlike, ethereal, who kindles passion and causes her emotional discomfort.

Shagun can be read as a ‘Willful Subject’, a subject for whom the idea of happiness is constituted differently because she is positioned in a different historical and discursive context, for whom happiness is a result of not submission to the great god family, or of choosing stability over passion, but in individual choice and freedom to make irrational choices to quench her desire, to possess what neo-liberal capitalism defines and constructs as the happiness object. She is also what Sara Ahmed would call a ‘killjoy’, if happiness for a woman involves, conventionally, settling down with a man with a steady income, mothering babies, and persistence/ perseverance in the face of irreconcilable differences with the husband. As she walks out of marriage with the steady though overworked and tedious husband, she is aware of the repercussions of her actions on all family members, yet she is eager to embrace the happiness this is inextricably a follow up of desire and passion rather than seeking safety in the family net. It is also possible to assert post a critical reading of the two novels that the promise or idea of happiness of the 50s India is different from the promise of happiness in late 90s India. Shagun gives up her married life and the social security that the institution of marriage bestows on women for a man who invokes in her love; love here is a phenomenon which is cleansed of its lowly association with base passions, that has established itself as a dominant cultural institution and perhaps the raison d'être of modern marriages unlike the way in which role suitability was paramount in the past, a good example of which is Seth’s *Boy*.

The study posit that *Custody* complicates the conventional idea of marriage and stable family as the source of happiness for all women, an idea that had a strong cultural currency in the past, as it can be seen in Lata’s search for a stable, grounded companion, and her denial of passion in Seth’s *Boy*. *Custody* proposes romanticism, desire, and passion as prerequisites of marriage thereby participating in the contemporary culture’s strong preoccupation with romance and love, individualism, choice, autonomy and the power of emotion, the irrational underpinned by the

forces of late capitalism. And in so doing provides us with a model that can be contrasted with the model of Seth's *Boy* in order to establish the changing nature of (desirable) masculinity, destabilizing in the process the commonsensical notion of fixed and stable masculinity.

In the binary of impetuous passion and cold rationality, *Custody*, as has been stated above, privileges passion. The first paragraph of the novel is a vivid description of a post-coital scene. 'The couple lay among stained sheets and rumpled quilts, eyes closed, legs twisted together like the knotted branches of a low growing tree' (Kapur 1). We can compare this with the very first scene in Seth's *A Suitable Boy* in which Mrs. Rupa Mehra is telling her daughter Lata that she would have to marry a boy of her choice. The keyword both in the beginning and indeed throughout the long course of Seth's narrative is marriage, and even though *Custody* also has marriage very much as its centre, given that the novel is after all a domestic realist fiction, however, the text engages far more with its destruction, the process of the separation of the couple, the unmaking of the socially acceptable form of arranged marriage and the construction of liaisons through passion. The first scene of *Custody* is also descriptive of the betrayal of Raman in which Shagun by 'clinging to reasons to justify her unfaithfulness' and by 'thinking badly of her spouse' is spending the night of the new year (Kapur 1). At the sobering moment of Raman's hospitalization due to a heart attack, the omniscient narrator deliberates on Shagun's desire but inability to fulfill the marital commitment of staying as a dutiful wife and affirms: 'But can you starve the passion that leaves you trembling through the day, block off the scent of desire that rises from between your legs. You have only one life to live, only one life, Ashok said repeatedly...'(Kapur 100). There are two things to be noted here. First is that the cultural concept of romantic love subsumes base passions under its more socially accepted cloak of a disembodied spiritual experience and that even though both Ashok and Shagun are under the gird of passion, they therefore accept it as romantic love, which in their implicit understanding should be the rationale for life-long companionship rather than humdrum realism or pragmatism as is the case with Lata. Germaine Greer informs us that:

> The mere mention of Cupid's arrow ought to remind us that there was a far different concept of love which prevailed not so long ago, a concept not only separate from pre-nuptial courtship, but quite inimical to marriage. Even in the brief lifetime of the concept of nuptial love it has not always been the same idea: many of the defenders of marriage for love…would be horrified if they could know

> the romanticism and sexual passion with which their ideal now is invested. Gradual changes in basic assumptions have obscured the traces of the development of the myth of falling-in-love-and-getting-married. (222-223).

As the reader further collates, Shagun wants to live up what Greer above calls the contemporary obsession with falling- in-love-and-getting-married which Alan McFarlane in his essay ‘Love and Capitalism’ describes as a central feature of modern industrial societies. In mapping both the temporal and epistemological aspects of the ideology of romantic love, and the phenomenon of love marriage, McFarlane, shares the orthodox scholarly opinion in which the ideology of love is seen as a result of modernization, and

> connected with capitalism, with an individualistic philosophy, and also with changes in the standards of living and changes in the means of production…it was only when a peasant society became transformed into a capitalistic one that the new marriage system based on love could emerge. (2-3)

However, there is a paradox in such an opinion, because capitalist modernity is usually thought to be underpinned by rationality, while love and passion falls within the ambit of the sentimental and the irrational. To solve this epistemological impasse, Max Weber as quoted by McFarlane opines that the central emotional feature of ‘love’ is a necessity where capitalist economic structures have developed most fully. Romantic love gives meaning to the autonomous disconnected individual in the age of functionality and ‘the lover…knows himself to be freed from the cold skeleton hands of rational orders, just as from the banality of the everyday routine’ (Gerth and Mill 347).

We see something similar in the case of Shagun whose husband and ‘the demands of his work forced him to be away long hours, thinning the connection between them’ (Kapur 30); he is also described as ‘a self-sacrificing overworked provider’ (Kapur 30), and as someone ‘who sacrificed family life for the sake of his job…ever since he had joined The Brand, he had felt the sharp edge of competition nudging into every idea he had, sometimes to the point of paralysis’ (Kapur 5). There is a scene in which Shagun ‘looked about her; there was not one wife seated around the low table who didn’t have to be alone most of the week, but the success of their husbands’ jobs added to the things they could buy and the places they could visit’ (Kapur 9). The reader gets a sense of the ways in which market liberalization in India which had brought skyrocketing money ‘salaries that at one time seemed unimaginable-40-50-60 lakhs a year, plus

bonuses' and which had made 'anything seemed possible if you worked hard enough' that while 'India was becoming a meritocracy, connections were no longer necessary for success' (Kapur 16), there was also a sense of ennui which had begun to grip the urban middle classes, particularly the housewives, a la 'problem with no name'. In the development of chronic dissatisfaction, the idea that 'you only live once' promoted by a strengthening consumer culture is a compounding factor. This notion that you get only one life to live, is also often repeated by the Harvard educated Ashok Khanna, whose philosophy appears to be derived from the Judeo-Christian world-view or what Max Weber called the protestant work ethic that played an important role in the emergence of capitalism, as opposed to the Hindu philosophy of endless cycle of birth and rebirth. As he says 'We only have one life to live and everybody wants to live it the best they can' (Kapur 81), and that 'even princess Diana left her husband. She found happiness before she died' (Kapur 81). This, of course, is also a regular feature of post-liberalization Indian commodity culture, keen as this culture is on consumption. A recent Hindi film Zindagi Milegi Na Dobara (loosely translated: You Live Only Once), for instance, intended to promote the idea to fight off one's greatest fears, however, ends up becoming a 153 minute long promotional advertisement for the tourism industry of Spain, produced as it was 'in close collaboration with the Spanish tourism promotion agency, Turespana (Hindu) giving as much as a hike of 32% in traffic, and giving birth to 'tailored adventure tour packages to Spain from India that include deep sea diving, flamenco dancing, sky diving, and bull fighting' (CNN). Shagun's action is situated within a discursive atmosphere which indirectly emphasizes consumption as one of the main priorities for its subjects through the discourse of imminent death and the irreversibility of bygone past; the strengthening of a different discourse of happiness in contemporary India allows the creation, and to a good extent glorification of a character like Ashok Khanna who is ruthlessly individualistic, competitive, and selfish, and still a 'happiness-object' whose possession ensures a new sense of happiness.

There are many axes along which differences between Raman Kaushik and Ashok Khanna could be mapped, and while they both are playing a pivotal role in the consolidation of capitalism in India, yet Raman's character has significant amount of traces of the traditional past. Though Ashok is significantly more accomplished and flamboyant; it is Raman, Shagun's husband, that appears close to Haresh from *A Suitable Boy*. Like Haresh, Raman comes from a middle-class Delhi family, has had his education at an ordinary school, and by dint of hard work he is able to make a living for himself at The Brand, intent on rising up the corporate ladder, Raman spends a

great amount of time visiting outdoors promoting the product, increasing sales, though the results are far from satisfactory. Raman is earnest, straightforward, sensitive, family-oriented, very similar to Haresh who is also industrious, forthright and they both come from humble backgrounds, but have made a place for themselves in the corporate middle class, but Raman is more akin to a corporate-slave, who is not a decision maker, and follows the plans of the upper echelons of his corporate organization, mainly Ashok Khanna. Raman is also described to be passive; he 'lacked the killer instinct,' (Kapur 195), is hesitant to use a wrong mean to achieve ends, and while conjuring her old life with Raman, Shagun can only come up with words such as 'safe, dull, and boring' (Kapur 224); later, at a different juncture her life with Raman is described with three more adjectives that are very similar to the ones above: 'joyless, dismal, uninteresting' (Kapur 106). His excessive caring attitude toward his mother-in-law is also seen by Shagun as 'boring and predictable' (Kapur 40).

At a different moment, Raman's choice of school for Roohi, his daughter, according to Shagun, is 'boring and conventional' (Kapur 345). The narrator also informs that 'Raman knew himself to be an ordinary man, ordinary looking, ordinarily talented though hard-working. The extraordinary thing in his life was his wife and his love for her, as strong as steel, as pliant as a spider's web' (Kapur 44). In another instance, when Raman regrets the fact that he cannot have his family lived together, he castigates himself and thinks that the family would have been together, and 'if he was another man, perhaps he would have handled such things better' (Kapur 348). In comparison to his mediocre looks, Shagun has been shown as a woman of great beauty, an aspirer for a wealth induced glamorous, sophisticated life, and importantly the reason why she could not respond in the negative to the advances of Ashok is that she does not want to appear unsophisticated.

