



DECONSTRUCTING AND REPRESENTING COLONIAL SUBJECTION: AN
ANALYSIS OF SCHOLARLY LITERATURE ON SELECTED WORKS BY RUSHDIE AND
ROY

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ROY

BY

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Deconstructing and Representing Colonial Subjection: An Analysis of scholarly Literature
on selected works by Rushdie and Roy

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ABSTRACT

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* have been conceived by scholars as key postcolonial novels that are said to represent the peak of India's nationalism and history. Rushdie's perspective on the subjugation of the colonized and the power of the colonizer invites us to dig deep into the dynamics of, identity formation and within the frame of the '-marginalized-' subject's resistance towards colonialism. Thus, it has been used by scholars to develop, to illustrate, and to apply various postcolonial theories. A similar thing happened with Arundhati Roy's story of a family's internal dynamics, as it has been conceived as reflecting Indian society, its values, and traditional inclinations, as well as its effervescent uniqueness. A number of scholars have commented upon and interpreted these works using different concepts and theories, notably within the perspective of post colonialism. My aim is to firstly present the interpretations of scholars, who have derived or applied theories, and concepts from, or onto, these texts. Secondly, I propose a comparative analysis of their combined critiques with an emphasis on the way they address the topic of colonial subjections, and the construction of the Indian post-colonial subject, as represented in these texts. Lastly, I aim to propose alternative, complementary, or corroborative interpretations, which supplement scholarly works reviewed in their theorization and conceptualization, in post-colonial studies.

The analysis related to Rushdie's representation of colonial subjection is driven by themes of the subaltern, nationalism and gender. Whilst the analysis related to Roy's representation of colonial subjection is driven by the themes of the gothic, gender and trauma. Scholarly literature on these postcolonial texts therefore sets the tone for a particular understanding of multiple subthemes that demand critical attention, for example, female subjugation, time and history, and tools of resistance. India's nationalistic essence, historical significance and socio-political context come to the fore perhaps most saliently even, after one comes to appreciate scholarly reviews and deconstructions. With this bibliographic research, I hope to show that scholarly engagement with the themes within these novels resonates beyond the texts.

Keywords: Post colonialism, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, colonial subjection, subaltern, gothic

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY.....	2
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	3
SUBALTERN AND COLONIAL SUBJECTION IN RUSHDIE'S <i>MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN</i> ...	3
NATIONALISM AND COLONIAL SUBJECTION	7
COLONIAL SUBJECTION AND GENDER.....	11
COLONIAL SUBJECTION AND THE GOTHIC IN ROY'S <i>THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS</i>	13
COLONIAL SUBJECTION AND GENDER.....	14
COLONIAL SUBJECTION AND TRAUMA	16
FINDINGS.....	18
FEMALE SUBJUGATION	18
TIME AND HISTORY.....	19
TOOLS OF RESISTANCE.....	19
CONCLUSION.....	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	22

Introduction

Popular authors such as Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy are famous for writing about postcolonial themes that place their novels in the context of nationalistic history, society and politics amidst the state of the citizens and their own disposition. The task of these writers therefore becomes one to provide a platform to give voice to and bring forward underlying concerns in regard to colonization through their unique characterizations, plots and storylines. A vast proliferation of scholarship on Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Roy's *The God of Small Things* exists pertaining to different interpretations on the representation of the Indian colonial subject.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'subjection' as the "action of subjecting a country or person to one's control, or the fact of being subjected". Colonial subjection, therefore, is the act of being subjected by a colonial power. Writers such as Brian Crow and Chris Banfield (1996) argue that postcolonial writers are silenced by the language of colonial subjection, Indian playwright Badal Sarkar (2010) admits. Subcontinental postcolonial literature, particularly in the genre of historical fiction, is not produced for academics to analyze and interpret in the aim of knowledge production. Rather it is produced for an audience of readers which uses historical fiction as a tool to (re-)imagine, (re)discover and (re)define "who they are" in a postcolonial world, in light of past repression and varied forms of resistance. My research paper aims to firstly, present the interpretations of scholars who have derived or applied theories and concepts from, or onto the text. Secondly, it attempts to offer a comparative analysis of their combined critiques with an emphasis on the way they address the topic of colonial subjections and the construction of the post-colonial subject, as represented in those texts. Thirdly, it aims to propose alternative, complementary or corroborative interpretations, which can supplement scholarly work, both theorization and conceptualization, in postcolonial studies. Other researches on scholarly literature do not aim to do what I have aimed for in my research and specifically on these novels, however, it is false to say that they are not common generally.

Background of the Study

Postcolonial studies emerged as an area of theorization since the late 1970s partially through Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) which focused on how Western literary discourse tended to label non-European people and cultures as the "other." Postcolonial literature is considered to be any literature that has been influenced by colonial experiences. Novelist Chinua Achebe argued that readings should not be taken as the "universal truths" of western cultures in order to assert dominance over them. Postcolonial studies center on critically investigating western products of knowledge since the colonial past and within the postcolonial present as a means of discovering alternative ways of expression.

Salman Rushdie was born on June 19th, 1947 in Bombay. He is an Indian-born British writer whose critically acclaimed novel *Midnight's Children* is "a fable about India" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). The novel won the Booker Prize in 1981 and is considered to be revolutionary in its fictional technique. It perfectly interweaves the phases of the Indian English novel ranging from the historical, psychological, political, metaphysical and social (Jaya, 2010). Salman Rushdie is widely known to be the pioneer of postcolonial literature. A diasporic writer at heart, Rushdie attempts to fuse the English and Indian culture. Many writers similar to him tend to discuss issues such as the hybrid identity in their works owing to the fact that they carry a "double vision" because they are separated from their culture. Rushdie admits that immigrant writers experience a sense of loss where they wish to look back at their cultures. Rushdie's famous essay *Imaginary Homelands* reflects this loss and need of the writers.

