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NARRATING DELIVERANCE:

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies the literary double in contemporary fiction by three Bengali American writers: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Bharati Mukherjee. The main focus is on examining what is expressed by the double, and in finding reasons for its recurrence in this fictional genre that mainly explores the migrant experience in the United States.

The dominant idea of an individualized selfhood is largely a Western construction and has been increasingly contested by diffused and decentered subjectivities. The literary double blurs boundaries between individual subjectivity and the community, expressing more than a singular 'I' could, and thus forges new forms of selfhood. These non-unitary subjectivities often emerge in the writing of nondominant or marginalized subjects such as women and ethnic minorities. In literary history, the double has often been reduced to an evil foil to the protagonist, but this dissertation broadens the concept of the double from a mere trope to a literary device reflective of its era, performing cultural work.

The texts studied in this dissertation are *Sister of My Heart* (1999) and *The Vine of Desire* (2002) by Divakaruni, "Hema and Kaushik" (a novella in the short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth*, 2008) and *The Lowland* (2013) by Lahiri, and *Desirable Daughters* (2002), *The Tree Bride* (2004), and *Miss New India* (2011) by Mukherjee. These works were published at the turn of the new millennium, paralleled by a theoretical reorientation from a socio-realist critique of postcolonial and world literatures toward a more aesthetically focused approach.

The dissertation argues that in the primary texts listed above, the literary double challenges the concept of individual subjectivity with a dual or non-unitary subjectivity, informed by the postcolonial context. Second, its frequent occurrence is connected to the bi-cultural identity of the Bengali American writers and their characters. Finally, it gives voice to that which has been silenced, functioning as a narrative vehicle for deliverance from the past – from individual, familial, or colonial trauma.

KEYWORDS: identity, literary double, postcolonialism, subjectivity

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Väitöskirja käsittelee kaunokirjallista kaksoisolentoa Chitra Banerjee Divakarunin, Jhumpa Lahirin ja Bharati Mukherjeen 2000-luvun teoksissa. Tutkimuksen päätarkoitus on selvittää, mitä kaksoisolennolla ilmaistaan kyseisissä teoksissa, sekä löytää syitä sen esiintyvyydelle kaunokirjallisuudessa, jossa pääsääntöisesti kuvataan bengalilais-amerikkalaisten elämää Yhdysvalloissa.

Vallalla oleva käsitys yksilösubjektiviteetista on ennen kaikkea länsimainen konstruktio, jota jaettu tai jakautunut subjektiviteetti yhä yleisemmin haastaa. Kaunokirjallinen kaksoisolento hämärtää rajoja yksilön ja yhteisön välillä ilmaisten enemmän kuin mihin erillinen ”minä” pystyy, luoden minuuden uusia muotoja. Jaetun subjektiviteetin kuvauksia esiintyy tyypillisesti valta-asemien ulkopuolisten ja marginalisoitujen yksilöiden kuten naisten tai etniseen vähemmistöön kuuluvien teksteissä. Kirjallisuushistoriassa kaksoisolento on usein typistetty yksiulotteiseksi päähenkilön piilotetun pahuuden ruumiillistumaksi. Väitöskirja laajentaa näkemyksen kaksoisolennosta kaunokirjallisesta troopista kohti kulttuurista konstruktiota, joka heijastaa aikansa ilmiöitä ja arvoja.

Väitöskirjan ensisijainen tutkimusaineisto koostuu seuraavista teoksista: Divakarunin *Sister of My Heart* (1999) ja *The Vine of Desire* (2002), Lahirin “Hema and Kaushik”, episodimainen pienoisromaani novellikokelmassa *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008; suomeksi *Tuore maa*) ja *The Lowland* (2013; suomeksi *Tulvaniitty*), sekä Mukherjeen *Desirable Daughters* (2002), *The Tree Bride* (2004) ja *Miss New India* (2011). Teokset ovat ilmestyneet vuosituhannen vaihteessa, jolloin jälkikoloniaalisessa kaunokirjallisuudentutkimuksessa siirryttiin sosiorealistisesta tulkinnasta kohti teosten muotoa ja estetiikkaa huomioivampaa suuntaa.

Yllä mainituissa teoksissa kaunokirjallinen kaksoisolento haastaa yksilösubjektiviteetin jaetun subjektiviteetin käsitteellä, jonka syntyprosessissa jälkikoloniaalisella kontekstilla on merkittävä rooli. Kaksoisolennon tiheä esiintyvyys tässä kirjallisuudenlajissa myös heijastaa bengalilais-yhdysvaltalaisten kirjailijoiden ja heidän henkilöhahmojensa kaksikulttuurista identiteettiä. Kaksoisolento kerronnallisena välineenä antaa äänen vaiennetulle, vapauttaen ja eheyttäen yksilön henkilökohtaisesta, yhteisöllisestä tai koloniaalisesta traumasta.

ASIASANAT: identiteetti, jälkikolonialismi, kaksoisolento, subjektiviteetti

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All work and no play(s) makes one a dull doctoral researcher. I have certainly enjoyed my fair share of plays; for this, I would like to thank my theater buddies Kati Laasonen and Saara Pääkkönen, and all the other members of the Helsinki Shakespeare Club. We'll always have Stratford.

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Thank you, my mother Tarja Tikkanen-Haili, father Pentti Arjopalo, and sister Outi Honkatukia, for your unwavering support.

I dedicate this work to my daughter Prisha, who taught me to be a mother while I thought I was learning how to be an academic.

January 2023
Nana Arjopalo

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Introduction

> He was forbidden access; the past refused to admit him. It only reminded him that this arbitrary place, where he'd landed and made his life, was not his. Like Bela, it had accepted him, while at the same time keeping a distance. Among its people, its trees, its particular geography he had studied and grown to love, he was still a visitor.
>
> (Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Lowland*)

After nearly forty years in the United States, Subhash Mitra, the protagonist in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Lowland*, continues to experience his surroundings like an expatriate stationed abroad indefinitely. Despite having lived in North America nearly twice as long as in India, his land of origin, he is still not quite at home. Much of South Asian American fiction[1] today focuses on characters like Subhash, individuals who have lived in North America for a long time, or are second or third-generation Americans, but for whom identity and belonging continue to be problematic concepts. Characters whose identities do not match the passports they carry; characters who have two homes, or none.

Asian American emerged as an umbrella term in the wake of the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s as an effort to promote political solidarity and cultural nationalism, but those advocating the term considered American nativity as a prerequisite to Asian American sensibility (Cheung 1997, 1–2). This approach was mainly fueled by frustration over Asian Americans being subjected to orientalist and racist attitudes and treated as foreigners in the United States despite their centuries-long history in the country (ibid.). At the time, Asian American literature mainly referred to works by writers of Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese descent. By the early 1990s, the term had become more inclusive, accepting

[1] South Asian American fiction is defined here as writing by people belonging to the South Asian diaspora in North America either by having migrated themselves or by descending from migrants from the Indian subcontinent: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, or via a third country or continent (for example, East Africa or the West Indies).

recent immigrants under its umbrella, and recognizing the double consciousness of diaspora subjects instead of insisting on a unitary identity (ibid.). The number of South Asian immigrants in the United States surged after the Hart–Cellar Immigration Act of 1965, which favored educated professionals (Das 2012, 22). South Asian immigrants to North America since the 1960s were mainly upper middle class and had received a postcolonial education in English in their birth country. They were represented by writers such as Meena Alexander, Rohinton Mistry, Michael Ondaatje, Vikram Seth, Sara Suleri, and, importantly, Bharati Mukherjee, whose more recent works are explored in my dissertation. Since the 1980s, there has been an influx of working class South Asians to Canada and the United States. They have found employment as entrepreneurs, owning and operating, for example, news stands, restaurants, and motels (Katrak 1997, 194). With the expansion of the South Asian diaspora, the South Asian American literary canon, too, has grown and diversified.

A recognition of the heterogeneity of the South Asian American literary scene has increased awareness of the diverse cultures of the Indian subcontinent, and new regional literary sub-genres have emerged. My perception of Bengali American literature as a distinct *genre* is mainly informed by critical regionalism (see Powell, 2007) and the idea of genre as a structure of affective expectation (see Berlant, 2008 and 2011). In *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape*, Douglas Powell (2007, 15) argues that a region is not "a stable, boundaried, autonomous place," but instead, "cultural history, the cumulative, generative effect of the interplay among the various, competing definitions of that region [...] participating in the ongoing creation of regional identities." In writing about Bengal, Bengali American authors participate in defining Bengal, in creating an understanding of cultural politics through locational dimensions. The writers engage in a form of writing back to Bengal; their own and their characters' "macro-level Indianness has been replaced by micro-level Bengaliness" (Mandal 2006, 169). Bengali American literature is thus characterized by a distinctive regionality that surpasses national borders.

One of Laurent Berlant's ground-breaking arguments is that genres are situational, and *situations* are a genre; ordinary life events take the form of genres and follow narrative forms (see Berlant, 2011). In *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, Berlant (2008, 4) argues that genre is an aesthetic structure of affective expectation, a mediator between the generality of the subject and the singularity of details. According to Berlant, audience identification is deep and complex due to the porous quality of the boundaries of genre, as "it locates real life in the affective capacity to bracket many kinds of historical antagonism on behalf of finding a way to connect with the feeling of belonging to a larger world, however aesthetically mediated" (ibid.). This

interconnectedness of the community and the individual, the general and the singular, is often present in minority literature, and Bengali American fiction is no exception. Furthermore, the concept of *national sentimentality* at the core of Berlant's work resonates stylistically with the primary sources of this dissertation. In this study, the Bengali American sub-genre is represented by the works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Bharati Mukherjee. The texts examined are *Sister of My Heart* (1999) and *The Vine of Desire* (2002) by Divakaruni, "Hema and Kaushik" (a novella in the short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth*, 2008) and *The Lowland* (2013) by Lahiri, and *Desirable Daughters* (2002), *The Tree Bride* (2004), and *Miss New India* (2011) by Mukherjee.

In her overview of the history of Asian American literature, Ketu Katrak (1997, 201–202) argues that the 'simultaneity' of geography, the possibility of living in one place in body and in another in mind, is of a particular kind for writers with a relationship to colonial history. Their works often render powerful mergers of the past and present, imaginatively challenging "the linearity of time and the specificity of space by juxtaposing their here and now with their histories and past geographies" (Katrak 1997, 202). The political dimensions of those histories and geographies have perhaps led to the current situation in which diaspora fictions in the United States, South Asian American literature in particular, continue to be critiqued from a sociological and/or sociorealist perspective, often neglecting the aesthetic.

The sociorealist approach has been valuable in exposing the complicated feelings of belonging and nonbelonging of Asian Americans, whose identity is often incompatible with the dominant white culture (Ng 2012, 235). However, it omits other, more abstract and subtle factors, which also contribute to the construction of identity and belonging, as feelings of displacement and discrimination experienced by Asian minorities in the United States are mostly endured at the level of the unconscious (ibid.). Therefore, different strategies for reading minority narratives are required to reveal the complexities and intricacies of migrant subjects that are neglected by the realist approach (ibid.). My study addresses this gap in literary studies identified by Andrew Hock Soon Ng by critiquing Asian minority fiction through the recurrence of a literary motif. A focus on formative characteristics combined with a psychological reading uncovers complexities in the position of migrant characters that have so far been overlooked.

One important complexity in the depiction of migrant lives is the concept of *subjectivity*, which is reflected in works by South Asian American writers. The dominant, largely Western construction of an individualized selfhood has increasingly been contested by dispersed and decentered modes of subjectivities. These non-unitary subjectivities often occur in the writing of nondominant and marginalized subjects such as women or ethnic minorities. *Duality* is defined as the quality or condition of being two, or an instance of opposition or contrast between

two aspects of something. This study explores the fictional *double*, an expression of the negotiation of duality in literature, and its manifestation in contemporary Bengali American fiction. I argue, first, that the double challenges the concept of individual subjectivity with a dual or non-unitary subjectivity. Second, its frequent occurrence is connected to the hybrid identity of the Bengali American writers and their characters studied here. Third, the main function of the double in Bengali American fiction is to narrate deliverance from the past – for example, the release from individual, familial, or colonial trauma.

The double emerges from the tension in the seam of division and unity, with the ability to articulate both self-fragmentation and multiplication (Herdman 1990, 2). It may express unity between separate individuals through a likeness or a dissolution of the self through complementarity. As a concept, the double is older than literary fiction and originates in ancient myth and folklore. An early example still known today is, for example, *ka*, the spirit double of ancient Egyptian mythology, which shared the memories, thoughts, and feelings of its counterpart. Due to its long history and propensity to reflect its era, the double should be considered a cultural construct and not merely a literary device (Živković 2000, 121). I fully acknowledge the larger cultural significance of the double, but my approach to it in my dissertation is first and foremost literary. Philosophical and psychological considerations cannot be entirely excluded, but my intention is to explore fictional representations of the double, and to do so by implementing methods of literary scholarship.

My research on the double emerges from an interest in fictional characters who are either firmly bound to each other or placed in juxtaposition, characters who either resemble each other a great deal or are each other's opposites, characters who are more than an 'I'. Curiosity about these constructs led to a more thorough exploration of their form, function, and significance as each other's doubles. The double may take on different roles, for example, that of an identical twin, a ghost, a shadow-self, or a physical doppelgänger. The relationship between doubles may be amicable or hostile. As Karl Miller ([1985] 1987, 21) asserts in *Doubles: Studies in Literary History*, "the component parts may complete, resemble, or repel one another." The crucial aspect is the interdependence of these parts.

The double is an alluring but ambiguous subject of study in its resistance to easy definition. In its most limited interpretation, it is understood only as a physical double, often foreshadowing the protagonist's demise in the story, whereas its broadest definition equates the double with any structural duality or multiplicity in texts. While occurring in all literary styles, periods, and genres, the double is always a child of its time, generated and formed by social conditions (Živković 2000, 121). If the form of the double is determined by its era, correspondingly, the double, like other literary motifs, may reveal underlying tensions and patterns that are symptomatic of its time. The re-emergence of the double as a literary device serving

an ontological function that is fundamentally connected to issues of the self can articulate questions of identity that are relevant today. In the case of the Bengali American fiction, the doubles in Divakaruni's, Lahiri's, and Mukherjee's texts shed light on identity issues hidden beneath the surface of the model minority.

Literature can tap into emergent feelings that are still on the verge of being voiced in general discourse. Susan Koshy argues that fictional texts offer effective means for interpreting the cultural present in their ability to grasp the prevalent social disquiet spewing from the void between individual experiences and the vocabulary available for them (Koshy 2013, 349). Fictional representations create meaning; it is thus worthwhile to examine the function of the fictional double, last popular during the social upheavals of the late nineteenth century, and seek reasons for its re-emergence in minority fiction today. Koshy asserts that fictional texts are less burdened by the temptations and restrictions of publicity than autobiographical texts (ibid.). Therefore, the study of fiction may be a more reliable tool in measuring the pulse of a society than the reading of memoirs and other personal accounts.

When considering postcolonial literary criticism today, there has been an increasing interest in the *aesthetic*, in the form and structure of a text, instead of, or at least as a critical part of, its content (Boehmer 2010, 170). Postcolonial fiction has evolved from direct writing back to empire and opposing oppression to covering a wide array of issues, such as globalization and migration, which originate in the colonial era. Thus, the majority of diaspora writing today, such as the works examined in my study, continue to address issues that are open to interpretation from a postcolonial viewpoint. Postcolonial literary criticism has typically focused on the cultural, historical, political, and sociological: for example, the effects of economic neoimperialism, the formation of diaspora identities, and the gendered experience of migrancy. As Sue-Im Lee (2006, 2) writes in the Introduction of *Literary Gestures: The Aesthetic in Asian American Writing*, Asian American literary criticism has been slow to recognize Asian American literary works as aesthetic objects that are "constituted by and through deliberate choices in form, genres, traditions, and conventions." Examining diaspora texts with a focus on the aesthetic may reveal other patterns that are characteristic of the genre. The study of literary motifs and other aesthetic features of Asian American fiction enables the discovery of connections between the occurrence of these motifs and the postcolonial position of South Asian American writers.

This study contributes to existing South Asian American literary criticism by demonstrating that the double occurs frequently in contemporary Bengali American fiction, has specific characteristics and functions in this genre, and thus forms a significant part of its aesthetic. An extensive study of diaspora and postcolonial fiction from other parts of the world would be required to establish whether the double is indeed intrinsic to the aesthetic of postcolonial fiction on a larger scale – if

such an aesthetic can be defined in the first place or is even fruitful to define. In this context, I have adopted Elleke Boehmer's (2010, 171) definition of *aesthetic* or a *postcolonial poetics* to signify an orientation that attempts to read postcolonial texts on their own terms, writing as writing, and not *only* through a historical, social, or political frame of reference. It is crucial to consider how the 'literary' is constructed to prevent it from vanishing into culture and politics (Levine 1994, 1). However, an emphasis on the aesthetic does not imply that the genre's social or political features are less significant than its form. A closer examination of literary devices draws attention to how they are used, what their purpose in the text is, and what kind of cultural work they perform.

Thus, the study of the aesthetic adds to rather than deducts from meaning. The analysis of literature should be informed by the consideration of the extent to which a text's features originate in the community, language, and location, and on a more abstract level, if they are quintessentially or distinctly postcolonial or worldly (Boehmer 2018, 29). Such features could be, for example, a melancholic mood, a refashioning of local myths, or the employment of gothic tropes in otherwise realist works. Before dismissing the search for common aesthetic features as insignificant, it is worthwhile to remember that the social realm in fictional works is composed and constructed in a similar fashion to the aesthetic (see, for example, Lee 2006, 2; Boehmer 2018, 34). An aesthetic feature such as the recurrent use of a literary device can help in highlighting a social issue. An aesthetic-conscious reading with a focus on form may uncover subtexts that deepen our understanding of the position of South Asian American subjects.

A dual heritage appears to invite the double. In other words, the frequent occurrence of the double in Bengali American fiction is connected to the hybrid identity of the writers and their characters. The double resurfaces in bicultural texts, indicating that there are similarities in the disruption, confusion, and apprehension experienced by individuals in the period of enlightenment and industrialization (when the double was at the height of its popularity as a literary motif) to the dislocation and questioning of identity of bicultural individuals today (Oster 1998, 69). In his study of the double in Post-Romantic fiction, Paul Coates has ventured as far as to suggest that "the double is the self when it speaks another language," and that narratives dealing with the double are mainly written by authors "who are suspended between languages and cultures" (Coates 1988, 2). As examples, Paul Coates mentions writers Joseph Conrad (who spoke Polish, English, and French), Robert Louis Stevenson (Scottish and English), Henry James (English and American English), and Oscar Wilde (French and English). Hence both Judith Oster's and Coates's findings support the view that there is a connection between a bicultural identity and the double, and that the connection appears to predate the current era of migration.

Only limited prior research exists on the attributes of the fictional double in twentieth or twenty-first-century minority literatures. Sau-ling Wong provides an interesting exception with her study of texts by, for example, Maxine Hong Kingston, Monica Sone, and Diana Chang. Wong (1993, 77–117) discovers a subtype for the double – the *racial shadow*, an embodiment of the hyphenated American's racial shame. The concept of racial shame is largely omitted by the writers examined in this study; Mukherjee, in particular, rejected the idea of a hyphenated identity as a kind of disfigurement that should be hidden and described her position as "a set of fluid identities to be celebrated" (Katrak 1997, 211). She considered herself to be an American writer like any other whose ancestors had passed through Ellis Island (ibid.). Though not directly applicable to my work, Wong's essay is effective in demonstrating that the literary double in minority fiction has different functions to Western mainstream fiction, even if the racial shadow is not its only minority subtype. Wong (1993, 78) argues that "the universalistic theories that have informed readings of Western classics of double literature are not so much wrong as partial; they must be modified before they can be of use to students of Asian American literature." She continues by asserting that establishing a group-specific framework "requires informed selectivity and scrupulous attention to text, context, and intertext alike" (Wong 1993, 115). Her work corresponds to the prevalent idea discussed earlier that minority fiction gives voice to tensions in multicultural societies and is in continuous dialogue with the real world. It is intriguing and rather surprising that despite these views, the double remains understudied in the context of minority fiction today.

Universal theories regarding identity and the double do not directly apply to South Asian American fiction due to differing perceptions of subjectivity. Despite the predominance of self-representation in society today, not everyone can assert themselves by writing 'I'. Writing 'I' requires the construction of identity as a unified, transcendent subject, and many nondominant groups, such as women and/or ethnic minorities fall beyond the scope of this precondition (Edwards 2011, 12). Instead, 'I' for them may emerge as a plural construction, expressive of a non-unitary or plural subjectivity. The fictional double in Bengali American fiction is an expression of a plural subjectivity, which challenges the Western concept of individual subjectivity. The concept of a non-unitary self has been a popular topic of scholarship in feminist criticism for the past three decades (see, for example, Friedman 1988; Smith 1993; Bloom 1998), but the focus has been on autobiographical texts. I find many of these concepts to be equally applicable to fictional works, particularly after the recent increase in the popularity of autofiction, which has blurred boundaries between the genres of autobiography and fiction. However, diving any deeper into these classifications would be a digression from the literary double and thus is beyond the scope of this study.

My analysis of the fictional works in this study is guided by the questions examined above with a focus on the essence and function of the double, and how they are specific to the Bengali American literary genre. My work is localized in a cultural and linguistic context rather than a national (governmental) area. The state of Bengal was partitioned twice in the twentieth century, first in 1905 by the British (the decision was reversed in 1911), and a second time in 1947 in the Indian independence partition, when East Bengal became a part of Pakistan. The joy of East Bengal's independence from Pakistan in 1971 was reduced by great suffering in the war, as well as the realization that the independent state of Bangladesh was now also forever separated from Indian West Bengal (see Jones 2011). Bengal is renowned for its rich literary history, having birthed such writers as Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and Rajshekhar Basu, among others. The area is recognized as a *desh*[2] in its own right and its people are considered unique also by contemporary Bengal-born authors; in *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee's characters jokingly but proudly claim they belong to 'Homo Bengalensis,' a rare but adaptable species on the verge of extinction in its own habitat, but thriving elsewhere (*Daughters*, 245).

Divakaruni, Lahiri, and Mukherjee are among the most prominent writers in the South Asian American literary scene today. Their position is exceptional even in the context of migrant writers in the absence of a unitary homeland as a point of origin. As Bengalis, they have an inherited divided existence, intensified by migration to the United States. Being suspended between two cultures and languages is a common denominator for the writers, and migration emerges as a theme in all of the texts discussed in my study.

Migrants from the Indian subcontinent are currently the second-largest migrant group in the United States. All the narratives include protagonists (and doubles) who are of a Bengali background and migrants in the United States, or descendants of migrants. In addition, all the texts contain references to India's colonial past. Lahiri's stories are often set in the late 1960s and 1970s, illustrating "neoliberal family matters" (see Koshy 2013), the side effects of upward economic mobility on the filial relationships of Indian migrants in the United States.

Through the lives of individuals, all the works reflect on larger issues and global phenomena. They encompass, for example, the following themes: the displacement experienced by migrants, difficulties in belonging to a minority, the British Raj and India's struggle for independence (*Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride*); the partition of Bengal and the Naxal movement (*The Lowland*); the aftermath of 9/11 and its effects on minorities in the United States (*Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride*); the 2004 tsunami ("Hema and Kaushik"); and the outsourcing of American

[2] A *desh* translates as a person's or a people's native country or place of origin; a homeland, home (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

and European customer support services to India (*Miss New India*). These elements obtrude rather than serve as a mere backdrop in the texts, inviting a postcolonial reading of the works: India, and Bengal in particular, remains a wide-reaching presence in all of them.

To emphasize contemporary relevance, I have chosen to focus on post-millennial texts and works published just at the turn of the millennium. 9/11 was a watershed that altered how ethnic minorities were perceived and treated in the United States. The optimism regarding multiculturalism that had been prevalent at the end of the 1990s quickly changed to a more pessimistic view, paralleled in the literature of the era. Another important reason for choosing these works is their focus on the othered position of women, motivated by a will to examine how this is reflected in the concept of subjectivity and the occurrence of the double. All of these texts also include representations of the familial double, which I interpret as an expression of the collectivity of Bengali culture and consider typical for the genre.

Chapter 1 maps critical approaches to the fictional double and explores some of the questions related to the definitions of the double more closely. The chapter begins with an introduction of the double in literary history, then examines psychological and psychoanalytical approaches as well as feminist and minority readings of the double. Chapter 1 also introduces the double as a trope of the postcolonial gothic genre, and studies the connection between migrancy, the double, and the modern Bengali American experience. The chapter ends with a discussion of plural subjectivity in women's autobiographical writing.

The analyses of the fictional works are grouped under each author according to the order of publication, from the oldest to the most recent. This corresponds to the timeline of events in the novels and progresses thematically from first-generation Bengali migrant characters to the third generation of Bengali Americans. Chapter 2 examines Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Sister of My Heart* and its sequel *The Vine of Desire*. The two novels render the story of two cousins whose lives run parallel first in Calcutta and later in California's Silicon Valley. Their story illustrates how even the best of intentions for a loved one may occasionally have adverse results, and how fine the line between love and codependence can be. The literary double illustrates the complexities of being a woman in a communal culture, and how the intricate web of family and community prevents the writing of an individual 'I'. Furthermore, it expresses a deliverance from grief over the failure of marriages, the loss of parents, and the stillbirth of a child. Punctuated by global events and narrated from a multitude of perspectives, the narratives create an impression of tapping into a collective consciousness.

Chapter 3 analyses the "Bengal trilogy" by Bharati Mukherjee. The three novels, *Desirable Daughters*, its sequel *The Tree Bride*, and *Miss New India* form a loose trilogy focusing on the same characters of Bengali origin in India and the United

States. The first two novels depict the protagonist's search for her own identity by tracing her ancestor's life story and writing it down. The third, independent part of the trilogy, focuses on the coming of age of a young Bengali woman, an internal migrant to India's fastest growing metropolis Bangalore. All three novels elaborate on the echoes of a colonial past in present-day India. Past sins cast long shadows, but deliverance is brought about with a catharsis created by a double. The trilogy proposes that colonialism permeates the present, informs the position of postcolonial individuals, and must be contended with by them. The novels voice the grievances of past generations, calling on their descendants to make amends.

Jhumpa Lahiri's "Hema and Kaushik" and *The Lowland* are discussed in Chapter 4. "Hema and Kaushik" traces the lives of second-generation migrant protagonists from adolescence to adulthood, illustrating that parents' good intentions have no bearing on the actual outcome of their children's lives. *The Lowland* is set in both India and the United States, spanning a period of fifty years from the 1960s to the 2010s through the experiences of one family. The novel depicts the repercussions of the emergence of the Naxal movement, which signifies a defining period for an entire generation of Bengali university students in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In both works, doubling is used to represent the effects of trauma and the struggle to reintegrate the fragmented self.

The conclusive Chapter 5 looks back on the issues raised in this introduction and how they are resolved in the study itself. I describe how understanding the complexities in the diasporic position, illustrated by the literary double in these works, may contribute to solving problems related to migrancy and globalization. I also propose future topics of research related to the literary double in Asian American literature.

1 Critical Approaches to the Double

In this chapter, I explore different critical approaches to the double, providing an overview of how this literary device has been defined in the past and what this background offers for a contemporary analysis of the double in Bengali American fiction. Despite the long history of the double, its definition is at best ambiguous.

The double emerged in the early oral and literary traditions of ancient cultures but was at the height of its popularity as a literary trope in nineteenth-century Anglophone fiction. Originally the double was perceived as a supernatural being carrying spiritual meaning, but it became increasingly earthly with the secularization of society, and by the end of the nineteenth century, it was believed to originate in the self. The evolution of the double was closely linked to Gothic fiction, and hence the double was commonly viewed as an embodiment of evil. The form and function of the double broadened in the twentieth century, and theoretical approaches to analyzing the double grew increasingly versatile.

The double has been examined from several overlapping as well as opposing perspectives, for example, psychoanalytical theory, feminist theory, and diaspora identity theory. Their main theses are discussed in this section from the perspective of general applicability to the fictional texts examined in this study. This chapter also introduces the postcolonial gothic and the critical tools it offers for the analysis of the double in postcolonial contexts. Finally, the chapter discusses plural subjectivity as a concept that challenges the western idea of the unitary 'I' and its relevance for studying the double in Divakaruni, Lahiri, and Mukherjee's writing.

1.1 The Double in Literary History

The history of the double as a fictional device is as long as that of fiction itself. Doubles occur in the Mesopotamian epic *Gilgamesh*, Greek tragedies, the Bible, Chaucer's tales, and Shakespeare's plays. The motif gained popularity in Anglophone literature in the Romantic period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and doubles continued to be abundant in Victorian gothic fiction. Its popularity in literature has since decreased, but the double continues to occur frequently in films and other forms of popular culture. Doubles are abundant in German gothic fiction as well as Russian nineteenth-century literature. They occur

in Fyodor Dostoevski's, Victor Hugo's and Franz Kafka's novels, but to condense the scope of this study, this analysis of the double in literary history focuses only on Anglophone literature.

Despite its long history, defining the double has by no means been straightforward or simple; the views of different literary scholars and theoreticians continue to vary a great deal. For example, some scholars limit the double to the role of a shadow-self, a supernatural being or physical doppelgänger conjured up by the fragmented or otherwise disturbed mind of the protagonist, while others embrace broader concepts of duality. The latter often view the fictional double as a soul-double, an independent character in a story who might bear little or no physical resemblance to the protagonist, and who is juxtaposed rather than paralleled with them (see, for example, Keppler 1972; Miller 1987; Wong 1993). The double as a literary device has always been a child of its time, reflective of its era and of the concept of humanity in that context, voicing the fluctuation of unity and division between the self and the other.

The double has always been assigned spiritual and religious meaning as a part of one's person (Herdman 1990, 2). In primitive cultures and folklore, the double originated in the archetype of universal duality, reflecting pagan beliefs of the plurality of the sacred and the dyadic structure of the universe, simultaneously creative and destructive (Živković 2000, 123). The ethereal connotations of the double altered with the introduction of Christian beliefs and the development of Western civilization. The double, which had earlier signified immortality to the self, evolved into its opposite: an omen of death (Živković 2000, 124). Early religious texts and myths located good and evil as external; human beings operated under a sacred presence which was an extraneous supernatural (Živković 2000, 125). Belief in the supernatural was a societal norm and present in people's daily activities.

Karl Miller ([1985] 1987, 31) identifies a critical shift in the conception of duality in the era of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, which most likely reflected the reformation of the church in Europe. Miller mentions Shakespeare's comedies *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Comedy of Errors* as presenting lighter interpretations of the double, but doubles are copious in Shakespeare's tragedies too, for example in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*.[3] Miller argues that the Renaissance seemed to favor similarity and duplication as typical of the double, whereas the "adversary duality of competing selves" appeared later during the Romantic period (Miller [1985] 1987, 31). John Herdman (1990, 9) claims a differing view with an

[3] See, for example, Rogers (1970). In his work, Robert Rogers refers to earlier psychoanalytical studies of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and analyzes the character of Othello as a composite that is split into three: the Normal Othello, the Romantic Othello embodied by Cassio, and the Psychotic Othello, personified by Iago.

earlier example, Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, which was based on a German legend. The play was written and performed in 1588–1592, and first published in 1604 (The British Library, n.d.). Herdman argues that Renaissance dramatists were in fact much concerned with theological questions, and that *Doctor Faustus* is a fundamental work in the development of the double concerning both its form and content. The character of Mephistopheles is a prototype for the tempter-double in Romantic literature, since even though he is an emissary of the devil in the play, he simultaneously represents the dark and evil tendencies of the self (Herdman 1990, 10). These tendencies became stock characteristics of the double in the Romantic period, and pacts of the kind that Faustus makes with the devil were common in Gothic fiction (ibid.). Thus, doubles were already common in Renaissance drama, and reflected the existential and theological questions of the era.

The double is often connected to the concept of evil. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was a significant alteration in human self-perception and, as a result, in the understanding of evil (Živković 2000, 124). The Enlightenment introduced rational humanity and replaced beliefs in the supernatural with a trust in reason and science. With a new worldview that problematized the individual, the double became secularized, an Other that was no longer considered supernatural, but a part of the self (Živković 2000, 125). A classic example of narratives that deployed the double on a fully secular level is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). The novel explores existential questions and the relationship between man and his god, but the Creature is nevertheless man-made, and a part of Frankenstein himself. The main character's moral ugliness is embodied in the monster's physical form (Coates 1988, 16). During the Romantic period, the double became more disturbing and difficult to define, but also "a crucial index of cultural limits: it returns us to an encounter with our own 'heart of darkness' – that area which has been 'silenced by culture" (ibid.). Romanticism's turn inward made the double a widely popular literary motif.

The gothic can be regarded in many ways, for example, as a historical era with its literary origins in the late eighteenth century, or as a psychological statement that expresses repressed fears in a textual form (Punter and Byron 2004, xviii). The genre can also be viewed more radically as a collection of subgenres such as the ghost story or horror story, or not as a genre at all, but as individual tropes or motifs which can be considered gothic and which are scattered across the western literary tradition (ibid.). Above all, the gothic is a way of representation (Punter and Byron 2004, xix). The evolution of the double is, thus, closely linked to the emergence of the gothic as a literary genre.

The literal meaning of the German word *doppelgänger* (or, doppelganger), which is often used for the double, is "double-goer." The term was coined by the novelist Jean Paul (Richter), who defined the word in a one-sentence footnote in his

novel *Siebenkäs*[4] (1796, quoted in Webber 1996, 58): "So heissen Leute, die sich selbst sehen" ('This is what people who see themselves are called'). Jean Paul's work presents the reader with "duplication by division," a pair of friends who form a unit, but are individually a half and dependent on the alter ego (Tymms 1949, 29). These friends, Leibgeber and Siebenkäs, appear to share a soul within two bodies, forming "one complex nature" (ibid.). The early German romantics did not develop the double further, but instead favored the complications caused by mistaking the identity of lookalikes, or the horrendousness of the phantom-double, in their texts (Tymms 1949, 35). Furthermore, even though the term for the literary double originated in German gothic prose, the English gothic form appears to have predated this coinage.

The gothic and many of its tropes were already introduced in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764 and often considered to be the first gothic novel in English. Walpole called his work "A Gothic Story" in the subtitle of its second edition, which has perhaps given reason for critics to consider him the very creator of "the gothic tradition" (Williams 1995, 13). However, other works in English of approximately the same era or before Walpole can already be classified as gothic (ibid.). Even if it is challenging to define the exact time of the emergence of the English gothic form and the double as its trope, their interconnectedness is undeniable. Ann B. Tracy's (1981, 198) index of motifs in *The Gothic Novel 1790–1830* lists numerous entries for *doppelganger*, and the motif's popularity continued to grow toward the end of the century.

A contributing factor to this growing popularity of reading and writing gothic fiction in the eighteenth century was the change that occurred in the meaning of the word *Gothic*. It was used in reference to anything medieval, with connotations attached to the barbaric (Punter and Byron 2004, 7). *Gothic* was originally used in connection to the Goths, the northern tribes that had had a significant role in the collapse of the Roman Empire. As the gothic was considered barbaric and medieval in juxtaposition to the classical, the term soon broadened to represent anything that was not classical: the chaotic, ornate, excessive, and uncivilized (ibid.). In the middle of the eighteenth century, a shift occurred in the way that the attributes assigned to the gothic were perceived (Punter and Byron 2004, 8). Writers began to argue in favor of these gothic features and announced that they possessed a valuable power, "a sense of grandeur that was sorely needed in English culture" (ibid.). Valuing the gothic became a way of being English instead of continental or French, and a way of

[4] In full, the title reads: Blumen-, Frucht- und Dornenstücke oder Ehestand, Tod und Hochzeit des Armenadvokaten F. St. Siebenkäs im Reichsmarktflecken Kuhschnappel (Flower, Fruit, and Thorn Pieces; or, the Married Life, Death, and Wedding of the Public Defender F. St. Siebenkäs in Reichsmarktflecken, Kuhschnappel).

reconnecting with England's (assumedly) forgotten history. This shift in attitudes was reflected in the popularity of gothic fiction as well.

In addition to the double, the poetics of the gothic include an ominous or dark mood, mystery, and elements of the uncanny. Some common motifs of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century gothic were abduction, blood, castles, corpses, ghosts, murder, rape, seduction, storms, and suicide, with women the usual victims of the aforementioned evils (Tracy 1981). The double often manifested as a physical doppelgänger, but stories involving other forms of doubling, such as twins or dissimilar brothers, were common as well. In literary criticism of the Romantic era, twins belonged to this broader subset of doubles (de Nooy 2005, 11). A twin-like bond was characteristic of the gothic double as every emotion of one psyche was felt by the other. Hillel Schwartz (1996, 54) describes the relationship of the gothic doppelgänger as "the horror and terror of a Siamesed bond: a life contravening yours, but its fate your fate." In compliance with the sinister mood of the gothic, the double was predominantly and inherently evil. Herdman (1990, 16) argues that the supernatural double was never truly at home in the English gothic, but that the genre was still important in the development of the double for the way in which it was taken up in later works. William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) introduced two types of the double: a complementary opposite who takes on his rival's characteristics after his demise, as well as an embodied conscience (ibid.). *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Maturin, then, included a doubling of brothers and an evil second self as an independent character (ibid.).

In North America, early gothic poetics were applied in works by Charles Brockden Brown, whose doubles reflected the dichotomy between civilization and savagery, and later famously by Edgar Allan Poe (Herdman 1990, 17). Poe's *William Wilson* (1840) was the first notable story of a double that was based on a psychological model in its portrayal of a split personality (Ng 2008, 3). The double was no longer an outside villain, but had become "an enemy within, a shadowy other residing within the psyche, threatening to disrupt the stability and coherence of the self" (ibid.). Thus, the seeds for psychoanalytical interpretations of the double were sown already in the early nineteenth century, long before the publication of Sigmund Freud's seminal work on the topic.

The gothic was no longer a dominant genre in Anglophone literature when historical novels introduced by authors likes Sir Walter Scott began to gain popularity in the nineteenth century. However, several well-known realist novels with gothic and uncanny elements were published in the mid-nineteenth century, for example, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). According to feminist critics, both novels can be considered examples of the *female gothic* (see, for example, Gilbert and Gubar [1979] 2000;

Blum 1988; Williams 1995). The novels explore patriarchal oppression and the physical confinement of women in domestic spheres.

In addition to the Brontë sisters' works, which will be discussed further in the context of feminist criticism and the double, the mid-nineteenth century is renowned for classic novels by such writers as Charles Dickens, George Eliot and William Thackeray. The popularity of the double as a literary device decreased with the increasing popularity of this more realist genre of fiction. There are a few exceptions such as Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), in which Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton are each other's doubles: mirror images whose characters develop in different directions and are gradually reversed in the course of the story. The resolution of the plot is built on the double's physical resemblance, as Carton performs the ultimate selfless act and substitutes for Darnay, the husband of the woman he loves, at the guillotine.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, gothic themes experienced a revival in the form of the *urban gothic* (Byron 2012, 186). The genre fictionalized anxieties and uncertainties related to industrialization, urbanization, and the changing social structures of the era. Victorian Britain was an imperial power in decline, and cities were plagued by the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution such as an increasing crime rate and disease, exacerbated by the influx of impoverished farm workers as a result of the agricultural depression (ibid.). Classic urban gothic works include Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). In both narratives, the double is an embodiment of evil, illustrating the inner battle between good and evil in human beings. In an attempt to repress his corrupt urges, Dr. Jekyll develops a potion intended to curb them, but instead, it transforms him into the evil and violent Mr. Hyde. Dorian Gray, in turn, is tempted by vanity and hedonism into a life of debauchery, in which he retains the beauty of his youth, but his portrait ages and bears the mark of his sins. Both stories end in the death of the protagonist. Dr. Jekyll, having run out of a key ingredient for his potion, is trapped as Mr. Hyde and kills himself, and Dorian Gray stabs his portrait with a knife to rid himself of it. When Dorian's body is discovered with a knife in his heart, it is that of a horribly ugly old man, recognizable only by the rings on his fingers. Dorian's portrait has been restored to its original appearance, the likeness of a handsome young man.

The double in late nineteenth-century fiction expresses the repressed self-knowledge of the corrupt capitalist and colonialist (Coates 1988, 34). Coates observes that "the immorality and bad conscience contained by the iron façade of Victorian official culture burst alarmingly to the surface" (ibid.). However, the duality of Wilde's novel offers the opportunity for a duality of interpretation: Miller (1987, 228) suggests that Dorian Gray recognizes the connectedness of mind and body – the spirituality of the body and corporeality of the spirit. This new spirituality

had to make its peace with the old censoriousness, and this was facilitated by duality (ibid.). The tale's moral dimension is at best ambiguous. Dorian loves his beauty as he loves his sin, as aspects of himself (Herdman 1990, 140). Wilde himself famously declares in the Preface of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that "there is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. […] An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style" and "vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art" (Wilde [1891] 1997, 5). Wilde's attempts to distance himself from moral issues in his writing failed, since the novel, among his other works, was used as evidence against him in court when he was accused, and convicted, of homosexuality a few years after the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Homosexuality and a sense of confusion regarding gender categories were considered proof of degeneration in late Victorian society.

In addition to an increasing awareness of their potential for evil, the new urbanites, balancing between old norms and fin de siècle freedom, were becoming conscious of their potential likeness to the Other. In the late Victorian era, "duality was an affair of expatriates" (Miller [1985] 1987, 221). Miller argues that the double was popular in the works of writers suspended between languages and cultures, for example, Robert Louis Stevenson, William Sharp, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Joseph Conrad, Oscar Wilde, William Butler Yeats, Robert Frost, and George Eliot (ibid.). Coates (1988, 33) observes that the appearance of the double coincides with an increase in inter-human identification, and the inclination to view oneself like the Other, or at least potentially so. Henry James's short story "The Jolly Corner" (1907) explores the ghostly alter ego of an expatriate to Europe, recently returned to New York. The double embodies that which might have been, had the protagonist Spencer Brydon made different life choices. The story is rich in oedipal symbols, and Miller suggests that it illustrates a shift towards Freudian doctrine, written only a few years after the publication of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899 (Miller 1987, 232). Whether or not all the works from this era containing doubles are open to Freudian interpretation is questionable, but James and his contemporaries certainly steered the double towards a more secular direction. This development of the double was taken up by Joseph Conrad in works like *Heart of Darkness* (1899), "The Secret Sharer" (1910), and *The Shadow-Line* (1916). *Heart of Darkness* is a classic example of *imperial gothic fiction* and is discussed in section 1.2 "The Postcolonial Gothic."

1.1.1 Psychological and Psychoanalytical Readings of the Double

For much of the nineteenth century, literary and scientific psychology were undivided, but they began to grow apart late in the century (Herdman 1990, 153). Spirituality gave way to rationalism, and an increased interest in scientific facts

replaced religious mythology also in the context of the double. As new psychological theories permeated the popular consciousness, the literary double lost its spirituality in favor of a rationalist and materialist approach (Herdman 1990, 154). Whereas Doctor Faustus was tormented by the devil, the late Victorian Dr. Jekyll is transformed into Mr. Hyde as a result of his own scientific experiments.

New psychological theories gained popularity at the turn of the nineteenth century (Herdman 1990, 154). Sigmund Freud ([1917] 1957) was interested in how early childhood development was reflected in the mental ailments of adults. Freud constructed his concept of identity on a theory of development which claims that human beings are born only with auto-erotic drives, and that the *ego* is constructed later, in conjunction with the relationship to one's parents and the outside world (ibid.).

Freud initially defined the double as individuals who are identical in their outer appearance. He broadened this definition in the context of German Romantic fiction to include characters whose mental processes are shared, "so that the one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other, identifies himself with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own—in other words, by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self" (Freud [1919] 1955, 234). In the therapeutic context, Freud proposed that one's *conscience*, or the self-criticism that one labels as one's conscience, can, in delusional individuals who are convinced they are under surveillance, become isolated and dissociated from the ego. The ego is then treated as an object which is external to the self (ibid.). This splitting occurs between what Freud calls *critical agency* and the rest of the ego.

The double, according to Freud ([1919] 1955, 236), was not only the embodiment of early developmental narcissism, but also contained unfulfilled possibilities and "strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed." This is perhaps best described as a kind of wishful thinking, the fulfilling of one's dreams if reality had not interfered, nourishing the idea of free will that Freud considered to be an illusion (ibid.). Freud acknowledged that this did not adequately explain the uncanniness related to the double, or the impulse toward self-protection that resulted in the creation of a double that was "external" to the self in the first place. He concluded that the creation of the double dated back to infancy, to a time when the ego was not yet differentiated from the outside world, a time "at which it wore a more friendly aspect" (ibid.). Thus, the double's appearance later in life was *unheimlich*, uncanny, because it signified the involuntary return and repetition of something that had been, the return of the familiar in a different shape, now as unfamiliar, foreign, and threatening. Thus, the double according to Freud is not a positive plurality, but an ego-disturbance, a malaise, and an unwelcome splitting.

Building on the foundations of Freud's early theories, Otto Rank's *The Double: A Psychoanalytical Study* (*Der Doppelgänger: Eine Psychoanalytische Studie*, 1919) paved the way for more explicit psychoanalytical interpretations. Rank's main argument is that the double is a harbinger of death, emerging out of narcissistic self-love (Humann 2018, 4). Rank hypothesizes that the consuming fear of death enables the creation of a double as a new self that continues to live on (Humann 2018, 5). Using the fictional Dorian Gray and his portrait as an example, Rank argues that the double offers an escape route for having to assume responsibility for one's deeds (ibid.). Rank's view has been contested due to an abundance of writing in which the appearance of a double does not appear to signify the main character's demise (Miller 1987, 135). Herdman defends Rank's theory in that the emergence of the double often results in a psychic disintegration, a symbolic annihilation of the self, and not the actual death of the protagonist (Herdman 1990, 155). However, he argues that the claim of the double primarily referring to the fear of death would require a reading of a subtext drawn from psychological theory, and possibly discovering not what is in the text, but what the reader would prefer there was (ibid.).

Psychoanalytical theory is widely recognized and still often used as a theoretical framework in examining fictional texts related to the construction of identity and subjectivity. For this reason, and because the works examined in this study invite psychological interpretations, it is worthwhile to attempt to weigh the validity of early psychoanalytical theory in a modern diaspora context. The opinion that psychoanalytical theory does not travel well was already voiced by Freud's contemporaries (Munos 2013, xix). As a Western discipline, psychoanalytical theory is often considered ill-suited for postcolonial and diaspora contexts. Many postcolonial and gender scholars have abandoned attempts to employ psychoanalytical theory, as it continues to be an inadequate means to theorize social, political, and ethical change (Greedharry 2008, 3). Regarding women and other cultures, Freud's work "reflected prominent stereotypes of his time by presupposing that European men are the measure to which all human beings are to be compared" (Hartnack 1990, 948). Freud failed to take significant cultural traits into account when forming his theory; for example, instead of holding androcentric, monotheistic beliefs, India's Hindu majority maintains a polytheistic worldview in which several dynamic goddesses are pre-eminent (Hartnack 1990, 922). In a similar vein, instead of the father-dominated nuclear family that Freud based his hypotheses on, most Indians grow up in extended families with several father and mother figures, and different family dynamics to those described in Freud's theory (ibid.). Due to cultural differences such as these, the universal applicability of some of Freud's weightiest hypotheses, for example, the Oedipal complex, is questioned.