In contrast to Raman's ordinariness, Ashok had had his school education at one of India's premier boarding schools, which signals his growing up in a wealthy home, as well as the basis for his love for competition, a school 'where children had to be taught to live in the real world, where competition was endemic to everything', so he is the 'man with cut-throat competition bred into his blood and bones-who saw the world as a marketplace with all its wares as sales' (Kapur 336); we do not know about his parents, they are not referred to anywhere in the novel, however, we are made well aware of his accomplishments as he is installed by his company because he has 'a formidable reputation for troubleshooting' (Kapur 3) and that 'he thrives on challenges…a

corporate man with a strong belief in hard work' (Kapur 2). Shagun knew that 'that he was a man of narrow and intense passions, one who lived, slept and ate business' (Kapur 32). The reader gets to know that not only Ashok could write poetry in his college days which signals his versatility but also his ability to sacrifice other interests in the larger goal of making it big in the corporate world and lack of idealism. Morally, Ashok is much more lax, as is evident in his frustration: 'It's the nineties. Don't Indians change partners? Or are we still living in Vedic times?' (Kapur 148); and philosophically, he is attuned to the idea of one life and living/ enjoying it to the fullest. Ashok, though selfish, is not an entirely villainous, black, flat character who is bent on wreaking the happy home of Raman, Shagun, and the two children, the way such characters are often constructed in realist narratives of the pejoratively titled *saas-bahu* (crudely translated mother-in-law-daughter-in- law) TV serials consumed often by Indian housewives. In such popular serials, the home wrecker is often a sexualized female, who likes to dress up garishly with heavy make-up, performing acts of feline cunningness against the gullible and victimized heroine, clad in sober and traditional attire; the binary opposition is strictly maintained.

In *Custody,* Ashok, though dynamic and flamboyant, and is in many ways different from Raman, yet he cannot be cast in a hero-villain binary; so we do not see him plotting a deliberate scheme, and there are clear indications that he is also reeling under the same narrative of love and/ as happiness as Shagun. Ashok is also straightforward and honest in his admission and proposal of a future marital alliance with Shagun. Though we are not introduced much to his humane side in the initial segment of the novel; we do not know, for instance, the whereabouts of his family, and indeed we see him as a Machiavellian businessman obsessed with achieving sales targets through ingenious means and projects, as he 'was always seeing connections where none were obvious' (Kapur 81), bereft of familial and kinship ties unlike Raman. Yet we gradually attain awareness of Ashok's benevolence and care toward Shagun's children when Shagun moves out of India with him. We see Ashok taking the charge of putting Shagun's son Arjun to the boarding school where he himself received his early education, and in numerous other instances he proves wrong the anticipation of both Raman and the morally conservative reader that Shagun would be punished sometime later in the course of the narrative for the moral transgression she committed by renouncing the idea of the stable happy family for passion. Ashok is characterized by a sense of the spectacular and the extraordinary in opposition to Raman's mundaneness and ordinariness.

Educated at Harvard, Ashok is reported to be a marketing star, his persona an enigma as it is evident in the following passage from the novel:

> Ashok's reputation was based on his ability to get the best out of people, even the most dispirited campaign appeared more lively when he blessed t with his attention. That was why his salary was in the astronomical region of 50 lakhs a year, why his house was in the West End and his car a chauffeured BMW. He had been in India only six months and already there was more confidence that the steady losses of the last five years could after all be stemmed. (Kapur 8-9)

Further, as we notice, Ashok's larger-than-life persona causes intrigue, and Shagun is forced to ask many questions about him to quench her thirst post the party in which she meets him for the first time: 'She asked many questions about the boss, was it true he was a marketing genius? Had he managed to produce results so far? Where was his wife? How come he wasn't married?' (Kapur 10). In other instance we are made aware that Ashok 'had a strong sense of the significance of his own presence. But was it any wonder? Apparently he had been successful since the day he was born (13). Such instances establish Ashok's extraordinariness, an exceptional masculine subject in the sea of ordinary men, one of whom happens to be Shagun's husband Raman. Ashok's exoticness is also amplified by the fact that "though he had grown up in India, he'd lived abroad for the past twenty-five years' (Kapur 13).

Besides, at last, what is more important from our perspective is that Ashok not just works for The Brand, but in fact, in many ways, embodies what The Brand stands for. The Brand is, as we know, really a pseudonym for the carbonated soft-drink brand Coke, the symbol of pronounced consumer culture, very much the face of global capitalism, one of the biggest names in consumer goods, indeed so big a brand that apparently the red and white Coca-Cola logo is recognized by 94% of the world's population. The Brand stands is influential, is extraordinary and exceptional in the sense that it stands out among a host of rivals. The other most important thing to note is that this world's most valued brand is 'often associated with happiness' as per the brand's website; in fact Coca-Cola means 'Delicious Happiness' in Mandarin. (Source: The Website). The reading of Coke's tagline 'Open Happiness' conveys the product as a happy object whose consumption will lead to happiness. Ashok, as stated before, not only works for the brand, but is the Brand, what it stands for: competitiveness, spectacle, hegemony, desire, extraordinariness, happiness.

Embodying the ethos of the Brand, he too is a product of the times, of late consumer capitalism, like Coke, a happiness object whose company or consumption, can offer happiness to his consumer, who, textually, happens to be Shagun as it is apparent in this scene:

> He drew her close and whispered 'little wife'. She sank down next to him; she knew she would have to pay heavily for this happiness, but at least, dear God, she would have a happiness she never had before. If she were to die tomorrow, it would be as a fulfilled woman (Kapur 108).

Like a multinational commodity product, Ashok comes to India in the 90s and creates his demand, exhorts Shagun to abandon traditional happiness that came from arranged marriage and stable family, to follow her heart, and desire, making Shagun feel that real happiness lies only in the possession of his being. The Brand's or Ashok's charisma, as they are analogous, lie in their exotic appeal, in their ability to create demand for their uniqueness and specialness, in their ability to construct the binary between the exciting and the boring, in which the traditional, the conventional is rendered commonplace, an impediment in the path of true happiness, true wellness of a nation beset by tradition.

Shagun like Lata from Seth's *Boy* can also be read allegorically, as she too is India, albeit at a different historical juncture, India at the crossroads in the 90s, in which she has embraced the forces of Western consumer capitalism abandoning the traditional secure status of closed economy. In choosing The Brand, India opens its door to a new culture which will give birth to new configurations, new frameworks of being and doing. In this culture, the persona, the characteristic masculinity of Ashok will have a stronger culture currency given that it mimics the ways of market capitalism; it creates its own demand through the aura of exotic and the spectacular: it is elitist, well placed, competitive. It privileges passion, edginess, risk over stability, a culture in which romantic love replaces, radically, the more practical concerns of survival, livelihood, family or social consent. The culture of neo-liberal capitalism promotes limitless individualism, a culture in which the great god family ceases to be the epicenter of human concerns, and a radical new subjectivity emerges which, though bound by market, seeks a novel form of happiness in following (base) individualist desire, and does not toe the line of traditional social norms. In such an altered material reality, in which the nation has moved from totally practical concerns of the 1950s, from its need to put in place a masculine subjectivity which would

find its acceptance in rationality, we find in *Custody*, a new masculinity which would find acceptance in a different discursive climate, that of individualism and happiness in desire. In the abandonment of Raman, and in the embracing of Ashok, we see a movement in Indian cultural climate, that of the relinquishing of the old, the traditional, the conventional and therefore the boring, to the new and exciting. India is seeking new models of engagement; if earlier it was complacent and happy with choosing a model of masculinity that signified simplicity, reliability, modesty, family orientation; by the 90s we witness, through *Custody*, the emergence of a new masculinity which is made desirable through other or rather opposite modes of significations.

This kind of juxtaposition between two separate configurations of masculine subjectivity at different moments in Indian history using two realist literary texts allows us to formulate a different notion of what masculinity is. In this formulation, masculinity is historically shifting, lacking a fixed shape or nature; it responds to the dominant discourse of the times, and is therefore not in accordance with the commonsensical discourse that it is naturally static and has been in the current configuration since the beginning of time.

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Chapter 4

Dislocating Masculinity: Emasculated Males, Manly Females

The previous two chapters attack the notions of stability and universalism in men's attributes/ actions by showing both temporal mutability in the emergence of desirable masculinity as well as foregrounding instabilities and pluralities in men's being. As reported earlier, the popular social discourse and sociology of masculinity regularly aligns it with negative power, independence, coercion, violence, competitiveness, risk-taking, resourcefulness and action orientation, etc. In so doing, such popular and academic discourses fix masculinity by seeking unification, deep structures, or what Anthony Easthope would call a 'sense of totality', 'an imaginary wholeness' (157) in men's variability as opposed to this study which privileges difference and heterogeneity and promotes 'the postmodern antagonism to identity politics' (Beasley *G&S* 178). However, even the 'difference' approach which propelled previous discussions in this thesis, works under the presupposition that a construction or deconstruction of narratives of masculinity will have to be predicated on men's lives, whether they be textual readings or positivist studies. In other words, it is presumed that all analysis of masculinity must necessarily entail an analysis into men's lives; chiefly the (heterosexual) male body as the only reservoir of masculinity while other bodies are characterized by its lack.

In the earlier chapters, there was an underlying notion that a stock taking of the attitudes, behavioural patterns of the male characters would pave the path for knowledge production, or rather a deconstruction of the prevalent notions of masculinity. Such an approach, as seen at work in the previous two chapters, unwittingly promotes the binary opposition of masculinity and femininity which already circulates in (patriarchal) culture, instead of transcending it. However, it is important to note that this is a standard practice in masculinity scholarship since 'Masculinity writers almost invariably in practice simply assume that the topic is men, those with male bodies, and indeed those who may be characterised as masculine males. They also typically focus on men who are heterosexual' (Beasley *G&S* 178). The linguistic category of 'male' is not invoked often in discussions given the biological linkages of the term with the body given that critical studies of masculinity explores the social aspects as masculinity is 'seen as socially, historically and

culturally variable and as constituted in relation to, or more accurately as against, that which is deemed non-masculine' (Beasley *G&S* 178). However, as Gottzen and Mellstrom affirm:

> Undoing the connection between men and masculinity, and women and femininity is an important task for future gender research. For this to happen, Masculinity Studies particularly needs to join the contemporary feminist debate on new ontological and epistemological positions of knowledge production in order to find new subject positions beyond the normative and binary gender order. (2)

This chapter, then, engages in this 'important task for future gender research' wherein the inevitable and natural connection between men and masculinity is contested and the points of disjuncture between the two are foregrounded. One good example of such a postmodernist engagement emerges from the reading of metaphors in Arthur Flannigan-Saint-Aubin's work wherein he questions the 'the phallic ideal…parallels that exist between biologic maleness…and masculinity as psychologic and cultural concerns' and how such a convention 'occludes the complexity and perhaps the contradiction inherent in any representation of masculinity' (240). The author states that:

> Masculinity, in its psychologic and cultural manifestations and implications, is assumed to be the homologue of the phallic genitality of the male with, at the very least, metaphoric connections to it—in part, aggressive, violent, penetrating, goal-directed, linear. Lacking in this perspective in particular is… the testicular and testerical aspect of male sexual anatomy and physiology. If the testicles are entered into the equation, therefore, an entirely different metaphoricity emerges, stemming from testicular/testerical characteristics: passive, receptive, enclosing, stable, cyclic, among others—qualities that are lost when male equals penis… these other components of and metaphors for masculinity, although they are authentically and intrinsically male, are not viewed or perhaps even experienced consciously as male. (239)

In so far as this thesis is a critique of essentialism, natural or social, it is imperative to dissolve the linear association between men and masculinity because such a convention fixes masculinity in the male body. So far, it has been posited that the repertoire of male attributes and action is not limited to a closed set, and indeed stable masculinity is fictitious; the emphasis in this

chapter is a continuation of previous chapters except that it also includes critical discussion of stable femininity since the two categories are relational, dependent on each other for meaning rather than on extra-discursive material reality. In so far as identity is haunted or contaminated by the spectre of non-identity, masculinity cannot be thought about in pure, stable, and abiding terms because it is always already contaminated by its Other, femininity. According to Dasgupta et al. 'it is erroneous to view femininity as the opposite of masculinity. Rather, the former should be regarded as supplement to the former: the definition of feminine qualities serves to also define masculinity' (28). Echoing this, Todd Reeser posits that 'in a post-structuralist approach one cannot simply *be* a man, and masculinity cannot simply *be* defined in a certain way since structures do not underlie a male identity and since masculinity is inherently unstable' (14). Yet such obsession with underlying structures that mobilise the opposition between masculinity and femininity or men and women is a commonplace phenomenon that gets played out in the social realm whose institutions construct discourse of gender and are also shaped by it. One attribute that bolsters the value dualism inherent in Western thought that tie masculinity to certain adjectives and attributes, and those attributes getting fixated on the body is rationality.

As pointed by a large number of feminist scholars, Western philosophy proposes men as the only repository of reason; the male body in this system of thought emerges as the only container for logic. In the words of Lorrain Code:

> white western philosophy has persistently associated reason with maleness and emotion/passion with femaleness: associations apparent from folkloric claims that men are "more" rational and women "more" emotional, to philosophical constructions of the nature of reason both in itself as it contrasts with emotion and passion, and as it is enjoined to exclude them. These associations inform gendered divisions of intellectual and domestic labour and hierarchical structurings of the social-epistemic order into private (emotion- governed) female and public (reason-governed) male domains. Representing the emotions/passions as fundamentally irrational, they sustain public disdain of emotion, and of women because of their alleged emotionality. (213)

Given that power constructs the two gender categories in opposition, women have a long history of exclusion from the mind and is frequently aligned with the body. According to Genevieve Lloyd:

> From the beginning, femaleness was symbolically associated with what Reason supposedly left behind - the dark powers of the earth goddesses, the immersion in natural forces associated with female powers. And the symbolism lingered in later refinements of the idea of Reason. In the Pythagorean table of opposites, femaleness was one of the terms explicitly associated with the unbounded, the vague, the indeterminate as against the superior "bounded," the precise, the clearly determined. (492)

This dualism of rationality-emotionality is fuelled by the 'disdain for the body' (Campbell and Maynell 2), what Spelman calls 'somatophobia' which stands for the separateness of mind and body, and which is then foisted onto multiple sets of dichotomies which are gendered. In the words of Plumwood:

> The postulate that the sphere of reason is masculine maps the reason/body pair onto the masculine/ feminine pair…in the case of public private the linking postulate connects the sphere of the public with reason via the qualities of freedom, universality and rationality which are supposedly constitutive of masculinity and the public sphere, and connects that of the private with nature via the qualities of dailiness, necessity, particularity, and emotionality supposedly exemplified in and constitutive of the feminine and the private sphere. (38)

Such dualistic constructions which permeate Western thinking for over thousands of years create the illusion of homogenized and dualistic gender categories even though the reality of being for humans is complex and most men and women are able to simultaneously reason and feel without feeling any necessary challenges. This is supported by Kessler and McKenna's who suggests that 'male' and 'female' are examples of what is referred to in philosophy as a 'cluster concept': one that is not amenable to straightforward definition but is recognised through a cluster of attributes, some of which are more salient than others, but which may not all be present. The gender binary,

in consequence, only operates at the level of the label. There are only two labels, but what they denote will vary considerably between situations, and will frequently overlap.

The creation of neat constructions of homogenous gender identities that are always oppositional as well as hierarchical needs to be undermined to show the ways in which 'the man of reason', the autonomous participant in the public sphere, is not always reasonable and not always independent. Similarly, and perhaps more importantly, it is important to display that the home-bound emotional woman also participates in the sphere of work and capital, makes independent decisions about marriage and career, fluidly and strategically perform actions that are usually aligned with masculinity. In other words, this chapter attempts to dismantle the linear and compulsory linkage between men and masculinity by showing how women's repertoire of actions and attributes contains many of those categories, such as reason, autonomy, courage, etc., which have historically served to constitute masculinity. In so doing, it also undertakes a discussion on how women, rather than bounded by a fixed role, occupy different subject positions which may include both a position in the discourse of femininity as well as a position in the masculine discourse of enlightenment humanism. As affirmed by Catherine Belsey:

> Women as a group in our society are both produced and inhibited by contradictory discourses. Very broadly, we participate both in the liberal-humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality and at the same time the specifically feminine discourse offered by society of submission, relative inadequacy and irrational intuition. (597–98)

This split subjectivity of women, lack of fixity in a specific discourse, and fluid movement between diverse and oppositional positions in different discourses creates a situation in which a straightforward, common-sense, and coherent narrative of masculinity cannot be constructed, since masculinity and femininity are relational categories that depend on each other for signification in the signifying chain and do not exist as positive terms. This features evidently in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* which superficially may appear as a social realist novel that can acquaint its reader about the social designs and constraints within which the construction of the feminine identity for a girl child takes shape. It, according to Manpreet J. Singh, deals with the road a woman has to traverse once she embarks on the forbidden journey to selfhood' (38). This perhaps buttresses the widespread notion of the author being a 'feminist'

writer, in which the reader aligns the author's allegiance to feminism with her interest in uncovering the rigid and oppressive boundaries of the sex roles as foisted on the growing girl child, as well as the catastrophic repercussions of role reversal/ transgressions, such as overwhelming success in the public sphere. Quite evidently, the novel succeeds in portraying both. The very first scene is shocking in that it vividly captures the horrific act of rape and attendant sadism on the female protagonist-narrator. Here, she is helpless and entirely at the mercy of her powerful husband. As a recourse, when she reaches the doorsteps of her erstwhile home in which she grew up, she recalls the *Krishna-Sudama* story and locates herself as '*Sudama*', the poor, helpless, friend who seeks help from the owner of house, her father, a man.

In a reading where Saru represents the collective state of women in India and perhaps the world, and her husband, Manohar portrays collective men or patriarchy, Deshpande appears to work within the macro-structural analyses of oppression and therefore exemplifies, at best, the social-constructivist approach, so dominant in gender and sexuality studies. According to Chris Beasley, this social-constructivist approach 'has a modernist stress upon power as social structures- as macro, foundational, centred and more or less determining-and is more inclined than postmodern thinking to view power/ structures negatively, in terms of oppression' (114). In such readings, the narrator-protagonist emerges as 'woman' oppressed by 'man' in need of emancipation from the workings of power which she does not have access to. However, as pointed out by Mann and Huffman, 'recent developments in social thought have heightened out awareness of how theories of emancipation can be blind to their own dominating, exclusive and restrictive tendencies and how feminism is not innocent of such tendencies' (56).

The social-constructivist reading of Saru's oppression may posit Saru to have a unified subjectivity, the oppressed Saru, in which the novel's protagonist, her subjected being, comes to represent singular mainstream femininity shared by women of all classes, castes, and regions. Clearly, the issue with such an approach is its lack of nuance and knowledge of the messiness of reality. It creates the illusion of identity or of sameness to establish a coherent politics of identity against what it deems to be an overwhelming structural and systematic oppression neglecting the localized and micro manifestations of the workings of power which itself is as complicated as the 'noumena' of identity. Because identity is not only sameness but also difference. The notion of difference is embedded in the formulation of any identity even though difference, in the first instance, is opposite to sameness which identity is synonymous with. As Mark Currie informs:

> 'Identity' can clearly mean the property of absolute sameness between separate entities, but it can also mean the unique characteristics determining the personality and difference of a single entity…the identity of things, people, places, groups, nations and cultures is constituted by the logics of both sameness and difference' (3). Indeed, not just the word 'identity' but 'every noun is marked by this kind of dialectic of identity and difference, and that every political or philosophical debate to some extent turns on the ways that this dialectic operates'. (Currie 3)

In a constructivist and modernist understanding, Saru's identity as a woman therefore is predicated upon both her 'sameness' with other women who share with her the female body and a subjected being, and her 'difference' from men who are different from her both in terms of body and a subjectivity which is free from constraints. But difference is not only external; it is also internal, and therefore positing Saru as a metaphor or metonymy for all women is rife with epistemological issues given that such an event effaces the 'irreducible individuality' of each woman and therefore 'woman' as a linguistic category is a generalization or a stereotype which is predicated on an illusion of false common essence. In addition to that, the spectre of difference which propels the postmodern formulation of identity also complicates the position that Saru has a single unified self. The reader gets an acute sense of how Saru's 'self' rather than a fixed totality is a process of becoming. Rather than apprehending Saru as a complete 'being' as an object or a thing complete unto itself, Saru's identity, in the process of her telling the tale, exemplifies a state of 'becoming'. This fracturing of identity comes right across to face the reader when he reads a passage wherein Saru recalls a story of witnessing an apparently 'mad' woman in a temple 'feet thumping, hands flailing, sari coming loose, hair flying round' something 'horrifying, for some reason obscene' which the young Saru 'just could not understand' (Deshpande 101). Yet, in moments later when the same woman who had had 'the Devi entered into her…could smile and look so pleasant' the young Saru 'could not put the two women together' and only much later 'it made sense. That a person could be so divided in herself, into two entirely different beings' (Deshpande 103).

In so far as the approach in this thesis is a critique of the modernist/ structuralist approach to gender which attempts to locate a homology in femininity neglecting or suppressing difference in order to work out a progressive politics via posing 'woman', Saru cannot be read as only a victim of oppression and moments of slippage are needed to be foregrounded to show the complexity which constitutes her identity. The author, as suggested above, presents the presence

of many selves in the spirit of postmodernism rather than a single consciousness and these selves according to the narrator are 'the guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife…person's spiked with guilts' (Deshpande 220). In other instances, she interprets herself as a 'dummy in a white coat' and shares her fear of 'disintegration. A terrified consciousness of not existing' and that 'one day Nirmala would look in and find no one behind the table. Just a white coat containing nothing. Emptiness' (Deshpande 22) drawing attention to the ephemerality and contingency of her 'self'. This inability to situate one's 'self' on a static, exterior, Archimedean point from which conclusive meaning of past and present life could be safely made is what drives the novel, and this fuels the ambiguity, the internal fracturing and the hybridity in the simplified male predator and female victim binary: 'But now I wonder…who is the victim and who is the predator? Are the roles so distinct, so separate? Or are we each of us both?' (Deshpande 159).