Arundhati Roy for her part, is an Indian author and political activist born November 24, 1961 in Shillong, India. She is best known for her Booker Prize winning novel *The God of Small Things*, one of the few best-selling novels by a non-expatriate author. Although Roy is not a diasporic writer like Rushdie, she nonetheless deals with postcolonial issues in her novel such as how the Indians living in the postcolonial present deal with a traumatic past. There are instances of mimicry that are one of the significant elements of the postcolonial condition. The land of the colonized is not the same anymore after the reign of the colonizer. *The God of Small Things* is known to be a postcolonial novel as it deals with issues such as the state of the Indians against the backdrop of a haunted colonial past. Roy is popularly known to give voice to India's vulnerable communities in her novels.

Literature Review

Subaltern and Colonial Subjection in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

The subaltern is referred to as the “populations outside of the hegemonic power structure of the colonial homeland” (Ludden, 2003). Antonio Gramsci called it the ‘inferior rank.’ The concept of the subaltern increased prominence with renowned Indian historian Gayatri Spivak’s essay on “Can the subaltern speak?” Spivak, in her article, argues that the voice of the subaltern cannot be fully recovered, if at all, due to the “unimaginable extent of colonial repression and its historical intersection with patriarchy, for instance, widow immolation” (Spivak, 1988).

Although the subaltern is a broad theory in post-colonial studies, the analysis that follows is limited to the ways the scholars have used to it to explore the representations of colonial subjection in *Midnight's Children*. Dutta (2014) in her article titled, “*Tongue-Tied: Writing Post-Colonial History in Coetzee's Foe and Rushdie's Midnight's Children*” states that the voice of the colonizer alongside the colonized cannot be disregarded when talking about the subjected. Her article revolves around the way history is (re-)written or represented in post-colonial literature and particularly on the issues of concern for the subaltern. She puts emphasis on the voice of the subject and asserts, “...it is often observed that the subaltern and his tale is ‘adjusted’ and ‘accommodated’ into the norms of the two competing discourses. The ‘true’ subaltern has no voice in the story or history in fiction. Even if it gets a chance to speak, it is preconditioned.” (Dutta, 2014). She says that the ‘silenced’ voice of the subjected is itself a form of resistance of the colonial subject in the way that the subject refuses to be colored with the master’s choice of “interpretive lens.”

In *Midnight's Children*, the author deals with writing a voice for a universal subject through the narrative of a single person. Dutta says that the story of the native belongs to everyone. Hence, the tale of the colonized subject is owned by everyone and it is not just a single individual’s story. Dutta compares this to J.M Coetzee’s novel *Foe* in which the story of the colonial subject is just as important to fit into the colonizer’s tale for this will fulfill the void left in the tale.

Therefore, we can see how Spivak’s statement lends truth to Dutta’s claim that indeed the voice of the colonial subject is irrecoverable. However, Dutta sees this as a sort

of resistance against the colonizer. The story thus becomes an act of resistance. The white person's history is incomplete without the tale of the colonial subject and this is how history fits into the writing of post-colonial fiction. Dutta also states that Rushdie himself admits that the act of storytelling is a process of certifying one's lies. Can post-colonial history be all that true? Dutta denies this. However, the story of the colonial subject makes it clear that authorship over the tale will tell a history of a situation experienced, always subjectively, rather than entirely about the history of colonization.

Subaltern vs Elite

Another interesting take on the 'voicelessness' of the colonial subject in postcolonial discourse is how it depicts the relationship of the subaltern with the elite. Ubaraj Katawal's article, "*In Midnight's Children, the Subalterns Speak! (2003)*" asserts that through their voicelessness, the subaltern still speaks. It is difficult to imagine one without the other. This echoes what Dutta earlier argued given the context of postcolonial writing. For Katawal (2014), "Wherever the elite speak, the subaltern speaks as well because "supplementarity" is the condition of their possibility," meaning that the subaltern and the elite both are constitutive of each other. This relationship is shown in *Midnight's Children* as Katawal points out, "...things are so mixed up in the novel that any kind of rigid segmentation or stratification between people and their environment simply collapses upon a careful uncovering; it showcases the surreality and messiness in human history" (pg.3).

History from the elite national point of view is important to consider and Katawal proposes to investigate the "real" history of India as it is written by elite historians. He chooses two texts: Nehru's *The Discovery of India* (1946) and Ramchandra Guha's *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (2007).

In his investigation, Katawal discovers that indeed the subjectivities of the subaltern refused to be excluded, for instance, the Gurkhas in *The Discovery of India* and the Great Revolt of 1857. Katawal notes, "The subalterns, therefore interrupt the total monopoly of the authorial author in his text." (pg. 91). These histories are, with little doubt, written from the perspective of the Indian elite. *Midnight's Children*, however, offers an alternative history that calls this into question. How does the novel portray this relationship between the elite and the subaltern? Ramram Seth, a subaltern subject, "forecasts the life story of Saleem." (pg.93). Chakrabarty explains that the subaltern sees the world as full of enchantments separate from that of the scientific world. They believe in magic and

superstitions, and this is what is represented in the novel as well. On the one hand, Nehru's account does not consider the foreshadowing of the subaltern, while on the other, the novel tells us something else - that they (the subaltern) work inside and outside of tradition and modernity. This sort of writing tells us, and reminds us of Dutta's assertion that indeed history from a post-colonial perspective is hard to grasp as the real and final truth, as it opens to multiple cross cutting complementary truths.