In her insightful work *Postcolonial Theory and Psychoanalysis: From Uneasy Engagements to Effective Critique*, Mrinalini Greedharry (2008, 37) argues that for

Freud, Western ideas of rationality and self-control represented civilization, and his thinking was largely built on the primary opposition between the primitive and the civilized. Psychoanalysis uses universally representative psychological models to describe Europeans as "*purely* psychological creatures", whereas non-Europeans are explained through their culture (Greedharry 2008, 62). Psychoanalytic theory has been sluggish in making amends and has failed to overthrow these negative aspects of Freud's historical legacy.

Despite their partial criticism towards Freud, some postcolonial theorists have proceeded to build their own thinking on the foundations of psychoanalysis: for example, Frantz Fanon, Ashis Nandy, and Homi Bhabha are perhaps the best-known examples. Still, Greedharry (2008, 142) asserts that even they are unable to account for the female colonial subject "either in terms of her lived experience (of culture, politics, or socio-economic constraints) or in theoretical terms as a subject with her own set of psychological identifications, misrecognitions or fetishes." Also, women of color have frequently been overlooked by feminist critics in their reworking of psychoanalytical theory to explain the formation of women's subjectivity (Greedharry 2008, 143). Greedharry (2008, 148) argues that there is a danger in acknowledging the limitations of psychoanalytical theory but nevertheless continuing to use it to explain subjectivity, as that reinforces its authority despite its inadequacies in representing all kinds of subjects. Instead of continuing with the uneasy application of psychoanalytical theory to postcolonial contexts, perhaps the theory itself should be the focus of study, an object of (post)colonial discourse analysis (Greedharry 2008, 150).

Another question to consider is the extent to which a theory can be adjusted and modified until it is too far removed from its origins, and has broadened into a more inclusive but scientifically no longer sound school of thought. Greedharry's rationale is motivation enough to abandon any profound attempt to use psychoanalytic theory to explain plural subjectivity or the occurrence of the double – in the context of my study – in texts written by Bengali American women writers who write from a postcolonial position, mainly focusing on women characters in their texts. It is undoubtedly more beneficial to rely on the literary works themselves in questions of identity, subjectivity, and representation of historical events.

William James, American philosopher and psychologist, offers a counterargument to Freud and Rank already in their own era by suggesting that the double is a dramatization of self-division. James asserts that the double implies "a certain discordancy or heterogeneity in the native temperament of the subject, an incompletely unified moral and intellectual constitution" (Herdman 1990, 156). James argues that these crises of fragmentation can often be resolved through conversion, but not necessarily of the religious kind (ibid.). Nevertheless, the Jamesian approach perceives psychology and religion as mutually supportive. James

advocates for the religious act of repentance as psychologically important if it is a genuinely sincere attempt to get away from sin (Herdman 190, 159). Morally divided protagonists often express a hopelessness in resisting their fate, and great difficulty in repenting (ibid.). An example of such thinking is the aforementioned Dorian Gray, whose willingness to repent is half-hearted. He would rather forget his sins than try to make amends.

The theories of C. G. Jung are heirs to the Jamesian perspective, and Herdman asserts their usefulness in the analysis of nineteenth-century fictional doubles. The most relevant of Jung's theories regarding the literary double is the second self, a shadow archetype. According to Jung, this construct represents the negative side of an individual's personality, the composition of unpleasant characteristics one would prefer to hide. If repressed and separated from consciousness, it is "liable to burst forth suddenly in a moment of unawareness" (Jung [1959] 1983, 88). Of the examples examined so far, the Jungian interpretation is unequivocally applicable to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Herdman 1990, 157). Jung asserts that this kind of double is not overtly evil, but "somewhat inferior, primitive, unadapted, awkward" (Jung [1959] 1983, 90). When Mr. Hyde is dormant or at leisure, he appears spiritually free and even joyful, but in contact with others, his basic instincts are expressed through evil (Herdman 1990, 158). Herdman (1990, 159–60) explains the predicament of the divided protagonist in the following manner:

> These are, typically, morally riven characters whose overweening pride, and belief in their own self-righteousness and election, cause the complete repression of their dark shadow-self. The repressed shadow then irrupts and asserts itself in moral reversal, separates itself from the conscious ego and is projected as a double. The subject's powerlessness in the face of his double's baleful activity and control of his will is then projected as 'fate'or infernal destiny, and this projection attaches itself to, and is reinforced and confirmed by, a fatalistic theological position which, by suggesting to the subject that he is predestined to reprobation, effectively limits God's mercy and makes repentance, and integration of the dissociated shadow-self, impossible.

According to Jungian theory, the fictional double is proof of the danger in attempting to repress the shadow-self. However, Jung's approach does not offer any explanation for the existence of fictional doubles that are not evil. Herdman's research material consists of mainly nineteenth-century fiction with a clear focus on ethical and theological questions, which supports his view that the form of the double must reflect its content. By content, in this context, Herdman refers to religious questions, morality, and the sudden emergence of evil characteristics in a person (Herdman 1990, 161). Herdman's study provides an interesting overview of the double in the

nineteenth century, but it appears limited in its total exclusion of doubles without evil tendencies.

The modern psychoanalytic approach to analyzing literature, which peaked in the 1960s and early 1970s, brought forth a wider interpretation of the occurrence of the double. According to this approach, the double was no longer a singularly evil entity, but instead took other forms and functions. However, despite this welcome broadening of the concept to recognize different types of doubles, literary scholars neglected to turn their gaze to contemporary fiction and continued to examine literary doubles of the past. Scholars such as Robert Rogers (1970) and Carl F. Keppler (1972), drawing from the theories of Freud and Rank, suggested that the double need not be a shadow figure or doppelgänger on the story level, but instead, that it can function as a single psychological entity split into two separate characters. Rogers (1970, 5) refers to the double as a *composite character* – the division of "a recognizable, unified psychological entity into separate, complementary, distinguishable parts represented by seemingly autonomous characters." Regarding the double, Rogers's theory interprets inter-character conflict in fiction as intra-character conflict, reflecting a conflicted human mind. He divides the double into two subtypes, the manifest and the latent. Manifest doubles consist of physical doppelgängers or "concrete" doubles, such as the aforementioned Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. Latent doubles are not as noticeable; they are independent characters on the story level and are usually not lookalikes, but, for example, part of a couple, friends, or rivals, like Cathy and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, Ishmael and Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), or Hamlet and Laertes in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Rogers maps out different types of the latent double, such as the Secret Sharer and the Opposing Self, and lists different functions for this kind of double. These functions include doubling for dramatic conflict, for representational reasons, in order to appeal to the reader's psychological makeup, to stimulate defenses, for distortion, and for establishing aesthetic distance (Rogers 1970, 172–73). Depending on the context, the double may stimulate the reader or establish equilibrium; in either case, its function is created through the reader's response.

Rogers (1970, 60) argues that the division or decomposition expressed by the latent double always reflects some form of psychic conflict. This presence of conflict might imply that the double characters are antagonistic to each other on the narrative level, as the "opposition between doubles at the narrative level corresponds to the underlying opposition of psychic forces which the characters represent" (ibid.). This position is better described as juxtaposition than opposition, as according to Rogers, direct dramatic conflict between doubles is exceptional rather than the norm (ibid.). Rogers's interpretation allows that occasionally antagonism between doubles may

be reflected on the narrative level too, or it may be entirely absent. However, as Rogers (1970, 61) remarks, "in almost all cases some feeling of closeness and sympathy will be manifested by the doubles at some point in the story." The double may represent endopsychic conflict, but it is presented as interpersonal conflict; disharmony prevails on the unconscious level of the narrative (Rogers 1970, 64). This disharmony is likely to draw some form of psychological response from the reader.

Rogers comments briefly on authorial intent regarding the latent double. He acknowledges that the writer may be aware of creating latent doubles, but probably does not attempt to analyze them as such (Rogers 1970, 172). The unaware creator of latent doubles has more freedom in characterization than a writer who intentionally deploys the double, which results in a more complex treatment of the device (ibid.). Rogers's theory is altogether helpful in understanding the function of latent doubles, but fails to address the core reasons for the occurrence of the double in fiction. Furthermore, Rogers's study of the literary double only discusses texts from the nineteenth century and earlier periods and ignores what Živković and others have described as crucial in the context of the double: its significance as a cultural construct and how it reflects its own era.

Another psychoanalytical, twentieth-century view in the analysis of the double is provided by Keppler. He describes the split into two characters differently from Rogers and applies the term *second self* to the double or doppelgänger. The second self suggests a duality without implying duplication, and the incorporation of *self* suggests a deep relationship, but one that is not limited to a state of mind (Keppler 1972, 3). Keppler argues that the first self is the character who is in the foreground of the reader's attention (usually the protagonist or narrator), whereas the second self is an intruder from the shadows (ibid.). The second self may be a physical lookalike, but never a psychological duplicate (Keppler 1972, 11). Despite being half of a double, the second self is different from the first self, and must differ in a particular way, "a way that is responsible for the dynamic tension that always exists between them" (ibid.). According to Keppler (1972, 12), the attraction of the second self for the first self is rooted in a fundamental opposition; the relationship between the first and second self may be characterized by "terror, hatred, revulsion, love, even at times a kind of worship," but they never take each other for granted. In Keppler's words, "there are no tepid relationships between the hemispheres of the soul" (ibid.). Keppler voices criticism for an inadequacy of scope in previous studies of the double, particularly those that perceive the double as a mere scapegoat.

Keppler (1972, 204) draws elements of his analysis of the double from Jungian theory. He divides the second self into five types: the Pursuer, the Tempter, the Vision of Horror, the Savior, and the Beloved (ibid.). These correspond to Jung's three archetypes of the collective unconscious: the shadow (the Pursuer, the Tempter,

and the Vision of Horror), the wise old man (the Savior), and the anima (the Beloved).

In searching for reasons for the occurrence of the double in fiction, Keppler turns to the age-old dilemma of human existence: the difference between 'I' and 'not-I'. Keppler (1972, 208) asserts that the second self reflects the basic human need to retain a differentiated selfhood while sacrificing it to participate in a shared selfhood. The second self is an instrument of self-exploration and self-realization, aiming at an expansion of being (ibid.). The idea of such a *world-soul* is not new; the concept is the same as the ancient Vedic *Atman*, Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Over-Soul*, or Arthur Schopenhauer's view that the inflictor of suffering and the sufferer are one (Keppler 1972, 209). The idea of a common consciousness is widespread and well-established. In fiction, it is expressed through the second self as specific cases and individual relationships, one to one, and one half to one half (Keppler 1972, 210). The collective consciousness is a recognized concept in the context of South Asian diaspora fiction, but Keppler's interpretation of the way it manifests in fiction seems somewhat dated and ethnocentric with its lack of examples from modern and minority fiction. Furthermore, the double's form, the second self as described by Keppler, does not appear adequate to account for the doubles in the texts examined in this study.

Keppler's theory is detailed in its description of the bond between the first and second self, and it offers a welcome deviation from the interpretation of the double as always evil. However, as with Rogers, Keppler's focus is only on nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century literature. He proposes convincing reasons for the occurrence of the double, but his theory remains on a general level. A connection between the idea of the collective consciousness and emergence of the double in specific genres of fiction at specific times remains to be established.

1.1.2 Feminist Readings of the Double

Since the 1970s, the definition of the double has continued to broaden and become more inclusive, representing social changes, cultural tensions, or gender and racial issues. Feminist literary theory began to gain ground in the middle of the twentieth century, and was also reflected in the analysis of the double.

A natural starting point for any foray into exploring how feminist literary criticism has interpreted the double is Sandra M. Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, first published in 1979. Gilbert and Gubar's main argument in *Madwoman* is that nineteenth-century writers cast women into the role of angel or monster, which was a source of frustration for women. Gilbert and Gubar analyze nineteenth-century texts and angel/monster characters created by women writers, for example, Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters. *Madwoman* examines the literary

double as a double for the female writer attempting to break free from this largely internalized patriarchal dichotomy. The othered character embodies the most assertive aspects of the (woman) writer and becomes a double for the protagonist as well as the writer herself (Gilbert and Gubar [1979] 2000, 170). The monster character incorporates all that is repressed and undesirable in Victorian society.

A famous example used by Gilbert and Gubar comes from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Bertha Mason, "the mad woman in the attic," is juxtaposed with Jane, and according to Gilbert and Gubar, is her double, her secret self. For most of the novel, Bertha is the executor of Jane's repressed wishes. For example, when Jane dislikes her wedding veil, it is Bertha who destroys it, and when she is apprehensive about marrying Rochester, it is Bertha who puts the wedding off (Gilbert and Gubar [1979] 2000, 359). Bertha is Jane's "truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress" (Gilbert and Gubar [1979] 2000, 360). Gilbert and Gubar's analysis conforms to the perception of doubles in Gothic texts: one of the characters represents a socially acceptable personality whereas the other embodies the unbridled and often criminal self (Rosenfeld 1967, 314). Gilbert and Gubar argue convincingly that all of Bertha's appearances are in connection to incidents in which Jane suppresses her anger ([1979] 2000, 360). When Bertha sets fire to Thornfield, mutilating Rochester and killing herself, Jane is finally free of her past, "both from the raging specter of Bertha […] and from the self-pitying specter of the orphan child" (Gilbert and Gubar [1979] 2000, 368). Bertha is a manifestation of repressed emotions and the constraints of gender, and her revenge, combined with Jane's clear-sightedness, "successfully transform and redeem the male-dominated world" (Gilbert and Gubar [1979] 2000, 465). Bertha's death frees Rochester too, both literally and psychologically. Jane, now wealthy after inheriting her uncle's fortune, is able to marry him as an equal and not as a poor governess. The fire at Thornfield leaves Rochester an invalid, which further diminishes the power imbalance between the two characters.

Gilbert and Gubar's examples of doubles in Austen's texts are more subtle. The double may manifest as "antithetical sisters" such as Emma Woodhouse and Jane Fairfax in Austen's *Emma* (1815). This type of double expresses the psychic conflict experienced by nineteenth-century women of being drawn in two opposite directions: the need to assert themselves in the world and the need to retreat into the security of the home (Gilbert and Gubar [1979] 2000, 162). According to Gilbert and Gubar, Austen's heroines negotiate this dilemma through the maturing of their self-consciousness (ibid.). The climax of the story usually results in a transformation of the protagonist, increasing her self-awareness and awareness of the world, and allowing her to find an appropriate balance between the domestic and the public, usually with a compatible marriage partner.

Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of the double in individual nineteenth-century texts is plausible, but the intricacy of the texts is occasionally reduced to a battle between the sexes. From today's perspective, what was a trailblazing study in its time now appears limited in places, for example, in its omission to address the representation of ethnic minorities in Victorian texts, and in promoting a view of a differentiated women's way of writing that largely ignores ethnicity and certain social aspects. For example, *Madwoman* fails to address the echoes of colonialism and racism in *Jane Eyre* and the part they played in the portrayal of the Creole Bertha Mason. Brontë's depiction of Bertha is not questioned as it was in, for example, Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a prequel to *Jane Eyre*.

As complementary to rather than in conflict with the theory of the Jane/Bertha double, Joanne Blum (1988, 11–24) has explored Jane and Rochester as each other's doubles. Blum notices similarities between the Brontë sisters' novels *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, which were both published in 1847. In both novels, a male/female double with a gender- and class-transcendent relationship question the social norms of their era (Blum 1988, 18). Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff have been interpreted as each other's doubles due to the supernatural quality of their mutual bond and their defiance of patriarchal social conventions. Cathy marries Edgar in an effort to reconcile her two selves: the Cathy who craves the orderly life of the Lintons, and the free-spirited nature child she is at Wuthering Heights (Rosenfeld 1963, 330). This self-created double fails, as Cathy continues to yearn for her truer other half, Heathcliff. However, Cathy and Heathcliff can be together only in the infinity of childhood or death, "where the claims of others do not impinge upon the self" (ibid.). Cathy and Heathcliff defy and subvert the divisions between man and woman, nature and culture, gentry and servant (Blum 1988, 16). This mythical couple-double has had unparalleled staying power and generated countless imitations in modern romance novels and popular culture.

Blum argues that in both novels, the double illustrates male–female bonding that defies cultural constraints, and that the male–female bond in its purest form, as depicted in *Wuthering Heights*, is, in fact, contrary to social forms (Blum 1988, 24). The doubles in both novels have generated a multitude of interpretations and laid important groundwork for the connection between the double as a literary device and female subjectivity.

1.1.3 Minority Readings of the Double

The study of the double as a literary trope progressed from women's writing to minorities in the 1990s. Asian American fiction scholar Sau-ling Wong included a chapter on the double in her book *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* in 1993. Wong interprets the double in Asian American

literature as a *racial shadow*. In her study of the silent, tortured girl in the final chapter of Maxine Hong Kingston's *A Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1976), she argues that the quiet girl is Maxine's double, a character who is more "Chinese" than she is, and thus "othered" and rejected by her as an inferior embodiment of racial shame. Wong asserts that Asian American fiction is abundant in encounters with the racial shadow, and even if we accept that the defense mechanisms of repression and projection are universal, the traditional interpretations of the double are lacking in their ability to expose the specific characteristics of the double in this genre (Wong 1993, 78). In addition to Kingston's writing, Wong discusses racial doubles in works by Monica Sone, Diana Chang, Lonny Kaneko, Ashley Sheun Dunn, and David Henry Hwang, demonstrating not only that the double is a common literary device in Asian American fiction, but also the ways in which it has developed alongside sociohistorical changes and alterations to the position of Asian Americans in the United States.

Wong (1993, 91) points out that both majority and minority populations share defense mechanisms and are to an extent prejudiced and even racist, but there is a difference regarding how these mechanisms operate. A shift towards acceptance of the majority population usually occurs once migrants become increasingly familiar with individual representatives of the majority, but the power difference which categorizes Asian Americans as alien is not as easily diminished (ibid.). Wong asserts that the recurring pattern of the double in Asian American literature depicts a highly integrated American-born Asian, who is disturbed by an alter ego that provides an uncomfortable reminder of their renounced Asian origin (Wong 1993, 92). Wong refers to this as a racially linked subtype that calls for a greater sociopolitical emphasis in the analysis of the literary double (ibid.). Wong's theory and examples from the works of Asian American writers are convincing, but raise doubts regarding the significance of cultural differences and variation in the migrant experience, as such clear-cut racial doubles appear to be absent from Bengali American fiction, which is in the focus of my study. In the works examined by Wong, the protagonists seem to have internalized hegemonic white standards, whereas in Bengali American fiction, the protagonists appear to live more freely, based on their own individual norms or the norms of their culture of origin. Wong (1993, 97) acknowledges that "cultural differences influence the form taken by the racial shadow" but argues that a culturalist reading does not account for the disgust with which the doubles are constantly viewed by the protagonists in these works. Wong (ibid.) further argues that insufficient compliance with white standards is more likely to create anxiety or shame than lapses from Asian cultural standards. My literary evidence, then, suggests that Bengali American fiction deviates from this supposition in its depiction of a multitude of Bengali-born characters who do not feel inferior to the mainstream population. Instead, they fear they may be letting down their parents

or ancestors by no longer living according to their norms. Wong's theory of the racial subtype of the double is convincing and valid, but not directly applicable to all kinds of Asian American or other diasporic literature. However, Wong raises very important points about the uniqueness of minority literatures in regard to the double and the necessity of applying a group-specific framework in analysis.

When considering these diverse views, it is important to bear in mind the contextual nature of the double. The double does indeed survive as a motif in all literary styles, periods, and genres, but is never "free" – it is not outside time but a product of its era and determined by its social context (Živković 2000, 1). The double can therefore reveal subtexts that are not immediately perceivable, but on closer inspection speak volumes about their time.

In addition to language, post-structuralists of the late twentieth century were primarily concerned with problematizing the binary categories of sameness and otherness, and used the double as a theoretical tool (de Nooy 2005, 14). However, the theoretical importance of the double does not appear to be reflected in the Anglophone literature of the same era, except for certain postmodernist works that have taken their cue from Vladimir Nabokov's *Despair*, originally published in 1932, translated into English by the author in 1937, and revised for re-publication in 1965. *Despair* offers an ironic portrayal of the double as its narrator, Hermann Karlovitch, believes he has found his spitting image, but only he can see the resemblance. Critics have called Nabokov's novel "a spectacular liquidation" marking "the fall of the empire of the double" (Troubetzkoy 1995 cited in de Nooy 2005, 139).

Regardless of this condemnation to "the wastebasket of literary history," the double has continued to flourish (de Nooy 2005, 139). For example, Martin Amis's *Money* (1984) introduces a narrator, a writer called John Self, who hires an author called Martin Amis to revise a film script for him. The discussions between Self and Amis "provide self-reflexive commentary on the distance between educated author and vulgar narrator" (ibid.). Furthermore, an all-knowing entity makes intruding and insulting phone calls to Self. Amis plays with the concepts of resemblance and illusion, and in the end, the joke is as much on the reader as on Self. Juliana de Nooy mentions Paul Auster's New York trilogy as "a textbook example of postmodern literature of the double with its dislocation and fragmentation of its characters, plurality of truths, massive intertextuality, and representation of experience as a textual weave" (deNooy 2005, 142). In the novels, each protagonist shadows another character to the point of losing themselves: another version of the writer-character who takes on the life of a non-resembling other who becomes his double. De Nooy (2005, 144) asserts that this "doubtful double" has become a trope of postmodern identity discourse, but it does not mean that the double takes the same form in other

genres. Postmodern fiction of the 1980s and 1990s illustrates how the double has not declined but diversified.

A trivialization of the double in popular culture is likely to occur if the double is reduced to a manifest lookalike and its psychological connotations are ignored (de Nooy 2005, 12). As Freudian doctrines have grown familiar to the public, the dividedness of the self has become a cliché. Similarly, as the self-consciousness of society has increased with mirrors everywhere, one's own image has become banal and hence diminished in significance (Coates 1988, 35). It is no longer a harbinger of death or a trigger of self-knowledge, but "pops up fleetingly and irritatingly wherever one walks, a slow seepage of identity" (ibid.). The secularization of Western societies, due to which individuals can no longer be fitted into a single form or given doctrine, has caused the double to lose its significance as a symbol ordering one to alter one's life (ibid.). Manifestations of the double that are facilitated by modern technology in film have contributed to moving the double from psychological depths to the surface, into "the realm of technical trickery" (ibid.). More recent phenomena such as the internet, social media platforms, selfie culture, and photo filters have not only taken self-perception and the ability to recreate one's image to a new level, but also brought new risks with them, such as identity theft, which features in Mukherjee's *Miss New India*, discussed in Chapter 3 of this study. These changes in perception are gradually reflected in fiction as well as popular culture and will further alter the interpretation and significance of the double.

1.2 The Postcolonial Gothic

Considering the prominence of the double as a gothic trope and that Divakaruni, Lahiri, and Mukherjee's works invite postcolonial interpretations, it is important to examine the connection between the gothic, the double, and the postcolonial. Initially, two aspects should be considered in the relationship between the gothic and the postcolonial: firstly, literature by contemporary or post-colonial era authors who write in a postcolonial context, and secondly, gothic writing produced in a colonial context but interpreted from a postcolonial perspective (see, for example, Brantlinger 1988; Baldick 1990; Smith and Hughes, eds, 2003). Characteristically different from these works, Victorian (or earlier) gothic novels set in the colonies are usually categorized as *imperial* gothic (Khair 2009, 72). Patrick Brantlinger ([1988] 2013, 227) defines imperial gothic works as adventure stories with gothic elements and written between 1880 and 1914, for example, H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). The imperial gothic fused imperialism and occultism, and according to Brantlinger, "the atavistic descents into the primitive experienced by fictional characters seem often to be allegories of the larger regressive movement of civilization, British progress transformed into British backsliding" (Brantlinger

[1988] 2013, 229). Thus, the imperial gothic recognized that the British Empire was in decline but continued to treat the non-European as the Other.

A common feature for both the gothic and the postcolonial is that they share an interest for the Other: "each defamiliarizes, destabilizes, and to some extent otherizes the strange, finding this other both attractive, fascinating, and also dangerous, repulsive, abject" (Wisker 2007, 423). However, as discussed earlier, despite its fascination for the Other, the gothic tends to regard it as ultimately evil, which results in its containment or demise.

Through its exploration of the human and the Other, the gothic became a literary form which both raised the interest of postcolonial writers and which can be read from a postcolonial perspective (Smith and Hughes 2003, 2). The eighteenth-century era of enlightenment was characterized by a conceptualization of humanity that defined the human in relation to the seemingly non-human (Smith and Hughes 2003, 1). This view contributed to the construction of the racial hierarchies that underpinned colonialism, as the Cartesian subject[5] excluded the Other in order to determine its own position (Smith and Hughes 2003, 2). Gothic literature explored the boundaries of humanity and challenged the dominant discourse with an array of Others: doubles, ghosts, lunatics, monsters, and vampires – a feature that invites the implementation of a postcolonial approach in analyzing these texts.

However, it is not always clear if colonial ideology was subverted or reinforced in nineteenth-century gothic texts. Regarding the racial subject, the gothic often supported rather than questioned the status quo, or was, at best, ambiguous in its approach. The nineteenth-century gothic reflected the racial apprehension of the British middle class and "was best situated to access, within the limits of the genre, the hauntings and dreams, the nightmares and anxieties of empire brought home to roost in the British countryside, the English metropolis and the British castle" (Khair 2009, 9–10). At the time, the non-European was mainly depicted as an inferior, negative Other against which the European self was constructed (Khair 2009, 14). To sum up, gothic fiction subverted enlightenment rationality and humanity by giving voice to emotion and the supernatural, but mainly reflected the dominant views of the racial subject as an exotic evil.

A great variety of authors have been classified as creators of postcolonial gothic works, including, but not limited to, Jane Campion, J. M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer,

[5] The knowing subject or ego according to the theory of René Descartes, who argues that the content of one's mind is formed by ideas that are clearest to the self. This theory has led to a dualism between subjectivity, the inner life of the mind, and objectivity, the outer world of things. The conclusion can be drawn that all knowledge is subjective, which in turn raises doubts if the outer world, other human beings included, can be known in any other way than as an idea (APA Dictionary of Psychology, dictionary.apa.org/cartesian-self).

Bessie Head, Toni Morrison, V. S. Naipaul, Jean Rhys, Arundhati Roy, and Salman Rushdie (Holden 2009, 354). Victorian gothic texts may uncover insecurities regarding the Empire, but eventually those anxieties are suppressed, whereas more recent postcolonial texts overturn stories, mindsets, and ways of representation which have their origins in colonialism (Holden 2009, 353). Most postcolonial gothic texts contain supernatural elements, challenging textual and social rationalities that directly address and challenge colonialism, humanism, and legacies of the Enlightenment era (ibid.). However, emphasizing textual features at the cost of ignoring historical background poses a risk. "Gothic elements need to be understood within specific cultural contexts," and hence drawing very broad structural or thematic parallels between postcolonial texts and the Victorian gothic may erase specific historical sites of meaning (Holden 2009, 356). Knowledge of area-specific history and culture is crucial in understanding how the gothic operates in postcolonial texts. The postcolonial gothic has the potential to unearth and examine the unease associated with nationalism as well as the passage from colonial subordination to citizenship in a nation-state (Holden 2009, 356). In the Indian context, postcolonial gothic texts also delve into post-independence problems of political unrest, communalism, social exclusion, and internal colonialism.

Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899) is often mentioned in the context of the imperial gothic, but as the text creates an analogy between the Belgian Congo and London, and criticizes colonialism in doing so, some critics view it as a postcolonial text. In its depiction of Charles Marlow's trip on the Congo River and obsession with the ivory trader Kurtz, the story is "a revelation of moral chaos and uncertainty" (Baldick 1987, 165). Marlow's main function in the novel is to meet the transgressor Kurtz eye-to-eye, hear his last words and report them back to civilization, his own enthusiasm for adventure much declined in the process (Baldick 1987, 166). The novel parallels the "civilized man" and the "savage," implicitly suggesting that there is very little difference between them. Conrad's story offers a critique of Britain's imperial mission, yet its view of the Other mainly adheres to the conservative, colonial view of a being beyond comprehension, a negative image of the European self, and a difference-waiting-to-be-the-same (Khair 2009, 79). However, a few passages in the novel do suggest that the European, too, is an Other to the African, and that the Other is not just a negative or a threat (Khair 2009, 80). *Heart of Darkness* has generated numerous contradictory analyses, but the work certainly raises at least an uneasy ambiguity regarding the justification of colonization, which had previously been unvoiced. Marlow appears only half-aware of the similarity between the Other and the self, which can be affected by the distancing narrative choice of Marlow telling his story to other characters instead of directly to the reader. Even if Marlow were to recognize fault in the European imperial mission, it is not something he could or would admit openly to his

contemporaries. Conrad – born in Poland – was also careful in locating his story in the Belgian Congo instead of an area belonging to the British Empire, and in leaving Marlow's view of the colonized subjects ambiguous.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), which was published nearly a hundred years after Conrad's novel, has been studied as an undisputed example of a postcolonial gothic work (see, for example, Punter 2003; Azzam 2007; Giles 2011). At the center of the story is the small Keralan town of Ayemenem and its History House, a colonial mansion which had earlier been inhabited by "Ayemenem's own Kurtz. Ayemenem his private Heart of Darkness" (Roy 1997, 51–52). Even with its original inhabitant gone, the History House continues to be the site of many tragic events in Roy's novel. It is eventually converted into a luxury hotel, but the renovation fails to erase the memories of the traumatized main characters or banish the unseen ghosts of its corrupt and violent colonial past.

The God of Small Things is an intriguing example of the postcolonial gothic also in its inclusion of a double, the dizygotic twins Estha and Rahel. The twins are closely connected and appear to be able to read each other's thoughts and feel each other's feelings: "Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually as We or Us" (Roy [1997] 2017, 4). When their mother dies, Rahel does not write to Estha, because "[t]here are things that you can't do – like writing letters to a part of yourself. To your feet or hair. Or heart" (Roy [1997] 2017, 156). Estha and Rahel's identities are as blurred as the boundaries between them, and their apparent incest towards the end of the novel is not portrayed as an event of gothic horror, as readers might expect, but an attempt to heal and recover from childhood trauma: an act of desperation to become whole again by literally becoming one. The incest passage and the horrific events that take place in the History House decades earlier are examples of how Roy employs gothic conventions in her novel, but in new ways that challenge typical Western narrative traditions and bring the importance of historical and cultural contexts into focus.

Numerous literary scholars argue in favor of a firm connection between the gothic and the postcolonial (see, for example, Punter 2003; Smith and Hughes, eds, 2003). Some scholars have voiced the opinion that all postcolonial texts are gothic, as explained here by Wisker (2007, 402):

> Postcolonial spaces, worldviews, writers, writings and reading 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, and those who now still might occupy a parallel universe, unheard, unspoken, unwritten, were it not, perhaps, for the emergence of the postcolonial Gothic, among other events and changes.

Postcolonial texts contain elements of the gothic, and the code of the gothic is "dialectical, past and present intertwined, and distorting […] each other with the sheer effort of coming to grips" (Punter 1996, 198). However, it is still debatable whether all postcolonial texts are in fact gothic, and the past and the present appear to exist simultaneously in postcolonial texts even when they do not contain gothic elements. The colonial past is always present in postcolonial texts, whether or not they are overtly political.

Due to the ambivalence of the definitions of the gothic and the postcolonial as well as their relatedness, it can be challenging at times to determine the significance of various literary tropes. For example, is an abandoned and threatening, colonial-era manor house in a novel set in India gothic, or a historical element illustrating the imposition of the past on the present day? Is the double in postcolonial gothic fiction always a gothic trope, or are there other reasons for its recurrence? Giving a definitive answer to these questions is challenging if not impossible. It crystallizes how flexible literary genres are, and that any attempt at categorization should not be based on the occurrence of individual tropes or stylistic features; a more holistic approach needs to be applied instead.

Postcolonial texts which contain supernatural features can be and have been analyzed with different frames besides the gothic, for example, as magic realism or strategic exoticism as part of the 'alterity industry' (see Suleri 1992). Strategic exoticism refers to the commercial exploitation of the otherness of postcolonial writing "as a package of attractive cultural commodities circulating within a global marketplace of culturally 'othered' goods" (Huggan 2020, 809). Strategic exoticism has been criticized for the assumption that postcolonial literature would be exclusively directed to and read by a western audience. This, of course, is not the case, and was acknowledged already by Graham Huggan (2001, 30) himself: "[P]ostcolonial literatures […] are read by many different people in many different places; [and] it would [therefore] be misleading, not to mention arrogant, to gauge their value only to western metropolitan response." Nevertheless, the marketability of cultural alterity remains an important issue to consider as cultural trendsetting as well as economic and political power are shifting from the global north towards the south.

Magic realism is a "disruptive, foreign, fantastic narrative style that fractures the flow of an otherwise seamlessly realist text" (Armitt 2012, 512). The characteristics of magic realism occasionally overlap with those of the gothic at least at the dark end of its spectrum, but it could be described as a kind of literary surrealism, "an uncanniness erupting from a fissure in the ordinary, out of which the extraordinary flows" (ibid.). Contemporary gothic texts often mix a multitude of characteristics usually classified as magic realist with traditional gothic tropes, to create a 'lighter'

form of the gothic than its nineteenth-century predecessor. This supports the common notion of the gothic as a reaction to the anxieties and queries of its era.

In addition to the postcolonial gothic, several regional gothic forms have emerged, some more contested than others. Some gothic variations are very localized, for example, the classification of Margaret Atwood's works as Southern Ontario gothic (Byron 2012, 369). On the other hand, in the case of countries such as Australia, Canada or New Zealand, the claim for regional gothic forms is uncontroversial, as the genres have developed as outgrowths of the Anglo-European variety and have adopted local characteristics (ibid.). In colonial contexts, the gothic questions the positive foundational narratives of these 'new worlds' and "often continues to give expression to lingering traumas produced by colonial life, with buried pasts resurfacing in horrific form to disturb the present" (ibid.). Once again, the cultural and historical contexts of gothic narratives are emphasized.

Despite the fairly common view that the gothic is a formulaic genre, the conclusion can be drawn from this abundance of regional varieties, and an ambiguity or even contradiction in definitions, that the postcolonial gothic, or any thematic or regional form of it, seems almost as elusive to delineate as the double. The gothic features in Divakaruni, Lahiri, and Mukherjee's works benefit from a more detailed analysis, but they appear to have more to do with historical (postcolonial) contexts than the gothic form per se. Even when not directly referred to, relics of colonialism in the texts are part of the writers' personal histories and points of reference. Some of these historical contexts are explored in the next section.

1.3 Migrancy and the Double

To explore reasons for the emergence of the double in contemporary Bengali American fiction, similarities between migrant experiences depicted in the novels examined in this study and the golden age of the double – the last decades of the nineteenth century in the Anglophone world – need to be considered. Furthermore, the cultural and historical contexts referred to in these works benefit from closer examination.

The double in gothic fiction embodied the unease of the era. The upheavals of the nineteenth century, such as the consequences of industrialization and colonialism, caused anxiety and uncertainty that are reminiscent of the experiences of diaspora individuals today (Oster 1998, 69). The current digital transformation and its effects on the workforce and the entire society resemble the era of industrialization. As in the late nineteenth century, jobs are now disappearing or their content is changing, and emotional responses to advancements in technology are often negative, or at least apprehensive. Romantic and gothic literature emerged from similar anxiety and fear of the unknown. Frankenstein's monster is essentially not

far removed from modern science fiction novels, or films like *Blade Runner* (1982), *Her* (2013), or *Ex Machina* (2015), which raise qualms about intelligent man-made creations to the surface.

The emotional and psychological consequences of industrialization-based upheavals can be far-reaching. A recent social psychological study conducted in England and Wales demonstrates that people who come from areas that are historically reliant on coal-based industries have more 'negative' personality traits, for example, a higher rate of neuroticism, anxiety, and depression (Obschonka et al. 2018, 903). A robustness check for the study in the United States in areas with a historical concentration of large-scale industries reproduced the same result (ibid.). The study suggests that regional personality traits and well-being originate in major societal changes that took place decades or even centuries ago (ibid.). The appearance of the double in literature occurred simultaneously with the invention of machines that had the potential to become sophisticated enough to behave like humans (Coates 1988, 2). The increasing popularity of the double now, in the age of actual intelligent machines, is therefore hardly surprising.

Thus, there are certain parallels between the Victorian era and our time; not only are there similar sociological issues, but also the psychological effects of many of the changes in society resonate among migrants today – anxiety, uncertainty, and dislocation, to name only a few (Oster 1998, 62). The influx of migrants to the United States today is more controlled than the tidal wave of new Americans in the late 1800s, but the psychological effects of migration endure. The migrants' desire to be accepted, and the subsequent willingness to mold their identity accordingly, may result in the fragmenting of identity experienced by those in the margins of society (Oster 1998, 69). The dislocation experienced by people of migrant origin is further enhanced by feelings of inferiority and the weight of others' opinions.

As mentioned earlier (see "Introduction" and Chapter 1.1.), there is a connection between a bicultural identity and the double. Certain literary scholars argue that texts dealing exclusively with the double are mainly written by authors who are suspended between languages and cultures (Coates 1988, 2). Like Dorian Gray and his portrait, the double then and now reveals a discrepancy between the external mirror image and the interior, mental self (Oster 1998, 59). Judith Oster (1998, 69) further argues that texts written by bilingual or multilingual (and bi-/multicultural) authors include mirrors and mirroring as central elements; either the mirror surprises someone looking into it, or an Other in some way mirrors the protagonist. The image in the mirror dramatizes the discrepancy between the individual's internal self-image and its external production (Oster 1998, 60). The hunger for inclusion generates various forms of self-rejection, which may manifest as a rejection of the double (see Wong 1993; Oster 1998). In the context of migrancy, doubling dramatizes the urge to cast

aside an earlier, now unwanted ethnic or national identity that no longer conforms to the subject's self-image.

When studying the link between the occurrence of the double in Bengali Indian fiction, particularly in texts that at least partly take place in Bengal and/or focus on characters of Bengali heritage, the unique history of the area and its possible effects on the identities of Bengali diaspora individuals should be addressed. The social and emotional effects of the 1947 Partition continue to resonate in the present day, and Bengali writers as well as their characters have thus inherited a fragmented identity.

1.3.1 The Partition(s) of Bengal

At its largest, the Bengal Presidency (later Bengal Province) stretched from the Khyber Pass in the north-west to Lower Burma and as far as the Malacca Strait in the south-east. The existence of a strong, shared regional identity among Bengalis is perhaps questionable, but human and environmental history have generated a sense of connectedness and unity (Chatterji 2007, 5). Floodwaters from Bengal's crisscrossing rivers produced an abundance of fertile soil in the area, and its waterways (both rivers and the sea) facilitated trade, which played an important role in building its prosperity (ibid.). Islam began to spread rapidly in Bengal in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and by the end of the nineteenth century, Hindus were outnumbered by Muslims, who formed the clear majority in Bengal's easternmost parts (Chatterji 2007, 6). The involvement of the British pushed Bengal from the periphery to the center of attention in the Indian subcontinent. The East India Company's foreign trade was mainly conducted from ports in Bengal, and the company's move from trade to political dominance began with Bengal (ibid.). The port of Fort William grew into Calcutta, and eventually became the capital of British India.

These developments created an entirely new social group in Bengal: Indian 'gentlefolk' or *bhadralok*, consisting mainly of Hindu Brahmins, the highest, priestly caste (Chatterji 2007, 7). By the early twentieth century, bhadralok Hindus were a small minority in eastern Bengal, but controlled its agriculture (as rentier farmers), education, services, and white-collar professions (Chatterji 2007, 8). After the Indian Mutiny in 1857, the British began to seek other allies, mainly among Muslim notables, landowners, and merchants (Chatterji 2007, 9). Bengal was partitioned by the British in 1905, creating the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, in which Muslims were the majority. The decision caused uproar and was reversed in 1911.

Despite the rescission of the 1905 partition, the political significance of Bengal began to decline. Bihar and Orissa were separated from Bengal to form their own province in 1911, and Calcutta was replaced by New Delhi as the capital city of India

the following year, which was "an ominous sign that the center of gravity in India had begun to swing back from the water's margin to the mid-Gangetic plains" (ibid.). The first decades of the twentieth century brought forth Mahatma Gandhi and a new style of Indian politics, which further diminished the dominance of the Hindu bhadralok in Bengal and made it increasingly difficult for the British to hold on to power. By the end of World War II, following the Quit India movement, various uprisings and a multitude of violent protests, Britain's capacity and ability to hold on to India had deteriorated beyond repair (Chatterji 2007, 13). Three parties with conflicting interests began negotiating a quick transfer of power: the Indian National Congress, the All-India Muslim League, and the British government. The largely unsatisfactory compromise to divide the Muslim-majority provinces of Bengal and Punjab was made in March 1947, along with the already inevitable decision to partition India into two sovereign states, one predominantly Hindu and the other Muslim (Chatterji 2007, 15).

The actual implementation of the partition proved challenging, as there were large communities of Hindus and Sikhs in western Punjab, Muslims in eastern Punjab and western Bengal, as well as Hindus in eastern Bengal. The attempt to create two religiously homogenous nation-states resulted in an unpreceded exodus, as millions of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs found themselves on the wrong side of the new border with discrimination and communal violence to fear. Conservatively estimated, approximately twenty million people in total crossed the borders between India and Pakistan in both directions in the first two decades after Indian independence, most of them within the first six months after Partition (Chatterji 2007, 105–06). Three quarters of these refugees were from Punjab, but the relocation of people in Bengal was significant, too. The partition in Bengal was a longer process, "the violence sporadic, and cross-border migration a long, persistent trickle (still ongoing), rather than a single torrential movement" (Dasgupta 2015, 53). Complex social networks were brutally unraveled, individual property was lost, and unity and political stability, which had been expected outcomes of the Partition, remained unattainable. It soon became obvious that religion was not strong enough a binding force in the new nation-states, and, for example, the demand for recognizing Bengali as a national language alongside Urdu in East Pakistan began as early as 1948 (Ranjan 2019, 1). The influx of refugees, over-crowding of cities, food shortages, and other adverse consequences of the partition continued in West Bengal for several decades. With help from India, East Bengal (East Pakistan) fought a devastating nine-month war against Pakistan, resulting in the acknowledgement of Bangladesh as a sovereign state in 1971. The final partition of Bengal was thus sealed.

The 1947 Partition was deeply traumatic for all social classes, but there were nevertheless a few positive outcomes. For example, some refugee women were able

to achieve more freedom and opportunity in West Bengal by finding employment or receiving an education, which caused significant changes in attitudes towards women (Chatterji 2007, 153). Women who traditionally led secluded lives were now becoming more prominent in society and bringing irreversible changes to what was considered decent and respectable behavior for Hindu middle-class women (Chatterji 2007, 154). West Bengal drew in millions of displaced people; the population growth of the state within five years after Partition was equivalent to fifty years of normal population growth (ibid.). With such a huge influx of new citizens, these attitudinal changes spread quickly from refugee communities to the society at large.

The partition of Bengal caused a collective trauma on both sides of the new border, and its societal and emotional consequences continue to affect ethno-linguistic Bengali communities to this day. The texts by Divakaruni, Lahiri, and Mukherjee studied in this dissertation all refer to Partition covertly. A key event in Divakaruni's novel *Sister of My Heart* makes use of a time when Calcutta was at the receiving end of a tidal wave of refugees relying on distant relatives and other connections to aid them in resettling, and proving the authenticity of these ties was occasionally challenging and therefore accepted at face value. Lahiri's *The Lowland* describes the over-crowdedness of Calcutta, and how the resulting food shortages aggravated the discomfort and contributed to the spread of the Naxal Movement as a backdrop to the events of the novel. The first two parts of Mukherjee's trilogy are set in a part of Bengal that was increasingly Islamicized after Partition, and which is now located in modern-day Bangladesh. The two novels depict how communal relationships can have far-reaching consequences into the present day in the form of ownership claims and feelings of inferiority. In Mukherjee's final novel, *Miss New India*, the protagonist belongs to the Bengali minority in Bihar, but would much rather claim Calcutta as her birthplace. Among other themes, the novel explores intergenerational relationships and what part Bengal's history has played in shaping them. All these works address the unique position of Bengalis, how they view themselves as a community, and how they are perceived from the outside. The double in these texts emerges from the traumas and complications which originated in the partition of Bengal, and is adopted as a device for negotiating history and narrating deliverance.

1.3.2 Migrant Pasts Reflected in Present Identities

When fictional works refer to real-life historical episodes, questions are raised regarding reliability, and readers' interest often shifts from the story itself to considering if certain described events are autobiographical. Gayatri Spivak ([1987] 1988, 243) argues that the difference between history and fiction is one of degree

and not genre, but what is called history will always seem more real to readers. However, the mechanics of representation in history cause historiography to always be partly fictional as well (Spivak [1987] 1988, 244). Official historical discourse privileges white men, and Spivak proposes that fictional texts provide a space for the subaltern woman to exercise her agency and tell her story. Spivak uses Bengali author Mahasweta Devi's narratives of nationalist insurgency as examples, which has particular relevance to the analysis of Mukherjee's independence activist character Tara Lata in this study.

Author Salman Rushdie discusses the fragmentary nature of a writer's vision in his 1991 essay "Imaginary Homelands." Rushdie (1991, 10) warns that for writers looking back, recovering exactly that which was lost is impossible, and they will, instead, "create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind." When writing about India outside India the writer is attempting to put together a broken mirror with some of its pieces forever lost (ibid). Due to the fragmented nature of memory, a given text is likely to include unintentional inaccuracies and inevitable authorial bias. Furthermore, representation is always positioned, from a particular place and time (Hall 1990, 222). This point is important to bear in mind as the works of bicultural writers are often scrutinized for authenticity and expected to represent entire nations. Bengali American writers are likely to know more about certain historical events than their Western readers, but nevertheless, their writing is filtered through experience and does not present an absolute truth.

Diaspora communities appear tightly woven to outsiders, but individuals within them might not have much in common besides their origins. Even when shared links to the "old country" create a sense of common history, there are communal differences within diaspora spaces, which make them "dynamic and shifting, open to repeated construction and reconstruction" (McLeod 2000, 207). Diasporas are not homogenous groups, and their heterogeneity and diversity should be acknowledged. Stuart Hall (1990, 222) describes identities as productions that are always in process and never completed, constructed within representation and not outside it. Identities can be defined as the different ways individuals are shaped by history and how they position themselves within narratives of the past (Hall 1990, 225). Diaspora identities are identities that live "with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 1990, 235). To borrow Paul Gilroy's (1993) often cited but consistently relevant term, identities are formed by *routes* as well as *roots*.

The mobility of diaspora identities is often concretely reflected in fiction by nomadic characters, also in the texts by Divakaruni, Lahiri, and Mukherjee examined in this dissertation. Displaced subjects feel psychologically and physically foreign,

and nomadic wandering may provide a way of finding a sense of belonging (Dutt-Ballerstadt 2012, 159). In other words, the sense of nonbelonging becomes a way of belonging in itself, a comfortable, familiar feeling that provides anonymity and justification for feeling out of place and being treated like an outsider. Hybrid identities are in constant motion, "pursuing errant and unpredictable routes, open to change and reinscription" (McLeod 2000, 219). The mobility of diaspora subjects is thus both literal and figurative. The connection between Othered subjects and the double will be explored further in the next section discussing the double and plural subjectivity.

When studying the occurrence of a literary device in bi- or multicultural fiction, it would be beneficial to be able to study the literary traditions of the cultures in question. In addition to studying, for example, gothic traditions in Anglophone literature, the occurrence of the double in Bengali literary history and Hindu philosophy would undoubtedly be useful. However, tentative research into these topics shows that they remain understudied and any material at least in English is scarce. The "double" and "doppelgänger" are non-existent among the entries of reference books and area-specific studies. Sets of twins and doubles such as the Ashvins, the divine horsemen of the *Rigveda* (Doniger 2009, 39–40), and Lava and Kusha in the *Ramayana* (Doniger 2009, 234–35), are not unusual in Hindu mythology. However, the significance of their duality or the frequency of other similar literary tropes in the literary traditions of the Indian subcontinent remain largely omitted as topics of research. An overview of the double in literature written in Bengali is outside the scope of this study. Furthermore, Divakaruni, Lahiri, and Mukherjee have chosen to write in English, and align themselves within the North American literary tradition and/or Anglophone diaspora literature. Therefore, I am compelled to merely acknowledge the limitations of my study regarding these subjects and recommend them as topics for future research.