In so far as masculinity as a concept or a notion is tied to autonomy, determination, strength, courage, participation and success in the public sphere, and such attributes are usually fixed only in the male body and the diametrically opposite attributes are foisted on the female body, yet it is found that that the female characters in the novel frequently make use of the repertoire of attributes that are aligned only with the male body. Therefore, Saru, the narrator-protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terror* does not come across, in this reading, as someone who is 'simply a dupe of an ideology [femininity], but rather as actively constructing positions for themselves' or as an agent 'rather than simply as the passive victims of oppressive ideologies' (Mills 82). As Singh remarks 'she decides early, to equip herself with power attributed to maleness, by abandoning the helpless feminine prototype…in this pursuit of self-empowerment, Saru transgresses the Sita and Draupadi stereotypes of living within the husbands means and adjusting to the circumstances ordained by him' (Deshpande 38). In other words, Saru does not render a picture of emphasized femininity rather her location falls somewhere in the masculine-feminine continuum, like that of her own husband, who is emasculated by his wife's success and his own failures. Indeed, in order to express this ambivalence Saru uses the metaphor of darkness: 'for he [Manu] is groping in the dark, as much as I am' (Deshpande 96). At one time she confesses of 'overreaching a male… doing something that took away shreds of my feminity' (Deshpande 53).

Even though from her childhood Saru brings attention to the text's audience about instances galore of the boundaries within which ideal femininity is constituted, yet there are many

instances in which Saru appears to transcend or transgress such boundaries by responding to the hailing of the discourses of freedom and modernity. Saru makes an active choice of taking up medicine even when her mother is strongly against such an adventure partly because of the family's dire financial situation and overwhelmingly due to her status as an adolescent girl. Yet Saru joins the 'medical college in spite of her mother. Standing up against her asserting her will against her…that had seemed impossible. But she had done it' (Deshpande 139). Saru's exercise of her 'will', a will to financial freedom and prosperity, of autonomy, is a testament to her possession or access to attributes/ actions which are aligned more readily with masculinity and men in contrast to her emasculated, 'pusillanimous' father, a man who has 'always avoided things. The truth. Facts. Life. Confrontation' (Deshpande 198). Not only the protagonist is able to join the medical college of her choice by being disagreeable than being malleable, by a 'desire hardened into ambition' in order 'to achieve an air of superiority' for which she has to give 'up all pleasure and concentrated on studies' (Deshpande 140), she continues her journey of excellence like she had 'obtained a first class' (Deshpande 140) in the Intermediate exams. This also allows her to avoid 'getting married, and end up doing just what your mother did, seemed to me not only terrible but damnable' (Deshpande 140).

In conventional discourse, attributes such as obstinacy and disagreeableness are associated with masculinity given that they are overwhelmingly performed by men, and we witness here not only Saru's strategic use of obstinacy but what is even more important to note in this particular instance is the active coercion, the disagreeableness on the part of the mother who herself is a case of deviance from stereotypical femininity and is in no manner an exemplary nurturing mother. In fact, throughout the narrative, she can be read as a woman with no particular investment in the caring and development of her child or for that matter an ounce of empathy or support for the challenges faced by a growing female child at home, the characteristic feature of 'proper' femininity. There is violent tension in the mother-daughter relationship; neither there is any apparent emotional connection between Saru's mother and father; their life is a life of passionless pragmatism; an enduring, bottomless drudgery. In order to avoid such a future not only Saru rebels against her mother in taking up medicine and becoming an independent career woman, she also assaults the traditional though stifling institution of same-caste arranged marriages by forging romantic liaison with a caste other and eventually marrying for love even if that meant abandoning her house and severing kinship ties. This can be contextualised as her responding to the discourse

of the ‘new woman’ who marries for love and straddles the poles of work and family and who has actively forsaken, in her individuality and autonomy, old ways of being for woman which entailed the endurance of pain and complete dependence.

Social constructionism should be distinguished from social determinism, because as can be learnt from Deshpande’s heroine, she does not capitulate to the parental pressure of staying at home; they even marry outside their caste by flouting the conventions followed by their families. In a culture that supposedly puts a lot of stress on caste, Saru’s open embracing of the lower caste Manohar must be contextualised by pointing out the relative autonomy of the female subject straddling different positions and is constructed by a variety of opposing discourses. Saru’s supposed ‘transgression’ can be put in context by highlighting the influence of the discourse of liberalism and equality which posits that female subjects of a nation that is formally aligned with the values of liberty and equality, make independent choices, and their subject position is a result of the encroachment of imported Western modernity which emphasizes on individualism and freedom. They are liable to formulate their selves according to the demands or expectations of the changing public sphere which encourages the modern woman to be decisive and autonomous with regards to her choices in marriage and career, and so, indeed the friction between Saru and her parents can be read as the clash of two opposing discourses.

This features illuminatingly in her assessment of her difference from her own grandmother who was left stranded by her husband, who had experienced ‘the burden of being unwanted, of being a dependent’ but who had never complained fixing the problem on to her destiny or fate which she had accepted of being ‘written on…[her] forehead’ (Deshpande 70), we capture a completely opposite take by Saru who believes that sadism cannot be endured by taking a recourse to the discourse of fate or destiny. In addition to that, she also points at the discursiveness of beliefs and how her subject- position at a different temporal juncture allows her not to submit to the continued physical and mental subjugation. As she affirms:

> she knew she could not go on… If only she had belonged to another time, where a woman had no choice but to go on! Human nature may not change, but isn’t there such a thing as a frame of mind, a way of thinking, which is shaped by the age you live in? It was so much easier for women in those days to accept, not to struggle,

> because they believed, they knew, there was nothing else for them. And they called that fate. If only I could say that. (Deshpande 70)

The apparent difference in the perspectives vis-à-vis fate, destiny, and the centrality of humans in shaping their lives, Saru and her grandmother appear to be inhabiting two separate poles of being. If the grandmother speaks of destiny and fate adhering to the pre-modern discourse of God at the centre of all being and action, in which everything situation is decided by fate and chance; Saru is keen to foreground her inability to leave the problems of her life to such discourses of the past to which earlier generations of women paid allegiance to and instead see the command of her life in her own hand. In this sense, her attitude is a manifestation of the modern belief in human rationality as the source of all meaning and action. This modern subjectivity, its concealed and embedded masculinism has been pointed out in the critiques of Simone De Beauvoir's formulation of female subjectivity which is both socially situated/ constrained and at the same time possesses capacity for transcendence as a human subject in the masculine traditions of modern Enlightenment humanism. It is 'because men, who define themselves in opposition to women, are the One, the positive pole. But men are also the neutral standard that define humanness itself; woman is both a negative and a lack' (Hekman 10).

In a similar fashion, Saru, despite presenting her femininity as socially constructed, and often incoherent, also foregrounds herself as a 'human', as a neutral figure rather than as a lack. For instance, when she wishes to share her subjugation with her childhood friend Nalu, she fears that her problems would be misread as the problem of a woman: 'I could talk to Nalu about my problems …but to her, I would be a woman, my problems a part of women's problems. But this is mine, Saru's…' (Deshpande 121). Saru is evidently posing herself as an individual, invoking difference rather than unity with the condition of other women. Yet what is important to note is that in so far as Saru projects herself as a neutral subject rather than a female subject, she is unwittingly drawing on the masculine subject position of Enlightenment Humanism, because as demonstrated by several feminist theorists, the autonomous, unified, supposedly neutral subject of humanism is masculine.

This instability of feminine-masculine binary continues in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* where the long-winded narrative of multiple families supplies different models of femininities. While, unlike the intense complexity of narrative and characterization, Seth's *Boy* is relatively

stable, the characters do not suffer any radical analysis-paralysis with regards to their being, yet the novel does offer strong women characters who balance their adherence to femininity with frequent display of rational and autonomous decision making thereby questioning the masculine-feminine binary displaying that a discourse which posits femininity outside the realm of reason and independence is untenable given that such a position ‘to define an identity, a closed totality, always depends on excluding some elements, separating the pure from the impure’ (Young 303), and the following reading proposes that such a ‘purity’ or ‘closed totality’ does not exist in women’s being to which femininity refers.

In her feminist reading of *A Suitable Boy* Mala Pandurang asserts that ‘while there are moments wherein the narrative attempts to problematise the inherent spaces allowed to women by patriarchal discourses, Seth stops short of a determined redefinition of the prescriptive and gendered constructs of social institutions such as wifehood, motherhood and widowhood’ (118). She further suggests that Seth ‘does not credit his female characters with agency to directly influence and bring about changes in socio-cultural attitudes at an important historical moment’ (118). In my estimation, the proposition made by Mala Pandurang is not entirely correct, because the life trajectories of many female characters, including the heroine Lata, often transcend the gendered constructs of femininity, by frequently drawing on attitudes that are generally placed below the umbrella identity category of masculinity.

This helps in showing forth that femininity is an ideology which does not reflect ‘at a higher level…real material relationships’ or exists as a ‘system of ideas in people’s heads’ but something that manifests itself in ‘commonplaces and truisms’ which really is a ‘set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, smoothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which in reality it evades, masquerading as coherence’ (Belsey 658). It is these ‘omissions’ or ‘gaps’ that many female characters foreground in their performance of gender or femininity. So, for instance, in the case of Lata who in juxtaposition with her friends like Malati may appear, at the surface, an overly feminine girl: polite, shy, agreeable, pliable, submissive, homely, ‘affectionate manner toward the child’ (Seth 6), there are important occasions in the text where she displays her non-conformity to the code of femininity which at best shows her split subjectivity effected by her responding to the hailing of oppositional discourses.

If passion is feminine because of its opposition to reason which in turn is intricately enmeshed with masculinity as suggested above; Seth's *Boy* presents to the readers Lata who foregrounds her commitment to modern rationalism at a time 'which is moralistically quite out of tune with today's western craze for finding the elusive meaning of life through losing oneself in passion' (Myers 131). Rather than attending to the stereotypical grid of female, femininity, emotions, body, nature; Lata, whose search for a suitable boy constitutes the main plot of the otherwise disjointed 1993 novel, is depicted to respond affirmatively to ways of being and doing that are more stereotypically connected with masculinity's easy association with the mind, and its ready-made access to detachment, coldness, and cultivated dispassionate analytical abilities to resolve thorny challenges that life throws. This is not to deny, as discussed earlier, Lata's otherwise adherence to the codes of femininity at most junctures.