Katawal notes that the subaltern and elite relationship is characterized by complementarity that is evident in Indian society. The subaltern's lifestyle is constantly debated within elite nationalist discourse and the novel portrays this. Characters in *Midnight's Children* shift between opposing lifestyles. Philosophers Deleuze and Guattari argue that types of societies coexist with each other and there is no such thing as one kind of subject, whereas subject positions are contextual and contextually negotiated. The subaltern does speak even when subjugated by elite practices regardless, of, but perhaps also, because of the fact they are spoken of, and for. They both need each other, at least discursively, and as expressed in practice. The relationship between the masses and public intellectuals is a necessity. The novel, however, does not make clear who the subaltern is – Saleem or Shiva? Or both in different moments? Who is the elite intellectual? Saleem or Picture Singh. The characterization of colonial subjection therefore speaks to a complex negotiation of positionality through the lifetime and in different contexts, within different fields of opportunities and constraints. Katawal notes that subaltern characters in the novels such as Padma and Musa ruin or challenge elite discourse by “speaking through them strategically” (pg. 100). This corroborates Dutta's argument that the subaltern and the elite are entwined in complex relations, and definitions, linked and divided, but essentially coproduced.

A similar argument is made by Indian historian Gyan Prakash (1994) in *Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism* in which he quotes Chakrabarty: “the reliance of theorists and the emphasis on “textual” readings arose from the absence of workers' diaries and other such sources available to British historians. Indian peasants had left no sources, no documents from which their own “voice” could be retrieved” (pg. 7). Prakash argues that reading these texts, however, is crucial because they showed that the colonial subaltern “was not just a form of “general” subalternity. The aim of the subaltern studies project is not just to provide the Indian version of history from the inferior rank approach, but to approach the concept power differently and write a different but complementarity history, one of on-

going forms of resistance, contestation and negotiation. One that is not about disempowered subjects, but rather, about creative, resourceful, strategic intersubjectivities driven by desire, hope, strength, fear, morals and values, etc. Indeed, this history, before the postcolonial genre had emerged, had not been told properly, let alone popularized. Prakash provides an interesting observation, “Of course, the tension between the recovery of the subaltern as a subject outside the elite discourse and the analysis of subalternity as an effect of discursive systems was present from the very beginning. Recent volumes, however, pay greater attention to developing the emergence of subalternity as a discursive effect without abandoning the notion of the subaltern as a subject and agent” (pg. 8). This argument is similar to Katawal’s as it emphasizes the complementarity coproduction of the elite and the subject. Prakash further adds that subalternity has emerged as a form of critique rising from inside the elite discourses in order to put pressure on the forms that subject it (pg. 8).

While Katawal investigates elite historical texts to learn more about India’s history as told by the elite nationalists, Prakash refers to Guha’s essay *Prose of Counter-Insurgency* (1984), an article that analyzes historiography of peasant revolt in colonial India, to establish the fact that elite writings worked to subject the subaltern in their own history. Moreover, their dominance “confronted, constituted, and subordinated certain forms of culture and politics” (pg. 8). He too admits that accounts written by authoritative figures such as Nehru only point to the fact that “elite nationalism rewrote history and how its rewriting was directed at both contesting colonial rule and protecting its flanks from the subalterns” (pg. 8).

Pranav Jani (2010) makes a similar argument in his book *Deconstructing Rushdie: Cosmopolitanism and the Indian Novel in English* in which he uses the term ‘subaltern’ to describe the marginalized and exploited. Jani uses the term in line with that of Guha’s and the Subaltern Studies Project which contest elitist writings of history by searching for subaltern resistance and rebellion. Jani mentions the significance of looking at power as a tool which strategically represent the colonial subject when he says, “In these texts, representing the voices of the oppressed is possible but requires careful investigations of the complex processes of power across overlapping and uneven social and economic arenas” (Jani, 2010, pg. 143, Chapter 4). These arenas of nationalist power and discourse replete the novel with representations of the colonial subject’s understanding and are not

blind to their oppression. Jani is thoroughly interested in using Gramsci's approach to the subaltern leaning towards a Marxist theorization.

Nationalism and Colonial Subjection

Allegory of History

It is widely understood that *Midnight's Children* is an allegory of India's history. A number of scholars have drawn on different conceptualizations to explain how the characters in the novel have been used to portray nationalism. Aruna Srivastava (1989) in her article titled, "*The Empire Writes Back, Language and History in 'Shame' and 'Midnight's Children'*" explains how the main character, Saleem Sinai, attempts to comply with his national history as a colonized subject. Srivastava mentions, "Saleem Sinai defines himself by his relation to India's history" (pg. 1). She explains that he does this by writing his own autobiography in hopes of defending himself from his own eventual death as well as his country's.

As an allegory of history, Saleem IS India – "he is All-India ratio, a map of India, the instigator of her fierce language riots. The trials and tribulations of his body and his family are inextricably entwined with those of his country – the various births, labors and deaths in the book correspond exactly to major events in Indian history" (pg. 2).

The task of history here is to "remember forward", however, this suggests that history has no standard structure and it is structured by the one investigating it who is necessarily ideologically conditioned, according to Srivastava. This reminds us of how the subaltern in history is also included in elite discourses by a preconditioned nationalist writer. What is the role of history then? Srivastava asserts that "the act of creating histories, then is an ideological act, designed to support political and moral systems" (pg. 2).