1.4 The Literary Double and Plural Subjectivity

The idea of a unitary subjectivity continues to prevail as a dominant concept even though it has been challenged by psychoanalysis, structuralist and post-structuralist theories, gender scholars, and postmodern thinkers. All the methods for analyzing the literary double presented in this study so far are partially applicable approaches to Divakaruni, Lahiri, and Mukherjee's texts, but none appear to fully grasp the reason for the recurrence of the double when it is not used overtly as a gothic trope or when authorial intent is not apparent. Consequently, it is pertinent to turn to how individuals perceive and express themselves in writing, to the essence of writing 'I'. Literary criticism of fictional texts recognizes plurivocal narration, but it remains understudied from the perspective of doubling or plural subjectivity.

Plural subjectivity has so far mainly been studied in women's autobiographical texts (see, for example, Smith 1987; Benstock 1988; Bloom 1998; Edwards 2011). However, the definition of "autobiographical" is not conclusive in this context. For example, key textual references to the autobiographical in this branch of literary criticism include Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (in Smith 1987) and Julia Kristeva's *Les Samouraïs* (in Edwards 2011).

In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston employs autobiography in the formation of identity, "breaking out of the silence that has bound her culturally to discover a resonant voice of her own" (Smith 1987, 151). As discussed earlier, this voice emerges from the silencing of an earlier, no longer pleasing version of the self, "the racial shadow" (Wong 1993). Kingston's work explores the complex position of the writer in between two sets of narratives, "those of the dominant culture and those of an ethnic subculture with its own traditions, its own unique stories" (ibid.). Postcolonial and minority fiction is abundant with descriptions of similar negotiations of the self.

Les Samouraïs is part autobiography, part *roman à clef* in its fictional representation of Julia Kristeva and her friends and colleagues in a formative phase of her life (Edwards 2011, 29). In the narrative, the author divides herself into two characters who offer commentary on the events: the young student Olga, who is the protagonist, and Joëlle, a mature psychoanalyst (ibid.). As Edwards observes, "Kristeva's 'I' is doubled, appearing as two different selves in two different narratives" (ibid.). This dual narrative structure enables Kristeva to write her version of the events as they occurred from her perspective at the time, and to look back on the events from the viewpoint of an older, wiser self.

In her inspiring study *Shifting Subjects: Plural Subjectivity in Contemporary Francophone Women's Autobiography* (2011), Natalie Edwards explores the expression of autobiographical subjectivity in the writing of Gisèle Halimi, Julia Kristeva, Assia Djebar, and Hélène Cixous. All of the writers experiment with voice, rejecting the single, unitary 'I' of 'traditional' autobiography and writing the subject in numerous different positions by multiplying the narrative voice (Edwards 2011, 144–45). These experiments with plurivocalization and different narrative strategies reach beyond the boundaries of autobiography and could be more broadly defined as *life-writing* or even *autofiction*, because they do not adhere to a singular, autobiographical entity in the formulation of 'I' and include fictional elements.

In the era of intense identity construction in communication, gaming and social media, self-representation has developed into an increasingly important societal issue. However, the ability to express oneself as an 'I' is not self-evident. For individuals belonging to a minority, writing I' can be a challenging and complex endeavor (Edwards 2011, 12). It requires the construction of the 'I' as an innate, undivided subject, a requirement that is simply not attainable to the marginalized and

excluded (ibid.). Instead, a marginalized position invites the expression of the self as a divided or plural construction.

Women life-writers employ elements of biography, historiography and fiction to an extent that breaks boundaries between genres (Moore-Gilbert 2009, xxii). The term *life-writing* refers to autobiographical texts that do not always follow the traditional norms of the genre, which is often the case in self-narratives by women and postcolonial subjects (Moore-Gilbert 2009, 131). Even if it is acknowledged that a certain level of unreliability is inherent to autobiography, readers nevertheless expect autobiographies to be truthful; this "truth" is the struggle of a historical instead of a fictional person coming to terms with their past (Smith 1987, 46). However, because the autobiographer "can never capture the fullness of her subjectivity or understand the entire range of her experience, the narrative 'I' becomes a fictive persona" (ibid.). Past selves are distinct from the present, and thus the autobiographer chooses which version of herself to reveal (ibid.). In autobiographical recollection, an inevitable distancing between the writing self and the textual rendition of the self occurs, as the self is doubled into a narrating 'I' and a narrated 'I' (Smith 1987, 47). A "fictionalization" of the self is hence inevitable, be it calculated or unintentional.

A fundamental claim of feminist theory is that language and discourse are in themselves patriarchal, and as a result, women either reproduce patriarchal stereotypes in their texts, or, perhaps more recently, experiment with alternative types of expression and narration (Smith 1987, 59). Rejecting patriarchal autobiographical conventions subverts the idea of "an atomized, individualistic, central self" and claims the legitimacy of another subjectivity, which is "nonunitary, fragmented, conflicted, fluid, and in flux" (Bloom 1998, 63). Western humanist ideology of the self denies any possibility of changes in subjectivity. It ignores the existence of multiple subject positions that individuals have and undermines the crucial roles of language, social interactions, and critical experiences (Bloom 1998, 3). The idea of a unique and sovereign self causes a critical bias in canon formation that marginalizes and misreads texts by women and minorities (Friedman 1988, 34). Contrary to this Western humanist notion, writing by women and minority individuals successfully demonstrates the mobile quality of the self and the positionality of identity formation.

It is important to be aware that the non-unitary self is not equivalent to a loss of self. Subjectivity is produced by specific discourses and social processes as a sum of culture, language, and history, and is hence positioned and discursive (Edwards 2011, 17). Individuals construct their identities through language, always in flux, "as the intersections between social relations and individual subjects constantly change, thus creating inconsistent and contradictory subjects" (ibid.). In women's autobiographical writing, the self and other are inseparable and form a collective or

plurivocal narrative of the self in which "'I' and 'we' are either interchangeable or indissociable" (Edwards 2011, 23). Instead of a splitting resulting in fragmentation, the plurivocal narration in women's autobiographical texts appears to reflect a plural or non-unitary selfhood.

From a global perspective, unitary subjectivity is an ethnocentric concept. Postcolonial literature displays a multitude of representations of the self that question western ideas of selfhood. Instead of a unitary 'I', these self-narratives define the self as a collective consciousness: a family, group, or community identity (Edwards 2011, 18). Alternative approaches to subjectivity question established western notions about subjectivity and initiate a redefinition of the narrative 'I' from a new perspective (ibid.). The important role that collective and relational identities play in the individuation processes of minorities and women is ignored when the separateness and distinctiveness of the 'I' is emphasized (Friedman 1988, 35). Awareness of these different ways of perceiving the self affects the analysis of life-writing as well as fiction. Women's autobiography blurs boundaries between fiction and autobiography, whereas postcolonial fiction appears to do the same for history and fiction.

Post-colonial life-writing by both women and men is characterized by a similar blurring of genres that feminist criticism attributes to women's autobiographical writing (Moore-Gilbert 2009, xxii). Postcolonial life-writing has adopted an originally Western form and merged it with non-Western narrative and linguistic features (ibid.). Feminist criticism of women's autobiographical writing explains women's plural subjectivity through societal structures and developmental acculturation, but *de-centered* subjectivity in postcolonial life-writing is considered an effect of colonialism (Moore-Gilbert 2009, xxi). Postcolonial writing, both fictional and autobiographical, localizes forms, figures of speech, tropes, and patterns of discourse, as well as hybridizes language (Moore-Gilbert 2009, xxii). For example, spatial relations might be emphasized over temporal ones, or a cyclical temporality over a linear one (ibid.). Furthermore, individuation processes and the formation of selfhood are likely to be different in cultures that have enlarged and more inclusive ideas of family constitution, and this is reflected in the life-writing produced in that area (Moore-Gilbert 2009, xix). Some of these non-Western ideologies may also be at odds with Western post-Enlightenment secular norms (ibid.). Edwards (2011, 149), too, notices a connection between plurivocal women's narratives and postcolonial fiction and suggests that the non-unitary, autobiographical 'I' could be further explored in texts written by minority and postcolonial subjects.

Edwards arrives at the conclusion that the texts in her study not only problematize autobiography as a genre, but also "carve out a new mode of writing the female self, beyond the confines of 'I' and 'we" (Edwards 2011, 147). In the

texts she examines, 'I' is not simply replaced by 'we', but subjectivity is pushed beyond the boundaries of 'I' and 'we'. Edwards (2011, 148) proposes that "'I' and 'we' are not binaries from which one can choose at will," and that the binaries I/we and singular/plural themselves should be questioned. Plurivocal narratives hence forge a new mode of selfhood.

Postcolonial life-writing occasionally promotes conceptions of selfhood that are culturally very specific (Moore-Gilbert 2009, xx). A question that remains unanswered is whether the experience of a collective identity or plural subjectivity is the same for men and women as postcolonial subjects and how great a role for example the patriarchal structures of these postcolonial societies play in that experience. All of the fictional works examined in this study address the effects of these structures with the assistance of the double as a literary device. The following chapters will explore the connections between patriarchal structures, postcolonial trauma, and the occurrence of the double in recent Bengali American fiction.

2 The Romanticized Double in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Works

> I called her into the world and therefore must do all I can to make sure she is happy.
>
> (Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *Sister of My Heart*)

In this chapter, I discuss the familial double in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels *Sister of My Heart* (1999) and *The Vine of Desire* (2002). The main character doubles are second cousins, but their mutual relationship is still best described as reminiscent of twins. The double contributes to a plurivocal portrayal of development into individuality in a close-knit family and community. The social issues tackled by the two novels include the position of women in a patriarchal society and the complexity of families. The novels acknowledge the significance of family ties but raise the question of whether a family consists of blood relatives or the people we choose. Previous literary research on *Sister of My Heart* (later referred to as *Sister*) and *The Vine of Desire* (later referred to as *Vine*) is limited in scope, and mainly focuses on how the position of Indian women is presented in the novels (see, for example, Moka-Dias 2000; Dhingra Shankar 2009; Dengel-Janic 2012). I begin with a short introduction of Divakaruni and the two novels, and then proceed to the analysis of the double in the two texts.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an award-winning, prolific writer of short stories, magical realist novels, poetry, fiction for young readers, as well as realist novels, with *Sister* and *Vine* falling into the last category. She has received praise for her ability to write about immigration and immigrants without expressing a preference for one country over another (see, for example, Alexandru 2012, 78). Divakaruni is also considered to be an advocate for women's rights, but like Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, and many other Indian American women writers, she has been accused of exoticization, inauthenticity, and pandering to the West. She has been blamed for achieving commercial success by catering to American feminist readers through the promotion of stereotypical ideas of a backward, under-developed Asia and a liberal,

modern America (Dhingra Shankar 2009, 29). Ellen Dengel-Janic (2012, 242) claims that Divakaruni's works "cater to nostalgic and normative tastes in Western readers who, despite the exoticism of the novels, recognize familiar generic patterns and conservative gender roles." Divakaruni herself says that she writes about issues she is familiar with, and as truthfully as she can (McConigley 2009, 98). She describes how patriarchal oppression affects her characters' lives, but she manages to avoid being judgmental, opting for a neutral and observant tone that is informed by her characters' history and culture. Divakaruni presents situations from her characters' background and point of view, which may naturally conflict with many readers' experiences and views. Women's issues are central to Divakaruni's works, but they would most likely be her focus irrespective of her migrant background. She is the co-founder of MAITRI, a helpline for women of South Asian descent in the San Francisco Bay Area, and that probably has had an influence on how her works are received, regardless of whether the writing itself is explicitly feminist.

When asked about having a feminist agenda, Divakaruni has responded that women's issues have resonance and echo in the entire community. Women's oppression affects not only those who are directly oppressed, as misogyny in patriarchy is largely internalized. In the author's own words:

> Not only do men oppress women, but women oppress themselves for various reasons. The result is that the role of the man becomes hardened, and you can't move out of that role either. Because all these are connected, every once in a while, I will write about what I see as those connections. (Rasiah 2000, 145)

Divakaruni's writing explores the interconnectivity of inequality instead of demonizing men or her culture of origin. That Divakaruni would cater to a market of Western readers hungry for exoticism appears to be an invalid accusation as well; this reader's view is that her texts are for Asian and Western readers alike – in fact, her writing is rich in cultural references that would, from a European reader's perspective, occasionally benefit from further clarification.

Divakaruni includes Indian myths and fairytales in her texts, and naturally these might seem exotic to Western audiences. According to the author, the source of conflict is that certain critics, Western as well as Indian, view the magical as exotic while she does not: "I believe that there are many levels of human experience and the magical (or beyond the world available to the senses) way is a valid and subtle one. What can that have to do with the East or the West?" (McConigley 2009, 99). Just as the problems women face are not unique to either the East or the West, the existence of the supernatural or a reality beyond that which we can see is not limited to any Asian philosophy or religion.

One of Divakaruni's unique abilities as a writer is her skill to juxtapose the habitual and the unusual even in her realistic works (Moka-Dias 2000, 90). This is certainly true of *Sister*, in which the uncanny connection between the two main characters is presented as entirely natural, as is the story of their fathers venturing deep into the jungle to look for a cave of rubies and perishing on the trip. Divakaruni names the teachings of Vedanta as an influence on her life and writing:

> We are all connected as part of the divine self and therefore we must try to see each other as not 'other' or different but as parts of the same divine being. […] Then you feel the pain of others, you see their situation imaginatively, not just from a social context or an activist context. You just empathize more with people. You're more aware of their being, and you don't think of yourself as different from them or as a separate entity from them. That has helped me immensely in 'becoming' other people, becoming other characters. (Rasiah 2000, 145)

It is understandable that doubles as expressions of non-unitary subjectivity are present in the works of a writer who supports the idea of a collective consciousness. Furthermore, Divakaruni's worldview regarding the connectedness of everyone and everything clearly enables her to create credible characters even in stories that include magical, out-of-the-ordinary elements.

Another strength of Divakaruni's as a writer is that she provides a multi-faceted view of the South Asian 'model minority' in the United States. Whereas Lahiri and Mukherjee focus mainly on the upper middle class, Divakaruni illustrates the diversity of the South Asian minority, and her characters include members of the working class as well (Moka-Dias 2000, 89). She argues that writers must be truthful and treat their fictional characters with honesty and care to generate empathy in readers. When readers perceive characters as individuals and begin to care for them as people, stereotypes and prejudices begin to crumble (Moka-Dias 2000, 91). Both *Sister* and *Vine* employ narrative choices that draw readers in, enticing them to identify with certain characters more than others. Not recognizing that ethnic minorities are constructed of individuals continues to be a problem not only in media and society, but also in literary criticism regarding the works of minority writers, whose writing is too often evaluated as ethnography rather than fiction.

Like the characters in the works of Lahiri and Mukherjee, Divakaruni's migrant characters forge fluid, mobile, and hybrid identities. Divakaruni alleviates the East/West division by creating characters who appear to value both India and the United States equally, acknowledging their differences without putting one country ahead of the other (Roy 2019, 167). Her protagonists are skilled in cultural negotiation and blending two different worlds. Divakaruni advocates for the

importance of protecting and valuing one's background also in a new environment (Alexandru 2013, 78). Her works promote the view that home is neither here nor there, but can be found in that future opportunity which pleasantly combines both (Roy 2019, 208). Divakaruni's texts support the idea of life as "a constant epistemological expansion and not a replacement of one set of world views by another" (Roy 2019, 207). Her migrant characters grow as multidimensional people instead of trading an Indian identity for an American one. Being uprooted is seldom a source of pain for Divakaruni's characters. They may encounter problems in their new environment, but the act of migration is not the root cause of those problems. Furthermore, in Divakaruni's texts, migration also includes the possibility of return, or at least the idea that one's homeland is not lost forever.

2.1 Anju and Sudha's Unbreakable Bond

Divakaruni's narrative of the female double depicts the long journey from a shared, dual identity and interdependence to independence. *Sister* and *Vine* explore the development of the unique friendship and kinship between two Indian women, Sudha and Anju, from Bengal to California's Silicon Valley. *Sister* is mainly set in Calcutta in the 1970s and 1980s when the girls are growing up, and *Vine* takes place in the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid-1990s, after Anju has migrated there with her husband, and Sudha travels with her infant daughter to visit them. The women walk a tightrope in balancing their primal need for each other with the need for independence and the maturing of their own identities. Reminiscent of the Bengali folklore and children's stories that the narrative is punctuated with, the bond between the two women also has a mythical essence in its sheer endurance and supernatural quality. This section examines the unique bond between Anju and Sudha more closely and explores the issues that are brought forth by the double in the two novels.

Born in the prestigious but deteriorating Chatterjee family mansion in Calcutta on the same day, Anjali (Anju) and Basudha (Sudha) are second cousins brought up in a household run by three widows: their biological mothers Gouri (Anju's) and Nalini (Sudha's) as well as their paternal aunt Pishi. The setting with its absence of men, particularly in an Indian household, is unusual. The mansion also lacks a clear matriarch with its triumvirate of mothers who preside over the household together. Gouri is responsible for family finances and the planning of the girls' future, Pishi for emotional nurturing and providing cultural knowledge, and Nalini for setting strict rules and ensuring that Anju and Sudha look the part as descendants of an old and respectable family, as well as behave accordingly.

The story opens with the girls' thirteenth birthday drawing close. Their fathers, who were cousins, have died in suspicious circumstances on an excursion. The bad news sent the young wives Gouri and Nalini into early labor, and Sudha and Anju

were born only twelve hours apart. Just before Anju and Sudha's birthday, Aunt Pishi reluctantly reveals to Sudha that her father Gopal was most likely an impostor and not related to the Chatterjees at all. The charming Gopal had turned up at their door one day and introduced himself as the son of Bijoy's, Anju's father's, uncle, who had fallen out with the rest of the family and moved to East Bengal. Gopal claimed that his father's property had later been seized in India's partition riots. With the steady influx of post-partition refugees to Calcutta, nobody thought to question Gopal's story, and he appeared to know enough about the family to pass for a cousin. Pishi also hints that Gopal might have caused Bijoy's death, directly or indirectly. Sudha is shocked to her core by Pishi's revelation:

> For how long did I cry, and when did the tears get used up? Now laughter is spilling out of me in great, bitter gusts, because the past is not reliable and solid, the roots of a huge banyan, as Pishi has always led me to believe. The past is a ferris wheel like the ones at the Maidan fair. A giant ferris wheel, spun faster and faster by my father until it careens out of control. […] My mother, who was really the daughter of peasants, washing soiled clothes by a muddy river, who thought to erase her ancestry with a clever tongue. The shame of their lies floods my head with thick crimson. Shame and more shame because others had watched them masquerade, first with suspicion and then with knowledge. Pishi, and surely if Pishi, Gouri Ma too. Watching them and me, knowing us for who we were long before I did. (*Sister*, 52)

Sudha's identity shatters with the realization that she is not Anju's equal, and she is additionally burdened by guilt for her father's likely role in the tragedy. She is ashamed of her mother as well, because even if Nalini had believed her husband to be a Chatterjee, she had hidden the truth about her own low socio-economic ancestry. Pishi's revelation is the first step on Sudha's path to maturity and separation from Anju, causing a rupture in the double's symbiotic relationship.

The magnitude of Sudha's shock and shame is described as a bodily experience, as she begins to menstruate soon after Pishi has finished her story and left Sudha on her own. In every possible way, this is the end of Sudha's innocence and the end of her childhood. The thick crimson that floods Sudha's mind is paralleled by the flow of her menstrual blood. Sudha's feelings of shame are accentuated, as Pishi had left her in charge of turning over some salted mango slices that were drying on the terrace of the mansion – a chore that could not be trusted to a maid servant, "for everyone knows that if the slices are touched by a woman who hasn't bathed, or has lain with a man that day, or is menstruating they [the slices] will turn into furry fungus" (*Sister*, 32). Sudha's shame for her father is amplified by the shame for this female bodily

function and entwined with a belief that she is now so stained that she will rot anything she might touch.

Anju is entirely unaware of Sudha's discovery and continues to be fully convinced of her own love for Sudha: "'I would love you,' I say, 'no matter who you were. I would love you because you love me. I would love you because no-one else knows us like we know each other'" (*Sister*, 61). She admits to herself privately that she is not entirely sure that she would indeed love Sudha if they were not related, but says to her cousin, "no matter what, I am still the person who called you out into the world" (ibid.). A life without Sudha is unimaginable to Anju, so close to her she has been from birth.

Sister is abundant with descriptions of the girls' closeness as they are growing up. For example, when in Chapter 2 the reader is first introduced to Anju, she explains how she hates many things, but that she could never hate Sudha, "because she is my other half. The sister of my heart" (*Sister*, 24). She describes how all through childhood they have bathed together and eaten together, often from the same plate and feeding each other (*Sister*, 25). Anju explains repeatedly how she and Sudha do not need other people because they have all that they need in each other, and that is why they are often considered conceited by others (*Sister*, 25–27). Sudha is beautiful, she has a calming effect on Anju's hot temper, she believes in magic, and loves telling Anju stories – all qualities which Anju greatly admires. Anju is a realist complementing Sudha, the dreamer of the two, but considers her entire being so tied to her cousin's that any separation would be unimaginable to her (*Sister*, 61). The girls' mothers, neighbors, and the nuns at the convent school they attend are all concerned about the girls' closeness and consider it abnormal, certain that it will stunt their development (*Sister*, 25). However, the girls' own experience of subjectivity is non-unitary, dual – a first-person plural 'we' instead of a singular 'I'. Consequently, the natural bond that the girls consider a source of strength is perceived as a weakness and threat by those around them.

In its depiction of Sudha and Anju's coming of age, *Sister* can be classified as a female Bildungsroman. This literary genre delineating the development of an individual into wisdom and maturity has traditionally included a presupposition that the individual in question is male (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 1983, 7). Fiction usually depicts women's development occurring later in life, "after conventional expectations of marriage and motherhood have been fulfilled and found insufficient" (ibid.). *Sister* and *Vine* follow Anju and Sudha from their childhood, but in their case too, life-altering changes for both occur later. However, the novels effectively demonstrate how earlier events have affected their life choices and led to the current situation, and how their urge to protect the other leads to disservices which complicate their mutual relationship as a result. Guilt is a significant factor in their relationship already from childhood.

Anju feels responsible for Sudha's happiness since she was born first and 'called' her cousin out into the world. She feels guilty if Sudha is unhappy for any reason. After Sudha discovers her true origins, she in turn feels extremely guilty for the assets she has gained as a daughter of the Chatterjees. Sudha vows to cause as little trouble as she can for Anju and her family in the future. Her vow brings misfortune to them both some years later, as Sudha gives up the idea of eloping with Ashok, a young man she has fallen in love with, to avoid bringing shame to the Chatterjees and preventing Anju from making a good marital match. Paradoxically, the decision results in unhappy marriages for both women. Sudha's discovery of this family secret also strains her relationship with her own mother, who continues to assert that her origins are respectable and thus her daughter is equally entitled to anything Anju is, even though in fact Nalini and Sudha have no financial resources of their own. This continues to cause great shame for Sudha.

2.1.1 The Double as Wives and Mothers

Marriage, and the significance of marriage for the main characters and their families, is a prominent theme in *Sister* and *Vine,* as it is in Lahiri and Mukherjee's texts, too. Most marriages in India and many other parts of South Asia continue to be arranged by family elders or through official matchmakers, but a recent development has been that daughters are increasingly involved in the matchmaking process (Allendorf 2013, 454). Most texts by India-born writers at least touch upon the topic of arranged marriages. They are at the center of externally imposed stereotypes of India and the diasporic Indian identity, regardless of whether they are portrayed positively or as a common cause of intergenerational conflicts (Khandelwal 2009, 585). Often the arranged marriages of second-generation migrants are delineated as having an effect – positive or negative – on the relationships their children have as adults. Western feminists at times preserve negative stereotypes of arranged marriages in their hurry to emancipate 'passive' South Asian women (Katrak 2006, 46). As a result, western readers may find arranged marriages intriguing; they are viewed as exotic but oppressive for women. However, as with other patriarchal structures, the institution of arranged marriage is complex and there is no immediate remedy for improving the position of women entering marriage. Placing arranged marriages and 'love' or 'self-choice' marriages in a good–bad juxtaposition would be an oversimplification of the prevalent perspective in Divakaruni's texts. Sudha and Anju's arranged marriages in *Sister* and *Vine* turn out to be unhappy, but instead of bluntly criticizing this patriarchal tradition itself, the texts demonstrate the perils involved when women are married off after only a short engagement and sent to live with their in-laws, who are perfect strangers or distant acquaintances at best. Nevertheless, Divakaruni's texts do not offer evidence that 'self-choice' or 'love' marriages would necessarily

be any happier, examples of the latter being Nalini and Gopal's marriage in *Sister*, and that of Myra and Trideep in *Vine*. The criticism in Divakaruni's texts is directed more generally at marriage as an institution as well as at other structures which weaken the position of women as full-fledged members of society.

This assumed universality of experiences regarding marriage is nevertheless challenged by the awareness that sexual desire and romantic love are culturally dependent concepts (Khandelwal 2009, 595). Despite the long tradition of arranged marriages, romantic love is not a novelty in South Asia, and just like in the United States, it has taken different forms in different contexts; for example, love shared by siblings may be romanticized without sexual elements, and marital sexuality celebrated without romanticizing one's spouse (Khandelwal 2009, 603). Anju and Sudha's relationship includes elements of a romanticized sibling relationship without sexual undertones. Furthermore, in both South Asia and the United States, potential partners and the success of marriages are evaluated according to compatibility, but while Indians emphasize social status, Americans focus on individual traits such as interests and personality (Khandelwal 2009, 604). Spousal equality regarding class status and education is important in both countries, and even in the United States, people are unlikely to inconvenience their lives to accommodate an attraction to an incompatible person in the long term (ibid.). The ways of finding a compatible spouse in India may differ from the United States, but different kinds of mediating institutions and social constructions are required in both (ibid.). Internet platforms and mobile applications are taking over the duties of traditional matchmakers in India too, as illustrated in Mukherjee's *Miss New India*, discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

In creating parallels between Sudha and Anju's marriages, their unhappiness is magnified, amplifying how marriage supposedly improves the position of women, but can prove to be a gilded cage. As a part-time employed university student with some connections and money of her own, Anju is equally vulnerable in the United States as Sudha is in Calcutta when she leaves her husband. The story of Sara in *Vine*, which will be discussed in section 2.3.1 in more detail, demonstrates that freedom is also accompanied by risk, and an unmarried, nomadic woman is not entirely safe in the United States either.

Sudha's love interest Ashok sends an offer of marriage to the mothers, but he is considered an undesirable match despite his family's wealth: he belongs to a lower caste and his family's money has been acquired through trade. Sudha and Ashok make plans to elope, but Sudha changes her mind, realizing that her elopement would bring shame to the Chatterjees and endanger Anju's chances of marrying well. Sudha sacrifices her own happiness for Anju's sake and instead marries Ramesh Sanyal, a boy from an 'old' family, whom the mothers consider a better match for her.

Sudha's self-sacrifice turns out to be an example of good intentions having undesirable consequences. When they meet for the first time, Sunil, Anju's bridegroom, is suddenly taken by Sudha's beauty and is very attracted to her. His distractibility reveals that he is not in love with Anju, as he has allowed her to understand, but is ready to marry her to please his parents and will simply try to make the best of it. Despite good intentions, Anju's marriage turns out to be a match made more out of convenience than love. There is poignant irony in the narrative as Sudha gives up her true love to facilitate Anju's great romance – a romance that is not real after all. Anju and Sudha's lives continue to echo each other in their spousal relationships as they both, unintentionally, find themselves married for pragmatic purposes instead of love.

The foundations for the love triangle between Anju, Sunil, and Sudha are set already weeks before any of them meet for the first time. After Ramesh's family visits Sudha's for a traditional 'bride-viewing', Sudha sees a falling star in the night sky. Realizing only one wish can be granted, she wishes for Anju to have a happy marriage:

> I am glad that I gave my wish to Anju.
>
> On the breath-end of that wish, just as the star burns out, comes a startling thought. If only Anju and I, like the wives of the heroes in the old tales, could marry the same man, our Arjun,[6] our Krishna,[7] who would love and treasure us both, and keep us both together.
>
> It is a ridiculous wish, maybe even immoral. But before I can take it back, I am interrupted by Pishi's heavy steps. (*Sister*, 131)

Despite Sudha's desire to retract the wish almost as soon as it occurs to her, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in *Vine*, when the trio shares close quarters in California. The act of donating the wish to Anju as well as the wish itself express how Sudha prioritizes Anju over any romantic attachment of her own.

Anju notices Sunil's initial attachment to Sudha, but she is soothed after their double wedding, as Sudha moves to her husband's house in Bardhaman and Anju to the United States, where Sunil is already settled. For a while, their situations are in juxtaposition, with Sudha as the Natun Bau ('new wife') in Ramesh's family home, in which her mother-in-law upholds strict traditions. Sudha settles into a self-sacrificing role burdened with domestic chores, while Anju is transformed into a

6 A heroic warrior in the *Mahabharata*, fathered by the god Indra (see, for example, Doniger [2009] 2010).

7 A deity: an incarnation of god Vishnu and hero of the *Mahabharata* (see, for example, Doniger [2009] 2010).

modern wife who drives a car, eats Western food, wears jeans, and has short hair. The women keep in touch with each other through letters and occasional phone calls, but they mainly exchange pleasantries instead of the secrets they used to share earlier.

Four years into their marriages, the women find themselves pregnant at the same time: Anju by accident, Sudha after several years of trying. With an ocean between them, the cousins rarely talk to each other. Both have an amniocentesis to rule out any hereditary abnormalities, the results of which are that both babies are healthy, and that Sudha is carrying a girl and Anju a boy. Their happiness is short-lived, as Sudha's mother-in-law insists that she have an abortion, claiming that the first grandchild of their prominent family should be a boy as it had been for the past five generations. Ramesh tells Sudha that he would not mind having a daughter, but does not lift a finger to oppose his mother and protect the baby. Heartbroken and furious, Sudha escapes her husband's house and returns to her childhood home in Calcutta. Ramesh soon files for divorce on the grounds of desertion.

Anju and Sudha's parallel pregnancies provide a plurivocal view on a life-altering period in the women's lives. The emotions pregnant women go through are doubled and thus intensified, describing how the babies they carry already feel like real people, and how protective of them they feel. At the same time, the text offers a glimpse into the societal significance of having a child. Bearing a child, a son in particular, can improve the position of a woman in patriarchal societies, whereas infertility is the worst possible fate, if motherhood is considered her most important purpose and only identity (Katrak 2006, 209). Infertility is a state in which a woman is "doubly exiled from her body – once as a woman, an outsider to patriarchal power, and next as an infertile woman who cannot fulfill her biological destiny" (Katrak 2006, 210). Sudha grows increasingly desperate to have a child, not only because she assumes that motherhood is her final chance at happiness in her unsatisfactory marriage, but also because of the immense pressure her mother-in-law places on her to conceive a son.

The preference for sons, too, is upheld by social power structures. In India, state-provided social security is minimal, and it is often claimed that sons must take care of the entire family: a wife, children, and aging parents (Katrak 2006, 236–37). However, the reasons for favoring men over women are not merely pragmatic, but deeply ingrained, and women's work is generally undervalued. Sons, too, often leave their parental home for educational and economic purposes without any guarantee of returning (ibid.). Revealing the baby's sex in an amniocentesis is against the law in India, and yet modern technology is abused, and female fetuses continue to be aborted (ibid.). Having grown up in a household of women and already deeply attached to her unborn daughter, Sudha is horrified by the idea of aborting a healthy baby and disgusted by Ramesh's failure to defend her.

When Sudha returns to Calcutta, the mothers welcome her with open arms after their initial shock – all but her own mother Nalini. Rather surprisingly, it is Pishi, widowed at eighteen, who speaks out in Sudha's defense:

> Why should she care anymore about what people say? What good has it done her? What good has it done any of us, a whole lifetime of being afraid of what society might think? I spit on this society which says it's fine to kill a baby girl in her mother's womb, but wrong for the mother to run away to save her child. […] Men whose wives died could marry as soon as a year had passed. They didn't stop their work or their schooling. […] But when, after three years of being a widow, I begged my father to get me a private tutor so I would at least have my studies to occupy me, he slapped me across the face. […] My life was over because I was woman without a husband. I refuse to have our Sudha live like that. (*Siste*r, 268–69)

Pishi's outburst leads to a decision to sell the Chatterjee family mansion, the land surrounding it, and its antique furniture and artefacts, to raise funds to pay for Gouri Ma's much-needed bypass surgery as well as to support Sudha and her baby.

Pishi's speech in Sudha's defense raises the larger issue of how precarious the position of married women can be in their husbands' intergenerational households, and that of single or widowed women in Indian society at large. Widows are expected to live in constant mourning, eat only simple dishes, wear nothing but white, and avoid social gatherings. Maintaining respectability and upholding traditions are offered as the only justification for controlling a widow's life in the cruel manner illustrated by the quote above. Traditions are perceived as ahistorical, eternal, and immutable (Katrak 2006, 157). Women's roles are defined by strict parameters, according to which women as wives and mothers are placed on a pedestal, whereas single women, lesbians, and widows are abhorred (ibid.). A great deal of courage is required to oppose these traditions, as Pishi finally does, and it would most likely have been impossible for her, even then, had their household been run by a patriarch instead of their shared matriarchy.

The passage effectively illustrates the mutable and culturally bound qualities of traditions even when they are considered eternal. Pishi's speech is eye-opening for the other women in its defamiliarization of the ordinary (see Saito 2017, 10–15, and Kuortti et al. 4–6). Simultaneously, the reader recognizes that what is perceived as unchangeable and ahistorical is in fact mutable and situational. When the ordinary is viewed from a new perspective, it becomes extraordinary, and what is perceived to be "ordinary" in the first place is, in fact, an aesthetic and political question rather than an absolute truth. In *Sister*, the three women replace their crumbling patriarchal

mansion with a modern flat, creating a parallel between a very concrete aesthetic choice and their newly liberated mindset.

Gouri, Nalini, and Pishi buy a flat in a different neighborhood and revel in their fresh start and sudden freedom:

> Along with the old house, the mothers seem to have shrugged off a great burden of tradition.
>
> […] Away from those ancient halls echoing with patriarchal voices which insisted that foremost of all they must be widows of the Chatterjee family, for the first time they can learn to live their lives with a girlish lightness.
>
> The mothers have joined book societies and knitting classes. They go for walks around Victoria Memorial. They volunteer at Mother Theresa's Sishu Bhavan and – chaperoned by the insistent Singhji[8] – attend all-night classical music concerts from which they return, cheeks flushed with the early morning cold, humming a song in the bhairav raga. They take day trips to Dakshineswar and bathe in the Ganges. After they have prayed at the temple, they eat singaras on the river steps while the afternoon sun dries their hair. Already they are talking of a trip to Darjeeling in the summer. (*Sister*, 296)

The three women are no longer defined by men; they are not required to look after the property of their husband, brother, or father, but instead, they are free to choose for themselves. Paradoxically, as they vacate the Chatterjee mansion, the only home they have really known, their *unhomeliness* (see Bhabha 1994, 13–14) is eased and they are finally able to feel "at home." Their moving out is described as an emancipatory act, freeing them from the "ancient halls echoing with patriarchal voices" long after the patriarchs themselves have gone. After moving into their new flat, Gouri, Nalini and Pishi must renegotiate their idea of home and their position in the world. They are finally able to be women in their own right instead of wives and widows. Letting go of their inheritance allows them to let go of the role they had been assigned as keepers of tradition – traditions that are no longer important in their lives.

Sudha's altered circumstances offer a chance for the double to reunite. Anju coaxes Sudha into visiting her in California after her baby is born, and possibly to stay on indefinitely. Sudha misses her other half and is tempted by the opportunity to start over, and thus eventually agrees. Sunil raises objections, uncertain of his feelings towards Sudha and reluctant to risk any further deterioration of his marriage to Anju now that they are happily expecting a child. Anju tries to reason with him

[8] The mothers' long-serving, faithful (supposedly Sikh) driver and Sudha's confidant in her relationship with Ashok. More on Singhji in section 2.2.

by explaining her and Sudha's mutual need for each other: "You don't know how it is between the two of us. I don't think you've ever loved anyone the way we love each other. Sudha's like my other half" (*Sister*, 273). The quote illustrates, once again, the unique bond between Anju and Sudha, and, as Basudhara Roy (2019, 163–64) suggests, men's peripheral existence in Divakaruni's texts, in which the relationships between women are highlighted. Anju's efforts to convince Sunil are in vain, and she continues to work in the university library behind his back to afford Sudha's tickets.

Anju and Sudha's pregnancies rebuild their mutual relationship and reaffirm their psychic bond. Sudha describes a dream that can be placed to occur at the same time as Anju loses her baby: "Last night I dreamed of Prem. He was blue as Krishna, and floating like a snowflake in milky light. He stretched out his little hands to us, Dayita and me, and said, 'Come.' I woke in tears, not knowing why I was crying" (*Sister*, 294). Anju goes into preterm labor in her sixth month, and the boy Prem is stillborn. When Sunil, who had seen the tiny body, later describes him to Anju, he says that "he was blue ... like a … baby Krishna" (*Sister*, 304). After the loss of her baby, Anju spirals into depression, is unable to eat, and unwilling to get out of bed or talk to anyone. Once Sudha is informed of Anju's miscarriage, she reaches out to her by telling her a story she names "The Queen of Swords," a fairytale of two sisters separated by an ocean. Anju pleads with Sudha to come to her, and Sudha promises that she will, once her daughter Dayita is born and they are both fit to travel. Sunil is relieved by the positive change he sees in Anju and offers to pay for their tickets and arrange the visas. Anju, who later becomes a writer, is thus literally brought back to life through narrative, and by the anticipation of seeing Sudha, her other half, again.

Before Sudha and Dayita leave for the United States, Ashok, Sudha's first love, renews his proposal to Sudha. With Sudha's altered situation and their new liberal state of mind, the mothers are now ready to accept the marriage proposal, but Sudha is no longer certain of her own feelings: "The yearning that shoots up from the soles of my feet when I think of Ashok, is it love? I am not sure. It is so different in its nature from the craving pull, gut and sinew and womb, that I feel for my sister and daughter" (*Sister*, 316). Reminiscent of Anju's pleas to Sunil to allow Sudha's visit, Sudha once again puts Anju ahead of any romantic attachment. She equates her feelings for Anju with the strong, physical bond she has with her unborn daughter and refers to her as her sister, not cousin.

Feminist criticism often depicts the prioritization of female friendship as a means of social transformation and fulfilment (Taylor 2016, 447). Adrienne Rich ([1980] 2003, 12) affirms the existence of a realm of literature that describes female bonding and identification as a prerequisite for women's survival. Divakaruni's story supports these views, as Anju and Sudha's relationship is depicted as more of a

necessity for their own existence than a voluntary friendship. Judith Taylor (2016, 448) argues:

> Friendship among women is necessary for their survival and political hopes, but friendship disappointment, heartbreak, and anger pervade feminist cultural production. In other words, feminists have recognized that asserting pleasure and priority in friendship among women is a political act, but that women don't exactly live up to one another's expectations.

Reaffirming Taylor's argument, Anju and Sudha's bond, too, has both power and value, but nevertheless, the two women disappoint and hurt each other. Their relationship is immersive, and their identification with each other shapes their personalities, but actual individual growth occurs when they are apart in both *Sister* and *Vine*. The novels constitute an intriguing version of the female Bildungsroman and description of female friendship in that they indeed prioritize Anju and Sudha's bond over their relationships with their mothers and spouses, but the narrative includes betrayal and disappointment in each other, too. Anju and Sudha's connection supports them, but on the other hand, real individual growth occurs during their periods of separation. Furthermore, for most of the narrative, they paradoxically cause each other harm by trying to put the needs of the other first instead of themselves.

Romantic relationships have been widely discussed from the perspective of choice, partnership, and desire, but feminist criticism has not granted the same authority or flexibility to female friendship (Taylor 2016, 449). It is perceived as possessing an obligatory and hazardous quality, the hazard created by interdependency that disregards autonomy (ibid.). This hazard is recognized in *Sister* and *Vine*, and the story is constructed around an attempt to find a balance between closeness and individuality to establish a level of intimacy that nurtures rather than hinders.

Female friendship in popular fiction and film is commonly used to illustrate the divergent paths of women's lives, and hence conveys the impression that women would prefer complementarity instead of similarity in their friendships (Abel 1981, 415). In the past decades, an example of this phenomenon is the hit television series *Sex and the City* (1998–2004; and the two subsequent films in 2008 and 2010), in which the lifestyle of thirtysomething single women in New York is explored through four very different female characters. Women's societal roles are traditionally fragmented, which motivates the use of different characters to represent different aspects of a personality (ibid.). However, in literary fiction that focuses on the friendship itself, female friends usually identify with each other instead of contrasting each other (ibid.). Elizabeth Abel cites Cicero's description of

friendships in *De Amicitia* as a merging of souls in which one person is created out of two, and argues that the depiction is more characteristic of female friendships than male (ibid.). Women's friendships are immersive, forming means of self-definition through an intimate relationship with another person who mirrors and portrays aspects of the self (Abel 1981, 416). *Sister* depicts Sudha and Anju's complementarity as a strength in their relationship – a complementarity that is contained by their unique ability to understand each other despite their differences in character.

The closing passage of *Sister* describes Sudha and Dayita's arrival at San Francisco airport, where Anju and Sunil have come to greet them. There is a slight unease in the air, with Sudha contemplating how life is never about being "happy ever after," and Anju acknowledging that there is trouble on the way, but that she will deal with it later. For now, both Anju and Sudha are content to be with each other again. Anju voices her feelings: "For one illogical moment I wish with all my might that the boundaries of our bodies could dissolve, that our skin and bone and blood could melt and become one" (*Sister*, 345). Her desire to fuse with Sudha is almost sexual in nature, yet without being so: a pull so strong to become one that it resonates with imagery ordinarily reserved for describing lovers. Sunil's position is, again, on the outside: he watches from a distance as the two women and Dayita form a tableau of two "Madonnas with child" (*Sister*, 347). As Anju notes: "For now the three of us stand unhurried, feeling the way we fit, skin on skin, into each other's lives" (*Sister*, 347). The image evokes idolization and holiness – an entity of only the two women and *their* baby. For the double, "empowerment exists in connection; depletion in division" (Blum 1988, 12). Patriarchal demands and restrictions have complicated Anju and Sudha's lives and threatened their bond, but once reunited, they form an entity again.

2.1.2 The Shared Husband

The double's attitude towards love in the course of the two novels is greatly altered, and the main instigator of this change is Anju's husband Sunil. Starting out, Anju is a pragmatic who would prefer not to be "yoked to a man like a cart to a buffalo" (*Sister*, 130), but her opinion soon changes when she meets Sunil and is immediately attracted to him. Some trickery is involved, as he sneaks into the Chatterjee bookstore in order to meet Anju before the official bride-viewing, feigning an interest in novels by Virginia Woolf, whom she greatly admires. She is disappointed to discover much later that his enthusiasm for the books was only a pretense to get her to talk to him, as he wanted to find out what his potential fiancée was like off-guard.

Sudha's earlier wish upon a falling star appears to come true in an undesirable way as Sunil's attention soon turns to her. Sunil's obsession with Sudha appears superficial, at least in the beginning, as he is initially attracted only to her looks. *Vine* portrays him as a father-figure for Dayita and as the father he could have been for Prem, softening the otherwise rather unsympathetic depiction of him:

> Dayita comes crying. She's pricked her finger on a bush of sweetheart roses. I suck away the drop of blood, try to hush her. But she won't stop whimpering until Sunil picks her up and kisses her. *Hey, kid, hey pumpkin, look in my shirt pocket*. She searches, tears forgotten, then holds up a lollipop in triumph. (*Vine*, 196)

Sunil's dealings with both women demonstrate the power men have in forming relationships in a patriarchal society like India. It is up to Sunil to decide if he likes Anju enough for their planned marriage to proceed. Accustomed to this power, he does not expect to be rejected by Sudha either, and is dismayed when that happens. It is unfathomable to him that Sudha would prefer to be alone. He overestimates Sudha's feelings for him and underestimates the importance of her relationship with Anju.

The loss of Prem raises an insurmountable barrier between Anju and Sunil when they were already distant to begin with. Sudha's arrival in the United States rekindles Sunil's attraction, and deepens his emotional attachment to her as well. Sunil confesses his love and Sudha contemplates her feelings for him:

> The hunger in him is a black hole into which I could easily disappear. When you want a thing so much, does that give you a right to it? Something slashes through my body like a sword. Is it desire? It cuts me to pieces. Now there are many Sudhas, each wanting something different. To be independent. To be desired. To be true. (*Vine*, 195)

Sudha has mixed feelings for Sunil, not only because of Anju, but also due to her own nurturing and even self-sacrificing disposition which draws happiness from pleasing others. Sudha is also described as cherishing a somewhat naïve belief in an overwhelming, life-altering love. However, the disappointments caused by Ashok and her husband Ramesh appear to change her outlook on men and relationships. At first, she is appalled by Sunil's interest in her, but as time goes by, her attitude is softened by his loving approach to the infant Dayita, who was first rejected by Ramesh and then by Ashok, too. Sudha is flattered by Sunil's attention, and eventually attracted to him as well, but she soon understands that the pull she feels

is only physical, and when they eventually sleep together, she regrets it immediately. She later explains her lapse with an overwhelming need to be desired.

For Anju, there can be no greater betrayal than Sudha and Sunil's sexual encounter. Her marriage has deteriorated after the loss of Prem and hence Sunil's straying is, if not understandable, at least unsurprising, but Sudha's betrayal shakes the very foundations of Anju's life. Her breakdown is demonstrated by the fragmentation of the narration in a passage describing how, alone in her and Sunil's apartment, she begins to hurl mugs and plates onto the floor:

> Anju is putting on her socks. She tugs at them with both hands. It's difficult, because she has two pairs on already. But it's so cold, the kind of cold that doesn't go away even though she's turned up the heat to the max. Her fingertips are shriveling with the cold. After she gets the socks on, she thinks, she'll put on her gloves. […] She lifts the cup in both hands. The lightbulb is singing a song about people who need people, how they're the luckiest people in the world. That's a good one! It almost makes her laugh. *What d'you think, Nicole?*[9] The steam from the kettle makes a damp patch on the kitchen wall. If you stare at it long enough, you can see faces in it. […] She's looking at the broken pieces on the floor, the splash of muddy liquid on her socks, the heat burning through, the splintery crash still echoing around her head. How did it happen? She takes another cup to see. Ah, like this, the curve of china slipping through her woolly palms. Like this, the sharp star burst of fragments on the cheap, hard linoleum. She tries another, then another, jumps away from each explosion like a child from a lighted firecracker. When the shelf holding the mugs is empty, she moves to the plates. […] The many-colored shards around her feet are so pretty. She removes the socks from one foot and tests their sharpness with a toe. Oh, yes! The small pain anchors her to this room, this moment, keeps her safe from the vacuum that yawns beyond. […] *In destruction lies distraction*. That's good! She must jot it down, use it later in an essay. But when she goes to the notebook, there's no space, the whole page filled. *Father father father father father father father*.
>
> When even writing fails you, what else is there? (*Vine*, 261–63)

Unlike Sudha, Anju is no longer a first-person narrator in *Vine* as she is in *Sister*, and instead, the reader's access to her thoughts is controlled by a third-person limited narrator. Her anger and devastation are thus described mainly through her actions. In the middle of the night, suicidal and bleeding from the cuts to her feet caused by

[9] A reference to Nicole Brown, whose ex-husband O. J. Simpson was on trial for her murder at the time of the novel's events.

the broken crockery and glass, she calls one of her new friends from her creative writing group and asks for help. Anju moves out of the apartment she shares with Sunil and into a house with women from the group. She does not talk to Sudha, who has found employment and escaped to Berkeley, or Sunil, who receives a promotion and moves to Houston.