Lata's upbringing, it can be said, takes place in a house which while it does allow its girl to pursue college education does not envisage them prospering in a thriving career outside home contrasting the emphasis it overwhelming places on the career trajectory, or the lack of it, of the male characters. A strong sex-role distinction is practiced at home in which both Savita and Lata are prepared to be eventually married off to a suitable *Khatri* boy/ household. While Savita is married off to Pran Kapoor another Khatri and an English literature professor at Brahmpur university, Lata is supposed to follow in the footsteps of her elder sister. In contrast, the identity of Arun Mehra, Lata's elder brother is constituted by his being 'one of the few Indian executives in the prestigious and largely white firm of Bentsen & Pryce' (Seth 10), and the younger brother Varun Mehra is characterized by a lack due to his inability to make a mark in the public sphere of work and employment.

While Lata, like her sister Savita is initially presented as a malleable girl 'named after that most pliable thing, a vine, which was trained to cling: first to her family, then to her husband...Indeed when she was a baby, Lata's fingers had had a strong and coiling grasp which even now came back with a sweet vividness to her mother' (Seth 24). Yet Lata's discomfort with such a formulation of her identity and destiny has also been portrayed. Therefore, in response to her mother's appeal to her to marry a *Khatri* boy like her elder sister Savita, not only she says that, 'I don't think I ever want to get married' (Seth 24) but she also vehemently objects to the idea of her being a 'vine' who 'must cling to [her] husband' (Seth 24). As the omniscient narrator describes: 'Cling?' said Lata. 'Cling?' The word was uttered with such quiet scorn that her mother

could not help bursting into tears. How terrible it was to have an ungrateful daughter. And how unpredictable a baby could be' (Seth 24).

Putting this in a historical context, critic Murari Prasad writes that 'Mrs Rupa Mehra, seems a domineering fussy matriarch, her concerns and fears are entirely understandable. Her preference for the kind of prospective mate or suitable boy is in perfect accord with the dominant ideological paradigms of the Indian middle class society of the 1950s' (Seth 103). Mrs Rupa Mehra, a character descendent of Mrs Bennett from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice,* with attendant histrionics and an exaggerated concern about the welfare of her young daughters through marriage, she is taken aback by her daughter's stand on the issue of marriage: 'What on earth had got into the girl? What was good enough for her mother and her mother's mother and her mother's mother's mother should be good enough for her. Lata, though, had always been a difficult one, with a strange will of her own, quiet but unpredictable' (Seth 24).

Otherwise genial and amiable, this rebellious streak in young Lata can be contextualised in both the historical moment which she represents metonymically as well as her close friendship with Malati with whom often she is initially found to be in sharp contrast. Malati is distinguished by her candour and outspokenness about matters sexual and otherwise as opposed to Lata who appears, at least initially inhibited and shy, working within the discourse of desirable femininity. Malati Trivedi, unlike Lata Mehra who pursues 'soft' BA (English literature) at Brahmpur university, is training to be a doctor, a student of 'hard' medicine, and takes active interest in socialism in contrast to Lata who is completely apolitical in her worldview. In her boldness and courage, her independent thinking, in her complete defiance of the social mores placed on women, her many boyfriends (Seth 27), Malati appears in the text masculine in attributes in so far as her character is not neatly aligned with such stereotypical feminine qualities as tenderness, softness, or delicateness, especially when juxtaposed with Lata. She belongs to a family, where the eldest daughter 'was a proper tomboy' (Seth 30) and herself 'grew up as a sort of boy-though not by any means like the tomboy her sister was-for a variety of reasons connected with her infancy: the direct gaze in her unusual eyes, her boyish look, the fact that the boys' clothes were at hand, the sadness that her parents had experienced at the death of their two sons' (Seth 30). She had 'been brought up almost entirely among women…the girls grew up in an atmosphere where men came to be seen as exploitative and threatening; many of the men Malati came into contact with were precisely that' (Seth 30).

It is also learnt that it was Malati's mother the 'simple, idealistic, upright woman' who was concerned 'more with what was right than with what was convenient or approved of or monetarily beneficial' (Seth 30), single-handedly brought the sex girls up and was 'remarkable in that she wished her daughters to be independent…Malati's mother made it clear to the girls that she would give them the best education possible, but that they would have to find their own husbands' (Seth 32). This registers the radical difference of the worldview and being of two women, Mrs Rupa Mehra and Malati Trivedi's mother, who are subject to the same time and its dominant discourses, yet cultivate and articulate extreme differences in their approach or response to similar material and cultural climate. While Lata's mother is adamant on forcing a life of secure though dependent domesticity on her daughter through the institution of marriage, Malati's mother is helping her daughters cultivate an independent life through professional training in medical education, and so in Malati's case, apart from the fact that 'most men struck her as being immature', 'marriage was a distraction for someone who had set her sights upon the career of medicine, and she was not enormously concerned if she never got married' (Seth 31-32).

Like Malati who is keener to make a mark in the field of medicine through her education rather than get tied down to a life of domesticity, another character, Prof. Illa Chattopadhyay, related to the Justice Chatterjee family, has firmly stuck to her profession of teaching English literature at Calcutta university even when it demanded the separation from her husband and his family. Prof. Chattopadhyay is characterized by a predisposition to 'strong and immediate opinions' (Seth 423) for which she attracts the attention of other people but about which she does not bother following the philosophy of Justice Chatterjee which is: 'until you were forty you were very concerned about what people thought of you. Then you decided to be concerned about what you thought of other people instead' (Seth 423). In one instance, she acknowledges it by saying: 'I too used to make myself miserable bothering about other people's opinions, so I decided to adopt your philosophy immediately...I was trying to decide whether to give up my career, and was under a lot of pressure from my husband's family to do so' (Seth 423-424)

It is not only Illa Chattopadhyay who has sacrificed her domestic life for a career outside the boundary of four walls, as there is Begum Abida Khan, 'the wife of the Nawab of Baiter's younger brother, and one of the leaders of the Democratic party' (Seth 269) who 'had refused to abide by the strictures of the zenana quarters and the constraints of a mansion' (Seth 285). Begum Abida, as she is popularly known, 'spent years chafing in the women's quarters before she

persuaded him [Nawab Sahib's younger brother] to allow her more reasonable and direct access to the outside world. There she had proved to be more effective than him in social and political causes' (Seth 284). Not only Begum Abida herself puts forth the desire to contribute to the public sphere via politics, she also outdoes her own husband in the 'outside world', quite similar to the case of Saru from *The Dark Holds No Terror*. While her husband, 'like his father, had been a member of the Muslim League before Independence and had left for Pakistan shortly afterwards. Despite the powerful persuasion and reproach of many, she, however, had chosen not to go' (Seth 269). Her reason behind not following her husband and father in relocating to the newly carved Pakistan is that she would be 'useless there, sitting and gossiping. Here in Brahmpur at least I know where I am and what I can do' (Seth 269). The author also brings to attention the 'lightning-like presence of Abida' (285), the 'reputation of being an aggressive fighter of all Muslims in the new, truncated Independent India', how 'the purdah she was expected to maintain irked her' (285) how 'she believed in being aggressive and if necessary modest in fighting for causes she considered just or useful' (269). Not only Begum Abida Khan 'did not have a very high opinion of her own husband who had, as she thought, 'fled' Brahmpur at Partition in a state of panic' (Seth 285), she also 'looked upon the Nawab Sahib as utterly ineffectual' (Seth 285).

In her book *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* author Rita Felski brings to attention a 'boundary' which 'firmly separates the public world of goal-oriented activity from the private world of emotion and affect. Women's culture comes across as a separate zone of romantic and maternal longings that is strangely uncontaminated by worldly desires and ambitions' (101). She shows how even feminist cultural critics in their endeavour to analyse 'traditional women's genres such as melodrama, soap operas, and romance fiction' have 'frequently worked with a relatively static model of femininity- often conflated…with the figure of the housewife' (100). In its attention to oppression to which women are subjected to in a patriarchal set up, cultural criticism has the tendency to privilege the domain of the housewife. However, when explored to examine transgressive models of femininities, *A Suitable Boy* provides female characters in the form of Malati, Abida Begum, and Prof. Illa Chattopadhyay, who have considerably more emotional investment on their career outside the family.

In contrast to the women characters discussed above such as Malati, Illa Chattopadhyay, and Abida Begum who have thriving professional lives built upon the denial of feminine duties, there are many male characters who can at best be called drifters, who are depicted to be floating

in the realm of nothingness. Instead of following instrumental rationality which could allow them to pursue flourishing careers in politics, law, or the corporate world, they are obsessed with occupations which do not contribute in any explicit sense to their claim of being men in possession of masculinity. Given that masculinity is predicated on success in the public sphere of work, these men by the conventional logic lapse into feminine passivity due to their predilection for transcending the boundedness of gender identity. Characters such as Maan Kapoor, Amit Chatterjee, Dipankar Chatterjee, and Varun Mehra who have also been discussed in the second chapter for their inability to align themselves with the dominant formulation of masculinity, their failure at instrumental rationality, their eager capitulation to sentiments, emotions, and desire, brings them into line with the phallogocentric definition of femininity. Such fluid swapping of attributes and action between male and female characters in Seth's *Boy* exposes that 'masculinity and femininity have meaning only in relation to one another and not because of their basis in sexed bodies' (Bryson 238).

This explosion of masculine-feminine binary, the presence of emasculated males and manly females lingers in *Ravan and Eddie* which given its interest in the private domestic space of home of Ravan and Eddie as the site of their moral and intellectual growth allows us to locate the ways in which working class women exercise what passes for masculinity in the conventional usage in order to survive in a competitive world. The novel is set against the first decade of independent India, the late 1940's, and while clearly there is a sexual division of labour applicable to both the key families, it depicts an otherwise concealed fluidity in terms of a quick transition of roles. So, for instance, while Violet does not participate in the sphere of work until the death of Victor, and Parvati is forever pushing her unemployed husband to seek employment in order to qualify as a 'man'; yet, these women move, rather quickly, from house-bound caretakers of their children to active economic productive members of the public sphere when the need arises. And the transition is characterized by a form of smoothness which would be difficult to conceive while sticking to a binary view of intergender relationship, or for that matter mistakenly adhering to the idea that women's venturing into the sphere of commercial work is a recent phenomenon. As portrayed in the novel, the onus of financial responsibilities of the *chawl*-dwelling impoverished family of Ravan Pawar falls onto his mother Savitri Pawar whose husband, Shankar Rao 'knew only two postures, the foetal position and a prostrate one' (Nagarkar 45). Shankar, though alive, is largely an absent figure in the family due to his lack of involvement in any emotional or financial

affair, the upkeep of his family. Consequently, Parvati is shown to supplant her husband as the source of security in the Pawar household and ventures into the food business and becomes quite successful in her enterprise.