Saleem searches for his roots and is enslaved to history. Srivastava quotes Joseph Esposito in pointing out that capitalist societies romanticize history. In order to continue to exert power, as Saleem describes, the Indian politicians are "clutching Time in their mummified fingers and refusing to let it move." Srivastava adds, "Only when the British want to leave India does time move again - the sound of clocks reverberates as Independence draws near. A true sense of history, then gets lost in politically ideological attempts at control." (pg. 64) Thus, history as we know it is not truth and this has been argued by many

other theorists as well. Saleem is searching for a way to fulfill his nation's wish to find a form and record its history considering imperial domination. Srivastava further explains,

“*Midnight's Children* points to the fact that history is a method of fictionalizing experience, as is the telling of lives – biography and autobiography. For Saleem, reality and truth are not quantifiable and not ascertainable. They are constructs of imagination and experience, and of language. For him, the truth of a story lies in its telling and is a reflection of the idiosyncratic process of selecting events from memory” (pg.4).

The relationship between history and fiction thus becomes significant here. History turns into a method of “fictionalizing experience”, whereas written history serves as memory, and it, in turn becomes a tool in cementing that experience. Colonization, according to Srivastava, has suppressed Indian's version of their own history with their rewritten versions. Saleem's writing of the novel is crucial in following the Indian urge to “encapsulate the whole of reality to understand lives and nations by swallowing them” (pg. 4). Chronological storytelling is thus not suitable to Saleem's idea of voicing India's history and story. Not only is Saleem an allegory of history but a “body of history” and this has been debated by many scholars as well. Srivastava admits that Saleem is afraid of being destroyed from and by history. She references Foucault in his emphasis on genealogy quoting him as saying “descent attaches itself to the body” (pg. 8). This is true of *Midnight's Children* because Saleem is seen to wrestle with his body's decay and inevitably suffers India's history as well.

A similar argument is made in Jean M. Kane's article “*The Migrant Intellectual and the Body of History: Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1996)*” where he pinpoints the moment when boatman Tai foretells Aziz that the nose is “the place where the outside world meets the inside you.” According to Kane, Tai is “describing both the novel's aesthetic strategy and its understanding of the colonial subject” (pg. 2). Aziz is part of the portrayal of the subaltern in *Midnight's Children* and is believed to represent “the porous embodiment of a violent, hybrid history and a fluid, endlessly proliferative narrative energy” (pg. 2) A narrative of a fierce history of the subaltern is made clear in the novel. Kane argues that *Midnight's Children* is a postcolonial novel that “allegorize(s) national history through the metaphor of the body politic” through its depiction of “a fusion of an individual body with (India) and a personal biography with its political history” (pg. 2). He argues that by using this image the author personifies conflict and tension. And in doing so, representations of

colonial subject as a “silent and atemporal, and natural(ly) primitive” are deeply challenged along with the idea of the “new country as an essential totality” (pg. 3). The ‘body politic’ is essentially the collective word for a group of citizens of a nation. Kane uses this to represent the Indian nation but not the whole of the subcontinent. The metaphor of the body politic has been widely used in Indian literature, however, it excludes Pakistani significance. Kane argues that in the novel, Jamila represents Pakistan that Saleem (as India) longs for: “Jamila, as Pakistan, becomes the missing and inaccessible part that Saleem, as India, incestuously desires to repossess” (pg. 111). It is interesting to note how Saleem and Jamila’s relationship does not constitute hatred and rivalry as seen as they represent Pakistan and India. They are both separated from each other and live in different nations. Kane alludes that Rushdie uses this to explain the protagonist’s retreat from a national union (of India and Pakistan) while at the same time cementing Rushdie’s diasporic position as a writer from India and a migrant from his homeland. The body politic consists of India’s diverse populations but also an inability to be unified with other foreign cultures and communities. This unification, Kane argues, is precisely what the subaltern desires but fails to achieve, much like the imagination of India itself as a unified nation-state.

Fictionality

In extension to this theme, fictionality plays an integral part in asserting the nature of the construct of the “imagined community” of India as a nation. The phrase was coined by theorist Benedict Anderson (1983) who uses it to define the nation as “an imagined political community that is inherently limited in scope and sovereign by nature” (Oxford Reference, 2017). Rushdie, in his essay titled ‘Imaginary Homelands’ argues that the populace imagines nations through the means of print capitalism and media. These create interpretations of historical events and come to define our sense of the nation. Through this argument, Rushdie describes the nation as a fictional construct which is not necessarily what Anderson means by his definition. Moss-Hawkins (2015) in his article “*Problematizing History and the Nation in Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children,*” explains this further adding that Rushdie’s unique diasporic position enhances this constructed nature of the nation. He also admits to the connection between Saleem’s genealogy and the nation, wherein, Saleem and his family are said to be an “allegory of the nation.” He notes, “Saleem’s family can then be defined as his “imagined” family. Though no blood ties exist, Rushdie proposes that perhaps family lies in the imagination and not blood. Similarly, the nation does not have a tangible connection but rather it is a creation of the mind. Through

exposing the fictionality of the family, Rushdie exposes the contrived nature of the nation” (pg. 4).

This is agreed upon by author Kortenaar’s essay titled “*Midnight’s Children and the Allegory of History*,” where he says, “Midnight’s Children exposes the fictionality, the constructedness, of the metaphors and narrative conventions implied in national history” affirming that there is indeed a fictionality as a result of the absence of literal truth – the nation is a fiction in itself. Saleem’s life is a metaphor of the narrative of history.