Anju and Sudha are eventually able to rebuild their relationship, but *Vine* leaves Anju and Sunil's marriage without final closure. However, it is understood that Sunil will try and see her on his next business trip to San Francisco. He writes letters to Anju to which she does not reply, yet after a while gives up telling him to stop writing. Sunil is determined to overcome his desire for Sudha (*Vine*, 365) and hopes that Anju might eventually forgive him.

Sudha and Anju's experiences of marriage are paralleled, and though their individual situations are different, the emotional effects and concrete consequences of their circumstances echo each other. As wives, both Anju and Sudha find themselves in marriages which lack love and in which grievances are repressed and not discussed. Both women have oppressive in-laws: Sudha her mother-in-law and Anju her father-in-law. Though Anju and Sunil live on their own far away from Sunil's parents, Mr. Majumdar has an indirect impact on the couple's daily life. Sunil and his father do not get along, and Sunil wants to pay back the money his father has spent on his education, and hence sends back a greater part of his monthly income than he and Anju could really afford. Indirectly, this takes a toll on the couple's relationship. Furthermore, their limited financial means are the motivation for Anju to work alongside her studies, the strain from which further complicates her risk pregnancy, and possibly contributes to her miscarriage.

Anju and Sudha's unhappy marriages highlight their disadvantageous and unequal position in comparison to their husbands, but with Sudha in India and Anju in the United States, a direct East–West comparison is avoided in the text. Instead, the narrative demonstrates the intricate network created by family ties and cultural traditions, and how this web reaches across the Atlantic, continuing to cause ripples. However, the narrative proposes that the women's upbringing in a patriarchal culture, but in an absence of strict patriarchal control in their home, has provided them with the courage to oppose injustice and to make decisions more independently. The double's symbiotic relationship conveys the importance of women's mutual bonds, but without forgetting their complexity and potential for hurt. Like sibling doubles, for example, in Lahiri's works, Anju and Sudha represent a plurality of experience that is enhanced by the women having been raised in an identical environment surrounded by the same people. The resolution of their story makes a case for individuality, but simultaneously illustrates how difficult that can be to achieve in a communal culture.

2.2 Absent Fathers

Anju and Sudha are paralleled not only in their simultaneous phases of childhood, marriage, and pregnancy, but also in their half-orphanhood. This section explores how the women are affected by the absence of their fathers, and examines another, this time male, double in the story: Gopal/Singhji, who becomes his own double – a tragic depiction of a man whose unfounded aspirations cause his demise.

The half-orphaned doubles express how the void of not having a father shapes their lives, again offering two versions that spring from the same setting. Anju's father exists for her only in the stories of others, in the memories of her aunt Pishi and mother Gouri. Due to the controversy surrounding his character and his death, Sudha's father is seldom mentioned, even by his widow Nalini. The absence of their fathers has emotional and societal significance for Sudha and Anju. In a patriarchal society, the absence of men in a household consisting of only women causes the cousins' status, reputation, and financial position to be constantly in peril. They are in every way vulnerable to the judgment of others. Furthermore, Sudha's assumption of her father having murdered Anju's causes her relationship with Anju to be burdened by guilt; she feels responsible, and that she should try to recompense her father's sins.

In a letter slipped into her bag unnoticed, Sudha discovers on her flight to California that Singhji, the family's loyal driver of many years, is her father Gopal. He reveals that he is indeed Bijoy's, Anju's father's, blood relative, but an unacknowledged illegitimate child of Bijoy's uncle and his maid servant. Singhji also explains what happened on the unlucky excursion that took Bijoy's life. In yet another attempt to make a fortune, Gopal/Singhji had made plans to go on an expedition to mine rubies with Haldar, a man he had met recently. Bijoy, Anju's father, was thrilled by the idea and decided to accompany the two men. The trip was a success, but on the way back from the ruby cave Haldar drugged his companions, stole their gems and threw them off the barge with the intention of killing them both. Bijoy drowned, but Gopal was able to fight back and kill Haldar in self-defense. During the fight, Gopal's face was burned by an oil lamp and he was disfigured for life. Worried that nobody would believe his story and that he would be considered an impostor in the Chatterjee household and accused of both murders, he decided to disappear. Gopal returned to the Chatterjee mansion five years later to apply for a driver's position, now unrecognizable with a turban, beard, and severely scarred face. He served the mothers dutifully and watched his daughter Sudha grow up, too afraid and ashamed to tell anyone the truth. He was also a key figure in facilitating Sudha and Ashok's romance, hoping that the young couple would find the marital bliss that had eluded him.

Singhji, the long-lost impostor-relative, a possible villain who is transformed into a faithful servant, represents one of several gothic elements in *Sister*. The others

are, for example, the historical but now disintegrating Chatterjee mansion made of marble, the men's sinister excursion to the ruby cave, the uncanny births of Anju and Sudha, and Sudha's evil mother-in-law. *Sister* defies straightforward classification as a gothic story, but these passages darken the mood and create an aura of mystery and the supernatural in an otherwise realistic narrative.

Singhji's letter relieves Sudha from her burden of guilt, and she realizes that her love for Anju is intact, and now stronger than ever: "My feelings towards Anju have not changed. If anything, they are purer, more intense because they are no longer dictated by necessity. I love her because I love her" (*Sister*, 339). What has changed is how she now positions herself in regard to Anju. That Singhji is Bijoy's real cousin and innocent of his murder allows Sudha to consider herself as Anju's equal again. As far as building a father–daughter relationship is concerned, Sudha's discovery of the truth comes too late. Singhji dies while she is in the United States, and Sudha respects his wishes in never revealing to the mothers who he really was. However, the knowledge that her father was not a murderer (not deliberately at least), and that he turned out to be Singhji, the one and only even remotely paternal presence in her life, liberates her from guilt and is an empowering experience.

Anju in turn fills the emptiness of not having a father with a certain fierceness, a complete denial of needing a father, let alone missing him. However, after the loss of her baby Prem, she begins to write letters addressed to her unknown father, expressing her innermost feelings and anger at his death, as well as at the poor choices he made which resulted in his death. She tries to make sense of the motivation that drove him:

> I find my old hatred as useless as the adventure you went on. I need instead (the way one needs to know about the genetic defects that kill one's parents) to know what drove you. Perhaps the same desperation is beginning to drive me. I need to know what you were most afraid of in your life. Because one knows people best through their fears – the ones they overcome, and the ones they are overcome by. […] Father, what was it you loved so much you had to leave us for it? (*Vine*, 64–65)

As grief is often said to trigger old traumas, Anju too begins to grieve her father at the same time as she grieves the loss of Prem and the failure of her marriage. She is not able to achieve the same kind of closure regarding her father as Sudha, who was at least able to know her father as Singhji, even if she did not realize at the time that they were related. However, writing to her dead father enables Anju to discover an emotional outlet in writing. Gradually, as can be gleaned from the college assignments and feedback from her teachers included in the novel, she develops into

an accomplished writer. The inferred suggestion is that Anju will continue to write in the future too, and that she is the implied author of *Vine*.

Sudha relives her relationship with her father and the experience of caring for an aging parent in her relationship with Mr. Sen, the old man she is hired to look after in Berkeley after she leaves Anju and Sunil's home. Mr. Sen is the father of Trideep, a wealthy Indian settled in California with his American wife Myra. Trideep's father suffers a stroke during his visit to the United States and is forced to stay with his son and daughter-in-law during his recovery. He is a confused, demanding patient and not at all happy to be confined in his son's house a long way away from home. With the help of Dayita and elements of Bengali culture such as well-known songs and traditional cuisine, Sudha manages to get through to the old man and eventually builds a rapport with him. When Mr. Sen is well enough to return to his home in Jalpaiguri in Northern Bengal, Sudha decides to first escort him back, and to then continue looking after him as a live-in nurse and companion. Caring for the old man is a conscious effort on Sudha's part to make up for the non-existent relationship she had with her own father:

> I never did anything for him that a daughter should. Neither in his life nor at his lonely death.
>
> But perhaps it isn't too late. What I couldn't do for my father, perhaps I can do for the old man.
>
> Perhaps I can prevent him from dying in an impersonal hospital bed, in a room filled with the fumes of antiseptic and dread. (*Vine*, 284)

The above quotation illustrates how natural the idea of a collective consciousness, a connectivity of the universe, or the laws of Karma, are to Sudha, in that she believes she can make amends by caring for this stranger. The old man becomes a double for her own father Gopal/Singhji, a father whom she can keep alive and bond with in this way.

One day, not long after Sudha's arrival in Berkeley, she goes into the old man's room and sees he has pulled a pillow over his face. There is nothing wrong; he had not tried to suffocate himself but merely to cover his ears, but Sudha is hit by a momentary panic: "*Baba, what have you done?* […] Later she'll recall what she called him. *Baba. Father*. It's common enough in her culture to address old men this way. But still" (*Vine*, 261). Sudha's reaction describes how her move to Berkeley began as an escape and a way to make some money, but now she has become emotionally attached to the old man. The quote further illustrates how Mr. Sen is indeed a surrogate father for Sudha, and her emotional involvement with him changes her life. Moving to North Bengal with the old man enables Sudha to become a self-sufficient woman, as she will earn enough to finance Dayita's education.

In attempting to fill the void left by their dead fathers, Anju and Sudha can find fulfilment and the means to support themselves. In Anju's case, what begins as an outlet for the bitter feelings towards her father is transformed into a passion for writing. Sudha in turn finds her vocation in caring for the old man and creating the family she always craved with him and Dayita.

The plurivocal view on fatherlessness provides the reader with a wider spectrum of possible emotional responses to losing a parent than the narrative of a single protagonist would. Anju and Sudha's stories suggest that even if the void can never be truly filled, wounds will heal. Sudha and Anju have inadvertently benefited from having been raised in a matriarchal household. They are conscious of the roles women have in society and have become independent decision-makers. Furthermore, their mutual relationship and the support of the mothers – even if not always unconditional – has given them strength to disregard the opinions of others. Excluding men or allocating only a peripheral position to them in *Sister* and *Vine* amplifies the voices of the female characters in the two novels. These voices are the voices of fatherless daughters, widows, and single women: voices that would otherwise be barely audible or remain unheard altogether.

2.3 Narrative Considerations

Divakaruni draws from fairytales, myths, legends, and other literary traditions she was brought up with. Of the two novels that I study closely, *Sister* in particular echoes gothic traditions with its crumbling mansion, a relative with a stolen identity, a mysterious and maimed family servant, evil and violent in-laws, and a cave of rubies promising wealth but reaping sorrow. The setting of *Vine* is sunny California, but its atmosphere is ominous and unpredictable in many passages, with a dead child casting a shadow over the entire narrative. Both novels are dotted with Indian moral stories and fairytales which the protagonists, Sudha and Anju, have been told when they were children, or variations of these stories that Sudha repeats to Anju, and later, to her daughter Dayita. Folk tales remembered and recited by women offer a means to retain the female body that has otherwise been exiled from patriarchal culture (Katrak 2006, 6). Women gain a voice and ownership of themselves in narrating their lives and the lives of other women. The purpose of these stories within the main story is twofold: firstly, they exist for aesthetic effect in enhancing the magical, fairytale-like qualities of the narrative. Secondly, they articulate the pain experienced by the protagonists in various plot twists and thus their applicability to contemporary, real-life situations is tested. It is hardly a coincidence that in Anju's greatest misery, Sudha can reignite her will to live by making up a story about their lives, fashioning it into the form of a myth about a heroic woman, the Queen of Swords.

Vine is set in 1994, and in the novel, events with a global impact are referred to with short descriptions, for example, "it is the year of death, the year of discovery" (*Vine*, 51) in reference to the Bosnian War and discovery of the skull of the earliest hominin, "it is the year of random malice" (*Vine*, 88) in reference to drive-by shootings, and "it is the year of temporary compromises" (*Vine,* 241) in reference to the IRA's agreement to cease hostilities. Furthermore, 1994 is "the year of exiles returning home" (*Vine*, 294) with Arafat returning to Gaza and Solzhenitsyn to Russia, as well as "the year of stubbornness" (*Vine*, 372) with Bosnia rejecting a call to cease fire, and India test-firing its first intermediate-range ballistic missile Agni-1. These references tie together individual characters' experiences with various global events, creating a link between the personal and the universal, and by doing so, supporting the idea of the interconnectedness of all beings. O. J. Simpson's trial for Nicole Brown's murder is also a significant backdrop for the events in *Vine*, especially regarding Anju's husband Sunil, for whom Simpson is a great sports hero. Sunil becomes increasingly preoccupied with the trial and, guilt-ridden himself, he wonders if a downward spiral is unstoppable: "Is it true, like with Macbeth, that once you start going bad, you might as well just give up, because there's no way back?" (*Vine*, 122). Sunil strives to understand what drives one to violence while trying to make sense of his relationship with his violent father and his own obsession with Sudha.

Sister is narrated in the first person with Sudha and Anju taking turns to narrate every other chapter. Sudha begins their story, and Anju is given the last word as the narrator of the final chapter. This technique emphasizes that while theirs is a shared story, despite their bond, they are still two individual characters. The narration is more complex in *Vine*, with Divakaruni exploring a variety of techniques. There are three first-person narrators in *Vine*: Sudha, Sunil, and Lalit (Sudha's suitor in California), as well as an anonymous third-person narrator. The third-person narration varies between omniscience and limited knowledge. *Vine* also includes correspondence between the main characters in the United States and their mothers in India. Crossed-out drafts of Anju's letters to her mother are included, illustrating how she first discloses her true feelings, but then rewrites and sends only letters that paint a picture of happy family life for the benefit of the mothers. One letter, written after Anju's separation from Sunil, reverses the pattern: the draft is a lie and she finally sends her mother a truthful account of what has happened. Anju's thoughts and inner world are revealed in *Vine* mainly through letters, creative written assignments, and her teachers' evaluations of the assignments. This technique adds an extra layer to the narration but reveals that Anju is at her most honest in her creative writing assignments.

Lalit's narration is an intriguing narrative experimentation as well. The passages narrated by him are usually written in the form of dialogue labeled, for example,

"what I said," and "what you said," but also, "what I didn't say," and "what I wanted you to say." This technique is effective in conveying all that was left unsaid between the characters, most often between himself and Sudha, as well as providing some comic relief in a narrative that otherwise has a somber tone.

In addition to experimenting with alternating narrators, Divakaruni occasionally implements direct address in *Vine*, for example, in a passage in which Sudha receives an important letter but chooses to ignore it: "We want Sudha to open her letter, but she goes about her daily chores with exasperating meticulousness" (*Vine*, 90). Through this kind of narrator intrusion, the reader is also invited to pass judgment on Sunil's actions when he prepares to walk out on his marriage: "Still, he has a plan. Should we admire him for this?" (*Vine*, 233). These occasions of direct address are somewhat jarring, but they give pause to readers and an incentive to consider the behavior of the characters more carefully than they otherwise might.

2.3.1 Individuation through Writing

Anju's love of literature is a driving force in her life already from childhood, but it is not until she loses her baby Prem that she starts to express herself through writing. She begins with letters addressed to her unknown father; letters in which she expresses her anger over his desertion of his family by dying, as if he had been responsible for his own demise. Mainly she blames him for choosing to go on an adventure without sparing a thought to the wife and unborn child (her) he left behind. Her inspiration to begin writing derives from one of her college courses dealing with letters and diaries: "What freedom it must have been! What exquisite loneliness. Angling words across a sheet to reach one faraway mind. Blotting a page created only for yourself, as much truth as you dared to face" (*Vine*, 53). Writing becomes a means for Anju to face truths that she prefers to hide even from herself. Gradually, Anju's anger subsides and is replaced by a genuine will to understand her father's motives. She realizes that Bijoy's urge to escape the mundane is not unlike her own nature.

Using writing as an outlet for repressed feelings continues beyond Anju's letters to her father in her creative writing assignments for her college classes. The inclusion of some of these assignments in the novel provides access to Anju's thoughts – the hidden truths beneath the limited third-person narration. Her teachers' comments on the assignments are incorporated into the narrative as well. Anju uses writing as a therapeutic outlet and her writing seldom corresponds to the instructions given for the assignments. This often results in somewhat baffled responses from her teachers, as illustrated by the following evaluation of Anju's assignment to write a character sketch of a person she normally has difficulty understanding. Anju writes about Sunil:

> This is well written and powerful in its impact, but a bit of a surprise. It's more of a dramatic monologue (which we do not cover in this class) than a character sketch, which is what I'd asked for. […] The character of Sunil is a strong one, though somewhat monodimensional. I am not sure this assignment has helped you understand him further. Nor am I certain of your relationship to him. […] Maybe you should just start over with a subject you feel less emotional about. (*Vine*, 167)

Anju's essay about her mother's life leads to her teacher advising her to contact student counseling services. However, the third assignment which is included as an instalment in the novel, a reinterpretation of the mythic character of Draupadi,[10] generates a praising evaluation from her teacher and a recommendation to develop her writing skills further.

Anju reclaims her identity and voice through writing. The description of her growth into a fiction writer and various narrative choices in *Vine* also suggest that she is its implied author. The events related to Anju's miscarriage are described twice in the course of the two novels: first narrated by Anju in Chapter 19 of *Sister* and again, in the prologue of *Vine*, focalized through Anju, but this time by a third-person omniscient narrator, who refers to Anju not by name, but as "the woman" or "she." This distancing technique is effective in describing traumatic events, and is used by Mukherjee in *Miss New India*, discussed in Chapter 3 of this study. Despite the external narration, the third paragraph of the prologue suggest that the implied author is Anju herself: "This too: it is hard to tell which is the beginning, and which the end. Particularly *when it's one's own story*, when its segments loop around, repeating themselves randomly, like a piece of computer code gone wrong" (*Vine*, 3; emphasis added). The implied authorship of *Vine* reflects how the sequel is first and foremost Anju's story. After losing Prem, Anju is "voiceless" as the story unfolds, but she recovers through writing, suggesting that eventually she tells her story in its entirety. Furthermore, writing enables Anju to disengage herself from her symbiotic relationship with Sudha and thus functions as a means to emotional independence. *Sister* and *Vine* reaffirm the idea of women finding their voice through narrating their stories (and the stories of others).

2.4 Supporting Characters

In the first chapter of *Vine*, Sudha and Anju are reunited in California with a need to support each other and regain their strength. Anju needs Sudha to help her in her grief for Prem, and Sudha welcomes a new beginning in America after the failure of

[10] A heroine in the *Mahabharata* epic; wife of the five Pandava brothers and later a goddess (Doniger 2009, 698).

her marriage with Ramesh, and the disappointment over Ashok's unwillingness to accept Dayita as a full-fledged member of his family. However, after Sudha and Anju's joyous initial reunion, they are increasingly unhappy to be under the same roof. The source of this unhappiness lies with other people who are an intrusion to their mutual relationship and compete for their attention: Sunil and Dayita. The cousins' relationship is clouded by jealousy: Anju knows that Sunil has feelings for Sudha, and she is also envious of Sudha's motherhood while mourning the death of her own child. Sudha's brief relief over Singhji's letter is gone and she is once again guilt-stricken: for having had a healthy baby while Anju miscarried, as well as for being at the receiving end of Sunil's feelings, despite not being able to affect either situation in any way.

The pressure builds up when Sudha meets Lalit, an outgoing surgeon of Indian background, at a party which they all attend together. Anju is relieved that Sudha has a potential love interest, but Sunil is fuming with jealousy, which erupts two days after Sudha and Lalit have been on a date. Sunil takes Sudha and Dayita on an outing and professes his love for Sudha. After returning to Anju and Sunil's home, Sudha and Sunil sleep together. Immediately afterwards, Sudha takes up the job offer as a live-in nurse for Mr. Sen in Berkeley and leaves in a hurry.

As one of the first-person narrators of *Vine*, Lalit offers a distanced outsider's point of view on the love triangle involving Anju, Sudha, and Sunil, and on the idealized impression of Sudha that most men, himself included, appear to share. Both *Sister* and *Vine* suggest that the building up of expectations based on Sudha's beauty and modest countenance are the main factors complicating her relationships with men. Sudha feels that these are unrealistic expectations she cannot meet, and which do not correspond to her actual personality, which leaves everyone involved disappointed and unhappy. Lalit's natural light-heartedness combined with a pragmatic approach to love enables Sudha to let her guard down. Lalit expresses a wish to get to know her and appreciates her friendship even when she says she has nothing else to offer. Lalit is thus juxtaposed with Sunil, who appears to be consumed by his desire for Sudha, but this desire is quite superficial and unrealistic in nature.

Sudha's first love, Ashok, is a classic romantic hero, the recipient of several final goodbyes from Sudha, who nevertheless keeps reappearing at times of need. He appears forever patient and forgiving, except in his inability to accept Dayita as his own. After Sudha's escape from her husband Ramesh's house, Ashok proposes to her again, but suggests that Dayita live with the mothers, at least for the first few years. The idea is intolerable and incomprehensible to Sudha and reaffirms her understanding that Ashok's place in her life is in the past as a fond memory. Not unexpectedly, based on the wavering character of Sudha and Ashok's relationship, Ashok later changes his mind. However, his decision comes too late for Sudha, who has already decided to leave for America. When he later follows her to California

and once again tries to persuade her to return and marry him, she has resolved to live without a husband and dedicate herself to looking after Dayita and Mr. Sen. Ashok's repeated returns border on being obsessive and wearisome even for the reader, but they serve the purpose of demonstrating that Sudha's resolve is not due to receiving offers from men who are unsuitable as such, but because she does not want to be dependent on any man who has an idealized view of her. For example, the little warmth she has for Lalit emerges only after she has disclosed to him the whole truth regarding her departure from Anju and Sunil. She would rather be alone than be put on a pedestal.

Through her relationship with and rejection of three different men – or four, if her ex-husband Ramesh is included – Sudha finds a way to freedom and independence. Her path to emancipation is unorthodox, but no less significant for it. Sudha's decision to return to India is a meaningful demonstration of newly acquired autonomy; not only because it occurs out of her own choice, but also because it illustrates that staying in the United States is not the only option for a Bengali woman to live on her own terms. One could argue that she returns to patriarchal control in choosing to accompany Mr. Sen to India, but I offer as a counterargument that she is his paid employee and the idea to stay and look after the old man originated with her. Furthermore, in her relationship with him, the power balance tips to her side rather than his.

The men in Sudha's life are the push she needs to strive for independence, but the initial pull and inspiration is provided by Sara, a woman she meets at a playground soon after her arrival in California. She is swinging high on the children's swing, and Sudha notices that her toenails are boldly iridescent like the feathers of a mynah bird (*Vine*, 82). Sara is Indian, and has decided to stay in the United States and live on her own terms:

> "I came here as an exchange student," she says. "It was only going to be for a year. I was all set to go back and get married to a guy I'd met in college in Bombay. Then about a month before my return, it hit me that for the rest of my life I'd never have another chance to be alone. In-laws, kids, servants, you know how it is in India. Scary. So I bought myself a bus ticket to California. A last bit of adventure, I thought. I'd planned on being back by the end of the week, but the Greyhound broke down halfway between LA and San Francisco. Like it was fate." (*Vine*, 83)

Now Sara lives on various odd jobs found for her by Lupe, "a woman of connections," and moves nomadically from one place to another. Sudha is stunned that anyone with a similar background to hers could be so free of attachments and responsibilities, and asks Sara if Lupe could find a job for her, too. Lupe does call

Sudha and arranges the job in Berkeley for her, but Sudha never sees Sara again. Much later, Lalit recalls a woman who was brought to Emergency with a knife gash across her chest and stomach that was as long as her arm, and "how the breath sounds when it's drawn into a torn lung" (*Vine,* 291). He thought she looked Indian and noticed that her toenails were painted the color of tropical birds. Naturally, the woman could have been anyone and the true fate of Sara is never disclosed, but Sudha, too, after not having seen or heard from her in a long time, suspects that she might even be dead. Sudha is grateful for Sara's example of a woman who can make decisions for herself and choose the kind of life she wishes to lead, "that even when everyone around you is saying no, you can say yes" (*Vine*, 352). At the same time, Sara is a reminder for her that a woman alone is vulnerable in the United States, too, and without family or friends, she could disappear or die without anyone knowing. Sudha realizes that she craves autonomy, but not Sara's kind of nomadic freedom. Sudha's choice is even implied to be the more courageous one, in that she returns to India to face what she left behind instead of remaining a runaway in California.

2.5 From Sisters to Sisterhood

Sudha and Anju's story is essentially a narrative about finding balance between extreme intimacy and absolute independence while finding one's own way in the world. In the course of the narrative in *Sister* and *Vine*, the doubles progress from symbiotic closeness to a severing of all ties, and then to a healthy acknowledgement of their need for each other, but as different, separate people.

Anju and Sudha are failed, it seems, by both Western feminist narratives and Indian mythological stories, emerging in the end with a different feminist philosophy (Iyer 2009, 15). Sudha casts aside the idea of romantic love, and the concept of ideal wifehood presented in Indian mythology, to achieve autonomy, and Anju modifies Western feminism with reinterpretations of Indian myths of womanhood through her own writing (ibid.). Perhaps neither philosophy fails them entirely, but dealing with their situations requires a merging of feminist theory and the idealized womanhood of myths. By the end of the two novels, the doubles' world views, as well as their personalities, are blended and greatly altered.

Women's friendships and other close relationships are a central motif in *Sister* and *Vine*. Roy (2019, 163) acutely observes that Divakaruni's narrative plots involve relationships between men and women, but it is the women's responses to these situations and each other's actions that are highlighted. Men are present in the texts, but only peripherally (ibid.). For example, Divakaruni's male characters may betray women in their relationships, but what appears significant is not the betrayal as such, but its effect on the relationships between women. Roy (2019, 164) asserts that "female togetherness is achieved and sustained despite the odds, and the strength and

understanding derived from it." In *Vine*, Anju appears to be more hurt by Sudha's betrayal than Sunil's; her primary, prioritized relationship is with Sudha rather than with her own husband. Only after some time has passed and she talks to Lalit, who has been in touch with Sudha in the intervening months, is Anju able to observe: "I, too, love her too much. I think I just rediscovered that" (*Vine*, 324). The straightforward, symbiotic bond of Anju and Sudha's childhood no longer functions in their adulthood and complicates their other relationships. They are prevented from moving forward, clinging to a shared, static position while their interests and differences pull them in opposite directions.

Female characters in Divakaruni's texts make choices that enable them to be independent. They let go of inherited patriarchal socio-cultural norms and expectations but avoid the simplified role of the emancipated activist (Roy 2019, 164). Neither Sudha nor Anju turn against the cultural traditions that have held them back; they work at improving their own circumstances but appear to accept societal norms on a larger scale as they are. The women are bold in opposing these norms individually, but they do not attempt to change them.

Other women are a source of strength for Divakaruni's female protagonists as they confront various challenges that are often related to intergenerational family relationships, spouses, and in-laws. Roy (2019, 164–65) argues:

> The women in Divakaruni's fiction, irrespective of their geographical location and their actual or potential physical mobility, are all constituted as migrants, continuously shifting between multiple gendered cultural identities – filial, marital, maternal, and widowed […] between different understandings of home and at-home-ness.

Divakaruni's focus is more on the un-at-homeness experienced by women universally than their feelings of displacement resulting from migrancy, or the patriarchal oppression of women in the global south, in this instance India. Her stories involving arranged marriages in India may superficially appear to be criticism towards that institution alone, but I find such a view to be quite limited. Divakaruni's works demonstrate a transnational approach, with interests that are global rather than local, and they explore the structural effects of marriage as an institution on women's lives – and those effects are universal, albeit with local variations and implications.

Anju and Sudha can reconnect before Sudha returns to India with Dayita and Mr. Sen. Sudha attempts to discuss Sunil, but Anju brushes her off, claiming what happened was like a bad dream, and dwelling on it would not help her in moving on and living her life. She takes Sudha to a hang-gliding school they visited for the first time after she and Dayita had just arrived in the United States and shows her that she has learned to fly. Thus, Anju recovers from her losses and literally rises like a

phoenix from the ashes (on her hang glider). Her earlier thoughts of marriage as undesirable altogether appear to have come true as her own marriage has disintegrated abruptly and brutally, but her optimism regarding the future is nevertheless restored. So is her love for Sudha. As Pishi points out in a letter to Sudha: "Don't worry about Anju's anger. Whether she wants to or not, she can't hate you. You are too much a part of each other. Can the left hand hate the right?" (Pishi in *Vine*, 351). Pishi's words can be interpreted in two ways. Not only is Sudha too much a part of Anju herself for Anju to be able to hate her, but Anju and Sudha are also too entangled in each other's lives. Anju's anger does eventually subside, and she accepts Sudha back into her life.

For Sudha, the incident with Sunil and its aftermath illuminate that she no longer craves being adored by a man. Instead, she desires to be free, but understands that a life in the United States is not for her. She prefers to return to India – if not home, as she moves to Jalpaiguri and not Calcutta, then at least to a culture she understands, in a new place "without the weight of old memories, the whispers that say, *We knew she'd fail*, or *Serves her right*" (*Vine*, 321). She takes great pleasure in having a personal bank account for the first time in her life, and in the prospect of being able to provide a proper education for her daughter. By the end of the story, both Sudha and Anju are free of patriarchal oppression, and their mutual separation, essentially caused by a man, Sunil, has allowed them to grow into self-sufficient individuals.

Despite her relief over being able to rebuild her relationship with Anju at the end of *Vine*, Sudha also realizes that too close a connection can prove to be unhealthy. She remarks to Ashok: "She and I have been too closely tangled to see anything but our reflected selves in each other's eyes" (*Vine*, 334). Sudha implies that her relationship with Anju involves an element of narcissism in that they look for their own qualities in each other, expecting the other to think alike, or at least to continue playing the role assigned to her early in life. After their period of separation, Sudha and Anju are able to see each other as individuals and not only as reflections of themselves.

Divakaruni's *Sister* advocates the idea that love is more important than blood. Sudha is still a Chatterjee, whether or not she is a biological daughter of the family. The idea that love is more important than biological kinship is often repeated to Sudha by Gouri Ma and Pishi (see, for example, *Sister*, 267; 313), but Sudha wonders if Anju would still love her even if they were not related. The idea continues to be tested in *Vine*. Possibly lacking a biological tie, there is no urgency for Anju to keep Sudha in her life after her betrayal, but the women's unique unbreakable bond survives even the man that comes between them. Love proves to be more important than blood also in Sudha's creation of a nuclear family consisting of herself, Dayita, and Mr. Sen.

By the end of the story, Anju and Sudha's mutual relationship is changed, but remains intact as a form of friendship that is healthier than their earlier codependence. Anju takes her tentative first steps as a fiction writer, fictionalizing those close to her and frequently digressing from the limits of the given assignments, demonstrating not only her writing skills but also a fervent need to express herself on paper. Anju and Sudha are delivered from the trials of the past into a promising future as women in their own right.

2.6 Concluding Remarks

The double in *Sisters* and *Vine* offers a plurivocal view of Bengali women in recent history: their marriages, pregnancies, husbands, fathers, mothers, and mothers-in-law, and touches on the difficulties of being an autonomous individual in a communal culture. A multitude of societal issues involving women in patriarchies are highlighted or brought to the readers' attention by the implementation of the double as a literary device. The novels illuminate how maintaining oppressive structures is not simply up to men, and how, often, it is women who pose restrictions for and control other women, usually those who are younger or in a more vulnerable position. Misogyny is deeply internalized, and women rarely stop to think of what they are doing and why in the name of tradition. Sudha's mother-in-law justifies her demand to abort her granddaughter as merely upholding traditions and protecting the respectability of the Sanyal family. Anju and Sudha's mothers exert control over the girls and themselves that has no personal significance, as effectively illustrated in their move away from the Chatterjee mansion. The old but majestic walls of the mansion are an allegory for the attitudes and norms that are hidden deep in the structures of society. Just as the marble walls are crumbling, societal norms are slowly changing.

Despite the equally alternating narration, *Sister* is Sudha's rather than Anju's coming-of-age story, and even Anju's narration focuses more on Sudha's life than her own. *Vine*, too, follows Sudha to Berkeley instead of tracking Anju closely, although the novel begins with a powerful and touching passage describing Anju's miscarriage, and ends with her soaring in the sky with her hang glider. In the final passage of the novel, Anju lets go of an ultrasound picture of Prem and allows it to be carried away by the wind while the narrator professes that "this is what you do with grief, you lean into it and open your fingers. You let it support you like the frail beauty of the turning, luminous earth" (*Vine*, 372). The mapping of Anju's path in learning to live with her grief for Prem, and Sudha and Sunil's betrayal, makes *Vine* very much her story, but it is mainly told from the perspective of others. In the crisis of losing her child, she has lost her voice and thus her story is impossible to narrate in the first person. She is no longer the active subject 'I' of *Sister*, but an object that

is spoken of, or expressed through another medium, such as her creative writing assignments. If *Sister* explores the interconnectedness of the young women's lives, *Vine* turns inward with philosophical and psychological contemplation of human motivation, desire, and love.

Anju and Sudha's story is rich in poignant irony regarding the characters' situations and life choices in a style reminiscent of Lahiri's *The Lowland*, discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. Growing up, Sudha is the storyteller, but it is Anju who ends up retelling those stories as well as creating new ones, loosely based on the Bengali myths and fairytales of their childhood. As the adolescent depicted in *Sister*, Sudha wants nothing more than to be a wife and mother, but in *Vine* she only wants to be free and self-sufficient. When growing up, Anju firmly believes that Sudha is all she needs, but she must learn to manage without her and finds solace in a sisterhood of feminist-writer friends.

In the two novels by Divakaruni, the double expresses the connectedness of women with their families and communities, the intricate web of society that does not enable the writing of an individual 'I'. In her novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Arundhati Roy (2017, 436) ponders the question of how to tell a shattered story and answers it herself: "By slowly becoming everybody. No. By slowly becoming everything." Divakaruni arrives at the same conclusion in *Vine*. The narration and perspective in her novel belong to everyone: alternating between an omniscient narrator, Sudha, Sunil, and Lalit, the story is occasionally focalized through Dayita, and even Prem, who hovers as a sentient, but not quite visible, presence close to the other characters, like an invisible dragonfly. In *Vine*, Gouri, Nalini, and Pishi are present only in written correspondence, but their voices are clearly audible, and often too loud to be ignored. The narration is punctuated by global events, reminding the reader that the world will not stop for an individual's grief, and will not stop turning.

With their romanticized double, *Sister* and *Vine* are an allegory for the non-unitary, polymorphic, and mutable self. The double in Divakaruni's works is not a tragic fragmentation of the self, but an expression of its intricacies, a multiplication, or, perhaps more accurately, an amplification of 'I', an 'I' in stereo.

3 Multiplied and Divided Subjectivities in Bharati Mukherjee's Bengal Trilogy

Even in far-flung California,
the Tree-Bride speaks again.

(Bharati Mukherjee,
Desirable Daughters)

This chapter explores the literary double in three novels by Bharati Mukherjee (1940– 2017). The first two, *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and *The Tree Bride* (2004), introduce an ancestral double who inspires as well as complicates the life of her modern-day descendant. The third, *Miss New India* (2011), depicts a type of double that clearly differs from other literary doubles in this study: a character whose innocent self-fashioning leads to crisis, and who, as a result, must fully reinvent herself to cope with trauma. In addition, *India* portrays another, more traditional literary doppelgänger in the form of a physical lookalike for the novel's protagonist.

During a career that spanned over forty years, Mukherjee wrote altogether eight novels, two short story collections, a memoir (co-written with her husband Clark Blaise), and various non-fictional works. She has been acclaimed for her ability to capture the experiences of the exiled in her writing (Dascălu 2007, 66). Born in Calcutta, Mukherjee lived abroad with her family as a child and was educated in English also when she lived in India, meaning that she was bicultural and bilingual already by her teenage years (Kutschbach 2012, 22). She later moved to the United States to study creative writing, met fellow writer Clark Blaise, married him, and settled in North America (ibid.). Mukherjee resists categorization, which is evident from the great variety of the types of anthologies that feature her writing (ibid.). As a U.S. citizen of Indian ancestry who lived in Canada for fifteen years, taught literature at Berkeley during her prolific writing career, and objected to being called Indian-American with a hyphen instead of American, she is hard to place in a specific authorial 'drawer' (ibid.). Mukherjee herself advocated for cultural hybridity resulting from migration. In fact, she has been criticized for being wholeheartedly

unapologetic in her celebration of cultural dislocation (Low 1993, 9), at least in her early works.

Mukherjee is without doubt best known for her third novel, *Jasmine*, published in 1989. The novel is a depiction of violence and a young Indian woman's search for identity as an immigrant in the United States. Traumatized by the death of her husband, followed by being raped by the man who assists in her illegal entry to the United States, Jasmine moves like a force of nature from one identity, man, and town to another. She exercises her right to reinvent herself in her search for wholeness and belonging, but eventually realizes that "such notions may be unattainable for an immigrant woman and that a stable sense of self is a luxury as much as a threat to the independent spirit" (Dlaska 99, 128). In Mukherjee's texts, female identity is often connected to an imprisoning home (Miller 2004, 265), and Jasmine's nomadism does appear to be connected to the fluidity of her identity. Explorations of rootedness and mobility, and their role in the shaping of women's identities, continue as motifs in the later works by Mukherjee analyzed in this study.

Throughout her writing career, Mukherjee was criticized for the way she juxtaposed India and the United States in some of her works. Indeed, her attitude towards India was often dismissive, whereas she was eager to praise the United States (Maxey 2019, 4). In her analysis of *Jasmine*, Susan Koshy (1994, 69) cautions that the celebration of assimilation in the novel fails to address the complexity of the formation of diasporic subjectivity as well as the historical context of ethnicity and race in the United States. However, this complexity is considered in Mukherjee's post-2000 fiction, which the three novels examined in this study represent.

In these late works, Mukherjee returns to India with a more positive perspective. Perhaps she was motivated by the negative effects 9/11 had on ethnic minorities in the United States, or by India's rapid growth into an influential global economic power, or the reasons her creation, Tara, the narrator of *Daughters* and *Bride*, voices: "If I didn't write their [the characters] stories I'd explode; there'd be no one to mark their passing" (*Daughters*, 280). Tara is painfully aware that she is a witness to dying traditions in a rapidly changing India – an India that future generations will only be able to access through fiction and recorded history. The three novels, *Daughters*, *Bride*, and *India*, constitute an entity that reconnects with Mukherjee's Indian heritage and can hence be called the Bengali trilogy (Maxey 2019, 97). The first two novels can be read independently, but they form a whole with the plot of *Bride* continuing directly from where *Daughters* ends. *India* is only loosely connected to the previous parts of the trilogy, apparently due to a change in publishing houses and the new publisher's requirement to detach it from the two previous novels (Lavigilante 2014, 180). The trilogy deviates from Mukherjee's other fiction in that many of its events are set in India instead of the United States. The novels effectively illustrate how individuals belonging to the Indian diaspora are still haunted by the

colonial era and need to negotiate their identities regarding their origins and current surroundings. Migration is related to Western colonialism, and colonialism can be studied as a form of intergenerational memory that travels (Einsiedel 2010, 19). In the three novels by Mukherjee examined in this dissertation, the literary double functions as a device that narrates deliverance from colonial trauma.

The following subsections discuss the main themes in the three novels and examine the form and function of the literary doubles in them in more detail.

3.1 The Ancestor-descendant Double: A Connection of Souls

Desirable Daughters and *The Tree Bride* map the story of Tara Chatterjee, a Calcutta-born, 36-year-old wealthy divorcee who lives in San Francisco with her teenaged son Rabi. Tara is the first-person narrator in both *Daughters* and *Bride*. The latter novel includes long passages involving characters from the past whom Tara did not know personally, but their stories are nevertheless constructed by Tara from written records and other people's accounts. She is the youngest of three daughters who are "as like as blossoms on a tree" (*Daughters,* 21). Tara and her sisters Padma and Parvati share the same date of birth exactly three years apart from each other. They are each other's physical doppelgängers, and Tara refers to Parvati as her mirror-self (*Daughters*, 289). However, they are dissimilar by nature and their circumstances are very different. Padma, the eldest, is settled in New York with her Punjabi husband, whereas Parvati lives in Mumbai with her husband Auro and their two sons. The physical likeness of the three sisters does not appear to convey a multiplication of identities, but instead, their similarities highlight the significance of birth order and family dynamics for individual development.

When a young Bengali man called Christopher Dey befriends Rabi and claims to be Padma's illegitimate son, Tara is struck by the need to reconnect not only with her eldest sister, but also to find out more about her family history, particularly her great-great-aunt Tara Lata. On this quest, Tara visits her ancestor's hometown Mishtigunj, as well as Parvati in Mumbai and Padma in New York. While traveling, Tara contemplates her family history and simultaneously revives her connection to her birth country and culture, realizing that she, too, must find peace with the past.

Tara recalls hearing stories about her ancestor, Tara Lata Gangooly, the backbone of her birth village and an activist in the Indian independence movement, in her childhood; she is "the quiet center of every story" (*Daughters*, 289). Tara has a strong connection with her ancestor, and this connection is further strengthened as her research into Tara Lata's life progresses. Writing down her ancestor's story and performing proper funeral rights (which she was denied when she was imprisoned and killed by the British) for her become a pressing mission for Tara.

Placing the two Taras in juxtaposition immediately draws the reader's attention to the differences and similarities in their lives, particularly to their position as women in their era. Tara Lata lives alone in her house except for servants and does not leave its compound for over sixty years. Despite her voluntary confinement, she defies the surrounding patriarchal society by leading a fairly independent life, free of the restrictions that a marriage and children would have posed for a woman in her time (the late nineteenth and early twentieth century). The significance of marriage on the lives of both women is discussed in the next section.

Mukherjee is quick to provide clues that the two Taras can be read as a double. As she muses on the details of her ancestor's wedding, Tara Chatterjee writes that "flesh-and-blood emerges from the unretrievable past" (*Daughters*, 5). She says that other ancestors "have always been ghosts […] but Tara Lata is not" (ibid.). Tara Lata is not a ghost, but as real for her descendant as if she were a part of her daily life. An uncanny, psychic bond such as this is common in literature on the double as well as in Indian American fiction. As the past continuously permeates the present in the Bengali trilogy, it creates a cyclical story that challenges the linearity of time. Similarly, in the creation of a double whose lives parallel each other across time and whose bond persists beyond death, the idea of individual subjectivity is questioned, and a shared or non-unitary subjectivity is promoted as an equally likely form of existence.

Tara Chatterjee's unusual connection to her ancestor originates in the stories about Tara Lata she was told in her childhood, mainly by her mother and her maternal grandmother Didima. They are stories of a woman with strong convictions, patience, and even the readiness to die for a cause. Tara's fascination lies in the flesh-and-blood woman behind the stories. Tara explains: "All of my life, or at least ever since my mother told me the story of Tara Lata the Tree Bride – and that I had been named for her – I have felt, for no discernible reason, a profound connection" (*Daughters*, 16). She admits that her willingness to conduct a search for her roots is the "most American of impulses" (*Daughters*, 17), implying that her initial motivation to be better acquainted with her origins is merely a superficial urge, but ultimately her mission of discovery becomes a deeply personal journey.

When Tara Chatterjee visits the Tree Bride's hometown Mishtigunj for the first time, she meets villagers who retell stories of Tara Lata and she ponders the connection she feels with her ancestor:

> Tara Lata the virgin, the untouched, who opened the house to beggars, then to the sick, then to the young soldiers fighting the Raj. […] Tara Lata the saint, the freedom fighter. Whatever the bond between us, it is less than obvious. Until six years ago, I had been a married woman, though never with vermilion in my hair, living in a gated community in Atherton, California. I have given birth to a son.

> I have become, as befits an educated, thirty-six-year-old Californian, free and well traveled. I suspect I will grow old, but I know I will never change the world. (*Daughters*, 18)

As Tara observes, the bond between the two women may not be obvious, but it nevertheless exists. One of the villagers asks "the question that had been on everyone's mind. As another Tara Lata, did I ever talk to her? Did we speak in dreams?" (*Daughters*, 18). Tara replies that she does, indicating that an intangible or spiritual connection does exist.

The inexplicability of this connection across decades leads Tara – and the reader – to question fundamental beliefs regarding what is real and possible. In the two novels, scientific facts are challenged by luck, serendipity, and fate. The uncanny nature of the women's connection becomes apparent in Tara Chatterjee's efforts to discover more about the Tree Bride. That her obstetrician and gynecologist in *Bride* turns out to be the grand-daughter of Vertie Treadwell, the man responsible for Tara Lata's imprisonment and subsequent death, appears to be just one of several coincidental plot twists in *Daughters* and *Bride*. The symmetricity of the plot highlights the underlying subtext regarding the tangible and intangible. Just as Tara Chatterjee's Bengali background and current Americanized identity are in continuous dialogue in the text, so are Western ideas and ancient Indian beliefs.

Of her debt to her ancestor, Tara Chatterjee observes that "it became my dharma, my duty, to set her story down" (*Bride*, 37). Like Anju in Divakaruni's *Vine*, discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, Tara Chatterjee too grows as a writer in the course of the two novels she narrates. Similarly to Anju in *Vine*, Tara is the implied author of *Daughters* and *Bride*. Tara's texts have not been published when the events of the two first novels unfold, but in the third, *India*, which is set some years later, Tara's son Rabi explains to a friend that his mother is a writer: "The Tara Chatterjee who writes, that's my mom. You mean you haven't read her stories?" (*India*, 45). Rabi's tone and choice of words suggest that Tara is a published and established author by then.

As the narrator, Tara Chatterjee keeps the reader constantly aware of the uncanny nature of her and her ancestor's intertwined story. In a passage toward the end of *Bride* (279) in which Tara Lata speaks to her namesake across time and space, modern-day Tara remarks: "What I'm about to relate may strike you, dear reader, as mumbo-jumbo." With this comment, Tara displays awareness of the subjective nature of her narration and that the narrative moment is constructed. This narrative intrusion also denotes that the story is meant to be subjectively hers and not neutral or 'objective', and is likewise aware of its readers. Tara appears to expect negative judgment from her audience, which would usually be treated as an accomplice. The comment suggests that Tara's implied readers are not familiar with Hindu beliefs, or

at least that they do not accept them at face value. Thus, Rabi's elaboration that "his mother wrote novels about India for American women" (*India*, 45) appears to justify Tara's foresight regarding the reception of her writing. Furthermore, it reveals Mukherjee's acute self-awareness regarding her own authorial position and how it has been critiqued.