In her research on difference in language use at workplace, the sociolinguist Judith Baxter finds that increasingly in the boardroom, there are

> relatively few gender differences in their [men and women] linguistic skillsets. On occasions, women will use authoritative, decisive and goal-driven language that we more typically associate with male leaders…. men at the top are also using a much wider linguistic repertoire than they did in the past. Because of the de rigeur requirement for leaders to develop professional skills in "emotional intelligence", men are keen to demonstrate that they are in touch with their feminine side (n.pag)

The following passage is a testament to Parvati's mixing of stereotypical masculine and feminine repertoires, her endeavour and subsequent success:

> They called her the mother of fisherwomen at the vegetable market. When it came to bargaining or a squabble, you could cross words with a Bombay Koli woman only at the gravest risk not just to your self-esteem but to your person. Parvati did not supply fish to her clientele, but she had mastered the technique of koli women and made some radical improvements on it. The vendors at the market loved and hated her. She knew everybody by name. Something about her, not just her looks or sex, made them confide unwisely in her about woman troubles...Parvati was born to be Superintendent of the Byculla vegetable market, if not the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India…she could make two ends meet and have a bit left over. There was nothing underhand about her. But she was a wheeler-dealer at heart. Bargaining was in her blood. She instinctively knew how to give in on small matters and gain the big advantage. (Nagarkar 42-43)

A similar scenario is replicated in the conditions of the Coutinho family where the mother of Eddie Coutinho, that is Violet, has to bear the financial responsibility of the entire family, post the early demise of her husband Victor. Violet copes with it by becoming a seamstress. 'She was at her sewing machine from ten in the morning till eight at night, sometimes even later' (Nagarkar

117), which is similar to Parvati who ‘spent twelve hours a day in front of three monster kerosene-stoves, cooking lunch and dinner for fifty bachelors or at least quasi bachelors’ (Nagarkar 40).

In addition to this, the narrative reveals a fairy-tale event in which Violet was offered a grand proposal to be married to a lieutenant Lima Leitao, the ADC to the Governor of Panjim and an impending settler in Portugal, yet she chooses to refuse such a lucrative offer and makes evident her capacity to make independent decision against the offer. What needs to be added to provide the full context is her romantic sway toward the lieutenant and her father’s appeal to have Violet make an autonomous decision on the matter even though it goes against her chance to lead a life of plenitude and marital bliss in a foreign land.

Violet repeats this once later when she refuses Mr. Furtado, another chance at marital alliance with a man of means on account of such a future making her children insecure. Both women, in order to prepare their children for a difficult life, also play the role of the father, order their being, in other words, the ‘task to be stern and chastise the children’ instead of being ‘God’s chosen vessel of softness and for gentling’ (Nagarkar 52). Apart from making independent choices as opposed to living in the passive mode that is generally thought to be prescribed for the second sex, these women are embodiments of action, of courage and determination, of strength and resolve, and by so doing complicate, especially in their appropriation and practice of autonomy and rational decision making in the presence of absent, passive representations of masculinities. These female characters ‘wore the pants in the family’ (Nagarkar 36) even if they had to appear as ‘a hard, bitter woman in whom all love has dried up’ (Nagarkar 153). If a strong and abiding commitment to work in the public sphere constitutes manhood in the contemporary world and unemployment is akin to the loss of manhood, then in the case of Nagarkar’s *Ravan and Eddie* it is the female characters in the form of autonomous, active, dutiful, responsible, authoritative mothers that are more deserving of being assessed as performing stereotypical masculinity, as opposed to the male characters in the form of dependent and passive fathers and sons who would rather follow the trajectory of hegemonic femininity.

In *Custody*, the author, as may have been suggested before, looks at how the traditional family system in India copes with the arrival of neo-liberalism. It also seeks, from a thematic angle, the question of who owns the woman’s body in the 21st century. The last chapter, as the reader may be aware, was informed by the spirit of historicism, and proposed that masculinity is

not static, or that the social imaginary with regards to masculinity, especially its most popular or desirable form is a product of a specific time and place, subject to temporal mutability. It proposed that, if the novel is read keeping the specific historical context of India in mind; i.e., the opening of the Indian market to foreign products and multinational corporations produced specific conditions for the desirability of a set of attributes and actions manifested and performed by Ashok Khanna. In other words, Ashok Khanna's masculinity corresponds with the historical specificity of India of the 90s, and therefore eventually emerges, in the reading, as the more dominant and desirable form of masculinity. In its radical difference from the masculinity of Haresh Khanna who in the same reading materializes as the appropriate boy for Lata, and by extension, the Nehruvian Indian modernity, Ashok represents the mobile and historical nature of masculinity as opposed to its regular characterization in mass media as fixed and stationery. Shagun's transgression, in the chapter, is allegorically contextualised, as India's experiment with neoliberalism, in which analogous to the nation, Shagun responds to inflation in desire and an all-consuming passion abandoning traditional happiness that comes from stability. Yet, what was left analyzing in the chapter is the way in which in Shagun and Ishita, two important young female characters go about ordering their lives as if they possessed an independent, autonomous rationality rather than a constrained passive consciousness thereby signifying the mobility of autonomy in female sexed bodies.

The text introduces Shagun with the 'marvellous green eyes, eyes that established her as a rarity from the moment of her birth' (Kapur 35) 'who graduated from Jesus and Mary College', who 'hadn't liked studying', and who was 'looking forward to the freedom marriage would provide' (Kapur 26). This desire for freedom in marriage is ironical given that being 'wifelike' is close to being 'docile and compliant' (Kapur 48) yet, perhaps mistakenly, the freedom of young unmarried Shagun relates to freedom from studies unlike Saru from *The Dark Holds No Terror* who seeks freedom in and through studies from her misery at home. If the public space becomes a source for financial freedom for Saru, the private domestic space becomes a place of succour for Shagun. Shagun married Raman 'along standard lines, she the beauty, he the one with the brilliant prospects' (Kapur 14). However, as it so happens, rather than continuing with the socially-defined, forced concept of happiness for a woman in a stable family, Shagun deliberately chooses to abandon her married life and Raman, her husband, to secure romantic, passionate love with Ashok Khanna, outside the fold of the four walls of her home.

While earlier chapters have looked at the internal variation within the practice of masculinity by delineating difference in the constitution of the male characters, it can be equally fruitful to apprehend the ways in which Shagun and Raman being female and male respectively make use of a behavioural repertoire which complicate a simplistic one to one correspondence of masculinity/ femininity with the male/ female body. It is true that

> whatever is meant by the term 'masculine' in any cultural-social setting, is spoken of in terms of the male. The connection is made for us, it is assumed. It is presented as given. The dualistic ordering of Western thought and language underpins this association, in the process positing essential differences upon male and female. (Whitehead 208).

Yet this dualistic ordering can be destabilised by showing the ways in which bodies, while constrained by dominant discourses, are also able to transcend such constraints by responding to other discourses thereby challenging the simplistic notion of fixed essence in terms of attributes and actions of male and female bodies.

In *Custody,* it can be suggested that while Raman exemplifies dependence, weakness and monotony, Shagun responds to the robustness and spectacularity of Ashok which represents her own boldness and determination to be free from her conventional arranged marriage with Raman. In the assessment of one critic, *Custody* is a 'story carrying echoes of Ibsen, Shagun chooses love with a westernised Indian businessman over family duty' (Kidd). According to another critic, Shagun's

> infidelity reflects and defends women's right to desiring, and the pursuit of the fulfillment of female sexual desire is a metaphor for women's equality politics. Autonomously decided, infidelity permits women to experience their own sexuality as a pleasurable one as they control their gender, their sexuality and their reproductive potential and it challenges the male domination and patriarchal mechanisms of surveillance and control over women bodies. (Saharan 66)

Shagun's transgression is an act of autonomous choice to protect herself from life-long burden of domesticity. She is not playing to the script of righteousness expected of a married woman mired in stifling traditions foisted on her by patriarchal mores unlike her husband Raman who like Ravan from *Ravan & Eddie* was 'named after Ram' so that he would 'grow up with his qualities' (Kapur

98). True to his name, Raman, is not only a dedicated husband and father, he is also devoted to the well-being of both his own parents, as well as the parents of his wife. For his mother-in-law he is 'the son she never had' (Kapur 38) though for his own assessment 'Raman knew himself to be an ordinary man, ordinary looking, ordinarily talented though hard-working' (Kapur 44). Raman also stands for tradition and security which go hand-in-hand for his mother-in-law Mrs. Sabharwal who 'the more she got to know Raman, the more secure she felt' (Kapur 25). However, later in the novel it is posited for the same 'self-sacrificing overworked provider' (30) that 'too much patience is not appropriate in a householder' (98). Raman is self-righteous, and a 'miserable, dependent fellow, to be so enmeshed with his wife he was forced into a magnanimity she didn't even care for' (Kapur 103), his 'tedious self-righteousness' according to one critic 'grates' (Subramanian n.p). He is also a severely emasculated figure not only because unlike Shagun he is heavily dependent on the idea of the ideal family for constituting himself normal, but also the very act of his wife's adultery with no one other than his boss renders him metaphorically castrated, who in his own assessment 'the man stupid enough to be betrayed by two most important people at work and at home had to be mentally challenged' (Kapur 86), and even in his wife's proposition 'too stupid' (Kapur 76). He is the boy 'so sensitive' (Kapur 103) who is so attached to his wife that 'he swallowed her up, leaving no space to breathe' and not authoritative enough to induce his wife to act 'wifelike…docile, compliant' (Kapur 48).

Like Saru from *The Dark Holds No Terror* who accepts her inability to cope with subjugation because of her alliance with modern discourses of liberty and equality, and who apprehends her modern-ness, her difference from her own grandmother who adhered to the pre-modern discourse of fate and destiny, Shagun too in her historical and spatial situatedness, i.e., in the metropolitan city of New Delhi, in a rapidly changing liberalised India, is depicted as 'a perfect blend of east and west' (Kapur 4).