Language as Decolonization

Referring to Aruna Srivastava’s article again, the language of the colonizer and the colonized is an important aspect of the relationship between nationalism and colonial subjection. Srivastana quotes Uma Parameswaran’s phrase “the decolonizing of English.” Kumar Sharma et. Al in their article titled *The Politics of Language: The Decolonization of Indian English* (2015) explains why this phrase has become popular in post-colonial studies, “For post-colonial writers, who use English language to suit their creative purpose, English is no longer a colonizer’s language for it has become a tool for decolonization” (pg. 11)

Kumar Sharma et. al present interesting insight to the decolonization of language when they claim that language has started the colonial process as a site for struggle (pg. 11). Language is important for any culture and it acts as a mediator bringing people together. In terms of describing colonial subjection, Kumar Sharma et al. interestingly quote Nguigi Wa Thiong’o’s essay *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) where she says, “...language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation” (pg. 2) Therefore, colonial subjection was driven by the use of language. It is fascinating to see how it is used by both the colonizer and the colonized. Kumar Shankar et. al defines,

“Decolonization is a term, being used for the ruin of colonialism, where a nation establishes and retains liberated territory of its own. It is used a counter discourse so that the indigenous people can search their own subjectivity” (Shankar et al. 2015, pg. 2).

In post-colonial discourse, the decolonization of English, as mentioned before, is a tool. However, it is argued that Indians are still being decolonized and using the language of the colonizer. In terms of colonial subjection, Kumar Shankar et. al refers to writer Franz

Fanon's book, *In the Wretched of the Earth* (1961) to describe three phases in which post-colonial writers can be retrieved; the first phase is called 'The period of unqualified assimilation' where the indigenous people adopt the culture of the 'subjugated authority.' The second phase is when these writers look towards their culture as a 'clichéd aestheticism' as a means to represent their own culture. The last phase is called the fighting phase in which the writers fight for their subjectivity, identity and expression through their own language. This description by Kumar Shankar et. al is important to note because it sketches out the route taken by post-colonial writers to give a voice to the colonial subjugated.

Other writers such as Pranav Jani (2010) in his book titled *Decentering Rushdie* sees *Midnight's Children* as a window that looks into the field of postcolonial literature whose narrative has been shaped by British colonization and the succeeding decolonization (*The Multiple Cosmopolitanisms of the Indian Novel in English*). In terms of the language aspect, Jani says, "Though the language was not available to Rushdie in 1983, he is effectively demanding that the category of postcoloniality be expanded to include a much broader range of cultural production and experience from the formerly colonized world. Implicit in this gesture is a certain ethical sensibility: the cosmopolitan-elite writer of English-language texts has a responsibility to employ her/his voice in the service of those that are being ignored" (pg. 44). Rushdie embarks on a mission to give postcolonialism a platform to rise. Pranav Jani uses the term "cosmopolitanism" in a way to describe how particular elites and intellectuals perceive themselves and the world.

Colonial Subjection and Gender

Woman as signifier of the nation

Nalini Natarjan in her book *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader* (2010) argues that the woman in *Midnight's Children* is witnessed as being able to mold the imagining of the Indian nation. This observation can be drawn by the association of the birth of the nation with the birth of the children, the woman's body with the national flag and a woman's pain with communal happiness. Gender, as Natarjan argues, becomes central in the social imagination of the nation and the community. She goes on to explain how the woman is a signifier for change in the nation by identifying three moments in nationalism, firstly the "movement from regional national in the 'modernizing' process, secondly, 'the threat of communal or civil rupture within the body politic or Mother India, and thirdly the rise of

fundamentalism to counter Westernization” (*Woman, Nation, and Narration in Midnight’s Children*).

In addition to this, Natarjan notes that the woman’s marginalization is an essential strategy for reading *Midnight’s Children*. The novel uses the woman’s body as a signifier for the nation, hence, it implies a critique of male-dominated culture. She identifies Rushdie’s use of the synecdoche to create the perception of women in the novel. It is commonly observed that the “woman should fulfill the individual male psychic need for scopis/figurehead for national culture, guarded by the censors” (pg. 406). Not only is the woman’s body seen as a symbol for cultural and religious reaction but also as a symbol for wholeness. Her integrity comes second. Natarjan notes in the novel how the woman’s freedom is sidelined when it comes to the narrative of nationalism.

Other critics such as Franz Fanon explain the significance behind the veil of the colonized subject as the colonizer’s way to degrade. Fanon says that the colonizer engages in a battle to end purdah because of their wish to ‘save’ the colonized woman from the “backward colonized male” (pg. 144). Natarjan argues that it becomes more a power game for men rather than female subjectivity when the uncovering of women’s bodies comes into question. The woman becomes a site for challenging westernization as her shame becomes a keystone in Islamic fundamentalism. In *Midnight’s Children*, this is evident when Saleem’s sister turns into Jamila and they move to Pakistan. Natarjan emphasizes on the mistreatment of the woman’s body as a site and for imagining the formation of the nation as seen in *Midnight’s Children* (pg. 145).

Domesticity and the home

Sara Upstone (2007) in her article titled *Domesticity in Magical-Realist Post-colonial Fiction: Reversals of Representation* in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, talks about colonial domesticity and how its idealization has put “women at the heart of the imperial project” (Upstone, 2007, pg. 266). Women were expected to work inside the home as a ‘deviant maiden’ and ‘industrious housewife’, and through it her own role in the imperializing of space (pg. 266). Upstone (2007) describes the space as gendered and explains how the spaces inscribe gender roles. She notes how Rushdie uncovers, perhaps as a “side dish” of the story, a link between colonial patriarchy and domesticity in nationalist ideology. Upstone (2007) also notes how the home may become a prison for the female because of her duty to protect it from colonial influence, “Mumtaz saw very little in those

days of the father whom she loved” because of her marriage to a fugitive (59), Amina is immobilized in a room in a tower (101)” (pg. 270).