In accord with the uncanniness of the events, Tara Chatterjee confesses that information about Tara Lata surfaces conveniently when she most needs it. When she suddenly finds a previously unseen wooden crate in her parents' house containing Tara Lata's old documents, she acknowledges that there probably is a practical explanation for it, but she refuses to believe it:

> I'm sure there's a practical explanation; perhaps the servant had been cleaning under the bed and forgotten to restore it. Obviously, my mother was in no condition to have moved it.
>
> I refuse to believe in any logical explanation.
>
> For some reason, my mother had accumulated her own little trove of Gangooly-family memorabilia, and it had been mixed with my father's holy books, and they'd not been willing to relinquish them. And when I needed them, they reappeared. (*Bride*, 67–68)

As illustrated by the quote above, Tara Chatterjee consciously rejects any rational explanation; she wants to believe in the supernatural where the Tree Bride is concerned. The conclusion to be drawn is that she wavers between the rational and the incomprehensible but is inclined to accept the more unlikely explanation of a form of divine guidance. She offers Hindu core beliefs as a reason for her readiness to accept the supernatural (according to Western philosophy):

> Buried deep in the consciousness of every Hindu is a core belief. […] We measure passing time on two clocks that coexist: one that ticks in God Brahma' eye and one that hums on our wrists. Time moves in cycles when it belongs to gods, in straight lines when it belongs to mortals. In Brahma's eye clock four eons add up to one complete cycle. […] Why fear dissolution when you know for certain that Brahma-time moves in cycles? After wrecking there will come the needed rebuilding. After misery and meanness, an eon of bliss, purity, and perfection. (*Daughters*, 279)

Tara Chatterjee's observation about the perception Hindus have about time, the cyclical time of the divine and the linear time of mere mortals, is illustrative of the worldview promoted in the Bengali trilogy. Western ideology is not in the center and ancient Hindu philosophy in its periphery, but instead, they are presented as coequal.

Tara does not attempt to substitute one conception of time with another, but suggests that they coexist, just like her own Indian roots continue to be a part of her modern American persona.

Thus, Mukherjee's texts challenge Western conceptions of linear time and individual subjectivity but do so without elaborate philosophical explanations. *Daughters* and *Bride* remind readers that concepts such as time or reincarnation are not universal but culturally bound, and it is up to the reader to accept or contest these beliefs. Another cultural construct that has prominence in the two novels is the institution of marriage, which is discussed in the next section.

3.1.1 Juxtaposed Marriages

Like Divakaruni's *Sister* and *Vine*, which were analyzed in Chapter 2, Mukherjee's novels also explore marriage as an institution and its significance for the position of women using the literary double. Furthermore, Tara Lata's life story highlights the situation unmarried women faced in colonial India and the role mothers and wives had in the Indian independence movement.

Both Taras are single-but-married women. With a tree for a husband, Tara Lata is a wife in name only, and Tara Chatterjee a divorcee who is emotionally, as well as in her family's view, still very much married to her ex-husband Bish. The couple reconciles at the end of *Daughters* and remarries at the end of *Bride*.

Daughters opens with a description of a bridal procession in the fictional village of Mishtigunj, East Bengal (modern-day Bangladesh), in 1879. The village was founded by John Mist, an orphan of English descent, as a kind of utopia or ideal society on the outskirts of colonial rule, which Mist wanted to escape. The expected wedding is that of five-year-old Tara Lata, but the nuptials never take place as her thirteen-year-old bridegroom dies of snake bite on his way to the event. The cancellation of Tara's wedding is a defining event not only in her own life, but also in the lives of her descendants. The bridegroom's father blames Tara for the death of his son and demands her dowry as atonement. The era is not auspicious for a girl child to begin with; a girl who brings misfortune through death to her family and community is all but doomed. Tara's father, Jai Krishna Gangooly, puts no blame on his daughter despite being an orthodox Hindu with great respect for traditions. He knows that the bridegroom's misfortune is not a result of negligence in performing pre-wedding rites, or the wrath of an enraged goddess at having been defiled by a menstruating devotee (*Daughters*, 13). He refuses the demands of the bridegroom's family and sends them away.

However, Jai Krishna decides to honor what his astrologer had predicted to be an auspicious time for Tara Lata's wedding. To save his favorite daughter from the fate of a widow, or more accurately, the fate of an unmarried and unmarriageable

woman, he arranges for Tara Lata to marry a tree. As Tara Chatterjee, the narrator, describes: "The marriage rites still had to be performed; marriage is bigger than the participants" (*Bride*, 32). This sudden turn of events is not a diversion into magical realism in the narrative, but a fairly realistic depiction of society's attitudes toward an unmarried woman at the time. Tara further explains that girls facing similar fates were married to rocks or crocodiles. Mishtigunj is surrounded by the Shoonder Bon forest and hence there is no shortage of eligible tree bachelors. That very night, Tara Lata marries one of them in a traditional Hindu wedding ceremony and her dowry of gold is buried at her bridegroom's feet.

That marriage is bigger than the participants is not restricted to young girls and trees. Tara Chatterjee, born nearly a century later than her ancestor, marries a boy chosen by her father at the age of nineteen, leaves her home, and accompanies him to the United States. As discussed in the context of Divakaruni's novels in Chapter 2, arranged marriages continue to be the norm in Southeast Asia and among its diasporas. The horoscopes of potential couples are matched, but perhaps more significant than the compatibility of personalities is their position in life. The first sons of prominent families should marry beautiful, accomplished daughters of their peers. Hailing from the same area geographically and belonging to the same social class and caste are still often non-negotiable prerequisites for a happy marriage. Social and economic factors are overt in the discourse of arranged marriages, whereas in self-selected marriages they are hidden, or their existence is altogether denied (Aguiar 2013, 184). Many practices related to arranged marriages are changing, but families continue to play a definitive role in the selection of a spouse, which exceeds far beyond merely giving the couple their consent (ibid.). Tara's husband Bish manages to surpass even the high expectations of success posed on him by his parents and in-laws in becoming a mobile technology tycoon and multimillionaire. However, material success does not equate marital success for Tara, who feels increasingly lonely and out of place in their gated compound in Atherton, and eventually moves out in pursuit of freedom and self-discovery.

In the context of marriage, the opening scene of *Daughters*, in which a five-year-old bride is about to meet her thirteen-year-old groom for the first time, strikes me as particularly critical for questions of matrimony and being a wife as discussed in this section. Tara the modern-day narrator is clearly conscious of how devastating a practice child marriage is:

> I cannot imagine the loneliness of this child. A Bengali girl's happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems that all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her. Even constructing it from the merest scraps of family memory fills me with rage and bitterness. (*Daughters,* 4)

Tara Chatterjee's narration above corresponds with modern views of child marriage; however, in order to effectively tell the Tree Bride's story as an illustration of colonialized Bengal, judgment must remain brief. The crux of the novel is not to advise readers about the horrors of this unfortunately common practice, but to tell another story. The wedding sets the scene for Tara Lata's narrative and is not a direct critique of past practices or even of Jai Krishna, Tara Lata's father. Jai Krishna is a Brahmin lawyer who turns to orthodox Hinduism in search of spiritual truth and as a rejection of British values. The text highlights that child marriage was already officially outlawed in India (*Daughters*, 19), but despite his legal training, Jai Krishna prefers to adhere to tradition and ignore the new legislation. For Jai Krishna in the novel and many of his corporeal contemporaries, ancient religious practices were a way of opposing British rule in India (see, for example, Forbes 1996). That merely fueled the fire, as it confirmed the British colonizers' perception that they governed a backward nation. Human rights violations provided justification for their presence in India as proof of how ill-equipped the nation was to run its own affairs.

Child marriages in nineteenth-century India were a common means of securing (from the point of view of the family) the best possible spouse for a child before puberty without the risk of a compromised reputation (Katrak 2006, 174–76). The bridegroom's family would benefit in the form of a dowry, often consisting of gold, money, or commodities. The practice was defended by claims that the wedding was only a form of engagement, and the marriage would not be consummated before the bride reached puberty (Forbes 1996, 85). However, it was customary that she would move into her husband's house immediately after she began menstruating, regardless of her age at the time. The age of consent was raised several times, which was used by the colonial administration as "proof positive that the British were carrying out their 'civilizing mission' in India" (ibid.). The Child Marriage Restraint Act, also known as the Sarda Act, setting the minimum age of marriage for girls at fourteen and for boys at eighteen, finally took effect in April 1930 (Forbes 1996, 88). At the time, there was no mention of a higher age of consent (for marriage consummation) as had been planned earlier. Gender equality or individual liberty to choose a spouse were not even discussed. The British struggled to keep peace, and thus enforcement of the Act was practically nonexistent. Reform-minded Indians were blamed for not supporting the Act strongly enough, whereas Indian reformers blamed the government (Forbes 1996, 89). The age limits were later amended to eighteen for girls and twenty-one for boys; they continue to be enforced today.

In addition to the question of child marriage, women's rights in general became a significant issue in the last decades of colonial rule in India. Furthermore, woman as mother of the nation became an important symbol in the independence movement and birth of the nation-state (see, for example, Thapar 1993). The British had adopted the idea that the position of women could be used as an indicator of a society's

advancement (Thapar 1993, 82; Forbes 1996, 13). As women's rights became a battle ground for communal groups with varying interests, many previously British-minded and reformative Brahmin civil servants turned their backs on the government. This is clear in the description of Jai Krishna: "What dwindling store of faith he had in Western reason deserted him – or to put it less negatively, what kernel of comfort could be found in the ancient faith was restored to him" (*Daughters*, 19). No longer approving of the British in his country, Jai Krishna discards Western laws and values, and turns back to his old faith.

Tara Lata does not question her father's decision in marrying her, and neither does Tara Chatterjee more than a hundred years later. The arranged marriages of the two Taras lead to unexpected and contrasting outcomes. By avoiding a traditional marriage, Tara Lata can lead a very different life from the other wives of her time. Unburdened by the needs of a husband and children, she can devote herself first to studying, and then to helping and teaching others. Tara takes an interest in the Indian independence movement and offers shelter to freedom fighters in her home. She requests her dowry gold to be dug up from the feet of her tree husband and donates it to Mahatma Gandhi in support of his Salt March, a historic act of civil disobedience protesting British rule in India in 1930. Tara Lata's generous donation is noticed by the British, and as her involvement with the independence movement deepens, the colonial authorities begin to take an interest in her. Thirteen years later, she is charged with sedition, arrested, and killed in prison.

Despite staying in her house and its grounds for over sixty years, Tara Lata is a free woman. She remains in her mansion, Mist Mahal, for all that time out of choice and not because she is forced to do so. The motivation behind her seclusion is the fate of her father's friends, John Mist, the founder of the village of Mishtigunj, and Rafeek Hai, Mist's Muslim lawyer (Jai Krishna being the Hindu lawyer).[11] The hanging of her two favorite "uncles" traumatizes her, and "she never forgot and she never forgave" (*Bride*, 69). Tara Lata explains: "My father said from that day forward the British were to be feared for their venom and treated like snakes. I have not stepped outside these gates since that day" (*Bride*, 265). Her choice of words and

[11] In the novel, the village of Mishtigunj was founded by John Mist, a young English orphan who kills two men to defend the honor of Olivia, a surrogate mother figure for Mist, ruined by her powerful English husband-to-be. Mist escapes into the jungles of Bengal, giving up his native language and English clothes in the process. Rafeek Hai assists Mist in his escape. Decades later, the British authorities track them down and hang them for the murders in order to gain financial and political power over Mishtigunj, by then a leading trading port on the Bay of Bengal. In building Mishtigunj, Mist attempted to create a utopian village unaffected by communalism. He called together notables from as far away as Calcutta and Dhaka: doctors, lawyers, and teachers, who preferably represented both Hindu and Muslim faiths. Christians, in representing the faith of the English, are banned from the village altogether.

the way that she lives her life – as a progressive, intellectual woman involved in the independence movement – implies that she stays inside her walled compound out of defiance and not fear. She refuses to participate in the daily life of a society ruled by the British.

Instead, those in need would come to the gates of Tara Lata's family mansion to seek advice or ask for her blessing:

> Every day there'd be a knot of women sitting outside her door praying to Tara-Ma. Praying for children, if you can believe it, praying for sons, praying for healthy sons, praying for a husband, for a sober husband – she who knew nothing of husbands and children. (*Bride*, 212)

Ironically, Tara Lata, who has no husband or children of her own, becomes a mother to the entire village. She gradually evolves into a saintly figure, a kind of patron saint of Mishtigunj, and is given the honorary nickname of Tara-Ma, Mother Tara. While she is herself an autodidactic, she teaches all her servants to read and write and sends them out into villages to teach others (*Bride*, 212). Tara is held in high esteem in Mishtigunj even decades after her death. "She was our mother," explains an old villager whom Tara Chatterjee meets on one of her research trips to Mishtigunj (*Bride*, 60). Tara Lata thus becomes a symbolic mother figure for the villagers of Mishtigunj and the independence activists in the area.

Tara Lata's only "real" children of her own are the trees from the Shoonder Bon planted as saplings in the garden by her father. Years later, Tara's children stand "in a regimental row" at the back of the compound (*Bride*, 254). She calls her arboretum her "sacred forest", in which she reads and talks to the trees. She finds peace and solace in nature, suggesting that she may trust it more than her fellow human beings. Furthermore, it is her duty as the Tree Bride of the Shoonder Bon to protect and nurture the forest.

By juxtaposing the two Taras regarding marriage and in discussing Tara Chatterjee's sisters' marital relationships, Mukherjee's Bengali trilogy offers insights on the significance of marriage. Tara Lata's groom dies and to avoid ostracization, she is married to a tree instead. Tara Chatterjee's sister Padma has an illegitimate child and is thrown off the course planned for her for decades. She moves first to London and then to the United States. Padma lives an unconventional youth (for an Indian girl) in New York, partying and sharing a flat with a gay couple. She feels closest to the gay men in her life, and after her best friend dies of AIDS, she marries a once-divorced Punjabi out of convenience in her thirties. Parvati, Tara's other sister, marries a self-selected fellow student, but her husband is a well-off Bengali Brahmin, a representative of the same caste and class, so their families do not object. Tara Chatterjee weds Bish, a boy chosen by her father, but leaves him

after a decade of marriage. After having found her independence and true calling in writing, she remarries him six years later, this time knowing exactly what she is getting into.

Mukherjee's take on the institution of arranged marriages is intriguing, particularly in the context of her own marriage: she married Clark Blaise, an American, instead of allowing her parents to choose a spouse for her. However, like Divakaruni's novels discussed in Chapter 2, *Daughters* and *Bride* do not criticize the practice as such and suggest instead that arranged marriages have an equal chance of success but require work like any other relationship. As Sandra Ponzanesi (2004, 35) observes: "It is in this binary but fluid interaction between origin and modernity, traditional values and emancipation, collectivism and individualism, that Mukherjee's female characters develop." In *Daughters*, Tara Chatterjee writes how her American friends are shocked by the practice of marriages arranged by parents: "Your parents, Tara, get a grip! What do they know of the needs of a modern woman? The simple answer could never satisfy them: I wasn't, perhaps I'll never be, a modern woman" (*Daughters*, 27). Tara's comment demonstrates how she acknowledges her roots and their influence on her views and personality. If disregarding her parents' opinion means that she is a modern woman, then she chooses not to be one.

The Tree Bride's life story illustrates how a woman's position in India was, and still often is, governed by her marital status; paradoxically, in her case, enjoying the social position of a wife but avoiding a traditional marriage becomes her saving grace and defines her life as an independent scholar, writer, and supporter of the Indian independence movement. In a scenario more similar to the Tree Bride's than would seem at first glance, once liberated from her marriage, rich and privileged Tara Chatterjee is free to pursue her own interests, discovering that writing her ancestor's story, and later fiction, is one of the most important ones for her. Despite their divorce, Bish continues a "benign involvement" (*Bride*, 17) in her life. For instance, Bish pays for the renovation of her house, and most of their relatives and friends in India are oblivious to their divorce. Even as a divorcee, Tara Chatterjee continues to be defined through her marriage; she is permanently positioned as Bish's wife (Munos 2004, 136). Tara Lata's tree husband provides a socially acceptable backdrop for her life, and Bish does the same for Tara Chatterjee. Tall, rigid in his posture and manners, Bish even resembles a tree, the proxy-husband of Tara's ancestor.

At the beginning of *Daughters*, Tara Chatterjee is in a relationship with Andy Karolyi, her Hungarian building contractor, an ex-biker turned carpenter and Buddhist Zen master. When Christopher Dey, the impostor pretending to be Tara's nephew, appears on the scene, the couple's relationship begins to deteriorate. Andy is unable to cope with Tara's total emotional immersion in the case and the entanglements with her family. Recognizing her inability to prove or disprove

Christopher Dey's parentage, he recommends that she drop the issue entirely. After hearing of Tara's visit to the police, he ends the relationship and to her shock simply disappears from her life (*Daughters*, 170). Tara belongs to a complicated network of family, caste, and class that continue to influence her decisions and general outlook on life. A strong sense of duty and family involvement in all affairs guarantee that relationships are never entirely over. Andy and Tara's romance is not society-bound like Bish and Tara's; this appears to be liberating for Tara in the beginning, but fails to keep the couple together in the end.

When Tara and Bish reconcile, Bish apologizes profusely for failing in his dharma, "the basic duty of a man in the householder phase of his life, to support and sustain his marriage" (*Daughters*, 265). This commitment to duty is ever present in Mukherjee's India-born families and appears to be the glue that holds them together – even more important than their mutual love. Tara and Bish share a deep understanding built on their long history and common background. As Tara explains:

> I only wanted Bish to stay with me. Because he knew I wasn't after his money or his status. I might very well have been the only appropriate woman in the world for him. And, because of his rectitude, if only I could bend it or dent it just a little bit, he might have been the only man for me. […] He would know to include me in his world; I would know not to expect from him things he couldn't deliver. (*Daughters*, 268)

Tara realizes that because of their circumstances and shared past, Bish is the right partner for her and due to their time apart, she believes they will be better equipped to cope with problems in the future. Thus, *Daughters* and *Bride* provide a very optimistic view on arranged marriages and the success of reconciliation in comparison with some of Mukherjee's earlier works, for example *Wife* (1975), which ends in mariticide.

In juxtaposing the two Taras as wives, *Daughters* and *Bride* propose that a woman's role even in patriarchal societies is not necessarily determined by her tangible circumstances. Tara Lata is independent and self-sufficient despite the restrictions imposed on women in her era, while Tara Chatterjee can only be free once she has claimed her autonomy and ventured out of her gilded cage. Her return to Bish is presented as a natural progression in her return to her roots. The depiction of Tara Chatterjee's marriage leads the way to a broader discussion of identity and culture illustrated by the literary double in the two novels.

3.1.2 Cultural Rerooting in Desirable Daughters and The Tree Bride

Tara Chatterjee's search for her roots results in a need to reconnect with India and a much wider search for identity than she had originally intended. An obvious reason for juxtaposing the two Taras is to draw attention to their position in life and society, and to contemplate the role of history, family, community, and beliefs in shaping identity. Tara Chatterjee pieces together the narrative of Tara Lata from bits of family memory while simultaneously reconstructing her own life within the intricate network of gender, religion, caste, and class (Miller 2004, 65).

The structure of *Daughters* and *Bride* is complex; the novels resemble autobiographical texts with a narrating 'I' (Tara now) and a narrated 'I' (Tara at the time the story takes place). The frame story of the author-narrator writing a book about her ancestor-double helps to shed light on cultural complexities and historical events. It also assists in creating the illusion that Tara is writing about real historical figures: *Daughters* and *Bride* are fiction fashioned as non-fiction by the narrator.

Much has been made of Mukherjee's "politics of identification" (Kuortti 2007, 158). Like Divakaruni and Lahiri, she too has been criticized for exoticizing India for the benefit of her readers, often by India-born scholars. Sarah Brouillette (2007, 176– 77) observes that the regional association of authors can be a burden in the postcoloniality[12] industry, as commercialization and politicization are closely linked. For example, Malashri Lal ([1993] 2010, 35) claims Mukherjee has "made up a formula which apparently works – Indian characters in search of American citizenship retain sufficient Indianness to be exotic but float gleefully into American materialism." My interpretation is that Hindu philosophy is not consciously exoticized or used to "spice up" the story, since Mukherjee (1988, 28) herself has cautioned other writers against being tempted by what other people term exotic. Mukherjee's works are rich in characters attempting to reinvent themselves in the United States, but I would discourage against reading them, particularly these late novels, as an indisputable promotion of America and its values. Basudhara Roy (2019, 110) argues that shedding the past in favor of the present in Mukherjee's works has been understood very literally by many critics as a recommendation of assimilation and radicalized Americanization, but such interpretations ignore her articulated and fleshed out understanding of America and Americanness. Based on her texts, Mukherjee's view of the United States is, in fact, quite nuanced. Roy (ibid.) proposes that for Mukherjee, 'American' "manifests itself as a specific attitude to

[12] Postcoloniality refers to "a value-regulating mechanism within the global late-capitalist system of commodity exchange" (Huggan 2001, 6); not to be confused with postcolonialism.

life, change, and the self rather than as marker of ethnic or religious nationality." Mukherjee's India-born but 'Americanized' characters appreciate the individualism and freedom offered by the United States, without necessarily wanting to change their outer appearance or what they believe in. Mukherjee perceives Americanness as a one-of-a-kind cultural attribute, "a state of mind and thought characterized by a certain readiness, flexibility and adaptability to change" (Roy 2019, 111). Mukherjee does not advocate for assimilation but for a mingling of cultures and an acceptance of differences instead.

As *Daughters* opens, Tara Chatterjee appears to be a classic example of an 'Americanized' character described above. For example, she paints her San Francisco neighborhood in the following manner:

> I felt for the first time in my life totally at home, unwilling to leave. I am one with the neighborhood, a young woman like so many others on the street: ethnically ambiguous, hanging out in the coffee shop, walking dogs, strolling with boyfriends, none of us with apparent sources of income. It's a work-at-home neighborhood where the older arts and newer technology seem to have come together. (*Daughters*, 25)

At this point in the story, Tara has lived in the United States for more than fifteen years. She embraces American culture but feels truly at home only in her post-divorce home in San Francisco. That ethnic ambiguity should be a prerequisite for Tara to feel at home suggests that she is not only amused, but also burdened by the strict categorization she has been accustomed to among other Indians. As she explains: "We're a billion people, but divided into so many thousands or millions of classifications that we have trouble behaving as a monolith. Yet each Indian is so densely packed with family that he or she seems to contain hundreds of competing personalities" (*Daughters*, 199). The various classifications of ethnicity reveal the contradictions in Tara's character; despite taking comfort in ethnic ambiguity as a way of remaining 'incognito' in her neighborhood, she admits to being guilty of ethnic prejudice and categorizing others based on their cultural heritage.

Tara attempts to explain the intricacy of the various categorizations of people in Bengali culture (see, for example, *Daughters*, 36; 245). These are categorizations that she ridicules, but still adheres to, as demonstrated by her request for a Bengali-speaking police officer of Indian but non-Muslim background when seeking assistance in dealing with Chris Dey:

> "You want an ethnic officer? Find your group here, and just give me the number." He handed me a worn sheet of thick paper. Bengali was listed, along with all the other languages of India.

> "My language is Bengali, but I'm fairly certain I'd be assigned to a Bangladeshi." In fact, I could see the name provided, Farookh Ahmad. "I'm really sorry, but I don't think a Muslim would understand."
>
> The sergeant kept peering down the list.
>
> "We're terrible, aren't we?
>
> "I'd just say special. Indians are … very special."
>
> "Perhaps just someone with an Indian background." […] And so I was assigned to Sgt. Jasbir "Jack" Singh Sidhu, a tall Sikh with a trimmed beard and a thoroughly American manner and accent. [. . .] "Okay, Mrs. Chatterjee, let's rock and roll." I never thought I would be discussing intimate family matters with a Sikh. (*Daughters*, 139–40)

The above passage presents the complex classifications based on ethnicity, class, and caste that Indians have for each other in the novel. Furthermore, it illustrates Tara's self-awareness; she does not defend her behavior but handles the situation with gentle irony. In offering that Indians are 'terrible', she acknowledges being an object of ridicule due to her unusual demand, but that does not dissuade her. The situation illustrates Tara's constant balancing between her 'ethnically ambiguous' American identity and her constrained and localized Bengali identity. Delphine Munos (2004, 136) writes of Tara's *compartmented* identity, suggesting a split into separate Bengali and American segments. In my opinion, Tara's smooth transitions resemble a form of cultural code-switching, quick changes between different representations of cultural identity, and illustrate the fluidity of her identity.

Despite Mukherjee's focus on the Indian diaspora in the United States, her writing has been criticized for giving a very limited view of it. The writer herself has altogether refused to act as a representative for Indian immigrants, rejecting the term "Asian American writer" in favor of "American" or "American of Indian origin." However, Mukherjee's insistence on being called an American writer is not a rejection of intercultural identity, but an attempt to extend the definition of American mainstream literature (Kutschbach 2012, 27). It is a refusal to be pushed to the sidelines for writing literature that depicts the abundance of ethnic communities and redefines through her work what it means to be American (Doerksen, 2000, 229). Mukherjee rejects the hyphen, because she perceives migration as a two-way process, in which both the migrant and the host society are transformed. The passage from a San Francisco police station quoted above illustrates this transformation too, as ethnic officers are offered to accommodate the needs of residents of diverse backgrounds.

Most of the criticism against Mukherjee assumes that she is writing within a realistic tradition that must remain committed to an external historical 'truth' (Chakravarty 2002, 92–93). Instead, Radha Chakravarty argues that Mukherjee's

narratives must be read as literary constructs that reflect the necessity of the dislocated individual to recreate one's self and surroundings (ibid.). Ruth Maxey (2019, 7) suggests that the critique regarding exoticization as well as the rejection of hyphenation indeed overlooks the aesthetic choices and influences that are important in understanding Mukherjee's fiction. Clearly Mukherjee's texts should be treated as works of art and not as socio-realist accounts of the plight of Indian women in the nineteenth century or of immigrant life in the modern era. Mukherjee's texts are stories about individuals and attempt to avoid stereotypical representations of ethnic groups.

In her analysis of the Bengal trilogy, Christine Kutschbach (2012, 191–233) interprets the first two novels as a play of Derridean *différance*, slippage of signification, in which Tara Chatterjee is faced with several varied concepts of reality, and her perception of them is altered by the end of the story. With or without the support of Derrida's theory, this interpretation appears accurate. Tara discovers the discrepancy between actual events and how they first appear time and time again. Miller (2004, 65) proposes that "Mukherjee explores a complicated working out of the relationship between home, identity, and community that calls into question the notion of a coherent, historically continuous stable identity and works to expose the political stakes concealed in such equations." Even in the rhetoric of her 'retrofitted' American home, Tara's beliefs are shaped by her Bengali Brahmin background (Miller 2004, 67). Miller's assessment rings true regarding some of Tara's core values. However, when placed in situations in which her attitudes are challenged, for example, regarding her own marriage and divorce, or her son's homosexuality, she no longer conforms to conservative Indian family values. Tara has adopted values from American society too, and, more importantly, her identity is not fixed but fluid and mobile. Tara Chatterjee's story is that of negotiating and coming to terms with cultural hybridity. She is able to navigate the differences between American and Bengali culture and examines both through a lens of self-irony and amusement.

When Tara visits her older sister Padma in New York, she suddenly realizes that she is no longer able to perform this categorization of fellow Indians as well as she used to:

> There was a time when I could identify faces from any north Indian state (the south being an enduring mystery), let alone related religions and nationalities. Now, my radar was down. I couldn't distinguish Muslims from Hindus anymore. I wasn't even one hundred percent sure of Bengalis. I felt as though I were lost inside a Salman Rushdie novel, a once-firm identity smashed by hammer blows, melted down and reemerging as something wondrous, or grotesque. (*Daughters*, 195–96)

Tara recognizes that her (cultural) identity is in the process of being remolded and she is unsure of its outcome. It is worth noting that even though Tara describes the shattering of her once-firm identity as a violent destruction, she recognizes that its re-emergence as something new can be equally wondrous or grotesque. Hybridity can be positive or negative, or neither.

Maxey (2019, 100) criticizes Mukherjee for ethnocentrism and reinscribing Bengali exceptionalism: "Tara's boasting about Bish's brilliance—and her own trophy status as the 'best wife' (*Daughters*, 44)—becomes as smug and tiresome as Mukherjee's own insistence on her atavistic privilege throughout her writing." I must admit to disagreeing with Maxey's otherwise insightful study of Mukherjee's life and works on this point. The text does not elevate the status of Bengalis or Bengali culture but illustrates the patriotic pride that many Bengalis have been brought up with. Mukherjee does not condone the attitude of her fictional character Tara Chatterjee, but simply demonstrates that this attitude exists; this is how Bengalis of her caste and class often perceive themselves. In fact, Tara's sense of entitlement is portrayed in a humorous light. Maxey appears to have missed Mukherjee's gentle irony in the treatment of Tara and her other Bengal-born characters. As Kajol Ghosal remarks to Tara at her home-shopping party for wealthy Bengalis in the New York tristate area:

> "We're already extinct in our native habitat. Marvelous plumage, though. Wonderful adaptability. A really good captive breeding program is our only hope." She seemed to be smiling. "That's what this party is all about." "The survival of the species?" "The apparent survival anyway. We look to be thriving, don't we? Homo Bengalensis, subspecies; Hindu Calcuttan, subbreed, Ballygunge. In your case, Brahmin." (*Daughters*, 245)

In addition to this humorous passage, the hybridity and flexibility of Tara's identity is perhaps most clearly displayed in her interaction with her sisters. With Parvati, who lives in Mumbai, Tara appears Americanized, whereas on her visit to New York to meet her older sister Padma, a very different side of her identity is revealed. Padma makes a living by recycling Bengal for her New York-based peers as the star of a TV show for Bengali expatriates on the East Coast. In addition, she designs saris and models traditional Bengali jewelry. Padma and her social circle live in a mini-Bengal on the Eastern seaboard. In this environment, Tara can tap into the Bengali side of her personality and is easily seduced into playing the part of the Bengali 'chhoto bon', the docile little sister.

As the narrative progresses and Tara Chatterjee revisits her Bengali identity, she appears to subsume more of it into her current sense of self. Her search for roots and groundedness runs parallel with her discovery of the mystery of Tara Lata. At the

party she attends with Padma in New York, Kajol Ghosal remarks to Tara that she appears to be drifting between two lives, and that she should not let it go on for much longer (*Daughters,* 246). Tara agrees, acknowledging her awareness of being in a precarious situation, not only due to the threat posed by Chris Dey, but also because of her own identity crisis.

Tara's drifting between her two lives is apparent throughout *Daughters*, but she achieves a form of closure in this respect by the end of *Bride*. Tara Lata leads her on a journey of self-discovery, and by the end of it, she realizes that she is more of a patriotic Bengali than she had assumed, and more appreciative of her roots. The novel illuminates that the relationship with one's heritage is personal and must be constructed by every individual. For example, Tara realizes that her son Rabi sees India in a very different way – through the somewhat exoticizing lens of his camera, but nevertheless independently, instead of blindly adopting the views of his parents and grandparents.

Even if Tara Chatterjee does not realize it at the time, it is her ancestor Tara Lata who returns her to her roots. Soon after Tara's trip to New York, her house in San Francisco is firebombed by the man who claimed to be Chris Dey: Abbas Sattar Hai, an impostor from Mishtigunj. Hai's motive is not fully disclosed in the novels, but Tara suspects it has to do with the Hai family's illegal claim on Mist Mahal, the Tree Bride's old mansion. The fear of losing family property and the dishonorable treatment of an ancestor by Jai Krishna Gangooly lead Abbas Sattar Hai to take revenge on Tara Chatterjee, a descendant of Jai Krishna. Having heard about Tara's trips to Mishtigunj and queries regarding Tara Lata, he is worried that she might attempt to claim back Mist Mahal, to which the Hais have no legal claim. There is a certain irony to this lack of a legal claim, as no mention is made of any legal claim that the Gangooly family might have to the house which originally belonged to John Mist, and which Jai Krishna continued to occupy with his family after Mist's death. Abbas Sattar Hai also wishes to avenge the hurt that his great-great-grandfather Abdulhaq experienced in the Gangooly household. Abdulhaq was Jai Krishna's cook, but Jai Krishna demoted him to gatekeeper after his religious awakening.[13]

The inclusion of this more personal motive in the attack against Tara Chatterjee can be read as a commentary on religious extremism as well as organized crime in the aftermath of 9/11. In the two novels, conflicts involving religion seldom arise from religious beliefs or practices as such, but from their application and effects on individuals, as in the case of Jai Krishna and Abdulhaq. Furthermore, the portrayal

[13] "For an orthodox Brahmin like Jai Krishna Gangooly to take food from a Muslim's hand would bar his path to salvation. We know he became super-orthodox, that in later life he turned his back on any kind of ecumenical accommodation with Christians or Muslims" (*Bride*, 69).

of Jai Krishna in many passages of the story demonstrates that strict orthodox religious practices are not restricted to Islam, as is the common Western assumption, but are equally common among other faiths as well. The police investigate the bombing of Tara's house as an attack against the wealthiest and most successful members of the Indian diaspora, but the Gangooly–Hai history reveals personal reasons for the act. Tara Chatterjee is shocked to discover that her would-be assassin and an indiscriminate killer was born and raised in her family's house (*Bride*, 278), creating an allegory for the general dismay when faced with homegrown terrorism. *Daughters* and *Bride* suggest that the political and religious always involve personal motives too.

The reasons behind the bombing are complex and in addition to family history, they are intricately woven into Mishtigunj's colonial history. This history, and how the double expresses the cathartic liberation from it in the two novels, is examined in the next section.

3.1.3 Deliverance from Colonial Crimes

Daughters is a personal story in mapping Tara Chatterjee's plunge into old family secrets, but its sequel *Bride* is a more political narrative, focusing on the history of Mishtigunj as well as its most famous inhabitant Tara Lata. Mishtigunj evokes the image of a peaceful and prosperous utopia, destroyed by colonizers' greed. In this microcosm, Mukherjee captures India in its entirety at a tumultuous time in the 1930s and 1940s. The British attempt to tighten their grip on an increasingly rebellious India while there is a shortage of food in Bengal and old loyalties, for example, between Hindus and the British, and Hindus and Muslims, crumble.

As Tara Chatterjee uncovers her ancestor's story, the role of the colonial administration in Tara Lata's death becomes clearer, particularly the involvement of Vertie Treadwell. Vertie is a cynical colonial official, stationed as the District Commissioner of the Sunderbans (Shoonder Bon) in East Bengal in the 1930s. Vertie's granddaughter Victoria is Tara Chatterjee's obstetrician and gynecologist, and after the two women become friends, she gives Tara some of her grandfather's old documents to assist her in her research into Tara Lata's life. The British were interested in the large donation that the Tree Bride made to Gandhi and began an investigation into her affairs. When Vertie visits Tara Lata to interrogate her, he finds himself attracted to her and becomes infatuated with her. When the Tree Bride rejects him, or to be precise, when her servants attack him as he enters her compound uninvited at night, he feels enraged and humiliated, and Tara's fate is thus sealed. Treadwell decides to make no attempt to protect her if she is found guilty of seditious activity. Years later, she is arrested and brutally murdered in her jail cell by a British police officer.

The juxtaposition of Vertie Treadwell and Tara Lata is interesting; they are born in the same year, 1874. Vertie also shares his birthday, 30 November 1874, with his great hero, Winston Churchill, with whom he has a conversation in his near-death delirium depicted in *Bride*. Drawing these characters together, two fictional and one real, is effective in conveying the structures of colonialism to the reader. Vertie Treadwell, despite his atrocious attitude towards the colonized as well as his heinous crimes, is not portrayed in an entirely unsympathetic light. Even with unacceptable and racist views, Vertie is not born evil, but he is a product of British imperialism, one of the countless officers who had "been serving England all their lives but hadn't seen it in forty years" (*Bride*, 163). Vertie Treadwell and Tara Lata represent the oppressor and the oppressed in roles pre-assigned by an outside force, personified in *Bride* by Winston Churchill.

As Tara Chatterjee writes the Tree Bride's story, she becomes increasingly engrossed in her ancestor's life, and simultaneously appears to reawaken the Bengali side of her identity that she has suppressed in San Francisco. In exploring the final stages of the Tree Bride's life, Tara must come to terms with Bengal's colonial past: "Even in far-flung California, the Tree Bride speaks again" (*Daughters*, 289). Tara Lata's story resonates strongly with Tara Chatterjee in the present day. When she visits Mishtigunj with Rabi in the final chapter of *Daughters*, she is able to visualize Tara Lata's last moments in the village: "Mishtigunj is a place of magic where the hour and date on my wristwatch melt into the hours of the Tree-Bride's last day in her home" (*Daughters*, 306–07). Visiting the village where Tara Lata lived concretizes the experiences of her last days in the aftermath of an insurrection in which much blood was shed, and which the British suspect Tara Lata planned.

Before her arrest, Tara Lata lists the crimes of the colonial police in Mishtigunj, for example, the number of villagers that were assaulted, raped, or murdered in connection to the riots. She hopes to get her records published by a journalist in the foreign press, but she is arrested before that can happen. Tara Chatterjee finds the Tree Bride's records, and the brutal childhood stories she has been told about the crimes committed by the colonial administration become increasingly real for her. In addition to uncovering family history, Tara uncovers bits and pieces of colonial history and must renegotiate her relationship with it. As Doris Einsiedel (2010, 39) suggests, Tara is "the migrant character who repeats the pattern of withdrawal but ultimately realizes that the past remains ever present and can be addressed precisely because of the temporal and geographic distance to the suffering of colonial subjects like the Tree Bride." Tara Chatterjee has not experienced colonial violence first-hand, but the past nevertheless continues to resonate in her life. She describes her response to her grandmother's stories about the Tree Bride in her childhood: "We lived the Tree-Bride's courage. We were child soldiers in Mother India's army" (*Daughters*, 289). Tara and her family's hate for Gandhi originated in his inability

to prevent Partition, and instead, their hero was Bengali nationalist Subhas Bose: "His Indian National Army would march with the Japanese to plunge a dagger into the retreating back of the British Raj. No Gandhi, no Partition, no loss of our beautiful, green, and golden East Bengal" (ibid.). The verb tense Mukherjee uses in this passage, the conditional regarding events that were to occur long ago but never did, highlights that the attitude is shared over several generations. Tara Chatterjee's words express how the pain of being ill-treated by the colonial police and the legacy of Partition travel across generations, embodied by her double, Tara Lata.

When the Tree Bride's story, as far as Tara Chatterjee has managed to reveal it, draws to a close, she begins to hear the urgent whispers of her ancestor, begging to set her free. When Tara looks after her injured ex-husband after the bombing of her house, her ancestor the Tree Bride reminds Tara of her duty to her and mocks her for prioritizing Bish: "*Ah, distracted from duty to me by pati-seva,*[14] the Tree Bride sneers. *The selfless Hindu wife dedicates herself to her husband's welfare. Even a divorced one. Even in America*" (*Bride*, 280). Tara Chatterjee's sense of duty towards the Tree Bride reaches its culmination when she realizes that the ghost of Tara Lata will not allow herself to be banished (ibid.) until long-overdue, proper funeral rites are performed for her:

> I have waited half a century to be liberated. Her voice is soft again, as soft and steady as the mist pressing against the panes of the kitchen window. Your son is there, he can perform my rites. Please! He can send me on my way to the Abode of Ancestors. I am ready for the journey.
>
> So it isn't vengeance that she seeks. It isn't even justice. It is her soul's release. (*Bride*, 281)

Tara Lata was denied a proper funeral by Vertie Treadwell, who was afraid that the ceremony would be turned into an anti-Raj, pro-Netaji Subhas Bose protest rally, and "he wanted no part in the circuslike making of an Indian martyr" (*Bride*, 281). Hence Tara's body was tossed over the prison wall into a sewage ditch. Tara Lata pleads with her descendant to perform proper rights in order to deliver her from dishonor: "I had no body but I felt the pain, and the shame" (ibid.). Tara hesitates but reveals her psychic connection to the Tree Bride to Bish, and instead of attempting to offer a scientific explanation as he might have in the past, he proposes that they travel to Kashi (the holy city of Varanasi) and perform funeral rites for Tara Lata there.

[14] Devotion to a husband. Source: Sanskrit–English dictionary, spokensanskrit.org

In addition to discovering records of crimes committed by the British, Tara Chatterjee finds yet another connection between her and the bomber Abbas Sattar Hai. John Mist's lawyer and friend Rafeek Hai had a son who married Sameena, the Tree Bride's childhood friend and the daughter of Abdulhaq, Jai Krishna's demoted cook. Tara muses that considering their very different positions in society, this would have been a highly improbable match without the promise of a substantial dowry: "In a Muslim-majority area there must have been many more suitable bride candidates than little Sameena. […] Sameena's dowry was the house she never owned" (*Bride*, 277). In light of this new knowledge, Tara Chatterjee arrives at the conclusion that it could only be Sameena and her husband who tipped off the police about Tara Lata's final, more aggressive involvements in the independence movement and her sheltering of freedom fighters in order to claim the property for themselves, and this ultimately resulted in the Tree Bride's arrest and subsequent death. Attempting to keep this long-hidden secret provides Abbas Sattar Hai with a further motive to hunt down Tara.

Succumbing to the Tree Bride's wishes regarding a proper funeral crystallizes Tara Chatterjee's understanding that not everything has a rational explanation. The funeral party in Varanasi has no body to burn; instead, the priest's assistants construct a raffia figure to place on the funeral pyre. "A proxy-soul[15] for a proxy-bride," Tara discerns (*Bride*, 292). *Bride* ends with a description of the scene at the cremation grounds that is simultaneously violent and joyous:

> On pyres all around us, as sons light the bodies of their mothers and fathers, heads are popping, bodies twitch and shrivel, family members erupt in joy and sadness, shreds of Sanskrit prayers and other languages escape their lips. The raffia sizzles as more ghee is added. And in the hiss of the burning raffia and wood, I hear a whispered exclamation. "Ram! Ram!" (*Bride*, 293)

"Ram! Ram!" is an invocation of a god, Lord Ram (also Rama), chanted as a prayer or in more common usage, used as a greeting (The Century Dictionary online, 1111). These are also the last words of a Bengali man hanged in Eric Blair's (George Orwell's) 1931 essay "A Hanging," which, paradoxically, was given to Tara Lata by Vertie Treadwell and considered seditious material by the British at the time of its publication.

Mukherjee builds a parallel between Blair's essay and the hanging of John Mist and Rafeek Hai. Tara Lata's British friend Nigel Coughlin expresses a wish to find out if Orwell's text, set in (British) Burma, was based on a true story, and who the

[15] 'Proxy-soul' is contradictory in this context. 'Proxy-body' would be more logical, considering it is the body which burns and the soul that is released.

hanged man in the essay had been. The Tree Bride discovers that he was Subodh Basu, a teak worker with eight children, and passes the information on to Coughlin. Most likely the worker indeed murdered his Anglo-Indian supervisor, but Tara Lata suspects he was provoked. Tara Lata regrets that Blair did not mention this in his story, despite his alleged sympathies with the Indian independence movement. Tara adds that "identification of our enemies is simple; separation from our so-called friends is infinitely more difficult" (*Bride*, 275). She is not certain of Blair's loyalties, but neither is she entirely convinced that she could trust Coughlin. Tara Lata possibly passed her records of colonial crimes to Coughlin, but there is no evidence that he published them. Tara also relays to Coughlin that the teak workers had been organizing themselves into a labor union, and thus the execution was political rather than judicial.

Orwell's essay is a plausible depiction of an execution carried out by the British, and not unlike the hanging witnessed by Tara Lata as she describes it:

> I was six years and five months old and I stood with my father eight hours at the base of the gallows. […] My father started the chant Ram, Ram, Ram, and it was picked up by the entire village, even our Muslim brothers. I can hear that louder than clearer than any words of Mr. Gandhi or Mr. Nehru […] Everyone worshipped John Mist. He was our father and our mother. (*Bride*, 214)

The death of John Mist signifies the end of peace in Mishtigunj. With Mist out of the way, the British can gain a foothold in the village by bribing Muslim traders, which contributes to the emerging rift between Hindus and Muslims in the area. The peaceful coexistence of the two religions dies with Mist.

"A Hanging" is a disturbing text, as Tara Lata, Vertie Treadwell and Nigel Coughlin all recognize. It incriminates the British and evokes a strong, emotional response from readers. *Bride* leaves Coughlin's later involvement in Tara Lata's fate ambiguous. Vertie Treadwell claims he was an agent for the British and his evidence incriminated her, whereas Tara Lata considers Coughlin to have provided her with important information about the crimes of British officials (*Bride*, 217).

That Tara Chatterjee should hear "Ram! Ram!" again at the cremation of Tara Lata, whispered perhaps by the Tree Bride herself, symbolizes deliverance. With the release of the Tree Bride's soul, the souls of others that never had a proper burial in the hands of the colonial administration are set free. Furthermore, in setting down Tara Lata's story in writing, Tara Chatterjee is finally able to publish the written records that the Tree Bride kept of colonial crimes in Mishtigunj. The publication is too long delayed to be news, but offers a symbolic catharsis and acknowledgement of crimes that were never officially recorded. The act of writing is important; in Vijay Mishra's (2007, 114) words, "narrative transformation of traumatic memory may

itself be seen as a necessary cure." The descendant double frees her ancestor, liberating them both from the weight of colonial trauma. The Tree Bride is no longer a *preta*, a ghost, but a *pitr*, an ancestor (*Bride*, 282). Tara Chatterjee, in turn, positioned for most of her life first as one man's daughter, then another's wife, is 'reborn' as an author. Asserting Tara Lata's (as well as her own) agency through writing communicates that autobiography is an important means of resisting patriarchal power structures for women and marginalized groups (see, for example, Smith 1987; Edwards 2011). As Tara Chatterjee aptly notes: "Ours is a special case. […] We're trying to bury a phase of history itself" (*Bride*, 283). Regardless of multiple burial attempts, colonial history continues to permeate the present, as Mukherjee's last novel, *Miss New India* demonstrates.

3.2 Neocolonial Mimicry and the Fragmentation of Identity in *Miss New India*

This section examines the last novel of the Bengali trilogy, and Mukherjee's last novel altogether, *Miss New India* (2011). The novel was much changed from the writer's original plan due to a change in publishing houses (Lavigilante 2014, 180). Mukherjee was no longer able to use Tara Chatterjee, the narrator of *Daughters* and *Bride*, as a central character in the third part of what she had intended to be a close-knit trilogy (ibid.). A few of the original characters do appear, such as Tara's son Rabi, who in the sequel is eighteen and travelling around India as a photographer, and Tara's sister Parvati, now an entrepreneur and relocated in an affluent neighborhood in Bangalore instead of Mumbai. Tara is mentioned only in passing, and her first-person narration has been replaced by an omniscient third-person narrator. The story is focalized through nineteen-year-old Anjali Bose. Regarding Anjali's quest for her own identity, and her testing of multiple identities along the way, she resembles the abovementioned protagonist of *Jasmine*.

Mukherjee's exploration of multiple identities, begun – intentionally or not – in *Jasmine*, is taken even further in *India*. The novel depicts a young woman searching for a new life and a new identity in present-day Bangalore, India's fastest growing metropolis. The story presents the reader with two kinds of multiple subjectivity. First, the protagonist Anjali self-fashions[16] Angie, a more international, outgoing,

[16] The term 'self-fashioning' is borrowed from Stephen Greenblatt, who coined the term in *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) to describe identity formation as a combination of an individual's aspirations and prevalent power relations in society. I employ the term in a contemporary context to describe the process of creating or performing an identity that the subject perceives to have higher social status and more power.

and modern version of herself, and for most of the novel, she alternates between these two identities, Anjali and Angie.

There is also a physical doppelgänger for Anjali in the story, a character called Husseina Shiraz. The two resemble each other so closely they could pass for twins, which proves to be useful for Husseina in the course of the story. Their duality follows the traditional pattern of Gothic doppelgänger fiction discussed in Chapter 1, with the double functioning as a bad omen or harbinger of death. Mukherjee's juxtaposition of Anjali and Husseina also draws the reader's attention to the significance of one's family background in identity formation and suggests that material wealth does not guarantee an easy or happy life.