It is evident that in her endeavour to seek a communion with Ashok based on passion, Shagun is subscribing to the liberal humanist discourse as opposed to the discourse of femininity adhered to by her own mother. Unlike Raman who is depicted as someone grounded in the traditional India of the past and who in his worldview is closer to his mother-in-law than his wife, Shagun in her obstinacy to attain freedom from mundane domesticity is ready to thwart every conventional assumption from a married woman which binds her to the 'safety' of the four walls of home. For instance, 'every conventional assumption that her mother-in-law made stiffened

Shagun's resolve to be her own woman' (Kapur 101). In another instance Shagun and her mother 'stared at each other across the unbridgeable chasm of passion versus safety' (Kapur 94). Shagun also thought that 'it was useless presenting her mother with any problem, she was too old fashioned…a woman with her values was incapable of visualizing a companionship beyond the mundane of domestic life' (Kapur 96). The radical difference, in fact opposition, between the values to which the mother and the daughter adhere to is a testament to the ways in which ethical values and morality are subject to time. The mother and the daughter occupy very different subject positions given that their subjectivity is constructed differently along the discourses of what constitutes safety, happiness, and freedom, and Shagun's mother appears to be closer to Lata from Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, with regards to her preference for stability though marriage than the disorientation that passion brings. Shagun is resisting the idea that 'the house rests upon' them and that if you are a woman 'in your children's happiness, your husband's happiness, lies your own' (Kapur 99). For her 'it was a part of Indian disease…the great Indian family which rested on the sacrifices of its women' (Kapur 99).

This formulation of the Indian bourgeois family as the site of oppression for women where desirable femininity as manifested by the ideal daughter/ daughter-in-law is constructed to keep the perpetuation of the existing asymmetrical gender order and the desire to overcome this appears even stronger in another parallel story of Ishita who has been abandoned by her husband and his family because of her infertility. Rather than subjecting herself to suffering by taking recourse to the discourse of destiny, Ishita, like Shagun, takes up the humanist subject position in which she decides to become an independent career woman. While her husband Suryakant instead of being supportive and sympathetic to his wife capitulates to the family imperative, following blindly the unreasonable parental diktat appearing to have no independent voice on the concerned issue, Ishita decides to forge a new life that is based on financial and emotional autonomy.

Ishita is initially modelled as a dupe of the discourse of the ideal submissive femininity 'a homely family-minded girl' (Kapur 51) or as 'a woman of no consequence' (Kapur 172) because 'from the moment she had been born marriage had been the goal, and every choice reflected this' (Kapur 172). The reader is informed that 'she had just endured whatever had been dealt to her. Young and the owner of a substandard body, she had been blinded by fear' (174). Initially at least 'if she had had a wish in life it was to be a homemaker, with husband and children, something

every girl she had ever known effortlessly possessed' (Kapur 176). Also, in her mother's estimation 'she was such a good wife, devoted, caring. For her marriage was for life. Life' (Kapur 251). However, post her divorce from her husband Suryakanta, Ishita realizes that 'there were many jobs in the nineties...a girl down their corridor was an air hostess, she often saw her in her smartly clad tied sari, with her little wheeled suitcase- going places, being adventurous' (Kapur 171). Pushing her was the social worker Mrs. Hingorani who tells her 'you are young, unencumbered, you can go anywhere, do anything' (171) asking her 'have you thought of studying further...it will get you a job with more income, and that spells respect and independence' (Kapur 170). This leads to Ishita's cognizance of her own dormant dream of financial independence, and so apart from being a teacher at the NGO run by Mrs. Hingorani she begins to think seriously about a life-long full-time career in social work. While 'she decided to try for the Institute of Social Welfare' (Kapur 81), she also begins to think that 'it will be nice to choose my fate instead of just waiting for some husband to appear' (Kapur 180).

Like Shagun, Ishita too about her erotic dalliance with another divorcee Raman 'decided not to tell her mother. Though she would be pleased at the romantic turn her interaction with Raman had taken, she would immediately start fretting about marriage. Her mother didn't understand courtship. Sex, romance, love had their place but only after the engagement had taken place and the wedding date fixed' (280). Also, 'Ishu didn't know what she was talking about, feelings grew between men and wife, look at her and papa, nobody she knew started out with love, it wasn't practical to expect it' (Kapur 170). However, as far as Ishita is concerned 'she could not marry a man she didn't even find interesting. If a lonely life was the consequence, she would rather be lonely' (Kapur 170).

Here, too, like in Shagun's case, a radical difference pertaining to matters of sex, body, and desire are foregrounded between two generations of women, the mother and the daughter, i.e., Mrs Rajora and Ishita, where Mrs Rajora in the culturally westernised and liberalised climate of the 90s comes to appear outmoded in her provincial and orthodox views which cherish the relative permanence and stability supplied by arranged marriage as profitable and practical in contrast to the ephemerality of passionate liaisons. Arranged marriage as the traditional mode of cohabitation for sexed bodies emerges in the novel as a site where culturally sanctioned submissive dependent femininity is constructed for the female body, and so love and passion outside the fold of this orthodoxy emerges as both transgression and transcendence.

In contrast, the husbands, both Suryakant and Raman Kaushik are depicted to be characterized by a lack, a will to power, as it were, considerably attached to the family imperative, they are dependent on their families. For instance, Ishita thinks of her husband who ‘was twenty-seven, had he never done anything without his parents’ permission?’ (Kapur 60). In fact, looking back, ‘her present activities made her relationship with SK seem childlike. A child's directness, a child's lack of subtlety’ (Kapur 285). And it is Raman now who ‘gave her long lectures on pleasure, on the right to experiment with their bodies as they pleased- if there was anything she didn't like, she only had to say. And by the way, just how incompetent had her husband been? Had he ever left her mother's lap?’ (Kapur 285).

In the case of both Shagun and Ishita, the right to choose a life partner, the will to act on one’s desire, sexual or otherwise; the forceful renouncing of domestic role in the private sphere becomes the dominant mode in which they align themselves with a masculinist ontology. There is a pattern of similar enactments in previous discussions of other novels in which the female subjects shift their position in the feminine discourse of submission to the husband, the family and other wifely duties to seeking transcendence through the masculine subject position of a will to power and desire. This approach toward a new future is a clear indication of the ways in which Ishita has shifted from a feminine immanent subject position to the masculine transcendental humanist position, and signals the shifting and provisional nature of woman.

In a nutshell, the analysis of all these female characters who frequently traverse beyond the boundary of normative femininity into the territory of generic masculinity shows how the border between the apparently opposite rigid gender identities of masculinity and femininity is starkly porous. Such porousness of the boundary of men’s and women’s actual being and doing in which men frequently do their gender in ways that usually constitute the gender identity for women and vice-versa exposes the illusoriness of a supposed indestructible attachment of masculinity with men.

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Chapter 5

Conclusion

This thesis contributes to what Judith Butler calls 'the tradition of immanent critique' that seeks to 'provoke critical examination of the basic vocabulary' and whose aim is 'to counter those views that made presumptions about the limits and propriety of gender and restricted the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity' (vii). While such traditions of immanent critique have been present and proliferating in the field of postmodern philosophy; this thesis, informed as it is by postmodernist paradigms of 'identity' and 'self', has sought to reconfigure the understanding of masculinity via destabilizing its naturalness and stability as an explanatory category of men's supposedly discrete attributes. The study has been undertaken as an interdisciplinary study, as gender studies has come to define itself, fusing the reading of four Indian English novels, i.e., Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993), Kiran Nagarkar's *Ravan and Eddie* (1995), and Manju Kapur's *Custody* (2011), with the postmodern/ poststructural skepticism for conceptual categories' capacity to encapsulate the reality and employing the two to explore the development of a non-essential and contingent masculine self.

To reiterate the main points: in its exploration of masculinity in the chosen realist texts of Indian English fiction from a postmodern/ poststructural perspective, the thesis has proposed that masculinity too, like other identity categories is only a mode of signification, a signifying category whose meaning emerges only through its binary relation with its Others, i.e., femininity and homosexuality. This is so because the meaning of 'masculinity' resides in 'masculinity' itself, the sign, and not somewhere outside, in the realm of the 'real'. Masculinity does not express an already existent transcendental reality of men out there lurking, waiting to be captured or apprehended. In so far as masculinity is claimed to be a signifier that fully denotes or reflects men's unique being, their essence, it remains an illusion, a fiction. This is because of the absence of depth in men's surface variability. There is no unificatory depth, a concealed natural pattern, beneath the randomness, the contradictoriness of men's apparent actions.

At the outset, the study points out the predominant modernist/ structuralist leaning of sociological and other studies concerned with teasing out the essence of manliness even though

much of contemporary gender and sexuality thinking have moved beyond the comforts of naturalizing linguistic or social categories. Because of the predominance of pro-feminist scholars who are committed to social justice, much scholarship on men and masculinity has been predicated upon exposing and critiquing masculinity's structural, systematic, and trans-historical alignment with negative power and dominance, i.e., the politics of gender inequality.

Even though gender has been studied as a social construct in which socialization of sex roles is theorized as the reason behind the creation of gender as opposed to sex which remains a product of nature; yet within this social constructionist paradigm, the reiteration of unequal power relations between the two sexes in patriarchy and its critique has remained the major preoccupation for the researcher. In such a scenario, the researcher usually seeks out those events in which the monolithic and universalist category 'man' by virtue of being in a gender regime which privileges his being over others, exercises power through nefarious physical or ideological coercions of its others, practices a form of hegemony of power, and reaps patriarchal dividend.

Simultaneously, there has also been a tendency to emphasize the ways in which the production and performance of femininity thwarts women's claim to any power, and where power itself as a phenomenon is characterized by an unchanging and reified nature. This type of modernist critical scholarship on masculinity has conceived it is an oppressive, negative force which subordinates women. The issue with this, as has been observed by a number of scholars, is that the overarching focus on men's power limits the exercise to have a comprehensive picture of men's behaviour. What this means is that the mundane ways in which daily behaviour of men is conducted gets overshadowed by the overriding concern to divide and segment men's behaviour into hegemonic and alternative, and this tends to reify or solidify the otherwise protean and dynamic nature of manliness. In other words, as posited by Alan Petersen, 'essentialism is rife in writings on men and masculinity…it is assumed that there exists a relatively stable masculine 'essence' that defines men and distinguishes them from a feminine 'essence' that defines women…this essentialism may be found in both scholarly and 'popular' writings on men' (6).

This project envisages a necessary corrective to the continued reliance on essentialism and hidden structures that men and masculinity are regularly marked by both in the academic critical study of men and masculinities as well the Mars and Venus type popular books on inevitable and unresolvable gender differences. Although over a period, in an attempt to avoid charges of

essentialism the academics producing scholarship in the field of men and masculinities have put forth the thesis of the plurality of masculinity even as they continuing to reify and solidify the categories with some additional sub-divisions, there has been a dearth of accounts of vulnerability and 'undecidability', to use Butler's term, in men's actions and behaviour. As she herself postulates in *Undoing Gender* (2004), there is often a component of radical 'undecidability' and psychic vulnerability in the performance of gender, and especially of masculinity. This idea of 'undecidability' mixed with say Bakhtinian notion of 'unfinalizability' has fueled this study to propose that masculinity is without essence and is ultimately a discursive effect without a referent.