However, the woman, in Rushdie’s novels, uses her assigned role in the home to their advantage if they cannot completely reject it. This act, as Upstone notes, is “a dual questioning of both colonial patriarchy and its Indian nationalist extension” (pg. 275). In doing this, the domestic home thus becomes “a site of resistance to colonial rule” in *Midnight’s Children*.

Colonial subjection and the Gothic in Roy’s *The God of Small Things*

Gothic literature is commonly defined as the sort of writing that uses dark scenery and melodramatic narrative devices along with an atmosphere of fear and mystery. Michelle Giles (2011) in her article titled *Post-Colonial Gothic and The God of Small Things: The Haunting of India’s Past* describes the novel as “an intricate postcolonial novel that utilizes Gothic conventions to create a compelling sense of angst and disorder” (pg. 1). Gothic conventions such as “dark imagery, the supernatural, the haunted house, the ancestral curse, and a threatening atmosphere, and incest are used to bring about cultural horrors of India as experienced by one family in Kerala” (pg. 1). She argues that this is essentially done in order to challenge Western Gothic conventions to describe the ‘haunting’ of India’s colonial past upon its struggle to achieve identity in today’s world. The foundations of the Gothic and postcolonial are similar, Giles argues. A number of scholars have agreed to this. For instance, Giles quotes Gena Wisker when she says, “Postcolonial spaces...are inevitably Gothic, since they, like the geographies of place and of history, are haunted by the ghosts of those who were hidden and silenced in the colonial and imperial past” (pg. 1). Hence, the relationship of the Gothic with colonial subjection, I believe, is based on this haunting past of the colonially subjected, and which perhaps also recalls all related traumas, which are still felt today.

Giles explains that Roy uses the Gothic narrative to depict the anxieties of the nation’s emergence as a modern sovereign state. *The God of Small Things*, Giles argues, reflects the small struggles of the Ipe family with the bigger struggles of India (pg. 2). The twins’ lives are punctuated with the national struggles, notably, with caste, politics and these are intertwined with their lives.

Giles' argument centers around the usage of the Gothic narrative form as tool to explore postcolonial issues and as a form of empowerment for the colonial subject by "the reinvention of the genre." She quotes Wisker and says that the "postcolonial Gothic reinhabits and reconfigures, it reinstates and newly imagines ways of being, seeing, and expressing from the points of view of and using some of the forms of people whose experiences and expressions have...largely been unheard of and even discredited" (401-402). Giles admits that Roy gives the colonial subject a voice "through a sympathetic view of the oppressed" (pg. 3). Also, using a Western narrative form allows the colonizer to engage in dialogue with the colonized, as Giles notes. Roy uses Gothic narrative as well as the English language in her novel to converse with the West, "In *The God of Small Things*, Roy employs a similar practice by reversing the identity of the Other. She depicts the postcolonial Other in newer forms of cultural, patriarchal, and political oppression that result from colonization" (pg. 3). This reversal of the Other is how the postcolonial Gothic can be seen as a hybrid. Giles then proceeds to identify Roy's uses of specific Gothic elements: dark imagery, ghosts and the supernatural, haunted houses, doppelganger and the haunting narrative.

The dark tone highlights the misery felt by the Ipe family and mirrors the misery felt by India. It also elicits strong emotions. Gothic fiction is used as "a process of cultural self-analysis, and the images which it throws up become the dream-figures of a troubled social group" (pg. 14) Pappachi's moth haunts the upcoming generations like India's violent colonial past. In the novel, Gothic narrative challenges western conventions to depict how India's past is haunting its present.

Another similar argument is made by Lydia Saleh Rofail (2005) in her article, *From God to Marx: (Meta) Physicalities in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*. She proposes that the novel can be read through its postcolonial present that has emerged from its 'mythological past' which lies in a 'Gothic postcolonial landscape.' Postcolonial literature is haunted by its past.

Colonial Subjection and Gender

Religion and Gender

Pallavi Srivasta (2016) discusses the relationship between religion and women as portrayed in the novel. Roy chooses a plot that narrates the conditions of the marginalized and subaltern. In Srivastava's essay titled *Society, Women and Religion: A Reading of*

Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things (2016), she talks about how Roy discovers that religion is a blessing in the hands of the powerful and a curse for the weak. Religion works as an instrument of oppression. The powerful people, according to Srivastava, pretend to be liberal and subjugate the innocent. The Gothic haunting of the past is repeated in this theme as well when Srivastava quotes Rofail: "Love laws made in mythological time stratified people into castes and are passed down throughout the various layers of Indian history and exist in the postcolonial present. Roy repeats this mantra of the Love Laws and it echoes throughout the novel as a reminder of a past haunts the present, suffocating the emergence of the new" (pg. 2).

Srivastava describes how Roy shows religion using three ways in the novel, firstly "how religion deals with a divorcee woman from an inter-religious marriage, how it behaves with innocent and helpless kids of a broken house, and thirdly how it refuses any help to a schedule cast man" (pg. 1). Religion is being used to put women down in society and we see this in Ammu's case. Srivastava quotes Pathak when he says, "What is even more important is the novelist's valorization of the woman in Indian society. She presents the predicament of women through her female character. These characters represent Indian women belonging to three generations. They are all exploited and subjected to brutality and inhuman treatment." (Pathak, 187-186).