Anjali is from Gauripur, what she perceives to be a dead-end town in the Indian state of Bihar. She attends commercial college, but as the younger daughter of a middle-class Bengali family, she does not have many opportunities beyond attempting to marry well. When the prospective groom chosen by her father rapes Anjali on their first outing, she runs away to Bangalore, with advice and money from her college English teacher, an American called Peter Champion.

The search for an identity or identities is the main theme in the novel, which could be categorized as a modern Bildungsroman. *India* is an exploration into the provisional performativity of identity, the way identities are enacted and affected by situational factors instead of reflecting an immutable, finite bodily reality. However, the novel also offers commentary on the resonation of colonialism in the present day, and speaks volumes on the position of the English language in India today resulting from globalization and economic neocolonialism. In the global north, competing for the largest empire geographically has been replaced by the pursuit of world-wide economic supremacy. Through Anjali and her peers, the novel effectively illustrates how English skills in India today offer opportunities for upward mobility, but simultaneously maintain hierarchies, structures, and subordination that are only too familiar from the colonial era. Anjali's generation, and even her parents' generation, no longer has firsthand experience of a colonized India, but as stated in section 3.1, colonial trauma travels across generations. When suddenly exposed to racist and oppressive attitudes as well as photographs depicting colonial violence, Anjali experiences a strong emotional response. This response is later repeated in her dealings with a racist American customer, creating a parallel between India's colonial past and neocolonial reality.

The city of Bangalore in Karnataka is the new global customer service hub, where call center agents are hired every day by the thousands, as American and European companies outsource their customer care to India. The main criterion for hiring is that the candidate speaks English with an American accent, or at least without a distinguishable Indian accent, as illustrated in the following quote from a discussion between Anjali and her teacher Peter Champion in *India*:

> "In Bangalore," Mr. Champion said, "if you've got the talent, there's a market."
>
> This time she asked the question that was always on her mind. "And what is my talent, Mr. Champion?"
>
> "Peter, please. Don't you know what your talent is?"
>
> "I haven't the p'oggiest."
>
> "*Foggiest*, Angie. Initial *f*-sound, not *p*. Initial *w*-sound, not *v*, and vice versa. *Wedding*, not *vedding*. *Vagaries*, not *wagaries*. Not *wice wersa*. *Develop*, not *dewellup*. Keep practicing."
>
> She could cry. They'll always find you out. (*India*, 16)

A neutral Indian accent may be Anjali's ticket out of Gauripur, but it is not enough to secure her path in the urban jungle of Bangalore, where she does not know the rules and "nothing is the way it seems – it's all light and angles" (a recurring statement in *India*, repeated, for example, on pages 39, 153, 197, and 306). The phrase "light and angles" emphasizes how representation is crucial but does not necessarily offer a realistic portrayal of its subject at all, as everything can be altered with appropriate lighting and a flattering angle.

Mukherjee seldom explained her work in much detail, but of her last novel she said, "I wanted *Miss New India*, through its large cast of characters, to present a complicated response to the transformative effects of globalization" (Lavigilante 2014, 184–85). The novel explores the advantages and disadvantages of globalization and its effects on local culture. In addition to its theme of globalization, the novel effectively demonstrates that internal migration causes feelings of displacement and estrangement that can be just as severe as in migrating to another country. Mukherjee elaborates:

> As I have dramatized through a variety of characters in my novel, some characters [and] real-life migrants respond to geographical displacement, and the emotional, psychological fallout of such displacement, by becoming increasingly secular (and occasionally consumerist and materialistic); others, by becoming religious fundamentalists and social reactionaries. (Lavigilante 2014, 181–82)

India's gallery of characters includes examples of all of the above, and some are personified by Anjali's housemates at Bagehot House: Tookie the secular consumerist, Husseina the fundamentalist, and Sunita the social reactionary. Some migrants, as illustrated in the novel by the character of Anjali, eventually succeed in negotiating an in-between identity. Like *Daughters* and *Bride*, Mukherjee's *India* makes a case for the hybridity and fluidity of identities, the multiple shades of gray

instead of black and white. The next section explores how Anjali's hybrid identity is constructed in the course of the narrative.

3.2.1 The Performative Double: Anjali/Angie

For most of the novel, Anjali is torn between two identities, that of Anjali and Angie. They are one flesh-and-blood character in the narrative, but a character whose identity is fragmented, partially resulting from her own actions in feigning an embellished version of herself and partially due to trauma. For most of the narrative, the Anjali/Angie performative double represents the two sides of contemporary middle-class Indian women that are perhaps the most prominent in society. Anjali is the tradition-bound and well-educated girl whose education leads only to securing a (hopefully) decent husband and raising children. Angie is the upwardly mobile, class- and caste-shedding, young professional whose identity is an imitation of what she perceives as 'American' or 'Americanized Indian'.

Anjali's imitation of an American, amplified by the throng of fast-talking, slang-spewing customer service agents she meets in Bangalore, echo Bhabha's concept of mimicry as a form of colonial discourse. Bhabha (1984, 126) defines colonial mimicry as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject that is almost the same, but not quite." This idea of similarity also carries the connotation "almost the same, but not white" (Bhabha 1984, 130). To fulfil its purpose, mimicry must not be perfect, but partial, flawed, or exaggerated. Mukherjee's novel depicts Indian call center employees with their American, or at least 'neutral' Indian accents, as objects of neocolonial mimicry. In this neocolonial context, perfect replicas (American customer service agents) would not do, as business is lucrative only if employment costs are low. Too great a difference to the original – customer service agents with accents that American customers would not be able to understand – would be equally bad for business. Hence, Indian customer service agents depicted in the novel are, to apply Bhabha's words: "the appropriate objects of a colonialist chain of command, authorized versions of otherness" (Bhabha 1984, 129). Mimicry disrupts colonial discourse by simultaneously reinforcing and questioning its authority. This ambivalence and uncertainty fix the colonial subject into place as a partial, incomplete presence (Bhabha 1984, 127). The failure to negotiate this ambivalence and partial existence are the root cause of Anjali's identity crisis.

I apply the term *performative* to signify Anjali/Angie's construction of her two sides, of which she is very much aware, and which beg an audience. Thus, by 'performative' in the context of the novel, I mean 'identity-as-performance'. However, Anjali/Angie's conscious regulation of her two identities crumbles under pressure, indicating that her two personas are not entirely under her control. It is also important to assert that Anjali's case does not present itself as an actual case of

dissociative identity disorder, but a more deliberate self-fashioning and "trying on" of identities, which involve her active agency. For example, when readers are first introduced to Anjali, they immediately discover that "Anjali was not the name she answered to" (*India*, 7), but that she "would wait to be called by the name she preferred, Angela, or better yet, Angie" (*India*, 8). They find out that "she told many stories, all of them plausible, some of them perhaps even true. She always made an outstanding first impression" (ibid.), and "sailed through life with a blithe assumption that she would be forgiven" (*India*, 11). These quotes convey the impression of a young woman who does not let the truth get in the way of a good story, but who has a certain charm and is thus confident that her likeability will always save her should she get into some form of trouble.

As the narrative progresses, the distance and differences between Anjali and Angie increase. At times it is unclear to what extent Anjali is in control of her two sides, which can be frustrating for a reader attempting to explain her condition. However, it may be an unfair demand for Mukherjee, as a novelist and not a cultural theorist or psychiatrist, to be clear about her protagonist's condition and its pathology. At times Anjali's Angie appears to be a creation of intentional imitation in accordance with Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry, and at others, an uncontrollable fragment of an identity that used to be whole. Anjali fashions herself according to a Western ideal, or more precisely, her interpretation of Western. Ironically, her favorite T-shirt advertises the tour of a German punk rock band she has never seen perform and lists European cities she has never visited and knows very little about.

In the first chapters of Part One in the novel, the narrator uses Angie and Anjali interchangeably in the text when referring to the protagonist. The narration is in third person, but the point of view is so firmly Anjali/Angie's, that the reader is left with the impression that she is the narrator. Angie is the more fashionable, outgoing, and international version of Anjali. She is the fluent-in-English side of Anjali, but at this point in the story, the two are clearly the same person without any other differentiating attributes, as illustrated in the following passage (emphasis added), in which Anjali discusses marriage with her sister Sonali:

> Mrs. Bose was silent on what Sonali, in her first month as a wife, saucily confided to *Anjali* about men's "animal nature." The sisters had giggled over Sonali's descriptions of marriage-bed drama. *Angie* doubted that her father, even in his youth, had been endowed with animal nature. Her mother could not possibly have ever expected, let alone experienced, conjugal delirium with her father. *Angie* wished she could asked her mother what shape her dreams of married life had taken before Mr. Bose had become her bridegroom. Her mother had married at seventeen. The senior Mrs. Bose, her mother-in-law, did not want

> a vain, ambitious, educated woman in the family, so she had demanded that the girl drop out of school just a month before graduation. *Anjali's* mother had hoarded that grievance. […] But for Sonali, as Sonali explained to *Anjali* on their rare secret reunions, successful marrying off of one's offspring was neither an art nor a science. (*India*, 29)

In the above quote, the names Anjali and Angie are used interchangeably, without any traceable logic or correlation between the character's words and the name used for her.

Anjali is plucky and courageous, and not afraid to stand up for herself: "She was part of the bold new India, and equal to anywhere, a land poised for takeoff. Her parents were irremediably alien, part of a suspicious, impoverished, humiliated India" (*India*, 23). Anjali's parents' generation has experienced post-Partition communal violence, food shortages, and political unrest, whereas Anjali and her generation are the products of a prosperous, fast-growing and fast-developing, increasingly international and modern India. However, even Anjali's confidence is dented in the presence of those worldlier than her, for example Rabi, and her teacher Peter Champion.

The splitting of Anjali/Angie begins when her parents commence the search for a suitable bridegroom for her. When her father offers to reply to various marriage ads in the newspaper, the narrator describes, "Anjali, feeling more like Angie, would reply: "You do that and I'm out the door, thank you very much" (*India*, 21). She feels "more like Angie," which suggests that Angie does not want to get married and is more daring in her responses to her father than Anjali would be. Anjali's parents forbid her to wear T-shirts and jeans in public to improve her chances in the marriage market. One day, out shopping with her mother, Anjali sees Peter, but decides not to wave to attract his attention, because "Angie-in-sari was Anjali, a stranger to her student self" (*India*, 33). The passage illustrates that Anjali/Angie is concerned in presenting the 'correct' version of herself in every situation.

Anjali meets Rabi when she goes to Sengupta's Marriage Portrait Studio to get her picture taken for her own marriage ad. Working at the studio as an assistant for a short while on his tour of India, he introduces her to the effects of 'light and angles' for the first time (*India*, 39), but prefers to photograph her after the official session in natural light in an ice cream parlor. While there, Rabi shows Anjali photos that he has taken of Peter and Ali, Peter's transgender boyfriend, revealing a side of her teacher and his partner that she had not been aware of. Anjali begins to question the little that she knows about people: "What if, in the larger world, no one held true? What if everyone was two people at least, like Ali, like Peter?" (*India*, 43). Anjali has been entirely oblivious of Peter's homosexuality and romantic involvement with Ali, whom she assumed to be his servant. Her discovery of the truth is a shock and

though Peter and Ali have not intentionally deceived her, she feels as if they are different people. Anjali herself also appears to be split into two different people. Peter observes that there appears to be a struggle for her soul, which Rabi has managed to capture on camera at the ice cream parlor (*India*, 49–50).

Chapter Four is a watershed in Part One – a flood of events that drive Anjali/Angie to Bangalore. For the first four pages of the fifteen-page chapter, the narrator does not refer to Anjali by name, but instead, only as "she." Peter calls her "Angie" as usual. He voices his disappointment in her for the first time when she shows him her artificial, impersonal, and touched-up portrait taken by "Shaky" Sengupta in his studio:

> He was telling her in the plainest terms that both the bride-to-be Anjali of the studio portrait and the gutsy-rebel-Angie who had ridden on the back seat of his scooter were frauds. He had become a dangerous mentor, sowing longings and at the same time planting self-doubt. (*India*, 50–51)

Anjali resents Peter's criticism, as she feels he has been the main motivator in her aspirations for a better life than Gauripur would have to offer, but then does not encourage her when she takes her first tentative steps to pursue her dream. The use of "she" in the narration instead of a name demonstrates how lost Anjali/Angie feels, and how she has drifted apart from both sides of her identity: there is no name left to call her by. Peter's judgment of her launches an identity crisis that leads her to further questioning, even a kind of fragmentation: "*Maybe I'm not here. Maybe I'm not seeing any of this. Maybe 'Anjali' is seeing it. 'Angie' is somewhere else*. Splitting herself in two was a comfort" (*India*, 51). Angie distances herself and 'outsources' her pain to her alter ego to cope with disappointment and self-doubt.

In the remainder of the chapter, Anjali assumes the role of an ambitious bride-to-be and Angie continues to be the English-speaking student, as illustrated by the following: "*Angie* was crushed that Peter hated the picture, but *Anjali* was drifting above it with a smile, trying to show her the way" (*India*, 52; emphases added) and "Peter Champion had just crushed *Angie's* confidence. But *Anjali* had plans" (ibid.; emphases added). Anjali's plan is to post the touched-up marriage portrait on the biggest wedding site in existence and then meet the next acceptable candidate: boy number seventy-five. He turns out to be Subodh Mitra, who impresses Anjali's parents but rapes her on their first unsupervised meeting. Shocked, humiliated, and disgusted, Anjali plots to run away. When she writes a farewell letter to her parents, "she was *Anjali*. She could look down and see poor little *Angie* whimpering on her bed" (*India*, 67, emphases added). To be able to continue functioning, Anjali thus assigns her pain to Angie; as she observed earlier, splitting herself in two is a comfort.

Throughout Chapter Five, the last chapter in Part One, only Peter calls Anjali "Angie." Throughout the narration of the chapter, Angie appears to have disappeared and Anjali is now the protagonist. This distancing of the self after severe trauma is, of course, a common survival strategy in traumatic situations. Modern psychological studies have found that self-distancing, or viewing oneself from a third-person perspective, reduces physiological reactivity to traumatic memories, whereas its benefit for reducing emotional responses is unclear (Wisco et al. 2015, 956). Recent research suggests that adopting a distanced perspective when recalling a trauma memory can even be counterproductive, is linked to PTSD, and may prolong recovery (Wisco et al. 2015, 957). Anjali's outsourcing of pain to Angie appears to help her in the short term, but her later breakdown suggests that she suppresses her emotions regarding the rape, only to have them erupt later in Bangalore.

Part Two begins with Angie's arrival in Bangalore. Ready for a new beginning, she has shed small-town Anjali, who aspired to a good marriage, and is reborn as a new-generation career woman, Angie. Bangalore appears to offer numerous possibilities for re-inventing oneself: "She didn't even have to be Angie Bose; she could invent a flashy Bollywoodish first name, like Dimple or Twinkle or Sprinkle. Why not?" (*India*, 96). She is intoxicated by her new-found freedom: "How liberating it felt, creating characters, obliterating oneself, being a composite" (*India*, 101). Her enthusiasm for reinventing herself is ignited by her visit to a coffee shop where she meets a group of fast-talking, American-accented customer service agents with invented American names. However, securing accommodation with Peter's contact Minnie Bagehot[17] in her colonial-era mansion requires her to be "a very proper, upstanding girl from a very good family" or "someone who does a good imitation of being a proper, upstanding girl from a very good family" (*India*, 105). Thus, Anjali must be resurrected once again, but as a much-improved version of the original.

When Anjali becomes a Bagehot Girl (a lodger at Bagehot House), the narration returns to alternating between Anjali and Angie, indicating that Anjali has gained control of her double personality and code-switches between her self-fashioned characters according to need. Anjali appears mainly in the context of her lodgings and dealings with people there, whereas Angie demonstrates the more international and streetwise side of Anjali. For example, "Angie could go along with Tookie's cynical theories" (*India*, 119), but "as a Bagehot-Girl-in-training, Anjali took to heart her first set of instructions: nothing is quite as it seems" (*India*, 122). Angie goes out with one of her housemates, the streetwise Tookie, and listens to her gossip about

[17] The name Bagehot is most likely an allusion referring to Walter Bagehot, journalist, essayist, and author of *The English Constitution* (1867), who is also known for developing a form of pseudo-scientific racism (see, for example, Prochaska 2013).

Minnie, whereas Anjali tries to learn the rules of Bagehot House to make a good impression.

To save on expenses and to make the money donated by Peter last a little longer, Anjali begins to dip into other tenants' toiletries. Once again, she explains her behavior with her divided identity: "Gauripur's Anjali had been too timid to experiment with expensive toiletries, and Gauripur's Angie too proud to stoop to stealing. Bangalore's Anjali, a creature of fantasy, considered herself a wily survivor, leveling an uneven playing field" (*India*, 136). Anjali pardons herself for stealing by assigning the blame to her invented persona. When Tookie takes Anjali along for a wild night out, she explains that she feels more like an Angie (*India*, 191). It is Angie who loses count of how many drinks she had and who paid for them; Angie who throws up on the sidewalk (ibid.). Bangalore's Angie is a modern woman and can occasionally get out of control.

Angie's persona accelerates to a new level when Husseina, yet another Bagehot House tenant, wakes Anjali up in the middle of the night and gives her all her expensive clothes and other belongings in exchange for Anjali's old T-shirts and jeans. She proceeds to sneak out of the house, never to be seen again. With a new wardrobe, Angie can finally look the part she plays: "Without even trying, Anjali slipped into her high-wattage Angie persona. Angie was smart, sexy, and special. Angie's steps had a bouncy lightness, her posture an eye-catching swagger" (*India*, 209–10). Anjali/Angie's dual personality not only enables her success, but also allows her to deflect all blame to her other persona, whoever it might be at the time: "She could not be held responsible for anything that happened in her life because she was not an initiator of actions. Angie the bold one, the initiator, was beyond blame, or shame. Anjali just watched and let things happen" (*India*, 224). Operating as a double offers Anjali/Angie the chance to always 'outsource' taking responsibility, be it for action or inaction.

Completely self-absorbed and unaware of what is gradually building up around her, Anjali allows herself to be taken advantage of. Husseina is involved in a terrorist plot in Europe, and by stealing Anjali's identity, manages to frame her. Bagehot House is raided and looted with the aid of Minnie Bagehot's long-suffering servant, and Minnie dies in the mayhem. Anjali is arrested, accused of both involvement in terrorism and Minnie's murder. Badgered by the police, Anjali's façade crumbles and, yet again, she tries to distance herself from the trauma: "It was not happening to her. This is not happening to me; it is happening to Angie. I am a ghost" (*India*, 258). Anjali is rescued from her cell by her new-found love interest, Mr. GG, and Rabi already the following day. Her harrowing experience has left its mark, and she finds herself without a stable identity to cling to. "*I am just a copy*," she realizes as she walks out of the police station with Mr. GG (*India*, 262). Anjali's words indicate a self-awareness of Angie not being a real person, but merely a version of who she

wanted to be in borrowed clothes, a copy of a copy. Bhabha (1984, 129) names this desire to emerge as 'authentic' through mimicry "the final irony of partial representation." Authenticity through imitation is impossible.

Part Four, the final section of the novel, opens with Anjali staying with Rabi at his aunt Parvati and uncle Auro's house in Dollar Colony, an upscale neighborhood. Bangalore's Angie has evaporated, leaving only a shattered Anjali behind. When Rabi attempts to drag her out for a run and calls her Angie, she recoils: "'I'm not Angie,' she mumbled, scrambling to a half-sitting position. 'I guess I never was.' *Tell me my name. Don't ask me, don't ask me anything*" (*India*, 270). Anjali has finally dropped both of her performances but is now at a loss regarding her real self. She also must face the surge of emotions regarding her rape and her father's subsequent suicide.[18]

Anjali is slowly nursed back to health but continues to be unsure of who she is and what she should do next. After everything that has happened to her in a very short time, she is overwhelmed by Parvati's kindness and doubtful of what use she could be to her: "*Tell me who I am, please. Tell me because I haven't the foggiest, other than the fact that I seethe with envy and rage*" (*India*, 321). Parvati suggests that Anjali is like a reflecting pool: "You give back wavy clues to what *we* are or what we're going to be" (ibid.). Parvati's reply is by no means a dismissal of a shallow personality that can only reflect what is projected on to it. Her *we* is a collective "we" beyond Parvati, Auro, Mr. GG and Rabi. The "we" refers to India, an Indian "us" – with the likes of Anjali, young women with untapped potential as their future.

This untapped potential is used when Mr. GG sets up an interview for Anjali at RecoverySys, a debt-recovery agency. In the epilogue, Anjali/Angie travels to Gauripur with Parvati to visit her old school, as well as Peter and Ali. She is introduced at the school as a success story, and the narrator of the passage, an admiring student of Peter's, explains that "if we were ready to listen, and to act, she had lessons to teach us" (*India*, 326). It is worth noting that Anjali's employer, RecoverySys, is a Sindhi-owned business (*India*, 317), and thus in her career, too, she is contributing to building an Indian India, instead of working in outsourced customer care for an American corporation. Mukherjee suggests that for new Indians like Anjali, in addition to caste and class, communality has less significance than for previous generations (ibid.). For example, Anjali does not share her parents' prejudices regarding non-Bengalis, and thus working for one is not a problem for her. Through Anjali's story, *India* effectively demonstrates that the past must be processed before progress is possible. The next section explores how India's colonial

[18] Anjali's father hangs himself after he discovers from the newspaper that Subodh Mitra is a serial rapist and swindler of dowry gifts (*India* 315–16).

past continues to permeate the present, and how Anjali is transformed by her negotiation of it.

3.2.2 Colonial Trauma Revisited

India draws a clear parallel between colonial oppression during the British Raj and current economic and linguistic neocolonialism. The role of the English language is significant in India's current economic boom and in the creation of a new middle class, which Anjali and her peers represent. Simultaneously, Indians must come to terms with the baggage that the English language carries from the colonial era. Sociolinguist Alastair Pennycook (2002, 14) observes that teaching English in the colonies led to the spread of English all over the world, but teaching English was also at the very core of colonial ideology and firmly embedded in colonial discourse. Many English language teaching specialists of the mid-twentieth century were employed in the education sector in India before the country's independence (Pennycook 2002, 227). English was the language that could bestow knowledge, civilization, and wealth on people, but it was also the language in which they were racially defined (Pennycook 2002, 17). Perhaps surprisingly for a work as recent as *India*, not much appears to have changed, as the novel depicts a society in which English skills determine the career path and success of young Indians.

The connection between power and language is naturally not new and has been studied extensively (see, for example, de Certeau 1986; Bourdieu 1991). The link between language skills and socioeconomic upward mobility resonates with the new middle class depicted in Mukherjee's novel. Anjali is very insecure about her English skills, knowing how much depends on them. She assesses the English accent of every new person she meets and attempts to define their social class based on it. These remarks are continuous; it is an element in *India* that the reader is expected to notice.

Naturally, the role of the English language is not only negative. English in culture, like currency in economics, is a medium through which knowledge is translated from the local to the global (Arac 2002, 35). However, English has been constructed to be viewed as a superior language and coupled with the belief that knowing it well endows the speaker with a better ability to describe the world (Pennycook 2002, 268). This view in turn creates the assumption that a native speaker of English would be a better teacher as well as having superior knowledge about the world (ibid.). In *India* this applies to the character of Peter Champion, who is Anjali's teacher and in some ways a role model as well. He, too, is transformed in the novel, when he understands that despite spending thirty years in India, he looks at Anjali and India entirely through an expatriate's lens. Peter Champion is, in fact, a kind of travel writer; he has, for example, written a book on Indian architecture (this is how he met Minnie Bagehot), and traveled extensively all over India to

conduct his research. Travel writing often reveals how the Other is constructed in Western discourse, and how that shares a continuity with colonial discourse, despite attempts to do exactly the opposite (Pennycook 2002, 307). In *India*, Peter Champion's intentions are good, he sincerely wants the best for Anjali, but he fails to notice what significance family ties or India's colonial history have for her. He appears to think that good English skills are all that she needs to be successful, and that any other issues will be resolved by themselves. By the end of the novel, he realizes the error of his ways, and unlearns his privileged position.

Anjali's first exposure to her generation in Bangalore takes place in a coffee shop soon after her arrival. The café is full of call center employees with American names who speak fast with American accents, and Anjali, who has good English skills, has trouble keeping up with the repartee (*India*, 90). The characters, who resemble caricatures, display a combination of mimicry and mockery (see Bhabha 1984; 1994, 21–31) in their self-fashioning of American selves while simultaneously making fun of their American customers. In Mukherjee's own words: "They are role-playing 'an American' without giving up being 'Indian'" (Lavigilante 2014, 182). However, "Mukherjee's call center agents are reconstructing 'Indian' in a contemporary India that is very different from that of their parents and grandparents" (ibid.). Anjali voices a similar idea: "The call center survivalist inhabits separate yet simultaneous lives. These were the luckiest times to be young, adventurous, and Indian" (*India*, 210). The key issue involving identity formation is in the phrase "to be Indian without giving up being Indian." The novel elaborates on the perils of losing oneself in an environment in which most individuals are uprooted and no one really knows anything about the people they meet.

The ethic of the call centers is called to question in the novel as well, but defended by Indian characters, Anjali's later benefactors, Usha Desai and Parvati Banerji of CCI, which trains future customer service agents. Usha argues that imitating or impersonating Americans does not pave the path to success:

> "That's what we told our corporate clients. Do you want a human answering tape, or do you want a proactive, efficient employee?" […] Parvati spoke of having trained young women from mofussil towns and villages to handle complicated questions on insurance claims. Women who might have remained illiterate and dependent were now earning decent paychecks. "The point Usha and I have made is that the Indian accent is a sign of competence." (*India*, 165)

Usha and Parvati cite the positive effects on society and the position of women in India brought about by the customer service outsourcing trend in defense of their line of work.

Angie continues to aspire to the perfect American accent, but Anjali makes a shocking discovery at Bagehot House. In "Minnie's museum," an off-limits part of the mansion, Anjali finds framed colonial-era photographs, most likely of the Jallianwala Bagh (Amritsar) massacre of 1919, hanging on the wall. The photographs are of bodies along a riverbank, bodies stacked like firewood, and among the bodies, British soldiers: "One had his foot on the head of a dead Sikh, striking the pose of the Great White Hunter. Maybe he was the young Maxfield Bagehot"[19] (*India*, 138). The photographs not only sicken and anger Anjali, but also awaken her patriotism, invoking an appreciation for Indian freedom fighters she had never experienced before. Furthermore, she parallels the injustices of the colonial era with her own situation:

> Which side of this picture are you on? Is your foot on my head, are you a hanged fighter, or were you laughing at the sight of men dangling by their turbans and women's bodies clogging the riverbanks? Everyone in my life has tried to change me, make me want something alien, and make me ashamed that I might not be good enough. Why would I want to change my name and my accent, why should I plead for a chance to be allowed to take calls from people who've spent too much money or driven their cars into a ditch? (ibid.)

Faced with the ambivalence of her position, Anjali realizes for the first time that though independent, India is not free, but firmly a part of the global economy and governed by its laws. A part of this governance is the Anglicization individuals are subjected to in their quest for job opportunities and upward mobility.

Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010, 2) describe affect as "in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*". The rage Anjali feels in Minnie's "museum of unsorted, uncurated horrors", as she calls Bagehot House, is a forceful, embodied experience, and the rage she feels becomes a transformative emotion. It provides a much-needed confidence boost in her search for work. Anjali also begins to question her motivation to perfect her English accent and work at a call center, but enrolls on a course with Usha and Parvati's company CCI regardless, as she does not have a viable alternative. However, she fails the final test when faced with a difficult, racist American test customer. Anjali is surprised by her own response: "If only she could say 'Go to hell!' Her own anger shocked her, as it had that day in Minnie's spare room" (*India*, 238). Anjali's rage replicates her response to the photographs in Bagehot House, and she makes a connection between the physical violence of the British Raj and the psychological violence inflicted by her

[19] Minnie Bagehot's long dead husband, who was a British officer nearly fifty years her senior.

customer. Anjali's conversation with her American test customer becomes a pivotal moment, as after that phone call, she finally casts Angie permanently aside. When she returns to Bagehot House that day, the mansion is in uproar, and Anjali is taken for Husseina and arrested (see 3.2.1).

By the end of the novel, Anjali does discover her identity – an identity that refuses to imitate, impersonate, or serve. She no longer needs Angie and is finally at ease as Anjali. She is committed to building India as India itself, and not as a generic, inferior copy of somewhere else. Anjali's transformation is initiated by her language skills, but not in the way that she originally assumed. She is transformed not through her English skills or knowledge of American culture, but through her understanding of the function of English and the laws of a global economy in her country as a playground of old colonial patterns. This ambivalent relationship, which recognizes that English is a cultural intrusion and linked to colonial authority, but also the language of success, is one that is omnipresent in colonial contexts (Pennycook 2002, 361). Whether or not postcolonial and neocolonial contexts can ever be free from the baggage of the past remains a relevant question. It requires the learning of English along with the unlearning of colonial ideology, and adapting traditional values to a transnational environment, not adopting the values of a foreign power. The solution that Mukherjee's novel offers is encouraging: leave it to the Anjalis, the Miss New Indias. However, *India* too reminds the reader that not every story is a tale of success, and not even a privileged position can guarantee happiness, as illustrated by Anjali's physical doppelgänger, Husseina Shiraz.

3.2.3 The Conniving Doppelgänger

This final section of analysis of *India* moves away from the examination of the performative double to the investigation of a more concrete literary device, a manifest double. In addition to the performative double Anjali/Angie, *India* includes a protagonist's physical doppelgänger, a character called Husseina Shiraz. She is a boarder at Bagehot House, a Muslim girl from Hyderabad, and her likeness to Anjali is made clear from the first time the two meet:

> She was as tall as Anjali and as fair, with the same green eyes. […] *We could almost pass for sisters, more than my own sister and I could*. Husseina also seemed to notice that likeness, staring almost to the point of remarking on it, then turned her head. *Sisters*, Anjali thought again, *only if I dressed up in expensive silks*. (*India*, 113)

Husseina's reasons for being in Bangalore are ambiguous; she comes from a rich family, has a perfect American accent acquired at an American school in Dubai, and

a fiancé in London. Anjali is envious of her accent, money, poise, and even her larger room at Bagehot House. The two are on friendly terms regardless, but Anjali feels frustrated by Husseina's secrecy because she discloses hardly anything about her background or her future plans. Anjali's other housemate Tookie has a more carefree attitude, and "often remarked, there was no point in worrying about Husseina's motives: 'She's so rich, she lives on a different planet'" (*India*, 152).

Despite her reticence, Husseina appears generous, and even gives Anjali one of her very expensive silk gharara suits to wear for a party.

> "Pistachio matches your eyes." She pulled Anjali closer to her, pressing her body hard against Anjali as if trying to fuse their flesh. "The same greenish eyes, would you believe?"
>
> Husseina's sudden intensity frightened Anjali, but she didn't want to risk losing the chance to borrow an expensive gharara that might inflame Mr. GG.
>
> "We could be sisters," Husseina continued. "If we dressed alike, I bet we could pass for twins." She laughed as she handed the crystal-speckled outfit to Anjali. "I want you to have this. And not just for tonight." (ibid.)

Anjali is surprised, but unsuspecting of Husseina's intensity. The likeness of the two women is emphasized, foreshadowing that one will indeed pass for the other. There is a sinister aura around Husseina's character, and hints are dropped along the way about her views of the world. At the dinner table on Peter's visit to Bagehot House, she remarks that there is a revolution going on in India (*India*, 166), and her hostility towards Peter, as a foreigner and an American, continues the following day. She is livid when she hears Asoke, Minnie's servant, call Peter *sahib* – a polite title, but with the additional meaning of "master" during the colonial era (*India*, 172).

The small clues that are dropped along the way about everything not being above board with Husseina culminate in her departure from Bagehot House in the middle of the night. She gives all her belongings to Anjali in exchange for her T-shirts and jeans. Husseina does not reveal where she is planning to go or why, but, instead, fans out a fistful of passports from her purse:

> "My father does favors," she said. "People give him things, like free identities. What should I be tonight? American? No, too risky. Canadian? Too cold. Qatari, Aussie, Kiwi, Pakistani, Indian … what-oh-what does poor little Husseina want to be? Where do I want to go? I've got all the damned fucking choices in the world. I've got a million of them." She gestured at Minnie's posters of bland British children playing with pets. "I'm like those fucking little girls up there on the wall. Instead of kittens, I've got passports. That's all I've got." […] "Fake

> identities are very easy when your whole life's been one big fucking fake." (*India*, 195)

The identity Husseina chooses that night is that of Anjali Bose. She travels to London and is involved in an unsuccessful terrorist plot to bomb Heathrow Airport. When Anjali is arrested in Bangalore, the police are in possession of a passport with her personal details and a photo of Husseina wearing Anjali's T-shirt. Weeks later, another passport in Anjali's name is discovered in an abandoned purse in Amsterdam, and later that day, the body of a young Indian woman in a hotel in the same city. The police believe that the young woman is Husseina, who hanged herself by a T-shirt from the shower stall.

Mukherjee's novels often include intricate sub-plots that may or may not have significance for the main plot. The inclusion of the Husseina sub-plot in *India* continues Mukherjee's commentary on international terrorism in the first two parts of the Bengali trilogy and reaffirms what was already implied through the character of Abbas Sattar Hai in *Daughters* and *Bride* that a terrorist's motives are more personal than political. Husseina had never wanted to leave India. Her estranged husband is involved in terrorist activity and Husseina proves to be useful for the cause. The reasons for Husseina's suicide are not entirely clear, but her unhappiness is. Her unstable tirade on the night of her departure from Bagehot House suggests that she would have preferred to permanently change places with Anjali, to be independent and unattached: "Husseina was talking into a vacuum, not expecting answers. […] She was like a spinning top. There was an edge to every word she spat out, as though the next one might come out as a scream" (*India*, 194–96). Husseina's anguish illustrates how superficial a position of privilege can be for a woman in a patriarchal society. Her predicament as the poor little rich girl is not unlike that of Tara Chatterjee discussed in section 3.1, but much more sinister.

The juxtaposition of the two women is intriguing. Anjali has nothing, but she is free; Husseina has unlimited material means, but she is unable to do as she pleases with her father and husband tugging at her puppet strings. As often is the case in traditional doppelgänger narratives, one of the characters must die, and in this story, it is Husseina. The mental well-being of the doppelgängers advances in opposite directions. At the beginning of the story, Anjali's identity is fragmented but heals, whereas Husseina appears to be self-assured and composed. However, her perfection is merely a façade which shatters entirely. For Anjali, Husseina is yet another example of the effect of light and angles, and that "*truth is more shocking than lies*" (*India*, 197). Husseina is not at all what she seems to be, and once again, Anjali has been duped by an image which proves to be false. Also, Anjali's acquaintance with Husseina offers her an important lesson on the insignificance of material wealth that she too has coveted and envied.

Through the character of Husseina, *India* provides commentary on the global unrest in the aftermath of 9/11. The "success" of the devastating terrorist attacks in New York sparked not only a distrust of ethnic minorities in North America and Europe, but also a string of terrorist attacks of varying scale and effect all over the world. Through the characters of Husseina and Abbas Sattar Hai, Mukherjee's texts appear to suggest that terrorists do not act solely out of political and ideological motivation but are equally driven by personal interests.

3.3 Concluding Remarks

Despite differing characters, plots, and settings, the three parts of Mukherjee's Bengali trilogy are closely connected thematically. All three explore how the echoes of India's colonial past are reflected in present-day individuals both in the United States and in India. In all three novels, deliverance from the past is brought about by the double. In *Daughters* and *Bride*, Tara Chatterjee, the double of her ancestor Tara Lata, liberates her by writing and publishing her life story, as well as by giving her a proper Hindu cremation ceremony in Varanasi. In *India*, Anjali wavers between her Indian identity and that of Angie, an Americanized version of herself, until she is confronted by photographic evidence of a brutal event in the history of the British Raj and feels it resonate in her present reality. Mukherjee's novel effectively highlights the ambivalence of 'neocolonial authority' in India by depicting individuals who, in Bhabha's terms, negotiate roles between "*mimicry* – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to *menace*, a difference that is almost total but not quite" (Bhabha 1984, 132). Mutiny as a 'menace' to colonial authority has been replaced by international terrorism in neocolonial contexts. Sins of the past cast long shadows in all three novels.

The trilogy focuses on the formation and negotiation of migrant identities, advocating for a fluidity and hybridity instead of a rigid identification with one or the other. In Tara Chatterjee's case, this entails reconnecting to her Bengali roots after more than fifteen years in the United States. Anjali is an internal migrant in Bangalore, but the metropolis is so different from her hometown in Bihar that she might just as well have landed on another planet. In addition to geographic distance, Anjali appears to have hopped across several decades into the glass skyscrapers of Bangalore. Tara Chatterjee, in turn, is transported back in time to the Shoonder Bon jungle in the nineteenth century. Read together, the novels span nearly two hundred years of Indian history. Both Tara Chatterjee's surprising discoveries about her ancestor and Anjali's visit to the "museum of curated horrors" in Bagehot House prove that colonialism travels across generations, permeating the present, and must be reckoned with by postcolonial individuals in order to gain a better understanding of their current condition. Furthermore, the texts suggest that some form of catharsis

is required. In *Bride*, it is Tara Lata's proxy cremation in Varanasi, and in *India*, the demolition of Bagehot House. Tara Chatterjee believes that Tara Lata's soul has been set free, and new buildings will be constructed on the Bagehot House property.

Achieving an emotional catharsis is more complex, and this is attained with the help of the double. In *Daughters* and *Bride*, the identity of the protagonist is multiplied in the form of the two Taras. In *India*, the protagonist's identity is doubled by splitting, a division into Anjali and Angie. Tara Chatterjee achieves wholeness through writing, Anjali through a breakdown in which she must cast off the fake identity she no longer can or wants to inhabit.

The Bengali trilogy gives voice to the silenced victims of India's past and present: the likes of Tara Lata and her villagers, as well as the thousands of modern-day young women flocking to Indian cities in hope of a better future. In its cyclical conception of time, the trilogy provides a multilayered and plurivocal view of a country in which past and present are intricately intertwined.

4 The Double as an Envoy of Filial Trauma in Jhumpa Lahiri's Writing

It's without you that I'm nothing.

(Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Lowland*)

Jhumpa Lahiri (1967–) was born Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri in London, England, to parents of Indo-Bengali origin, and moved to Rhode Island in the United States with her family when she was still an infant. Lahiri's nickname, Jhumpa, became her proper name to be used outside her home when her kindergarten teacher found Nilanjana too long and difficult to pronounce. Lahiri has later commented in an interview that "I always felt so embarrassed by my name. You feel like you're causing someone pain just by being who you are" (Gourkanti 2013). Naming, unnaming, renaming, and their significance on the formation and metamorphosis of identity have been important in Lahiri's works; her first novel, *The Namesake* (2003), which was made into a film in 2006, focused on this theme.

Lahiri became a household name at the turn of the millennium with the publication of her Pulitzer-winning short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). Her writing has since developed a vast international audience; her published works in English have mainly focused on the experiences of Indo-Bengali immigrants and their descendants in contemporary New England, yet they address universal themes, appealing to wide and varied audiences.

Lahiri's ethnicity, as well as the thematic choices and characters in her works, have caused controversy among critics and literary scholars regarding her categorization: Is she "a Bengali writer? An Indian writer? An Asian-American writer? A postcolonial writer? An American writer? A global writer?" (Dhingra and Cheung 2012, xiii). These categories as such do not benefit one in the analysis of Lahiri's works, but Lavina Dhingra and Floyd Cheung (2012, xiv) argue that naming the canon or canons to which Lahiri's writing belongs may influence how different kinds of audiences read the works, and how and in which contexts these works are taught and interpreted. Despite the classification-elusiveness of Lahiri's writing, her works do bear the burden of ethnic representation. The literary qualities of Lahiri's

works have been given due recognition, but she has been criticized for her portrayal of the Indo-Bengali diaspora. Not surprisingly, considering the similar feedback that Divakaruni and Mukherjee have been subjected to, Lahiri's portrayal of the South Asian minority has been acclaimed for its realism as well as accused of exoticization. In Lahiri's defense, it can be argued that not unlike other South Asian Americans, she writes from her own experience, about issues that she is familiar with. Locating her stories in New England among educated migrants who are affluent enough to send their offspring to Ivy League colleges excludes most people of South Asian origin in the United States. However, accusing Lahiri of too limited a representation of her diaspora is redundant; as a writer, an inclusive and realistic representation of Indo-Bengali migrants is not as much of an aim as the ability to depict the universal human condition, with all relevant emotions involved.

Even with more political topics, Lahiri's focus remains on the individual. Due to her migrant heritage, one might expect an engagement with the politics of gender and ethnicity. Lahiri has mainly ignored this expectation, even though her works do tackle issues of cultural identity. Lahiri's style may be subtle, but she drives her point across regarding the realities of model migrant families, the compensatory aspects of intergenerational relationships within the family, and the displacement experienced by members of a diaspora. Ambreen Hai (2012, 206) suggests that Lahiri's second short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) articulates "with poise, delicacy and sensitivity, the multiple and different problems of re-rooting/rerouting from one family to another, from one culture to another, the difficulties of simultaneously retaining and forming communities." Hai adds that Lahiri's greatest contribution and cultural value may lie in her success in building a transnational community through her writing (ibid.). She has succeeded in gaining a transnational audience for her works.

Perhaps motivated by the will to emphasize the universality of human experiences, or simply due to a passion for the Italian language, Lahiri has lately chosen to write in Italian. Her most recent novel *Dove Mi Trovo* was published in 2018 and was translated into English by herself as *Whereabouts* (2021). In addition, Lahiri continues to translate the writing of others from Italian into English, for example, Domenico Starnone's novels *Ties* (2017) and *Trick* (2018). *The Penguin Classics Book of Italian Short Stories*, edited and introduced by Lahiri, was published in 2019.

For a successful writer to turn away from English to write in Italian has been hard to accept for critics, fans, and scholars alike (Pellas 2017). Fewer people are skilled enough in Italian to read the original versions of her texts, and most existing Lahiri scholars are affiliated with English literature departments rather than Italian and do not study translated texts. Lahiri has explained that audience expectations based on her previous works became a heavy burden. In an interview with Francesca

Pellas (2017), Lahiri advocates for "freedom to write in my own way, to write whatever I want in whichever language, form, length, and without any pressure." Hence, the classification-elusive author has successfully escaped categorization even as an Anglophone writer.

The two works by Lahiri studied here in relation to the literary double are "Hema and Kaushik" (2008) and *The Lowland* (2013, later *Lowland*). The former comprises three short stories that share the same main characters, the titular Hema and Kaushik, bound in a narrative of impossible love. "Hema and Kaushik" was published as Part Two of the short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* (later *Earth*), with Part One (without an additional title) consisting of five independent short stories. The three stories in Part Two are titled "Once in a Lifetime," "Year's End," and "Going Ashore." The stories can be read individually as coherent entities but form an episodic novella when read together.

Unlike her first short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*, in which Lahiri's focus was on first-generation migrants in the United States, *Earth* is centered on the lives of second-generation Americans of Bengali origin. Put together, the eight stories in the collection function like a prism, echoing each other, offering variations on the same themes. Characters within the stories are frequently juxtaposed, with emphasis on intergenerational relationships and conflicts.

Lahiri refrains from discussing autobiographical elements in her works in much detail but has referred to the displacement she experienced growing up on several occasions, saying, for example, that "my upbringing and my sister's upbringing were almost hydroponic because our roots had nowhere to cling" (Hore 2011). She suggests that her experiences differed from her parents' because they had "originally come from a land somewhere, firm ground. The fact that they lived away from it was a source of pain and unhappiness and frustration, but there was a land they thought of as home" (ibid.). *Earth* voices this rift between the experiences of first- and second-generation migrant individuals.

The negotiation of cultural identities is a central theme in *Earth*, particularly in illustrating how descendants of migrants build their identity from inherited cultural norms and values, and from the norms and values of the surrounding society. The short story cycle explores how well, or badly, second-generation migrants succeed in "striking their roots into unaccustomed earth," as the book's epigraph, borrowed from Nathaniel Hawthorne's introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, "The Custom-House" (1850), so hopefully declares. The main conflict in all the stories is the gap between the expectations of first-generation immigrant parents and the wishes of their American children.

As is often the case in Lahiri's writing, temporal shifts are frequent in "Hema and Kaushik" as well as in other stories in *Earth*. The past is constantly present, demonstrating how the characters are unable to reach their full potential until they

have achieved some closure with the past, and how they succeed in negotiating their own cultural hybridity. Susan Koshy (2013, 355) has applied the term *filial gothic* to describe these intergenerational narratives in *Earth*, based on the stories' recurring formula of parental expectation and the conflicting will of the offspring, resulting in the disintegration of filial relationships. I have previously argued that the female characters in *Earth* appear better able to negotiate their hybrid identities than their male counterparts, and though tested, their filial ties are not always severed in the stories (Arjopalo 2015).

The Lowland, Lahiri's second novel and her last fictional work in English so far, is the story the author claims she had wanted to write from the very beginning of her career, drawing from an incident she had first heard about on a visit to Calcutta (Nelson 2013). Not far from Lahiri's grandparents' house, two activist brothers had been shot by the police in front of their parents. More political than her earlier works, *Lowland* is the depiction of two brothers whose lives are dramatically altered by the Naxal movement[20] in Bengal in the late 1960s. *Lowland* portrays controversial protagonists: an activist involved in bomb-making as well as plotting and carrying out a murder, a man who marries his brother's widow in a posthumous attempt to triumph over him, and a mother who abandons her adolescent daughter to pursue an academic career. Applying her skill in creating complex rather than likeable characters to the fullest in *Lowland*, Lahiri's creations are believable, multidimensional, and cleverly juxtaposed with each other. The reader finds it impossible to side with one individual against another, as all are given plenty of reason to act as they do. *Lowland* also raises some basic existential questions regarding the human condition and purpose.

Any analysis of *Lowland* cannot ignore the story's political undertones, despite it not having a political agenda as such. By this I mean that the novel is not an instrument for a political cause, but instead illustrates the effects of a political crisis on both the nation and its individual citizens, offers an accurate depiction of the lifecycle of a political movement, and explores what "dying for a cause" entails.

Both "Hema and Kaushik" and *Lowland* employ the literary double in exploration of the effects of family secrets and trauma. The repression and silence

20 The Naxal movement is also known as the Naxalbari or Naxalite movement. The movement arose from an initially small episode in Naxalbari, West Bengal in May 1967. The police fired at tenant farmers who expressed their objections to an unfair division of the produce. Radical communist leaders were soon involved, and the event led to "land-grabbing," the unauthorized occupancy of farming land by tenant farmers in the countryside, as well as a students' movement protesting government control and ideology in larger cities. The movement developed into a violent and long-lasting insurrection that strained the democratic ideals of the new independent nation (Asl 2018, 383).

surrounding these events have severe consequences in the texts, not only for the individuals themselves, but for their descendants too.

"Hema and Kaushik" includes several doubles: the protagonists form a male/female double reminiscent of the examples by Joanne Blum (1988) discussed in section 1.1. Furthermore, there are two gothic doppelgängers, one for Hema and the other for Kaushik, acting as foils for the protagonists with the purpose of foreshadowing future events. *Lowland* depicts a male variation of the sibling double in Divakaruni's works, discussed in Chapter 2, a double equally characterized by guilt but with an additional competitive component. The next section analyzes "Hema and Kaushik" and its doubles in more detail, followed by a discussion of *Lowland* in section 4.2.