Besides, another area to which the thesis tangentially contributes is theorizations of realism in the past few decades in which a binary has come to emerge where the postmodern metafictional narrative emerges as a redeemer, as a genre that 'plays (seriously) with the structures of authority' and 'exists in the liminal space between power and subversion' (Lee xii) in contrast to 'out of date and second rate', the genre of 'poor old realism' which is 'predictable and simple…as being without intellectual or aesthetic interest' and which by contemporary political and aesthetic criteria has 'stabilising effects' (Bowlby xi- xii). The postmodern in contemporary literary theory is often discussed as a more accurate and comprehensive outlet for the apprehension of the contemporary human condition which is marked by acceleration of complexity and indeterminacy in the lived reality of the citizen of the information-technology age in opposition to the realist novel which harks back to a solidity of earlier ages, of unchanging values, and stable times.

According to Linda Hutcheon, 'postmodernism challenges our mimetic assumptions about representation…assumptions about its transparency and common-sense naturalness' (30). As Susan Andrade affirms in her essay 'The Problem of Realism and African Fiction': 'anti-mimeticism is valued more than mimeticism; it is understood to be sophisticated and complex' (184). She further asserts that 'literary criticism…has moved toward a hypervaluation of the anti-mimeticist, the avant-garde, or the hybrid indeterminate' (184). This is the reason why most authors chosen to discuss in the thesis have not been paid adequate critical attention sometimes by Indian academics and ubiquitously by Western academic criticism vis-à-vis their counterparts such as Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy 'in a literary and critical landscape which expects literature from the non-Western world to be both "representative" and "resistant"' (Ben-Yishai 3).

This has been pointed out, for instance, with regards to Shashi Deshpande's art which given its allegiance to realism has been characterized by conventionality and commonality, and it has been suggested 'that her prose is uninventive, simple, pedestrian, or realistic and is thus easily cast on the wrong side of the favoured postcolonial aesthetic' (Qtd in Ben-Yishai 3). However, as Pam Morris citing Bertolt Brecht notes, 'Brecht's sense of the genre as always in process and transition…dismantles that unhelpful binary opposition that misrepresents realism as the conservative other to radical avant-garde experimentalism' (132). Similarly, George Lukasc, another major critic,

> championed the realist novel because he believed that this was the only literary form capable of addressing the fractured conditions of modernity. So whereas the ancient epic, one of the long narrative forms predating the novel, was the product of an epoch of stability and wholeness, the [realist] novel was the outcome of a less stable, no longer inherently meaningful world order. (MacKay 12)

Therefore, disregarding the current predisposition of the academic critic to favour the magical-realist, postmodernist, post-colonial novel, a minor proposition that this thesis has put forth is that by being a fertile site in which complicated images of masculinity can be located, the realist novel can be redeemed from its current misreading as a genre that naturalizes reality.

As explored and established in the previous chapters, the close reading of the chosen four texts, the thesis, in my estimation, has been successful in countering such claims on the realist novel. It has displayed the possibility of finding multiple configurations of masculinity in the chosen, supposedly naïve, realist novels; and so, the second chapter 'Fractured Masculinity: Polyphony, Hybridity, Difference' which has followed the introduction, has made a case supported by textual evidences from all the four novels, that masculinity should be spoken in the plural. Additionally, it has put forth that the binary between models of the alleged coercive hegemonic masculinity and its counterparts, namely the supposed pro-feminist, egalitarian, alternative masculinities, or the new man/ lad, is false and fictitious. On the contrary, such embodiments are not without contamination from their supposed binary opposites because all embodiments or models are the hybrid of, effect of different and oftentimes opposite discourses.

Therefore, the study encountered male subjects simultaneously inhabiting different worlds, as it were, and even supposed embodiments of what passes off as hegemonic masculinity in

contemporary social science were not without their own vulnerabilities. It captured that more specifically in the reading of Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror*, in the internally inconsistent characters of Manohar and Boozie, where it was posited that the author deliberately made use of narrative strategies of incompleteness, of partial knowledge of the characters to ensure that the characters appeared lifelike and autonomous to solve the operative paradox of realism which entails the problem that the reader must simultaneously negotiate her deep connection with the characters as if they were living beings with the knowledge that ultimately the characters and the plot is the creation of the author and have their carefully crafted lives only within the text.

The performative and artificial nature of masculinity has been apprehended through a close study of Boozie, another important male character in *The Dark Holds No Terror* whose exaggerated play of stereotypical masculinity has allowed to understand that ultimately the codes of heterosexual masculinity conduct are mobile and can be co-opted also by homosexual men. The very excessiveness of Boozie's masculinity displayed that there are no linkages between masculinity and desire and that masculinity as a signifier is predicated on a set of signifiers which are mobile acts. Deshpande's narrative, apart from delineating the crisis and artificiality of masculinity also showed its varieties. It attained this by creating space for male characters in different hues, and while certain male characters displayed superficial characteristics of normative masculinity, there were many others who appeared to have had rejected to the hailing of the discourse of normative masculinity. If initially Manohar and Boozie were, at least superficially, embodiments of the popular culture idea of alpha masculinity, there were characters like Baba and Padma who evidently and easily registered as examples of non-coercive, supportive masculinity even in a cursory reading.

In the case of Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, the chapter deconstructed Arun, whose apparent bullying and coerciveness is inconsistent with his other being, the overly supplicating Arun; his domineering attitude toward his own brother when seen with his excessive supplication toward his masters depicts his split-subjectivity and the mobility with which he makes use of a different repertoire of attributes and actions. Additionally, the difference between Arun and Varun, as well as among many other male characters such as Rashid, Amit Chatterjee, etc., in the novel bring out the aspect of difference among men's responses to similar stimuluses. Similarly, another set of brothers Maan and Pran signified the differences in which the daily lives of men are conducted

and how differently they perform their gender. Seth, in his vision, to write a sprawling novel with a big cast of (male) characters and in his commitment to provide microscopic and precise details of characters and situations provides a very large narrative space to apprehend the polymorphous character of masculinity.

In *Ravan and Eddie*, the close reading of male characters provided adequate space for challenging the stable notion of masculinity because the narrative itself is permeated with contradictions of all kinds and the construction of contradicting manliness as exemplified by important male characters is only one of the strategies to induce complexity in the novel. *Custody* suggested the ways in which two starkly different embodiments of masculinity, namely Raman Kaushik and Ashok Khanna, sustain within a particular time period and also how they are divided from within.

The third chapter of the thesis 'Time's Arrow: Masculinity as a Historical Phenomenon' has made a case for temporal mutability of masculinity by showing the ways in which the character of Haresh Khanna in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* embodies completely different qualities and aspirations in contrast to Ashok Khanna from *Custody.* Their differential attitudes, neatly in correspondence with the cultural climate of the historical decades of postcolonial Indian history, against which the fictional texts are set, build a compelling case of historical variability in the dominant discourse of what constitutes ideal constructions of masculinity. In both the novels, the central female characters represent the nation in an allegorical reading, albeit at different historical junctures, and their independent choice of suitable companions mediated by dissimilar needs, is read to depict the ways in which suitable masculinities at different moments respond to varying national moods and aspirations. The foregrounding of variation in the ideal manifestations of masculinity from one important historical moment to another substantially questions the commonsensical formulation of masculinity as something ahistorical and unchanging.

This assault on the given-ness of masculinity, on its status as something that does not require explanation or enquiry, continues in the fourth chapter titled 'Dislocating Masculinity: Emasculated Males, Manly Females' which calls into question the obviousness of the embodiment of masculinity in the male body. In the commonplace belief of the male body as the producer of specific, discrete characteristic traits for boys and men has been challenged by displaying the ways in which the female characters in the four novels exercise autonomy and rational decision making

in personal life as well as in the public sphere of work even when such actions and attributes have a historical alliance with men or the male body subsequently implying the inherent and innateness of passivity as well as emotionality of the female body. The women of reason and action, as it were, in the realist novels that centered around the domestic, private space of the family display the mobility of masculine 'virtues'.

This fluidity of masculinity makes its presence felt in Saru/ Sarita from Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terror* who makes independent decisions about both her education/ career trajectory as well as who she marries despite being bound by the discourse of femininity as well as her caste. It also happens in the case of Lata in Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, who rather than submitting to the force of passion, much to the befuddlement and chagrin of the reader, makes a rational decision of marrying a boy who embodies stability and a strong capitalist work ethic. In making such a decision while being situated in the first decade of post-independent India speaks volumes about the mobility of masculinity even in those time periods which in hindsight, and in the contemporary social imaginary, are characterized by entrenched patriarchy and rigid sex-role distinctions.

Quite similarly, Shagun Mehra in Manju Kapur's *Custody* too makes a difficult decision which pushes her outside the orbit of ideal femininity where she seeks happiness based in passion outside the boundary of her immediate family. Her illicit romantic affair and eventual marriage with the foreign returned Ashok Khanna puts her family in jeopardy, yet she follows her heart's desire in consonance with the dominant discourse of happiness in neo-liberal India. In Nagarkar's *Ravan and Eddie* where the women characters come not from the urban middle-class milieu which the Indian English domestic fiction, in general, takes as its central object, both Parvati Pawar and Violet Coutinho are depicted to move swiftly into the public domain of work that has traditionally been aligned with men and masculinity.

The fluidity with which both these women act as 'father figures' and 'wear the pants in the family' even as the fathers turn into absent figures complicate the conventional understanding that men's bodies, the concomitant physical and mental strength, works as a permanent and natural causal factor mobilizing men to act in the competitive marketplace. In their success at autonomous rational decision making, and their active participation in the competitive arena of work, these

female characters show that there is no one-to-one correspondence between masculinity and men, in so far as masculinity continues to be defined as a proxy for reason and autonomy.

This comes out to be especially significant when these women characters are put in juxtaposition with their male counterparts, who in turn display striking departure from the conventional notion of masculinity and men. While the women in the novels are depicted to be recurrently drawing on the masculine discourse of liberal humanism; the men, on the contrary, demonstrate frequent descent into passivity, dependence, and emotionality. The easiness with which the men and women in the novels draw from a big repertoire of actions and attributes, representing a complex, split subjectivity, not sticking to a fixed state of being and doing contributes to the main drive of the thesis which aims to make apparent the inherent complexity of masculinity.

Lastly, it can be said that the present study brings to the fore the fact that continued reliance on the category of masculinity to make sense of men's lives is fraught with significant challenges. Given that there is not one single life trajectory that men undertake, their lives are varied, lacking any essence, and so any assessment of men's being and doing that neglects this key aspect would be tantamount to being only a generalization.

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