Srivastava proceeds to explain the effect of religion on children in the novel. Along with that Rahel the narrator notes that a woman has no place in society, according to religion. Only the man is responsible for giving her an identity in a patriarchal society and religion reinforces that. *The God of Small Things* is a novel that puts religion in both the colonial and postcolonial context in Kerala and explains it well. She discusses how religion is used in society as a tool to "crush the helpless" and misuse the marginalized (pg. 4). Srivastava connects this to Roy's past when she herself faced issues due to religion. She ends her essay with a comment by Nair,

"Women, conventionalized into their roles of wives, sisters and mothers, as a result, remain trapped within a powerful cross cultural metaphor that violently divided the genders - and in the process, condemned one of these genders to an unnatural silence (Nair, 197). Therefore, voicelessness or silence of the women is highlighted in the novel as well.

Another article titled *Gender Discrimination and the Wretched Condition of Women in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things and Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid*

Suns (2015) discusses the portrayal of women's woeful conditions in the novels that are considered as the finest examples of depicting the plight of women. Roy shows readers the patriarchal reign in Indian society through incidents such as Ammu's mistreatment by her husband. This and many other examples depict the willingness of women to overthrow patriarchal dominance.

Colonial Subjection and Trauma

Elizabeth Outka (2011) in her essay titled *Trauma and Temporal Hybridity in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things* argues that Roy uses the role of trauma in "creating a temporal mix in the characters" whereby there is a connection between time and trauma. The past, present and future are mixed and blended with each other – this creates a temporal mix. Trauma disorders time in the way that it comes to haunt the present with flashbacks or dreams of the past. This sort of traumatic experience, according to Outka, is portrayed in Roy's novel and is a feature of this blending of different times.

Temporal hybridity helps to map out traumatic damage that the characters have experienced in their lives. Outka (2011) uses "temporal hybridity" to highlight the effects experienced after traumatic events. This provides her a way to assess the criticisms of Bhabha's theory of 'cultural hybridization' that digs deep into the nature of the colonizer/colonized dichotomy (pg. 22). Furthermore, it helps her investigate how Roy's characters' deal with traumatic events. The theme of the Gothic can quite significantly be related to the temporal mix because the past is haunting the present and eventually contrives the future.

Hybridity theory makes way for new understandings to emerge. Another interesting argument that Outka (2011) presents is how the writer represents trauma and how it is given a voice. There are certain risks attached to doing this for the reader itself. Furthermore, Outka (2011) believes that Roy's writing about trauma provides a way for readers to respond and eventually attempt recovery of the historical trauma. The narratives in the novel employ this blending of different times when the past is haunting the present and the future. Time is mixed for the characters, however, for Roy and the reader, the "stories blend- and do not blend- together." (pg. 27). Outka (2011) believes Roy attempts to answer issues, for instance, representing the memory of the traumatic experience and the role of literature in representing the non-representable. Readers can "identify with trauma" while at the same time, experience it differently. There is a vast array of voices in the story which makes

multiple viewpoints for the reader to engage with. This describes the relationship between trauma and literature, that is, a single form is not enough for the reader to understand traumatic experience. Instead, it will take a multitude of different voices, just like Roy has masterfully done that in her novel.

The narrative of different voices also accounts for ‘communal traumas’ - traumas experienced as a community. This points to the effects of colonialism. Outka (2011) explains, “The colonial encounter could allegedly imply a meeting of different times: a “modern” colonizer confronting the supposedly “primitive” past. The post-colonial period may reflect damaging traces of this attitude, as well as a haunted sense of a past time, and a past community, that have been buried by the colonial encounter” (pg. 18). Through examples like British and American culture, Roy attempts to show how a traumatic past can affect the present for communities living in India. She does this through the image of Chacko’s History House, “Even after independence, Chacko implies, India remains caught in the colonizers’ narrative, forced to dream foreign dreams and to play unchosen parts. History has been disordered and leaves not a clear sense of connection to the past but an uncharted, unanchored sense of living in many times simultaneously” (pg. 19) The colonial subject, therefore, is constantly haunted by a traumatic history upon being shut out from it and having to live with it in a post-colonial present. The History House is significant because it speaks to a caste system just as importantly as it speaks to the characters’ exclusion from it pointing towards an exclusion from history itself. This, according to Outka (2011), produces traumas *from* traumas and inevitably a discrimination from another discrimination arises. Therefore, history has now become a traumatic experience of oppression itself which is damaging for her characters. However, Outka (2011) notes interestingly that Roy uses this to point towards a type of “intertextuality.” Intertextuality is essentially the various ways in which texts stand with each other to produce meanings (Nordquist, 2019). Outka explains that the History House is “a new artifact” of a previous Western narrative about colonization that gives new voices a chance to speak. Roy suggests that these narratives produce a haunting past such as the examples in the novel show.

Findings

Rushdie and Roy, both hailing from India, give us two different perspectives on colonial subjection of India in their novels. It is important to note that *Midnight's Children* was written in 1981 and *The God of Small Things* in 1997. Hence, there is a wide time gap between the publications of the two novels, however, as mentioned before, my justification for choosing them lies in their use of postcolonial themes. *Midnight's Children* can undoubtedly be called a postcolonial novel as it is set around the time when the partition of India took place. Whereas, *The God of Small Things* is set in 1969 and follows the fate of an Indian family while touching upon the effects of colonization. Both novels, nonetheless, explain the dynamics of colonial subjection in similar to different ways as I have laid out in the literature review.