4.1 The Coupled Double

"Hema and Kaushik" spans the lives of two second-generation Indo-Bengali Americans from childhood into their late thirties through three instalments: "Once in a Lifetime" (later "Lifetime") takes place when Hema is thirteen and Kaushik sixteen, "Year's End" (later "End") when Kaushik is in his early twenties, and "Going Ashore" (later "Ashore") when the couple is in their late thirties. The two meet as children through their parents, who are friends and members of the same Indo-Bengali community in Boston.

In "Lifetime," Kaushik's family stays with Hema's while house-hunting when they return to Boston after seven years in India. Hema has a crush on the aloof Kaushik, while Hema's mother finds Kaushik's mother Parul much changed and is unable to rekindle their earlier friendship. At the end of the story, Kaushik reveals to Hema that Parul has terminal breast cancer. "Lifetime" is narrated in the first person by Hema, who addresses her story to Kaushik using the second person pronoun "you."

"End" takes place five years later, three years after Parul's death, and is narrated by Kaushik. He, too, addresses his narrative to a "you," which is Hema, in an unspecified time and place. Kaushik's father has remarried, to a Bengali widow twenty years his junior, with two young daughters from her previous marriage. Kaushik returns home during his Christmas break from college, only to find his father changed and his new family members difficult to relate to. Seeing Chitra, his father's new wife, in his mother's place triggers his grief for Parul. When Kaushik finds his stepsiblings Rupa and Piu looking at photographs of Parul which have been hidden away in a shoebox by Kaushik's father, he is furious, berates the girls, and leaves abruptly. He drives north along the East Coast, and finally buries the photographs in a remote and scenic spot close to the Canadian border. Rupa and Piu never reveal the events that caused Kaushik to leave to their parents. The house Parul

last called home is sold, as Chitra prefers the closeness of other Bengalis and an Indian grocer to the proximity of the ocean and modernist architecture ("End," 292), and Kaushik heads to South America following his college graduation.

"Ashore" is set in Rome some nineteen years after "End." Hema and Kaushik meet by accident through a common acquaintance; Kaushik is now a photojournalist and lives in the city, whereas Hema is a classics scholar on research leave. Not wanting to face middle age without a husband and children ("Ashore," 298), Hema has agreed to marry Navin, an Indian physics professor whom she has met only a few times, set up by her parents. Kaushik has accepted a job offer as a photo editor in Hong Kong and is about to move there after a brief holiday in Thailand en route. Hema and Kaushik have a whirlwind romance ending in tears, as Hema is not ready to follow him to Hong Kong and Kaushik does not propose marriage or offer to accompany her in the United States. After the couple bids farewell to each other, Hema marries Navin in Calcutta and Kaushik perishes in the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami.

"Ashore" is narrated by an omniscient narrator, excluding the last few, epilogue-like paragraphs which are again narrated by Hema for Kaushik. These choices regarding narration allow the reader to create a sense of intimacy with each of the main characters separately before the characters reunite as adults in the third and final short story which seals their destinies. The first-person viewpoint and second-person address in "Lifetime" and "End" give the stories an intimate, but very literary quality. The reader's attempt, and unavoidable failure, to determine a time and place for when the actual narration (from Hema to Kaushik and vice versa) takes place assigns an ethereal, intangible quality to the narrative, as well as a touch of the uncanny.

The narrative is abundant with gothic features, but a classification as a gothic text does not affect the form or function of the double in the narrative as such, since the application of the literary device is more complex than in more traditional gothic fiction. There is a melancholic mood in all three stories, a sense of nostalgia permeated with regret. David Punter (2000, 132) argues that as a discourse of loss, the postcolonial relates to trauma, and "thus inevitably [deals] with mourning and melancholy." Lahiri is considered first and foremost a realist writer, and the gothic elements in her texts have received little attention except for Koshy's (2013, 355) analysis of *Earth* as a filial gothic story cycle, portraying the debt-bound quality of intergenerational relationships. Loss and mourning are difficult, if not altogether impossible, to articulate, and the gothic form is able to express this void by giving voice to that which is repressed and unspeakable. The gothic features in "Hema and Kaushik" are discussed in more detail in section 4.1.2 after the analysis of the bond between Hema and Kaushik in the next section.

4.1.1 Hema and Kaushik: Magnets That Attract and Repel

My reading offers that Hema and Kaushik are each other's doubles, illustrating the conflicted cultural identities of second-generation migrants. The characters' lack of intimacy is paralleled by their hybrid identities: "each one experiences a different tangled inheritance of rootedness and drifting" (Bess 2012, 117). The different paths the characters choose, or are driven to, in the story, depict the fragmentation and displacement that diasporic subjects often feel.

Hema and Kaushik are childhood acquaintances eventually turned lovers, whose strong bond defies the ordinary. Kaushik is a constant presence in Hema's life even when physically absent. Their families are acquainted through their mothers, who meet before Hema is even born:

> Our mothers met when mine was pregnant. She didn't know it yet; she was feeling dizzy and sat down on a bench in a small park. Your mother was perched on a swing, gently swaying back and forth as you soared above her, when she noticed a young Bengali woman in a sari, wearing vermilion in her hair. "Are you feeling all right?" your mother asked in the polite form. She told you to get off the swing, and then she and you escorted my mother home. It was during that walk that your mother suggested that perhaps mine was expecting. They became instant friends, spending their days together while our fathers were at work. ("Lifetime," 224–25)

The two women recognize their common origins, and as is often the case in South Asian diaspora fiction, their entire friendship is based on this shared memory of the land they were born in. In her analysis of "Hema and Kaushik," Delphine Munos (2013, 9) writes that with the nearly unnoticeable shift in this section of the narration from Hema to a first-person omniscient narrator describing how Hema and Kaushik's mothers first met (before Hema was born, and therefore could not have been present), an imaginary narrative of these common origins is reproduced between Hema and Kaushik, mimicking the bond between their mothers. Hema's own identity is dissolved and merged with her mother's recollections (ibid.). Munos suggests that "the narrative implies here that there is no returning to the originating moment of the bond between the two protagonists without a collapse of identities between the generations and a dismantling of the polarities between inner and outer, between fantasy and reality, as well as between the past and the present" (ibid.). Hema and Kaushik's identities, as well as their mutual relationship, have an intergenerational quality, in which their very existence is bound to the intricate web of the diaspora community. Munos (ibid.) further argues that by indirectly involving Kaushik in Hema's birth (by being present when Hema's mother realizes that she is pregnant), the narrator "fuses their selves together by inserting *him* inside the

primitive moment of *her* own origination." Hema and Kaushik are bound together from the beginning, if such a beginning can even be traced.

Hema further recalls how she was fed in Kaushik's old high chair and pushed along the streets in his old pram ("Lifetime," 225). Years later, after Kaushik's family has moved to India, Hema describes how she was left some of Kaushik's old clothes to wear, boyish items that she disliked: "One winter I had to wear your coat, which I hated so much that it caused me to hate you as a result. […] I wanted desperately to get rid of it" ("Lifetime," 226). Hema is unable to differentiate her identity, or that of Kaushik, from the clothes she is given to wear, and is forced into an unwanted intimacy with Kaushik by wearing his hand-me-downs.

Hema and Kaushik share a deep bond, but one that is initially created externally – through their mothers, through shared clothes, toys, and pieces of furniture. After spending seven years in India, Kaushik's family moves back to Massachusetts and at first stays with Hema's family while house-hunting. The teenaged Hema is no longer repelled, but instead intrigued, by the thought of Kaushik. Hema moves into her parents' bedroom so that Kaushik can stay in her room: "After dreading it all this time, now I was secretly thrilled you would be sleeping there. You would absorb my presence, I thought. Without me having to do a thing, you would come to know me and like me" ("Lifetime," 234). Hema hopes that he would "absorb her presence", as if through a form of osmosis, reminiscent of her absorption of him through wearing his clothes. The reader is encouraged to see Hema and Kaushik as bound to each other; they inhabit each other's skins, attracting and repelling each other simultaneously. This quality of their relationship continues into their adulthood, and is transformed into a strong, mutual sexual attraction.

In the last story, "Going Ashore," their shared past is continuously present. After meeting by chance in Rome and embarking on a passionate affair, Hema and Kaushik take a trip to Volterra, a mountaintop town. Feeling cold, Hema gratefully borrows Kaushik's peacoat. This is a direct reference to their youth, when Hema was given Kaushik's old coat to wear:

> It was colder than Rome, a cold that emanated from stone, and instead of her leather jacket Hema now wore a peacoat of Kaushik's, grateful for the weight over her shoulders, remembering that other coat of Kaushik's she'd so hated wearing when she was a girl, back when they were nothing but already something to each other. ("Ashore," 319)

Hema recognizes their history and acknowledges how her feelings toward him have changed. At the same time, the reference to the childhood hand-me-down coat alludes to the omnipresent quality of their relationship, the comfort brought by having been attached to each other throughout their existence.

In all three stories, Hema and Kaushik's relationship is described as instinctual rather than rational; it has a magnetic quality that neither can resist. The foundation of their relationship, their shared, if partly imaginary, common origins, and their mothers' friendship is ever present, and brings them closer as a couple. In "Ashore," when Kaushik and Hema make love for the first time, the reader is informed that "Hema knew, without having to be told, that she was the first person he'd ever slept with who'd known his mother, who was able to remember her as he did" ("Ashore," 313). Just as Kaushik's mother was present when Hema was first about to enter the world – when Hema's mother realized that she was pregnant – she was also present when Hema entered puberty and became a sexual being. It was Parul who bought Hema her first bras and helped her try them on, and told her that one day she would be very beautiful ("Ashore," 239). She is also "present" when Hema and Kaushik make love for the first time. There is a specific kind of intimacy between the adult Hema and Kaushik – that of new-found lovers, yet who in many ways are as close as siblings. This gives their relationship an incestuous quality which, in turn, calls its longevity into question.

Hema realizes that their parents had become acquainted and liked each other "for the sake of their origins, for the sake of a time and place to which they'd lost access. Hema had never been drawn to a person for that reason, until now" ("Ashore," 315). Through her relationship with Kaushik, Hema understands her parents' need to form relationships based on their common cultural background. Simultaneously she realizes that without anything but common ethnicity and nostalgia to build on, her relationship with Kaushik is purely coincidental, and is not likely to have more endurance than the friendship of their parents.

Hema and Kaushik's uncanny connection, an intimate sharing of consciousness, is unable to transcend the division posed by place and time: they are headed in different geographical directions and there is very little time to change course (due to Kaushik's new job and Hema's impending marriage). In relation to doubles in fiction, Blum (1988, 39) argues that "romantic attachment is detrimental to male/female bonding, that it raises divisive barriers (over which are waged sexual/ political battles) between men and women." The male/female double is driven to a romantic attachment that transcends the boundaries between them, but they are rendered incapable of coping with the restrictions instigated by their societal (gender) roles. The next section explores the narrative choices employed to construct this uncanny bond, and some of the other out-of-the-ordinary elements in the three stories.

4.1.2 Gothic Elements in "Hema and Kaushik"

Lahiri's realistic writing style de-emphasizes gothic elements in "Hema and Kaushik" and in *Earth* as a whole, but they are nevertheless undeniably present.

Furthermore, literary realism is an ambiguous concept, and "claims to a true 'representation' of 'reality' imply as much repressive folly and violence as any skeleton in the closet" (Williams 1995, 10). To rephrase, literary representations are always interpretations without claim to an objective truth or reality. Before returning to analyzing Hema and Kaushik as a double in more detail, I will discuss some of the other gothic features in the story cycle, to illustrate my argument on their prevalence, and how the story cycle can be read as a modern gothic.

Some of the narrative choices employed in "Hema and Kaushik" are unusual. The ambiguity of time and place in the narration is striking, and the use of second-person address is rare in modern fiction. As Munos (2013, 4) observes: "a 'narrating I' keeps addressing a voiceless yet all-pervading 'you' from an indeterminate time and space." The addressee thus seems an abstract construct in the narrator's mind rather than a real person in his/her life. Munos (2013, 4–5) suggests that this form of narrative "reinforces a sense of doubleness and confusion in relation to time and identity." This ambiguity is at times challenging for the reader.

Anne Williams (1995, 66) argues that "as narratives of an 'otherness' distant in time and space, Gothic fictions necessarily emphasize writing rather than speech." Stylistically, the writing in "Hema and Kaushik" is literary: detailed and descriptive, eloquently worded, but with sparse dialogue. When dialogue does appear, it is often not directly reported speech, but narrated by one of the characters at a later time, emphasizing the text's literariness. Williams (ibid.) claims that recognizing the materiality of the text makes the reader aware of its illusory and unreliable quality. Furthermore, the act of writing is "inherently a sign of absence, even as it records the signs of a past presence" (ibid.). Narration strives to be anchored in time.

The lack of an anchor in "Hema and Kaushik" leads the reader to question the temporality of the second-person address: with Kaushik dead at the end of "Ashore," when does the narration occur? In "Ashore," the omniscient narrator explains that the couple "did not speak of their own future, of where their days together would lead. Nor did they discuss the past, the months during which he had lived in her home, the friendship between their parents that was already dying, along with his mother, during that time" ("Ashore," 314–15). Since the omniscient narrator in the last story specifically mentions that the couple does not discuss the past, any theory that Hema or Kaushik's earlier narratives could be actual pillow talk taking place during the last story is dismantled. The reader then arrives at the conclusion that "Lifetime" and "End" are epistolary, internal monologues, which blurs both temporality and the boundaries between the two main characters even further, creating a kind of duality also on the narrative level. In addition, in switching between two first-person narrators from one story to the next, the differences between the two characters are leveled instead of their separateness being emphasized.

Characteristically for gothic literature, there is a focus on interiors and houses in "Hema and Kaushik." A central motif in gothic literature is the house, often a haunted manor or castle (see, for example, Punter and Byron 2004, 259). This tradition, most likely originating with Walpole's gothic classic *The Castle of Otranto*, is typical of most gothic tales, from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In "Lifetime," Hema's family lives in an ordinary, detached house in a middle-class suburb of Boston, but just outside its perimeter are thick and threatening woods in which a boy had gotten lost the previous year and had never been found – this is mentioned twice ("Lifetime," 234–35; 248). In addition to adding an ominous ambience to the story, the lost boy foreshadows Kaushik's drowning (officially a disappearance, as no mention is made of the discovery of his body).

Kaushik also finds a family graveyard in the woods, and mentions to Hema that "the last one, Emma, died in 1923" ("Lifetime," 249). There is an intentional similarity between the names Emma and Hema. As Hema herself notes, "I nodded, disturbed by the similarity of the name to mine, wondering if this had occurred to you" (ibid.). Unknowingly, in finding Hema's "graveyard double," followed by revealing his mother's fatal illness to Hema, Kaushik is the first to bring the idea of death into her world. In addition to the similarity of the names of the dead Emma and Hema, a parallel is created with Hema's physical closeness to the graves and her proximity to Parul in the department store dressing room when they tried on bras:

> I was too young, that day, to feel sorrow or sympathy. I felt only the enormous fear of having a dying woman in our home. I remembered standing beside your mother, both of us topless in the fitting room where I had tried on my first bra, disturbed that I had been in such close proximity to her disease. ("Lifetime," 251)

Dealing directly with the source of Parul's cancer (breasts), the passage adds weight to her diagnosis and its effect on Hema. It also illustrates the intimacy between Parul and Hema, which will later be important to Kaushik. Furthermore, Hema's first physical step into womanhood (acquiring her first bra) is mirrored by her emotional understanding of death. As she bursts into tears in the graveyard, she appears to mourn the end of her childhood too, gripped by a fear she has not been subjected to before that day. The graveyard passage gives the narration a sinister twist, foreshadowing more serious events to come, such as Parul's death in "End," and Kaushik's drowning in "Ashore."

Parul's death is foreshadowed in several passages in "Lifetime," giving the character an aura of mystery, and even a foreboding of doom. After staying with Hema's family for a few weeks, Parul comes down with a cold, "using this as an

excuse to stay in bed for days" ("Lifetime," 243). When Hema then catches her smoking a cigarette in the bathroom, Parul is embarrassed but defensive, and remarks brightly: "One cigarette a day can't kill me, can it?" ("Lifetime," 244). Obviously, it cannot, as Parul is already dying, but the irony in her comment is naturally evident only after Hema (and the reader) discovers that she has terminal cancer.

Another equivalent of the gothic castle or haunted house is Kaushik's new family home on the North Shore, the coastal area between Boston and New Hampshire, in "End." The house is a modernist construction designed by a famous Massachusetts architect, with windows from floor to ceiling, and a pool in the backyard. The house is an allegory for Kaushik's mother, but also becomes an actual subject in the story. This develops on Andrew Hock Soon Ng's (2015, 147) idea that a traumatic memory rejected by the subject can be projected onto the house, which becomes a storage for the unspeakable that the subject then identifies as a threat. The house that Kaushik's father's new wife, Chitra, and her daughters move into is essentially Parul's, Kaushik's mother's, house, rather than his father's home. Its modernity, sparse furniture, and clean, open spaces clash with Chitra's ideas of what makes a home, and her more traditional Bengali tastes. The privacy and isolation of the house, and its proximity to the ocean, provided a sense of peace and tranquility for Parul, but cause anxiety for Chitra. "And I will be alright? […] I will be safe alone, in this house?" she asks Kaushik ("End," 270). For Chitra, the unspeakable is Parul; every item in the house has been chosen by her, yet there are no pictures of her anywhere, as Kaushik's father has not been able to look at them in his immense grief. Kaushik feels that Chitra causes personal injury to Parul, and to himself, by even touching objects that used to belong to his mother. Ng (2015, 99) suggests that a house can "inherit" an identity; "there are places that preserve memories indefinitely, including memories that are independent of their original inhabitants, but which can affect subsequent inhabitants nevertheless." Any slight change to the house suggested by Chitra triggers Kaushik's grief for his mother.

A few weeks before his college graduation, Kaushik hears that his father has put the house up for sale and will move with his new family to a more traditional one in a Boston suburb. Kaushik no longer feels outraged but relieved: "I knew we were both thankful to Chitra for chafing under whatever lingered of my mother's spirit in the place she had last called home and for forcing us to shut its doors" ("End," 293). The gothic's haunted house is a modern building in "End," and the haunting is emotional rather than actual paranormal activity, but Parul's house is nevertheless a gothic subject.

Another gothic element linked closely to Parul is water. Its ominous presence in "Hema and Kaushik" is reminiscent of the river in Roy's *The God of Small Things*, discussed in 1.2. Water is both a comforting and threatening element in the three stories. One of the meanings of *Parul* in Sanskrit is "flow of water" (Gámez-

Fernández 2016, 58). The reader is made aware of how Parul loved the pool at her club in Bombay, and after moving back to the United States, she wants to find a house with a pool or the possibility to build one, perhaps also with a view over water. She swims in her pool as long as her illness permits and asks her family to scatter her ashes in the ocean after her demise. In "End," Kaushik mourns her, as well as his father's new marriage, by taking a road trip on impulse along the Northeastern coast of the United States. Kaushik stops occasionally, walking out to the cliffs to take a closer look at the sea, and observes that its water "was the most unforgiving thing, nearly black at times, cold enough, I knew, to kill me, violent enough to break me apart" ("End," 289). The passage alludes to the threatening quality of water, which is concretized later in Kaushik's drowning in "Ashore." Kaushik buries the box containing the only photographs left of his mother in a remote spot on a cliff dropping into the rough sea, never to return to it again. This signifies the burial of his mother's remains, which Kaushik never had the chance to do. However, instead of burying the memory of his mother, Kaushik buries his grief, never to revisit it again.

Water is introduced as a welcoming and comforting element in "Ashore." Kaushik describes the water at the resort in Thailand as calm and shallow ("Ashore," 325). Kaushik disappears on a boat trip he takes with a Swedish man he meets at the resort. On the boat, Kaushik watches Henrik, his companion, swim to a nearby cove, and suddenly sees his mother:

> Kaushik saw his mother also swimming, saw her body still vital, a brief blur that passed as effortlessly as the iridescent fish darting from time to time beneath the boat.
>
> […] He wanted to swim to the cove as Henrik had, to show his mother he was not afraid.
>
> […] The sea was as warm and welcoming as a bath. His feet touched the bottom, and so he let go. ("Ashore," 330–31)

The ocean, Parul's final resting place, becomes Kaushik's grave too. Kaushik's vision of Parul swimming in the water parallels her with the ocean once again, and thus Kaushik's death becomes a symbolic reunification with his mother. Kaushik's death is not explicit in the text, and instead, the final image of him that the reader is presented with is this peaceful passage in which Kaushik lowers himself into the water and feels secure enough to "let go." Despite Parul being a haunting presence in her son's life long after her death, her ghost is not present as a tangible object in the story until this passage. The "letting go" creates an expectation of a symbolic rebirth into peace and prosperity in Hong Kong, but this idea of a happy ending is

interrupted by gothic darkness, and in the following passage, the omniscient narrator has evaporated, and Hema resumes her first-person narration.

As Kaushik is about to meet his end in Thailand, the text employs yet another gothic convention: the traditional doppelgänger figure as a harbinger of death. Kaushik's unlikely doppelgänger is Henrik, a Swedish man on holiday with his wife and two children. Like Hema and Emma in the graveyard passage in "Lifetime," Kaushik and Henrik are similar names. The men have similar professions as well – Kaushik is a photojournalist about to become a photo editor, and Henrik works for a Swedish television station as a film editor. The similarities appear not to be random choices, but instead, the reader is meant to notice: "'Our jobs, they are similar,' Henrik said. 'Our names too'" ("Ashore," 327). Kaushik observes the family closely; he is startled to hear that the tall children are only five and seven. He thinks that Henrik's wife is attractive, and thus considers the pair "an incongruous couple." He describes Henrik as "a large man, his skin burnt, straw-blond hair to his shoulders, hair longer than his wife's, a face like a ham" ("Ashore," 326). Despite this negative first impression of the man, Henrik and Kaushik get acquainted, and Henrik asks him on a boat trip to a nearby coral reef while his wife and children go shopping in town. Kaushik agrees, and thereby his fate is sealed. In a truly gothic vein, Kaushik is led to his death by his doppelgänger.

In addition to discovering a doppelgänger and seeing his mother's ghost, Kaushik is haunted by the image of his own shadow. Seeing his shadow in the water on the boat trip reminds him of a sculpture he saw in Italy with Hema, "L'Ombra della Sera": The Shadow of Evening. It was a bronze sculpture of a severely elongated boy's body, standing with his arms at his sides. This memory is significant – and ominous – not just due to the sculpture's title, but because it is an Etruscan sculpture. The Etruscans, Hema's current topic of research, were a people who seemed obsessed with the journey out of life and the afterlife.[21] Furthermore, the Etruscans were a diaspora, and not an indigenous people on Roman soil, linking them with the modern diaspora characters Hema and Kaushik. The sculpture, the appearance of Kaushik's Swedish double, and of his mother's ghost, all foreshadow Kaushik's demise, but in a way that becomes clear to the reader only in retrospect. The irony that Lahiri often applies in her stories is present here outside the scope of the narrative itself.

There is an uncanny ambiguity to Kaushik's death, which is mainly brought about by the switch from omniscient narration to Hema's first-person narration in

[21] The primary legacy of the Etruscans, as mentioned by Hema, "was tombs and the things that were put in them: jewels, pottery, weapons to accompany the dead" ("Ashore," 300). In Volterra, Hema and Kaushik visit the Etruscan museum, taking in the hundreds of urns in which the ancient people stored the ashes of their dead.

the final passage of "Ashore." Hema is convinced that Kaushik is dead, but her limited perspective does not offer absolute certainty to the reader. Furthermore, the reader is haunted by Kaushik's words in "End," when he describes his feelings while traveling on the Northeastern coast after his failed holiday at home: "I had never traveled alone before and I discovered that I liked it. No one in the world knew where I was, no one had the ability to reach me. It was like being dead, my escape allowing me to taste that tremendous power my mother possessed forever" ("End," 290). If the idea of death terrified the teenaged Hema, for Kaushik it signifies almost a form of empowerment – perhaps a result of having to experience his mother's debilitating disease at such close range. However, this ambiguity is not pursued further in the text.

The gothic elements in "Hema and Kaushik" create an ominous, sinister mood that often takes the reader by surprise. They effectively change the tone of the narrative and undercut expectations of a happy outcome. Koshy (2013, 375) argues that in all the stories in *Earth*, "the gothic form captures the unresolved conflicts and unnamable feelings that shape intergenerational bonds, emphasizing the uncanny as a constitutive element of inheritance." The resolution of the story and the significance of the double in relation to it are discussed in the following section.

4.1.3 Deliverance from Silence

In accordance with the title of the story, "Going Ashore," the two main characters, adrift in an in-between state in Rome, navigate towards the shore in their separate ways: Hema finds dry land, but Kaushik is literally swept away. The final paragraphs of "Ashore" are separated typographically from the rest of the story (in the case of the 2009 paperback edition, with an image of a leaf), giving the section an epilogue-like quality. The narrator of this last section is Hema, addressing Kaushik as "you," whom she now knows to be dead.

After first hearing about the tsunami, news of which was globally broadcast, Hema checks Kaushik's website for signs of him being alive. She can only find photos from their trip to Volterra and "then, scenes of another coast. Two children playing, a gentle turquoise sea" ("Ashore," 332). With no further images from Thailand, Hema is convinced that Kaushik must be dead.

First, the new ground under Hema's feet appears shaky rather than solid. When Hema's fiancé Navin arrives in Calcutta, where Hema's parents now live, for their wedding, she resents his appearance merely because he is still alive with countless days to live, unlike Kaushik (ibid.). However, on her wedding day, Hema "felt the weight of each ritual, felt the ground once more underfoot" (ibid.). Hema suddenly finds a deeper meaning in traditional Indian wedding rituals, and she is able to take comfort in the weight of commitment. She describes how Navin, without force,

without being aware of it himself, pulls her away from Kaushik, "as the final gust of autumn wind pulls the last leaves from the trees" (ibid.). Marrying Navin grounds Hema and provides her with the security she craves; after returning to the United States, she explains that "I returned to my existence, the existence I had chosen instead of you" ("Ashore," 333). Hema's words convey that she does not marry Navin by chance, or because she didn't dare to cancel the wedding – a life with him instead of Kaushik was her own choice. Ironically, a traditional, arranged marriage to a man picked by her parents becomes a feminist act in this story. Kaushik, in turn, had too little to offer Hema – an indefinite existence in Hong Kong without a proposal of marriage, and without any guarantee of being able to continue her academic career – and that little came too late for her.

Hema's craving for solid ground is crystallized on their trip to Volterra. Upon realizing that the villagers lived all their lives and died in one place, Hema admits to envying them. She craves a similar stability and belonging. "You're complaining to the wrong person," Kaushik remarks, revealing that he has no conscious wish to belong anywhere ("Ashore," 320). Kaushik represents the drifter, cynical of filial bonds, and too traumatized by loss to be able to latch on to anything permanent. One of the meanings of *Hema* in Sanskrit is earth, and indeed, Hema represents solid ground. She is depicted as a pragmatist who may be swayed by her emotions, but does not allow them to throw her off course. With parents adhering to traditions and a firm connection to her inherited land of origin, India, she is better equipped than Kaushik to navigate her dual heritage. She realizes early on that she cannot directly adopt her mother's Indian identity or Parul's "permanent expatriate" identity (Munos 2013, 20). Parul liked the idea of not belonging to a place, preferring to be an expatriate rather than a citizen, and had a multitude of homes in different countries. Hema must find her own, hybrid form of existence, which acknowledges her roots, but leaves her space to code-switch between cultures and choose the best of both worlds.

Kaushik, in turn, experiences migration more than once, and has a more complicated diasporic path (Gámez-Fernández 2016, 55). As I have discussed in an earlier text (Arjopalo 2015), cultural identity is inherited mainly through one's mother. Having lost his mother at a vulnerable age, Kaushik lacks this cultural inheritance, but is not fully able to latch on to an American identity either. Parul's will was to have her ashes scattered in the ocean, which leaves Kaushik without a permanent place to mourn her, particularly after his father remarries and the house is sold. Munos (2013, 16) argues that Kaushik is burdened by having to "forge an 'earthly', coherent sense of self in a land in which no concrete sanctuary can ever bring his mother back into symbolic existence and, by extension, authenticate his own presence on American soil." Thus, Kaushik's loss is twofold: first the inherited

loss of a motherland, followed by the loss of his mother. The force of trauma lies in its repetition (Mishra 2007, 118).

Kaushik presents as a sufferer of chronic melancholia; he no longer intensely grieves his mother but is unable to let go of the weight of sadness he carries, as it has become a part of his existence. In the final passage in Thailand, he lowers himself into the water, feels his feet touch the bottom, and then he lets go, planning to swim to the cove and show his mother he is not afraid ("Ashore," 331). The ending of "Ashore" is open to different interpretations: as a final submergence into melancholia, a symbolic unification with his mother, who in turn, is a symbol for his lost motherland, or as an exuberant dip, demonstrating Kaushik's new-found (and unfortunately misplaced) courage regarding the sea, of which he had been wary in the past. The discussion of authorial intent is often redundant, but in this case, I venture to argue that by choosing a real-life event, the 2004 tsunami, as Kaushik's cause of death, Lahiri denies the idea of an intentional giving up and surrendering to death. The tsunami did not select its victims.

Hema perseveres and creates new life. In the very last lines of "Ashore," she confesses to being pregnant. She ends her narrative with the following words addressed to Kaushik: "It might have been your child but this was not the case. We had been careful, and *you had left nothing behind*" ("Ashore," 333, emphasis added). The fact that the baby Hema is carrying is fathered by her new husband and not Kaushik brings some closure to the narrative which has thus far avoided it.

The phrase "you had left nothing behind" is more complex to unpack. Kaushik was a photojournalist; he would have left thousands of photographs behind. Furthermore, even if estranged, he would have left behind family and friends who would mourn him. That Kaushik "left nothing behind" refers specifically to a child who would have been the receiver of Kaushik's legacy: the intangible inheritance of loss that all the stories in *Earth* circle around.

The short stories in *Earth* depict a fractured filiality: an illustration of the model minority that hides more than a few faint cracks under its polished surface. The object of destruction in the stories is the nuclear family, as second-generation immigrant children display a variety of negative emotional responses to their parents' expectations and to their legacy as migrants of a Bengali background. Koshy (2013, 358) astutely observes that "filial relations are shown as rife with symptoms of psychic disturbance in the story cycle, the resentment or regret in one story echoing and reechoing against the sadness in another and gathering a cumulative force across these narratives." Characters are haunted by the memory of their dead mothers while struggling "to come to terms with a legacy of loss" (Koshy 2013, 375). As these intergenerational narratives are repeated in the short story cycle, the reader can grasp what the characters often attempt to deny – that the main cause of their unhappiness is the family they were born into (Koshy 2013, 358). In the realm

of the stories in which the life choices of parents are reflected in the lives of their offspring, Kaushik breaks the cycle of repeated trauma by "leaving nothing" (no child) behind.

When analyzing Hema and Kaushik as a double, they appear to conform to the gothic form in that one of them must perish for the other to thrive. Through their shared consciousness, a sameness that is yet not the same, they reflect the heterogeneity of the Bengali diaspora. Their story effectively demonstrates a failed attempt at deliverance from the silence of their parents regarding family secrets. The secrecy surrounding Parul's illness in "Lifetime" results in a misinterpretation of motives by Hema's parents. Unaware that Parul is terminally ill, they criticize the spending of the Choudhuris as well as their consumption of alcohol and cigarettes. It is suggested that Parul wanted to avoid a fuss and live her last days as normally as possible, but confiding in Hema's family could have brought much-needed support for her husband and son, and perhaps rekindled her own friendship with Hema's mother.

Kaushik confesses to Hema that her family's house was the last place that had felt like home to him ("End," 291), which indeed suggests that he perceived it as a consoling environment. Kaushik and his father's silence regarding Parul after her death causes unsurmountable curiosity for Chitra's daughters Rupa and Piu, which leads to their discovery of the photographs of Parul, resulting in Kaushik's estrangement from his father and new family. The adult Kaushik avoids staying in one place for very long and is unable to commit to a long-term relationship with a woman. Thus, the story expresses how silence regarding trauma and loss can complicate relationships and hinder recovery.

Kaushik and Hema's Roman affair does not offer healing but ends in a complete communication breakdown between them. That Hema regains, or reclaims, her voice by taking over the narrative at the end of "Ashore" could suggest an end to the vicious cycle of intergenerational silence. However, Hema hides her grief for Kaushik behind her symptoms of pregnancy, as demonstrated by her words: "Those cold, dark days I spent in bed, unable to speak, burning with new life but mourning your death, went unquestioned by Navin" ("Ashore," 333). Her silence implies a persistence in the repression of painful memories in the name of the welfare of the next generation. This theme is further explored in *Lowland*, introduced in the next section.

4.2 Brothers Juxtaposed: The Double in *The Lowland*

Lowland tells the story of the short life of Udayan Mitra, a student activist shot in front of his parents and his young wife, Gauri. Appalled by how his conservative Hindu parents treat Udayan's widow, his brother Subhash decides to marry her and raise the child that she is expecting as his own in the United States, where he has

recently moved. The couple decide to hide the truth of the child's parentage from everyone, including the girl herself, Bela. The novel explores the effects of Udayan's death and the secrecy surrounding it on the lives of Gauri, Subhash, Bela, and Udayan's parents. In addition to Udayan's death, a pivotal moment in the story is the desertion of Bela and Subhash by Gauri. *Lowland* is a family saga that subtly explores the connections between personal and global events, linking the complexities of India as a young, postcolonial nation with the narrative of migration (Iyer 2018, 259). Some reviews have regarded it as a political novel, but even though the Naxal movement provides a frame for the story, the text does not evaluate the rights and wrongs of the movement, or the Indian government's response.

However, the Naxal movement, and the violence related to it, are more than a mere backdrop, as the novel does raise moral and existential questions triggered by the movement. In his work on the connections between diasporic memory and the aesthetic in diaspora fiction, Vijay Mishra (2007, 106) writes that unhappy diasporas are often traumatized diasporas. *Lowland* elaborates on how traumatized diaspora individuals certainly appear to be unhappy diaspora individuals. Reminiscent of Mukherjee's *Daughters* and *Bride*, the violent death of a family member in the hands of the authorities, and the repression of the shame and trauma it causes, cast long shadows on the lives of future generations in *Lowland*. The fate of Udayan, who is shot by paramilitary forces, bears resemblance to the death of Tara Lata in Mukherjee's texts, discussed in Chapter 3. There is no trace of the violence Udayan is subjected to in official records; just like there is none related to Tara Lata, and her death is written off as a heart attack. However, most Indians were not swayed by the Naxal movement in the manner they advocated for independence from Britain, and hence in comparison to the saintly public image of Tara Lata, Udayan Mitra is a questionable martyr. His death for a cause is more a source of shame than pride for his family, though he is mourned by them and the close-knit community. Regarding the uncanny bond of the Subhash/Udayan sibling double, parallels can be found with Anju and Sudha in Divakaruni's works, analyzed in Chapter 2.

The novel's main themes are the formation of identity, the consequences of an individual's choices on others, and the debilitating effect that guilt and a misplaced sense of duty can have on an individual as well as the lives of future generations. It is not surprising that Gauri, as one of the main characters in the novel, is a scholar of philosophy, directing the reader, too, to consider some of the complexities of humanity that the novel takes up. *Lowland* contributes to the nature/nurture debate as well, in exploring how two brothers from the same background, and physically so alike, can turn out to be very different, and how a child (Bela), who has never known her biological father, can still grow up to be very much like him, appearing even to have inherited his idealism. With Subhash raising his brother's daughter, and Gauri deserting her biological child, it brings parenthood into focus, and asks the reader to

consider whether blood is thicker than water. Reminiscent of "Hema and Kaushik," characters are burdened with the silence of a family secret, and the narrative demonstrates how this silence and outright lies to shield children can be more detrimental to their emotional wellbeing than sharing the truth would most likely have been.

As in "Hema and Kaushik," mothers and motherhood have a central role in *Lowland*, which depicts four very different kind of mothers – Subhash and Udayan's mother Bijoli, Subhash's girlfriend Holly, Udayan's, and later Subhash's, wife Gauri, and Bela, Udayan and Gauri's daughter, raised by Subhash. The reader is invited to consider the effects that the presence or absence of a mother may have on a child's development, and the sacrifices that patriarchal societies often expect from mothers. As with "Hema and Kaushik" and many other stories by Lahiri, all relationships between parents and children in the novel are scattered along a scale of varying degrees of dysfunctionality.

Like other works by Lahiri, *Lowland* is not overtly feminist. However, as a central female character, Gauri expresses an independence and defiance that is atypical of Lahiri's women characters in previous works. Gauri's choice to abandon her daughter to pursue a career on the other side of the continent has alienated readers, if marrying her dead husband's brother was not unusual enough as a plot twist. Gauri's choice is, naturally, not an opportunist career move, but an attempt to get away from the burden of the past, the guilt she carries, and the unwillingness to continue living a lie with Subhash. In a diasporic context, women are regarded as the "guardians of tradition," but tradition is gendered, and hence moving out of a patriarchal space can be considered betraying a cultural ideal, as suggested by Ketu Katrak (2006, 159). Gauri and the feminist aspects of her characterization are discussed in further detail in section 4.2.5, in order to dissect some of her choices, and to illustrate how her character acts as a mirror in between the Subhash/Udayan brother double. I will begin my analysis with a discussion of narrative choices in *Lowland*.

4.2.1 Narrative Techniques in The Lowland

As in "Hema and Kaushik," narration, temporality, and the abundance of reported speech are worthy of notice in *Lowland*. The novel is narrated by a third-person narrator, with limited character-bound focalization[22] through one character at a time,

[22] To avoid ambiguity, I wish to clarify that my understanding of the contested term "focalization" adheres to Mieke Bal's ([1985] 2009, 149) interpretation of focalization as "the relationship between the 'vision', the agent that sees, and that which is seen", taking place on the story level rather than above it. I use the term as a synonym for a character's point of view on the level of the narrative.

except for the first few chapters of the novel, in which Subhash and Udayan are referred to as a joint "they." Focalization alternates mainly between five different characters: Subhash, Gauri, Bela, Bijoli, and Udayan. This technique gives the reader access to a character's thoughts and feelings, offers insight into their motivation, and reasons and justification for their actions. The shifting focalization provides several viewpoints on events but attempts to remain objective and maintain some distance through the means of third-person narration. If the reader were to judge by focalization alone, Subhash would stand out clearly as the main character, despite his subdued qualities as a protagonist. The novel is divided into eight parts that consist of several chapters. In most of them, the point of view is Subhash's, with smaller sections narrated from the perspective of other characters. Key events, such as Udayan's death, are repeated and referred to frequently from several characters' perspectives, contributing to the effect that the past continues to haunt the survivors, and will not let go unless reckoned with. Udayan, dead for most of the novel, is given the last word in a lyrical final chapter.

The varying of perspectives assists in maintaining the mystery surrounding Udayan's true character throughout the novel. With Udayan undeniably being a central, albeit deceased, character and therefore not active for most of the novel, his persona and significance on the lives of others can be described from the viewpoint of the other characters without giving too much of the plot away too early. The preference of third-person narration over first-person in *Lowland* can be justified by the author's willingness to narrate the story by using several voices; in its place, first-person narration with shifting focalization (as in "Hema and Kaushik") might be confusing for the reader and appear less objective. Varying focalization in order to tell the story from different perspectives is one of the novel's strengths, illustrating that there is no absolute, single truth to an event or a person's character.

Speech is reported indirectly throughout the novel; quotation marks are absent, giving the writing, once again, for want of a better term, a very literary quality, not unlike the epistolary narration style of "Hema and Kaushik," with the difference that there is no second-person address in the novel. This choice of style expects the reader to be invested in the reading experience, as the absence of punctuation where it is expected requires concentration and commitment. A positive effect is that it draws the reader in and enables a deep immersion in the text.

Lowland spans more than five decades and four generations in the story of the Mitra family. The narration mainly progresses in chronological order, but includes frequent, repetitive flashbacks to past events, creating an elliptical structure, enhanced by shifts in the narrative perspective. Punter (1996, 198) has observed that the gothic has a 'borderland' attitude to the past, "a compound of repulsion and attraction, fear of both the violence of the past and its power over the present." I would not classify *Lowland* as a gothic novel by its form, but the effect described by

Punter is certainly achieved, as every character's actions are reactions to past events. The greatest deviation from chronology occurs in the eighth (and last) chapter.

In Chapter One of Part VIII, the reader is first offered a glimpse of an ageing Elise and Subhash on their honeymoon in Ireland, during which Subhash looks back on his life in retrospect, appreciating the beauty of the landscape around him and the life he now shares with Elise. The phases of the day he sees in the vast horizon reflect the phases of his life, and he suddenly has a very real recollection of his brother Udayan walking beside him across the lowland in Tollygunge as a boy. In an earlier passage in the same chapter, Subhash and Elise's wedding has taken place in the small red-and-white church by Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island. This is a church that Subhash has always admired, and where, passing by soon after his initial arrival in America, he witnessed the wedding of a middle-aged couple. He then guessed that theirs had to be a second marriage, "two people trading one spouse for another, dividing in two, their connections at once severed and doubled, like cells" (*Lowland,* 39). With his own (second) wedding in that very church, Subhash's life has come full circle, and he now has understanding and experience of a second marriage – something he could only speculate on as a young post-graduate. He has gained two sons and a second daughter, in addition to his own: Elise and Subhash have altogether seven grandchildren. The passage also illustrates how Subhash has finally come to accept Rhode Island as his home, and American culture as his own. He no longer feels like an outsider longing for a like-minded companion but feels enough at home to marry an American of Portuguese descent, and have his wedding in an American church, a place of worship he once considered to belong only to others.

The second chapter of Part VIII, the last chapter of the novel, is narrated from Udayan's point of view, describing the last moments of his life, with his love for Gauri foremost on his mind. The last chapter ties loose ends together, and simultaneously contrasts the brother double's lives. Udayan's short but passionate life is like a flare next to the peaceful, slow-burning candle of his brother's. This complementary double is further analyzed in the next section.

4.2.2 The Brother Double

The central characters in *The Lowland* are two Calcuttan brothers Subhash and Udayan Mitra, born after the Second World War but before India's independence from Britain, a year and three months apart. The boys' relationship is a balance of independence and codependence, yet always with a sense of "us two against the world." Subhash is the older, but Udayan the more daring – an assignment of roles that follows them into adulthood. Close as twins, Subhash had "no sense of himself without Udayan. From his earliest memories, at every point, his brother was there"

(*Lowland*, 6). Lahiri emphasizes the characters' physical similarity, as illustrated in the following:

> In spite of their differences one was perpetually confused with the other, so that when either name was called both were conditioned to answer. And sometimes it was difficult to know who had answered, given that their voices were nearly indistinguishable. Sitting over the chessboard they were mirror images: one leg bent, the other splayed out, chins propped on their knees. (*Lowland,* 11)

Describing the boys as each other's mirror images, and how even members of their immediate family could not always tell them apart, suggests early on that they are to be read as a double, as one unit divided into two: parts of each other, yet separate. Why, then, has Lahiri made the narrative choice of creating characters that are brothers instead of being each other's exact physical doubles too, as identical twins? I suggest that the motivation behind this choice is practical; the oldest son has specific rights and responsibilities in Indian culture, and this fact is useful in demonstrating Subhash's sense of duty as the older son, and for illustrating the differences in the boys' personalities. In addition, it emphasizes the characters' doubling, not physical twinhood. Carl Keppler (1972, 12) writes that even if the two "selves" of a double are physical duplicates, it does not imply that they are psychological duplicates: "Their oppositeness in nature tends to result in a certain (often profound) opposition in attitude, and it is this opposition that most frequently characterizes the special closeness between them." The two parts of a double act like two magnets, constantly locked in combined affinity and opposition.

As the younger brother, Udayan often oversteps his familial entitlements and acts on impulse. His political activism may be motivated by a genuine wish to fight for a more equal society, but the choices in his personal life are based on more selfish needs, not on what might benefit his family. Subhash is the opposite – the quiet, obedient observer, fully aware of what is expected from him, respectful of his parents and traditions:

> Subhash wondered if his placid nature was regarded as a lack of inventiveness, perhaps even a failing, in his parents' eyes. His parents did not have to worry about him and yet they did not favor him. It became his mission to obey them, given that it wasn't possible to surprise or impress them. That was what Udayan did. (*Lowland*, 11)

Subhash and Udayan's brotherly rivalry is surprisingly subdued, considering the inequality of their treatment within the family. Udayan's charisma secures him the position of parental favorite to the degree of over-indulgence. The reader is offered

an illustration of this with an example from the boys' early childhood. When the courtyard of their family home is being paved, the boys are instructed to remain indoors. Udayan defies the order, and runs down the long, wooden plank that has been set up to get from the door to the street, only to fall off it halfway, and to leave his footprints in the concrete. Another layer could have been added to cover the prints: "But to the mason their father said, Leave it be. Not for the expense of effort involved, but because he believed it was wrong to erase the steps that his son had taken" (*Lowland*, 12). This comment is characteristic of the boys' parents' attitude towards Udayan throughout his life, and ultimately contributes to the turn of events which ends it. When Udayan is deeply involved in the Naxal movement and a parental intervention might have helped, possibly even saved him, his parents worry about him, but do not confront him, allowing him instead to make his own mistakes.

A pivotal moment in the brothers' lives occurs when they are caught attempting to scale the high wall of the nearby Tollygunge Club, a country club and remnant of the colonial era. They carry old golf balls and a broken putting iron, sold to them by one of the caddies. The policeman patrolling the grounds is suspicious and questions Subhash:

> Was this your idea? Aren't you old enough to know better?
>
> It was my idea, Udayan said.
>
> You have a loyal brother, the policeman said to Subhash. Wanting to protect you. Willing to take the blame. (*Lowland*, 8)

The text is not explicit, but considering that Udayan usually was the instigator of all kinds of antics, it is likely that the initial idea of trespassing was his and not Subhash's. The policeman hits Subhash twice on the backs of his legs with the putting iron before letting the boys go. Even though it is Subhash who is beaten up, Udayan is deeply affected and shaped by the event. It ignites a hatred for policemen in him, which later manifests in his lack of hesitation to plot the murder of one. The passage elaborates, once again, the closeness between the brothers, as pain inflicted on one is felt by the other. Furthermore, the vicinity of the Tollygunge Club stirs a resentment for inequality in Udayan, which motivates his later involvement in the Naxal movement.

The boys' relationship is symbiotic for most of their childhood, and they are drawn apart only when they start college in different areas of Calcutta. Udayan studies physics at Presidency, and Subhash chemical engineering at Jadavpur. They socialize separately and their previously daily chess games grow few and far between. Still, for Subhash, "each day of his life began and ended with Udayan beside him" (*Lowland*, 18). However, the evenings and nights spent together would end, too, with Udayan's involvement with the Naxalites.