Female Subjugation

Many scholars account for and discuss female subjugation as it is represented in both novels. This points to the fact that despite the difference in the time setting of both the novels, gender discrimination was prevalent, and it knew no end. India is and has been plagued by the suppression of women dating back to partition. Patriarchy dominates Indian society and Roy, as an activist, puts forward the view and need to recognize these issues of gender. As opposed to this, Rushdie's novel is centered on India's nationalism and history. The woman's mistreatment is inevitably the nation's mistreatment because, according to the scholars, Indians are adamant towards their love for Mother India. The woman plays an important role in creating a nationalistic narrative about India; however, her own freedom is overlooked.

If we employ subaltern theory as a critical lens here, we see how power and structural forces rise above imperialism and make "the other others," which in this case, are the women, invisible. These women are systematically represented as the side-dish in these texts therefore perhaps signaling towards a masculinist postcolonialism without being completely subalternist.

In Roy's novel, the women and the marginalized are the subaltern. According to a subaltern lens, these scholars say that society, religion and men treat them like oppressed subjects. Roy's novel deals explicitly with the subaltern question of who gets to speak for who, much more than Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and the subaltern and elite debate. Scholars

generally agree that Roy and Rushdie both deal with the historical and political conjuncture of the oppressed subaltern subject.

Time and History

In terms of time, Roy's novel follows events of time chronologically as her characters' experience them. This is why scholars argue upon the theme of trauma in the novel because the effects of colonialism make it difficult for Indians to live in the postcolonial present. Both *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things* depict the trouble faced during India's emergence as a postcolonial nation and are engaged with history and the passing of time, notably with regards to loss, confusion and trauma.

While *The God of Small Things* uses the History House to signify India's entrapment in the colonizer's history, *Midnight's Children* uses history in a similar way as agreed upon by multiple scholars. Hence, the idea that history "leaves not a clear sense of connection to the past" is reflected in *Midnight's Children* as well. Due to the fact that history itself has become a method of fictionalizing experience, there is no clear sense of its truthfulness. The marginalized in *The God of Small Things* are excluded from history the same way through the character of Saleem, we see how the subaltern are constantly marginalized in elite-written historical texts.

Moreover, chronological storytelling, according to Srivastava, is not suitable for the narrative of *Midnight's Children*, however, it is crucial for *The God of Small Things* as the book is a series of flashbacks. Rushdie aims to show how Saleem is the Indian nation himself and the allegory of history. It is important to connect with Saleem's autobiographical story to narrate the history of India whereas *The God of Small Things* focuses on the three different settings of time - the past, present and future. Through this, Roy focuses on the emergence of India as a postcolonial nation whilst Rushdie depicts the process of its emergence.

Tools of Resistance

Throughout the scholarship, there is an emphasis on giving the colonial subject a voice to resist and engage with the effects of colonization. A number of scholars argue that Rushdie uses the English Language as a tool for decolonization. Across postcolonial discourse, it is commonly agreed that the use of the English language by Indian writers is a form of resistance. Bill Ashcroft in his book, *The Empire Writes Back (1989)*, states that writing

literature in English has made "(decolonization) a powerful element in postcolonial self-assertion" (Ashcroft, 1989, pg. 22).

Similarly, Roy employs the use of the Gothic to challenge Western Gothic conventions. Michel Giles argues that Roy uses the Gothic narrative as a tool to reinvent the genre and empower the colonial subject. The aim of the Gothic in postcolonial literature is to imagine and express the experiences of those who are/have been discredited, neglected and/or silenced (Giles, 2011). Roy uses English to engage in a conversation with the West similarly perhaps to the way Rushdie uses the English language as a way to speak to the colonizers and express both the trauma and forms of resistance. Hence, postcolonial literature that highlights the subjectivities of colonial subjects becomes itself a tool of resistance for Indian expression. This is widely agreed upon by scholars as the politics of these texts imply that the subjugated are in need of ways to express their pain, anger and recognition of that was done to their "histories/memories."

Conclusion

Postcolonial writers such as Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy offer a voice to the colonial subject in order to highlight important issues attached to the emergence of the Indian nation. My research, due to the constraint of time, could not delve deeper into these historical, social and political debates, however, the more important part is to highlight them. My analysis found that scholarly literature focuses on female subjugation, the binary of time and history, and using language and the gothic as a means of resistance. The findings from the analyses of the scholarly literature show that writers tend to argue about India's nationalism and the major problems surrounding Indian society to a large extent. India's nationalistic history is celebrated and iconized to this day and undoubtedly these authors portray that in their novels. The woman is suppressed at the hands of patriarchy, and still today, Arundhati Roy, as a political activist, paints a picture of the state of the marginalized in India, especially women. According to Roy, translation is the beginning of creation, therefore, Indian English not only allows her novels to be read in a single language but rather in several languages. Thus, allowing for a kind of freedom gained through multiple forms of cultural expressions. For Rushdie, writing in the English language represents the Indian empire itself talking back to colonialism and providing a space for subaltern subjectivities to be given their rightful place in history. Future research could look into the use of intertextuality of the colonial subject across time and how they have been represented in both literature and historical archives/journals. Comparative literature and historical texts across time and regions helps to put into perspective the state of colonial/imperial discourse. We can be certain that the scars of colonialism are still prevalent to this day however, the task of postcolonial authors such as these thus becomes one of restoring, rewriting and re-appropriating the multiple histories that are and have been ignored, erased and/or silenced within the colonized world, in particular South Asia.

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