The conflict in Naxalbari causes a rift between the brothers. Udayan is immediately intrigued by the rebellion, and the harsh reaction from the government to the uprising motivates him to get personally involved. Subhash, true to his nature, is more cautious, and wonders about the difference the Naxalites could make if they had any chance of succeeding. Udayan fuses agrarian politics with the inequality he sees in his own urban surroundings, as illustrated by the following:

> If they happened to pass the Tolly Club together on their way to or from the tram depot, Udayan called it an affront. People still filled slums all over the city, children were born and raised on the streets. Why were a hundred acres walled off for the enjoyment of a few? […] Udayan said that golf was the pastime of the comprador bourgeoisie. He said the Tolly Club was proof that India was still a semicolonial country, behaving as if the British had never left. (*Lowland*, 25)

Udayan is critical of the Indian government and its inability to create a more egalitarian society after the end of imperial rule. However, the Naxal movement, with its engagement of student activists, was not an isolated campaign limited to India, but influenced by other simultaneous movements occurring all over the world, such as the Civil Rights movement in the United States, the student protests in Paris, Maoism in China, and the Cuban revolution (Paudyal 2015, 20). Udayan's political awakening causes a decline in his relationship with the boys' father, too, as their father views the movement's Marxist rhetoric merely as a recycling of old ideas that he, as a government employee, is not even at liberty to comment on. For Subhash, the inability to be enthusiastic about something that his brother, essentially a part of him, feels so strongly about, seems like a failing in his own nature: "He wondered if it was a lack of courage, or of imagination, that prevented him from believing in it. If the deficits he'd always been conscious of were what prevented him from sharing his brother's political faith" (*Lowland*, 28). Subhash is unable to understand Udayan's personal feelings of exclusion that motivate him to fight injustice.

As the brother double's ideology separates, they grow distant physically too. After finishing their studies, both young men find themselves overqualified and unemployed. Udayan finds a teaching job that he is content with, whereas Subhash decides to apply to doctoral programs in the United States. In addition to these superficial reasons for leaving, Subhash wishes to avoid confrontation and chooses to distance himself from his family and the ongoing political unrest. Udayan, of course, does not approve, and cannot fathom Subhash "walking away" from everything that is going on. Subhash blames Udayan for being selfish, and for not considering the implications his activism could have for his family:

> This isn't a game you're playing. What if the police come to the house? What if you get arrested? What would Ma and Baba think?
>
> There's more to life than what they think.
>
> What's happened to you, Udayan? They're the people who raised you. Who continue to feed you and clothe you. You'd amount to nothing, if it weren't for them. […]
>
> You're the other side of me, Subhash. It's without you that I'm nothing. Don't go.
>
> It was the only time he'd admitted to such a thing. He'd said it with love in his voice. With need.
>
> But Subhash heard it as a command, one of so many he'd capitulated to all his life. Another exhortation to do as Udayan did, to follow him. (*Lowland*, 30–31)

It is of significance that the brother double switches their roles in this passage, if only for a moment. Subhash expresses his assertiveness, challenges Udayan, and refuses to give in to him, whereas Udayan voices his dependence on Subhash. Once again, their symbiotic relationship is highlighted: Udayan refers to Subhash as the other side of him, just as Subhash has noted earlier in the text that he has no sense of himself without Udayan. Despite their recently found independence regarding interests and friendships outside the home, the brothers continue to depend on each other. However, soon after this exchange of words, Udayan stops trying to convince his brother to support the Naxalites and leaves for the countryside to further indoctrinate himself. Not long after his return, Subhash leaves for the United States. Decades later, when asked by twelve-year-old Bela if he remembered his dead brother, Subhash replies that "he's a part of me. I grew up with him" (*Lowland*, 205). Considering the "assigned" roles in the brothers' relationship, and Subhash's docile temperament, the assertiveness he demonstrates in standing up to Udayan and carrying out his plan of moving to the United States comes as a surprise to both Udayan and the reader.

Subhash's intentional distancing from his brother is accentuated by his change of surroundings; once in Rhode Island, he compares the foreignness of his environment to waking up in the morning after a night of vivid dreams: "The difference was so extreme that he could not accommodate the two places together in his mind. In this enormous new country, there seemed to be nowhere for the old to reside" (*Lowland*, 34). Subhash appears to compartmentalize his existence; Calcutta is pushed to the back of his mind as he takes in his new surroundings.

The year 1969 is a restless time in the United States as well. There are student protests and rallies opposing the Vietnam War, but Subhash chooses once again to stand back. Reminiscent of his father's forced loyalties, Subhash, too, realizes that

his status is fragile; "he was here courtesy of a student visa, studying thanks to a fellowship. He'd been invited to America as Nixon's guest" (*Lowland*, 36). Subhash's preference to stay out of trouble is therefore not motivated by a lack of empathy for the cause, but as a shrewd evaluation of his position. His vulnerable status reminds him of his childhood, and once again, of the brothers' denied access to the Tollygunge Club:

> Here, each day, he remembered how he'd felt those evenings he and Udayan had snuck into the Tolly Club. This time he'd been admitted officially, and yet he remained vigilant, at the threshold. He knew that the door could close just as arbitrarily as it had opened. He knew that he could be sent back to where he'd come from, and that there would be plenty to take his place. (ibid.)

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 in the United States abolished restrictions based on national origins, offering better chances for skilled Asian immigrants to enter the country. However, accustomed to a culture of rapid political changes in India, Subhash is unwilling to take any risks, perhaps even realizing that Udayan has already put his family in danger in Calcutta, and is not willing to add to the threat. Udayan is presented as more self-absorbed and impulsive; once called to a cause, he cannot not be swayed. Subhash is proud of his decision to come to America, to take a step that Udayan would not, admitting that this was his greatest motivation in leaving Calcutta. However, at the same time, he confesses to feeling lost: "Each day, despite its growing routine, felt uncertain, improvisational. Here, in this place surrounded by sea, he was drifting from his point of origin. Here, detached from Udayan, he was ignorant of so many things" (*Lowland*, 40). Udayan had been Subhash's guide to new phenomena and experiences, and he feels displaced as well as lost without his brother's guiding force.

While separated, the brothers begin a sporadic correspondence initiated by Udayan. Udayan writes that he cannot forgive Subhash for not supporting the Naxal movement but apologizes for giving him a hard time about it. Reading the letter, Subhash can feel their mutual affection and loyalty to one another, "stretched to the breaking point by all that now stood between them, but at the same time refusing to break" (*Lowland*, 43). The boys' lives are linked, no matter how far apart they are. Udayan's first letter is very political; he recommends that Subhash burn it after reading, and Subhash does find enough cause to do so.

Udayan's second letter a few months later informs Subhash of his marriage to a girl called Gauri, enclosing a photograph of her. Subhash is shocked to read the news; he disapproves of Udayan disregarding what he perceives as their parents' right to choose marital partners for them from families they deem suitable. Subhash's response to the news demonstrates his conservativeness: the importance he places

on birth order and marriages arranged by parents. Subhash considers Udayan's marriage yet another example of his "forging ahead of Subhash, of denying that he'd come second. Another example of getting his way" (*Lowland*, 47). Subhash notices that Gauri's photo is dated from a year earlier, 1968, implying that Udayan was already acquainted with Gauri while Subhash still lived in Calcutta. This betrayal, the thought that Udayan kept the relationship a secret, makes Subhash uneasy. Once again, Subhash feels defeated by Udayan, not only because he had married a woman of his own choosing, and done so before his older brother, but also "for having found a girl like that" (ibid.).

Subhash finds Gauri compelling, and the phrase "a girl like that," as well as the fact that he begins to carry the photograph of Gauri with him, implies that he is attracted to her from the very beginning. The brother double's internal rivalry rears its head once again. As is apparent also in his later decision to marry, and stay married, to Gauri after Udayan's death, this passage makes clear that Subhash does not simply act out of loyalty and a sense of duty towards Udayan, but out of desire for Gauri. Gauri is the woman that both brothers marry, but there are other significant relationships in Subhash's life, which will be discussed in the following section.

4.2.3 Romantic Relationships Juxtaposed

Part II of the novel deals with the brothers' romances: Udayan's with Gauri, and Subhash's with Holly, a separated American woman he meets on one of his beach walks in Rhode Island. Udayan and Gauri's love story will last beyond death, whereas Subhash and Holly's is a passing affair. The paralleling of the romances heightens the sense of the characters' doubling; the brother double is separated by thousands of miles but living a similar phase in life.

Another reason for the parallel presentation of Subhash and Udayan's romances is to illustrate how differently they deal with the potential (and in Udayan and Gauri's case very real) disapproval of their parents regarding their love interests. Udayan marries Gauri in secret, and chooses to tell his parents only afterwards, saying firmly that if they are not welcome as a married couple in the family home, they will live as a married couple elsewhere. Subhash, in turn, understands that bringing Holly home to his parents would be impossible:

> Her situation, her child, her age, the fact that she was technically another man's wife, all of it would be unthinkable to his parents, unacceptable. They would judge her for those things.
>
> He didn't want to put Holly through that. And yet he continued to see her on Fridays, forging this new clandestine path.

> […] A woman whose company he was used to, but whom, perhaps due to his own ambivalence, he didn't love. (*Lowland*, 77)

Subhash's parents' assumed disapproval of Holly is introduced as the reason preventing Subhash from getting too attached to her: he does not want to disappoint or distress them. Taking this fact into account, it is intriguing that only months later, Subhash marries Gauri with little consideration for how his parents feel about it. The loss of Udayan appears to free Subhash of his internalized need to be the good son.

Udayan's untimely death breaks apart the brother double, figuratively and literally. Udayan's death portrait is made from a photograph taken with Subhash on their graduation day from higher secondary school. The picture is cut in half, the image of Udayan isolated, framed and hung up on the wall. The halved image heightens the isolation Subhash feels; Udayan is gone, his parents broken with grief and unable to reach out to him, and he has yet to meet Gauri. His arrival in Calcutta is of no comfort to his parents; they do not ask about his life in the United States, nor do they ask him to abandon his life there and return home permanently. They refuse to tell him the details of Udayan's death, and Subhash must turn to Gauri for the truth. She tells him how Udayan was shot in front of his parents and herself, and how his body was never returned to them. Subhash understands that his parents had been shamed, which adds to their unwillingness to speak about their son's death: "Unable to help Udayan, unable in the end to protect him. Losing him in an unthinkable way" (*Lowland*, 113).

The above passage crystallizes the complexity of political violence. Sayan Aich Bhowmik (2018, 41) observes that there is a rift between public history and private memory, as "the heroes of the wars are decorated and the martyrs of local/communal violence forgotten." The Naxal movement divided rather than unified India, and friends were not easily identifiable from enemies. Accounts of factional violence are often glossed over in a form of collective amnesia (ibid.). *Lowland* depicts how this collective amnesia results in the repression of the painful private memory (Udayan's involvement with the Naxalites and subsequent death), in the case of Udayan's parents, Gauri, and Subhash alike. The concepts of official history and collective amnesia explain why a repressed trauma continues to affect involved individuals decades later.

After Udayan's death, Subhash must build a new identity for himself. As concretely illustrated by the boys' graduation picture turned into a death portrait of Udayan, essentially half of Subhash is gone. For his entire life so far, his identity has been built in relation to Udayan – his existence has never been singular, but always the other half of a unit. Subhash is unable to shed the past and chooses to continue Udayan's life for him. He marries Gauri and takes her with him to the United States, offering to raise Udayan's child as his own. Despite losing such a great part of

himself, Subhash is not paralyzed by Udayan's death in the manner that his parents and Gauri are. He is able to evaluate the situation from some distance but sees Udayan's efforts in the Naxal movement as wasted: "Udayan had given his life to a movement that had been misguided, that had caused only damage, that had already been dismantled. The only thing he'd altered was what their family had been" (*Lowland*, 115). Udayan's activism resulted in his own annihilation, heartbreak for his parents, and an uncertain future for Subhash, Gauri, and Udayan's unborn child.

Subhash feels an awareness, a lingering presence of Udayan around Gauri, a feeling he wants to hold on to. In addition, he is increasingly appalled by the way his parents treat Gauri, finding his mother's coldness and father's indifference equally cruel. Hindu traditions restricting the lives of widows are discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3 in relation to Divakaruni and Mukherjee's works. Subhash anticipates that Gauri will lose control of the child she is carrying to his parents, and have to endure a trapped existence, unable to leave. He considers the options he has to help her:

> The only way to prevent it was to take Gauri away. It was *all he could do to help* her, the only alternative he could provide. And the only way to take her away was to marry her. *To take his brother's place*, to raise his child, to come to love Gauri *as Udayan had*. To follow him in a way that felt perverse, that felt ordained. That felt both right and wrong. (*Lowland*, 115; emphases added)

This is a pivotal passage regarding the future of all the main characters, and also in illustrating the competitive aspects of the brothers' bond. Subhash is not motivated by altruism alone, and does not merely propose a marriage of convenience, but his intention is to *take his brother's place* and to come to love Gauri *as Udayan had*. Subhash's purpose is not to support, but to replace. However, when Subhash contemplates presenting his suggestion to Gauri, he is racked with doubts. "You're nothing like your brother" (*Lowland*, 118), a police investigator comments to Subhash, adding to the irony that now, possibly for the first time in his life, Subhash would want to be like Udayan, for Gauri's benefit. Despite this unintended snub, Subhash makes use of Gauri's wariness of the police, whose interest in her has not ended with Udayan's death, and manages to convince her that she will be safer joining him in the United States.

Despite the opposition of Subhash's parents, and the disapproval of other family members and friends, Subhash and Gauri marry, and she moves with him to Rhode Island. Subhash tries to build a relationship with Gauri without putting too much pressure on her. When he asks her at the beach one day if being in America with him helps her at all, she replies that it does, but adds: "Your brother was supposed to be here. […] This child should have been his responsibility, whether he wanted it or

not" (*Lowland*, 137). Adjusting her thoughts to the new situation and letting go of Udayan seem to be an impossible feat for Gauri. Her answer also reveals that Udayan was not ready to be a father yet. Gauri's gratitude is mixed with guilt for her involvement in the Naxal movement that Subhash knows nothing about, and this casts a shadow on their relationship from the very beginning. Walking on the sand with Subhash, Gauri is reminded of Udayan's permanent footprints in front of the house in Calcutta: "Unlike Udayan's steps from childhood, which endured in the courtyard in Tollygunge, theirs were already vanishing, washed clean by the encroaching tide" (ibid.). This illustrates how Udayan, despite dying young, left a permanent imprint on the lives of the people who knew him, and how Gauri's love for him would endure decades, whereas the compassion that Gauri and Subhash feel for each other is but a fleeting emotion.

The couple remains distant also after the birth of Bela, Gauri and Udayan's daughter. The mutual love that Subhash hoped would eventually emerge fails to manifest, and true companionship between the spouses is non-existent. Subhash grows very close to Bela, whereas Gauri, as Bijoli (Subhash and Udayan's mother) had predicted, turns out to be a detached mother:

> Though she cared for Bela capably, though she kept her clean and combed and fed, she seemed distracted. Rarely did Subhash see her smiling when she looked into Bela's face. Rarely did he see Gauri kissing Bela spontaneously. Instead, from the beginning, it was as if she's reversed their roles, as if Bela was a relative's child and not her own. […] In order to marry Gauri he'd compromised his ties to his parents, perhaps permanently, he did not know. But he was a father now. He could no longer imagine a life in which he had not taken that step. (*Lowland*, 159–60)

Ironically, Subhash, who is not Bela's father, is able to bond with her in a way that Gauri, her biological mother, cannot. Subhash might have doubts regarding his marriage to Gauri, but he has no regrets regarding Bela. However, he is constantly aware that Bela is Udayan's daughter, and fearful that his secret will be revealed. For this reason, he chooses to avoid his parents even when they begin to express an interest in Bela: "he didn't want to be around the only other people in the world who knew that he was not Bela's father. They would remind him of his place, they would regard him as her uncle, they would never acknowledge that he was anything more" (*Lowland*, 155). Subhash's fear of being exposed prevents his parents from having any kind of relationship with their granddaughter.

Telling Bela the truth about her paternity when she is an adult not only releases Subhash from the burden of keeping a secret, but also from Udayan's shadow. Subhash finally realizes that he has not taken Udayan's place as a father, but that he

is Bela's father in his own right. He has not raised Bela *as his own*, but in every way that matters, Bela *is* his own.

Free of the burden of this secret, Subhash's life begins to flourish in a new way. He takes great pleasure in being a grandfather, and his relationship with Elise, a widowed schoolteacher, deepens into more than just a casual relationship. The final passage of the novel in which the reader encounters Subhash takes place during his honeymoon in Ireland. It depicts Subhash as an ageing man, but at peace with himself. He understands the effect that time has in molding character, describing how his life with Elise is a "shared conclusion to lives separately lived, separately built. There is no use wondering what might have happened if the man had met her in his forties, or in his twenties. He would not have married her then" (*Lowland*, 330). Subhash understands that regrets are futile, as people become who they are shaped by their experiences.

In this final chapter, Subhash is not once referred to by his name, but as "the man" or simply "he." This has a distancing and disorienting effect at first, but the reader is still given access to his innermost thoughts. This narrative choice creates a double layer: it describes how Subhash and Elise look to outsiders who observe them but do not know them – an elderly couple on holiday, "random people," but with so much experience, such full lives beneath their façade. At the same time, the reader's intimacy with Subhash is coming to an end. The reader is pleased to recognize him, and to see him content, but the distancing effect is similar to a camera moving away at the end of a film, saying goodbye.

The focus of the final chapter is on temporality; its first part offers a glimpse into Subhash and Elise's life of a shared present and expected future. It illustrates how past, present, and future exist simultaneously in any given moment. Subhash looks to the horizon on his walk with Elise:

> Amid the gray, an incongruous band of daytime blue. To the west, a pink sun already begins its descent. The effect is of three isolated aspects, distinct phases of the day. All of it, strewn across the horizon, is contained in his vision.
>
> Udayan is beside him. They are walking together in Tollygunge, across the lowland, over the hyacinth leaves. They carry a putting iron, some golf balls in their hands. (*Lowland*, 332)

The multi-layered narration complements Subhash's awareness of the multiple layers of time present in his life, which form and define him. Udayan now belongs to the past but continues to walk with him.

The second chapter in Part VIII finally offers the reader insight into Udayan's motivation from his own perspective. The reader is given Udayan's account of how he initially got involved in the Naxal movement, and how the atrocities he was

subjected to on his fieldtrip to the countryside allowed him to accept violence as a weapon for attempting revolution. Udayan began a double life, lying to Subhash, his parents, and even Gauri. Policemen were symbols of brutality for the Maoist party, and soon he was expected to involve himself in the murder of one. In the final passage of the novel, he stands in front of policemen and paramilitary about to kill him, but he can only think of Gauri: "He knew that he was no hero to her. He had lied to her and used her. And yet he had loved her" (*Lowland*, 339). As the fatal shots explode in Udayan's body, the reader is left with the final image on his mind – Gauri – and then: "Only silence. The sunlight on her hair" (*Lowland*, 340).

The last chapter creates a final parallel between the loves of the brother double: the ease, comfort, and nurture in the relationship of Subhash and Elise in their senior years, contrasted with the novelty, passion, and excitement of young Udayan and Gauri. Despite the brutality of Udayan's death, the reader is consoled by the genuine love he feels for Gauri.

Reminiscent of "Hema and Kaushik," *Lowland* employs the double to express the cumulative hurt that ensues from repressing a filial trauma or family secret. Subhash's good intentions of saving Gauri and raising Udayan's daughter result in making the whole family wretchedly unhappy. Only revealing the truth eventually brings relief and happier times, and releases Subhash from the haunting presence of his brother. On his honeymoon in Ireland, Subhash feels Udayan by his side, but only as a fleeting presence, and no longer as a black cloud casting a shadow on all aspects of his life. Like the rock that Subhash stumbles on during his walk with Elise, Udayan too has become "a marker, toward the end of his journey, of what is given, what is taken away" (*Lowland*, 332). Udayan thus becomes a non-threatening, fond memory. In addition to the intangible, haunting presence of Udayan, there are other gothic elements in the novel, which are discussed next.

4.2.4 Gothic Elements in The Lowland

Unlike "Hema and Kaushik," *Lowland* is not a gothic text according to a strict interpretation of the term, but it is scattered with elements of the gothic. *Lowland* lacks a traditional haunted house and madwoman in the attic but offers variations on both. The Tollygunge Club haunts Udayan and Subhash as a remnant of the colonial era and symbol for upward mobility, whereas repressed grief transforms their mother into a neighborhood banshee.

The proximity of the boys' home to the exclusive Tollygunge Club echoes the setting of a classic gothic novel, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and the Earnshaw family home's relationship with Thrushcross Grange and its inhabitants. Subhash and Udayan's nightly excursions to the club are reminiscent of Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff spying on Edgar and Isabella Linton outside the windows

of their home. In Udayan, being excluded from the club generates a violent opposition to injustice, and his willingness to participate in the class struggle later in life originates here, whereas Subhash is perhaps more motivated to climb the social classes to be legitimately admitted inside. When a policeman discovers the boys trespassing at the club and beats Subhash with a putting iron, a seed of distrust and even hatred of the police is planted in Udayan's mind. Subhash's response is of subdued resignation. The scene illustrates not only the social atmosphere in Calcutta a decade after India's independence, but also differences in the boys' characters. The passage also foreshadows future events of the novel, as Subhash will indeed return to the club one day as an invited guest, and Udayan's fate will be sealed by his participation in the murder of a police officer. Ironically, Udayan's daughter Bela will spend her twelfth birthday at the Tolly Club.

In a postcolonial context, the Tollygunge Club represents the manor house or great house of the 'Empire gothic'.[23] As Carol Davison (2003, 137) observes, the manor house "is usually bolstered by colonial wealth and functions as a prominent signpost of the British 'civilizing mission' and its attendant patriarchal power and authority." At the Tolly Club in Subhash and Udayan's childhood, "though Nehru was Prime Minister, it was the new Queen of England, Elizabeth II, whose portrait presided in the main drawing room" (*Lowland*, 7). The Tollygunge Club represents the roots of inequality in India; in Udayan's words, "The travesty of Independence, half of India still in chains. Only it was Indians chaining themselves now" (*Lowland*, 335). The ruling class in India were no longer outsiders, and yet equality was no more attainable than during the colonial era.

The authentic Tollygunge Club building, a Palladian villa, was originally built in Calcutta by Richard Johnson, a chairman of the General Bank of India, as part of an indigo plantation in 1785. Later, the widows and sons of Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore and firm rival of British imperialism, were exiled to Calcutta and some of them lived on Johnson's estate after Tipu's death in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War. By 1895, "the great house was abandoned, colonized by civets, sheathed in vines" (*Lowland*, 14). It is worth noting that Lahiri herself uses the term "great house" in reference to the Tollygunge Club. William Cruickshank had the villa restored and converted into a country club opened in 1895, first for the British, and later, after independence, for the Indian upper classes too.

[23] The Empire gothic refers to a gothic text in which the shadow of the British Empire has significant influence. Both the Imperial gothic of the fin de siècle, and the postcolonial gothic of the late twentieth century can be classified under this rubric, "given their preoccupation with imperialism and its impact domestically and abroad" (Davison 2003, 137).

In Subhash and Udayan's childhood, it is still only children of British families that have stayed on after independence who host birthday parties with ice cream and pony rides. When Subhash and Bela visit Calcutta in the 1980s, the club has long allowed access to Indians, but naturally only to those who can afford its high membership fee. The tradition of serving cheese and cucumber sandwiches, and organizing parties with ice cream and pony rides, is still alive and well. The house's status remained unaltered after the end of British rule, as the club continued to be exclusively for the ruling class – this time, wealthy and powerful Indian families.

As often with female gothic texts (see, for example, Punter and Byron 2004, 279–80), interiors are significant in *Lowland*. Common themes include escape from patriarchy, the realization of psychological individuation, and socio-cultural readings which focus on domestic ideology (ibid.). In *Lowland*, too, interiors house women willing to break free for various reasons – in old age, Subhash and Udayan's mother Bijoli is literally prevented by a chain from leaving the upper floor of her house, and Gauri has her spirit stifled as a young widow inside her in-laws' home. Gothic tradition is abundant in passages of this kind; once again, one does not need to look beyond the works of the Brontë sisters – Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Catherine Earnshaw (imprisoned first as a young woman and later in her last days at Thrushcross Grange), her daughter Cathy Linton (imprisoned at Wuthering Heights in order to force her to marry Linton Heathcliff), and Isabella Linton (imprisoned at Wuthering Heights until she manages to escape) in *Wuthering Heights*.

Gauri, too, is a prisoner of interiors: first inside the house of her in-laws, then in Subhash's house in Rhode Island. Even as a college student in Calcutta at her grandparents' flat, she prefers to spend time outside on the balcony. On one of the first occasions that she meets Udayan, she tells him how as a child she would come out to the balcony to sleep: "She had loved waking up out-of-doors, without the protection of walls and a ceiling" (*Lowland*, 54). From the perspective of feminist critique, in a culture in which women tend to lead restricted lives, this characteristic could be interpreted as a metaphor of a woman's struggle for emancipation in a stifling patriarchal environment that confines her to the house. It is safe to say that it illustrates Gauri's character as someone who is not afraid to act against norms – a characteristic she shares with Udayan. In Rhode Island with Subhash, Gauri does feel trapped by wifehood and motherhood, but a contributing factor is that she is simultaneously trapped inside a lie. In her later life in California, Gauri is presented as a content if not overtly happy, independent woman, who does not really need anyone else in her life, certainly not a man. She maintains a rather unorthodox personal life consisting of socializing mainly with colleagues and students, and of fleeting relationships, including one longer affair with a woman. Her publications include a feminist appraisal of Hegel, but she is not the kind to fight on barricades

for women's rights. Her emancipation is not explicitly that of a woman oppressed by patriarchy, but a woman haunted by her past. Even after her escape from married life and motherhood to California, Gauri still appears to lead but half a life. Her "rebirth" after visiting India and turning away from suicide is not into a new life altogether, but instead a return to the life she has created for herself, only now enhanced with closure with her past crime soon to be followed by the hope of re-bonding with her daughter and granddaughter one day. Gauri's story is not that of the typical gothic wife character, who is driven to madness by her marriage, but rather a reversal of it – the clarity of her mind allows her to pursue an academic career and create an independent life for herself.

Bijoli is a devoted mother-figure, but after the loss of one son, she is unable to find pleasure in the existence of the other. Some years after Udayan's death, the boys' father suggests that the couple sell the house and move away from Tollygunge, possibly even to America to be with Subhash. For Bijoli this is an incomprehensible idea; she could not "abandon the house where Udayan had lived since birth, the neighborhood where he died" (*Lowland*, 182). Bijoli appears to believe that maintaining physical proximity to where Udayan had lived and died will somehow sustain him; she acknowledges that he is dead but refuses to fully comprehend it, expecting him to return some day. Partly out of her own choice, Bijoli then gradually transforms into "the mad woman in the attic." She never fully recovers from the loss of Udayan, and eventually slides into dementia and confusion. She walks to Udayan's memorial stone at the edge of the lowland where he died every day, clearing its surroundings of garbage – an allegory for attempting to keep the memory of her son pure. Her neighbors, however, have long forgotten, or may even have wished to forget, that Udayan ever existed. Bijoli's grief prevents her from keeping up with the present, and gradually she is lost in the wilderness of her own mind, an outcast in her own society:

> Bijoli understands that she scares these children; that to them she, too, is a kind of ghostly presence in the neighborhood, a specter watching over them from the terrace; always emerging at the same time every day. She is tempted to tell them that they are right, and that Udayan's ghost does lurk, inside the house and around it, in and around the enclave. (*Lowland*, 180)

For Bijoli, Udayan's presence is very real. For example, when on her visit to Calcutta, Bela asks Bijoli why she goes out to the lowland every day, she replies that she goes to speak to Bela's father (Udayan). Bela explains that her father (Subhash) is in the next room, and Bijoli is confused, believing for a moment that Udayan has in fact returned (*Lowland*, 198). In her permanent state of melancholy, Bijoli is aware

that Udayan is dead, but wishes so hard for him to be alive, that for her, he almost continues to be.

Bijoli's grief is mixed with rage and bitterness: that Udayan was killed in such a brutal way, that his body was never returned to the family, and that there was no public acknowledgement of his death. Udayan's memory was dishonored by what he was involved in and the way he died, and as a result, the whole Mitra family was shunned for it. Bijoli, who in the past used to assist others, and was once a respected member of her community, finds this an additional taunt. Her rage is so great that it comes out only in bursts and must be literally subdued, chained in. One day, finding Udayan's memorial stone surrounded by waste from a wedding party, a celebration of the kind she was never able to have for her sons, pushes her over the edge:

> She wants to know who has done this. Who has desecrated this place? Who has insulted Udayan's memory this way? She calls out to the neighbors. Who was responsible? Why did they not come forward? Had they already forgotten what happened? […] She waits for Udayan to appear amid the water hyacinth and walk toward her. It is safe now, she tells him. The police have gone. No one will take you away. Come quickly to the house. You must be hungry. Dinner is ready. Soon it will be dark. Your brother married Gauri. I am alone now. You have a daughter in America. Your father has died. She waits, certain that he is there, that he hears what she tells him. She talks to herself, to no one. Tired of waiting, she waits some more. (*Lowland*, 191)

Lowland is a ghost story of a kind; Udayan does not haunt his family as an apparition, but his presence in his family's life after his death cannot be denied. He continues to influence the destiny of all his loved ones, including his daughter Bela and even his granddaughter Meghna, neither of whom he had the chance to meet. He visits Gauri in her dreams, Subhash in his memories, and his mother in her everyday existence. Eventually the passing of time and the appearance of new generations brings closure with the past to those who survive Udayan, and gradually the memory of him begins to fade. When Gauri is about to jump to her death from the guesthouse balcony on her visit to Calcutta after more than three decades away, she is not saved by what she has, but by that which she no longer has – a deep connection with Udayan. As she is about to give up her life, she expects to see him or feel his presence, but he is no longer there. Forty years after Udayan's death, it is finally time for Gauri to let him go.

As the wife and daughter of both Udayan and Subhash, Gauri and Bela are significant characters in *Lowland*. Their relationship with the brother double and relevance to the general themes of the novel are explored further in the next section.

4.2.5 Forging a New Diasporic Womanhood: Gauri and Bela

Gauri is the central female character in *Lowland*; she is loved by both brothers but does not have a lasting relationship with either. She marries Subhash in order to secure a better future for her and Udayan's child, but eventually deserts that child as well as Subhash. Gauri is a mirror between the two brothers, bringing out their good qualities: the soft and loving side of Udayan, and the good father in Subhash. However, Gauri should not be considered merely a foil, as the novel awards her ample time and space to voice her own story, and roughly a third of the book is narrated from her perspective.

Nalini Iyer (2018, 259) argues that as a character, Gauri is significant in depicting how a woman's identity is constructed through family, community, and nation, and how this process is unsettled and refashioned by migration. As already suggested, Lahiri is not a writer with an overtly feminist agenda. Taking this into consideration, Gauri is probably the most radical female character out of all her works. Gauri does not object to wifehood or motherhood as such, but once family life turns out to be a failure for her, and an alternative is presented, she does not hesitate to leave in pursuit of an academic career.

Gauri is depicted as a bookish girl, entirely unaware of her attractiveness, which is described as not of the traditional kind. Gauri was brought up in Calcutta by her grandparents instead of her parents, who chose to live in the countryside, far from the city. This unusual arrangement is not given much space in the narrative but could have played a significant part in Gauri's attachment issues later in life – it is certainly a plausible explanation for her capability to abandon her daughter. After all, Gauri's own experience was that a child could have a happy enough life without the presence of her biological parents. She appears quite detached from her family altogether; growing up, she is close to her brother Manash, but they barely keep in touch after she settles in the United States.

Gauri and Udayan's love story is brief and passionate. They rush to get married but are in no hurry to start a family. Udayan is a social reformer, and yet he expects Gauri to adopt the traditional role of a wife and daughter-in-law at home. Despite her independence and earlier disregard toward marriage, Gauri accepts this role out of love for Udayan. *Lowland* suggests that the Naxalite movement was male-dominated with women only in an ancillary role (Iyer 2018, 261). Gauri does not criticize the oppressiveness of the domestic sphere in her mother-in-law's house, and Udayan also remains silent about the position of women despite his revolutionary thinking and concerns with social inequality (Iyer 2018, 262). Gauri's emancipation comes later in connection to her studies in philosophy in the United States.

Udayan mentions to Gauri that since he was the first to get married, he would want Subhash to be the first to have a child. Later he says that once the revolution is successful, they will bring children into the world. On the morning of the day he

dies, Udayan, most likely ridden with guilt over the policeman's murder he participated in, asks Gauri if she would be satisfied to never have children. "I can't become a father, Gauri. […] Not after what I've done," he says, but not revealing to her what it was he had done (*Lowland,* 322). Neither of them is aware at the time that Gauri is already pregnant with Bela. After Udayan's death, Gauri does not want to raise the child alone, nor be a burden to her in-laws. She is not enthusiastic about becoming a mother, but the child is the only concrete memory of Udayan that she has. If she were to remain with her in-laws, she would possibly lose control of her child to them and would be bound to them for the rest of her life. Wanting to hold on to a piece of Udayan drives her to accept Subhash's offer of marriage and move to Rhode Island with him. In addition, after being interrogated by the police months after Udayan's death, Gauri realizes that she may also need protection from prosecution. Last but perhaps not least, Subhash promises (but appears to forget this after Bela is born) that Gauri can continue her studies in the United States, which no doubt is a tempting offer compared to continuing to live with her in-laws in Calcutta.

Gauri is presented as withdrawn and reserved, her moods difficult to read. She is not prone to hysterics, and barely cries after Udayan's death, giving the other characters, as well as the reader, the impression that she is more composed than she is. In fact, Udayan's death is such a shock to Gauri that her life becomes merely survival, the present moment unbearable.

Gauri's reasons for accepting Subhash's marriage proposal are not explicitly worded in *Lowland*, but fear of losing her child to her in-laws, and fear of the authorities, are significant motivators. She does acknowledge Subhash's physical similarity to Udayan, but the attraction Subhash feels for her is not reciprocated. The only explanation that the reader is given is that Gauri's grief and feeling of being alone in the world leads her to desperate measures:

> And yet, with Udayan gone, anything seemed possible. The ligaments that held her life together were no longer there. Their absence made it possible to couple herself, however prematurely, however desperately, with Subhash. She'd wanted to leave Tollygunge. To forget everything her life had been. And he had handed her the possibility. In the back of her mind she told herself she could come one day to love him, out of gratitude if nothing else. (*Lowland*, 127)

Gauri's wishful thinking is of no avail; at best, her and Subhash's relationship is a respectful amicability between two adults who know that they are not in love and never were. At worst, it is a bitter push-and-pull struggle of repressed feelings of wasted effort and lost opportunities. It takes Subhash a long time to admit that he has made a mistake in expecting that Gauri would ever be happy with him; the first

indication is her detachment as a parent (surprisingly but correctly predicted by Bijoli), the last the cowardly way she leaves him and Bela – in secret, while they are on holiday in India, leaving them only a brief note to discover on their return.

Attractive, intelligent, and the object of both Udayan and Subhash's affections, Gauri is not a maternal woman, which can be jarring for the reader; at least it is an unusual trait for any female protagonist. It also undercuts the idea of the South Asian model migrant's double productivity, referring to success in both work and family life (Nadiminti 2018, 245). Gauri opts for intellectual labor instead of succumbing to reproductive labor in the family, in which "the Global South female body is expected to nurture the national primacy of the family unit" (Nadiminti 2018, 246). Gauri not only questions expectations set for South Asian diaspora women in the United States, but also the narrative of motherhood within Indian culture is reinscribed through her actions (Iyer 2018, 264). In India, motherhood is venerated and fetishized, and the figure of the mother is intertwined in forms of nationalism – both right wing and feminist (ibid.). Through Gauri, *Lowland* describes how occasionally, motherhood must be sacrificed to gain autonomy or facilitate a demanding career. That women must sometimes prioritize their careers instead of having children is not an uncommon concept, but for a woman to leave an existing family is still taboo even in fiction and appears radical in the context of both Indian and American cultures.

Gauri is, first and foremost, a philosophy scholar, which influences her outlook on other aspects of life as well. She contemplates the essence and meaning of temporality: how the future is and has been perceived. In comparison, Udayan's perception of time was that of a physicist, in accordance with how he perceived life in general; the flow of time did not have any naturally preferred direction in the case of fundamental interaction, no distinction between forward and backward (*Lowland,* 151). For Gauri, putting an ocean between her and the past helps her to look forward and go on; she can tolerate the present by looking ahead. Simultaneously, being married to Udayan's brother and raising his child is a constant reminder of past events. This inability to find closure and let go is most likely what drives her to desert Subhash and Bela – a need to sever ties to unburden herself. She is unable to love Bela wholeheartedly, and her past with Udayan offers no consolation, as her love for him is now intermingled with resentment. She explains her motives in the following:

> She was failing at something every other woman on earth did without trying. That should not have proved a struggle. Even her own mother, who had not fully raised her, had loved her; of that there had been no doubt. But Gauri feared she had already descended to a place where it was no longer possible to swim up to Bela, to hold on to her.

> Nor was her love for Udayan recognizable or intact. Anger was always mounted to it, zigzagging through her like some helplessly mating pair of insects. Anger at him for dying when he might have lived. For bringing her happiness, and then taking it away. For trusting her, only to betray her. For believing in sacrifice, only to be so selfish in the end. (*Lowland*, 164)

Recognizing that she is unable to love Bela like she thinks a mother should, Gauri considers it better to remove her presence from her daughter's life altogether. Gauri's ambivalence regarding motherhood and her marriage to Subhash increases her frustration and heightens her feelings of imprisonment. The little time that she can dedicate to her studies sustains her but does not bring the balance that she craves. In addition, Gauri is trapped in the lie of Bela's true origin. Subhash has become the better parent, but he is not Bela's real father. Gauri would want to reveal the secret of Bela's parenthood to her, perhaps to justify her ambivalence regarding Bela, but Subhash convinces her not to, for fear of losing Bela's affection. Gauri also depends on the firm bond between Subhash and Bela for practical matters; the more time they spend with each other, the more she has for herself. Even as Gauri and Subhash's marriage deteriorates, the possibility of separation is not discussed.

Gauri's choice to desert Subhash and Bela accentuates Subhash's success in supplanting his brother as a parent. He has taken his brother's place, but in regard to Udayan's daughter rather than his wife. Gauri recognizes this herself, in her farewell letter to Subhash: "You are her father. As you pointed out long ago, and as I have long come to accept, you have proven yourself to be a better parent than I. I believe you are a better father than Udayan would have been. Given what I'm doing, it makes no sense for her connection with you to undergo any change" (*Lowland*, 211). She continues to keep the secret of Bela's paternity.

Gauri is a mirror, or rather, a magnifying glass between the brothers, emphasizing and drawing out the good in them. However, this comes at a cost to her own likeability as a character. Even with access to Gauri's innermost thoughts and feelings, she remains distant to the reader – her pain often inaccessible, and her motivation a mystery. Only with Udayan has Gauri given in to her emotions, and ever since, her actions appear to be governed by rationality. Subhash offers this analysis upon the discovery that she has gone:

> Of the three women in Subhash's life – his mother, Gauri, Bela – there remained only one. His mother's mind was now a wilderness. There was no shape to it any longer, no clearing. It had been overtaken, overgrown. She'd been converted permanently by Udayan's death.

> That wilderness was her only freedom. She was locked inside her home, taken out once each day. Deepa[24] would prevent her from endangering herself, from embarrassing herself, from making further scenes.
>
> But Gauri's mind had saved her. It had enabled her to stand upright. It had cleared a path for her. It had prepared her to walk away. (*Lowland*, 213)

The two women who witnessed Udayan's death thus have very different destinies. Overcome with losing her son, Bijoli's reason is compromised. In contrast, Gauri's emotions shut down, and it is the clarity of her mind and shrewd thinking that save her. Readers and critics have been equally baffled by the depiction of Gauri, and in her review of *Lowland*, Michiko Kakutani (2013), acclaimed critic for the New York Times, called her "a folk tale parody of a cold, selfish witch, who's fulfilling her nasty mother-in-law's worst predictions." However, I offer that Gauri is no worse than many of her fictional male counterparts who walk out on their families with very little insight offered into their internal motivation.

Considering that Gauri has so far been portrayed as a detached character, preferring to keep to herself and avoiding intimate relationships, it comes as a surprise to the reader that in California her permanent position is at a small college, in which she is expected to get to know her students well and to mentor them. She does make herself available to them but avoids other relationships. She prefers to keep to herself, excluding a few brief affairs. Looking back, Gauri admits to herself that apart from Udayan's death, every action since has been a calculated move, drawing out various versions of herself:

> From wife to widow, from sister-in-law to wife, from mother to childless woman. With the exception of losing Udayan, she had actively chosen to take these steps.
>
> She had married Subhash; she had abandoned Bela. She had generated alternative versions of herself, she had insisted at brutal cost on these conversions. Layering her life only to strip it bare, only to be alone in the end. (*Lowland*, 240)

Settling into her autumn years with retirement looming on the horizon, Gauri does have regrets regarding Bela. She occasionally searches for her on the internet, but finds nothing, and does not contact Subhash to ask. Gauri is aware that the damage she has done is irreversible and does not have the courage to even attempt to make amends. When Subhash finally writes to Gauri, asking her for a divorce, she decides

[24] A servant and companion to Bijoli.

to return to Rhode Island to meet him in person, and to find out about Bela at the same time.

Gauri is entirely unprepared to find Bela and her young daughter Meghna at Subhash's house. After Bela rejects her attempts to reconnect, Gauri changes her travel plans, and, instead of attending a conference in London where she was originally headed, she books a flight to Calcutta.

Gauri's visit to Calcutta is a last attempt to find closure with the past. She meets her brother Manash's family, visits the Mitras' old house in Tollygunge and what is left of the lowland by it. Revisiting the site of Udayan's murder brings no peace: "She was unprepared for the landscape to be so altered. For there to be no trace of that evening, forty autumns ago. […] Standing there, unable to find him, she felt a new solidarity with him. The bond of not existing" (*Lowland*, 320). On the following morning after her visit to Tollygunge, Gauri is overcome by the urge to end her life. As she imagines climbing over the balcony railing next to which she is standing, she is saved by what has eluded her for most of her life – the immediacy of the present moment:

> She leaned forward. She saw the spot where she would fall. She recalled the thrill of meeting him, of being adored by him. The moment of losing him. The fury of learning how he'd implicated her. The ache of bringing Bela into the world, after he was gone.
>
> She opened her eyes. He was not there. (*Lowland*, 323)

She can no longer see Udayan, but only the ordinary hustle and bustle of a typical Calcuttan morning. She hears Abha, the housekeeper at her guesthouse, call up from a vegetable stand, asking if she needed anything else for the day. A few days later, Gauri returns to her life in California.

Some months later, Gauri receives a letter from Bela, saying that her daughter Meghna has been asking about her since her visit, and that once she is older, Bela will tell her about Gauri. If, after learning the truth, Meghna is still willing to get to know her, Bela will not stand in their way. Like Subhash being unable to carry on living a lie into the third generation, Bela does not want her bitterness to prevent Meghna from knowing her grandmother. Also, Bela refuses to conceal the truth from Meghna, but wants her to be able to base her decision on a full disclosure of facts. Bela's letter is the last glance at Gauri offered to the reader; the ending of the novel is left open regarding her, but on a positive note. Gauri, who had not wanted to become a mother, is most likely to find comfort and meaning in her senior years from her relationship with her granddaughter. She does not grow old with either of the Mitra brothers but leads the fulfilling life of an academic that she originally sought before meeting Udayan. She is not a feminist activist or public advocate for social

change, but "embodies small, personal revolutions" (Iyer 2018, 265). Her character is not the only embodiment of novel diasporic womanhood in *Lowland*; equally significant is that of her deserted daughter Bela.

Despite Gauri's emotional detachment, she is a significant presence in her daughter's life, and her sudden disappearance is devastating for the twelve-year-old Bela. Gauri's abandonment causes Bela to distance from Subhash as well, as not understanding the situation, she blames him for driving Gauri away and not thinking of a way to get her to return. The years following Gauri's disappearance are mainly characterized by Subhash's fatherly concern for Bela. Losing her mother is a huge blow for Bela, and that Gauri's exit from her life was voluntary makes it harder still. Subhash had hoped to be a comfort to Bela, but she withdraws from him too. Subhash feels that Gauri has left Bela with him and yet taken her away (*Lowland*, 216). He makes no effort to contact Gauri, and eventually, with the passing of time and seeing a psychologist, Bela's pain begins to ease. Subhash is grateful for the help but feels threatened by the psychologist, resentful that he is not able to help Bela by himself. As the narrator describes Subhash's emotions: "He remembered first learning that Udayan had married Gauri and feeling replaced by her. He felt replaced now, a second time" (*Lowland*, 217). After school, Bela majors in environmental science, but instead of continuing to graduate school after college, she moves to Western Massachusetts to work on a farm. Bela forges a nomadic existence, consisting of a series of temporary jobs without fringe benefits or even insurance. She visits Subhash a few times a year, speaking of friends but never bringing anyone with her. Subhash notices that she is driven by an ideology and strong vocation reminiscent of her biological father, Udayan:

> He saw that there was a spirit of opposition to the things she did.
>
> She was spending time in cities, in blighted sections of Baltimore and Detroit. She helped to convert abandoned properties into community gardens. She taught low-income families to grow vegetables in their backyards, so that they wouldn't have to depend entirely on food banks. She dismissed Subhash when he praised her for these efforts. It was necessary, she said. (*Lowland*, 224)

Bela's choices are hard for Subhash to accept, but as with Gauri, he decides it is better to let go. However, Subhash fears that Udayan's genes have influenced her more than the stability provided by himself, and "there were times Subhash believed that Udayan would come back, claiming his place, claiming Bela from the grave as his own" (*Lowland*, 275). The rivalry between the brothers, first for their parents' affection, then for Gauri, and now Bela, is still not over. Subhash lives in constant guilt from lying to Bela, in fear of being exposed, and feels compelled to tell her the truth. The opportunity presents itself when she returns to Rhode Island, pregnant and

asking if she can stay for a while. Bela explains that she has decided to raise the child on her own, because the father was not the kind of father she wanted for her child – nothing like Subhash (*Lowland*, 263). Subhash finds the coincidence a bewildering repetition of Bela's own origins and realizes he cannot go on without telling her about Udayan. When Subhash finally tells Bela the truth, it is initially a great shock for her, but eventually brings them closer as father and daughter than they had been. Bela's paternity provides her with a reason for Gauri's desertion. Bela moves back to her childhood home in Rhode Island and raises her daughter Meghna there. She meets Drew, a local farmer, and trusts him enough to allow herself to fall in love and be happy with him.

Bela is detached and nomadic, but she has one close relationship that endures: her association with the earth, the land she farms. The land in connection to identity is not a coincidence, and it is an allegory Lahiri has used in the past in *Unaccustomed Earth*.[25] Iyer (2018, 266) suggests Bela's connection to the land facilitates her deracination, her moving away from cultural links to India and merging with America. For twenty-first-century feminism, ecology and sustainability appear more important than ethnicity and ancestry (ibid.). According to Iyer (ibid.), *Lowland* promotes the view that barriers of race and gender can be overcome by leading a "local" life focused on land and family. I offer that Bela leads the kind of life in which ethnicity is not an issue; she exists in a less racialized environment. *Lowland* suggests that upper middle class South Asian Americans have a wide array of options, even the option to disregard the expectations of their first-generation immigrant parents and the norms set by society. Furthermore, with its atypical family formations, the novel contests the idealization and stereotyping of the immigrant nuclear family in the United States (Nadiminti 2018, 255). Through the characters of Gauri and Bela, the novel accentuates the diversity of the South Asian diaspora in the United States and reimagines South Asian American womanhood.

Bela is significant in the narrative of the brother double in that she enables Subhash to grow into a father in his own right, not as Udayan's substitute. Revealing the truth about Bela's paternity unburdens Subhash from the weight of his brother's legacy that he has carried for decades. He gains his freedom and a daughter who wants to stay with him regardless. Furthermore, Bela appears to have inherited Udayan's idealism and urge to fight inequality, but instead of attacking the

[25] The aforementioned epigraph of *Unaccustomed Earth* is borrowed from Hawthorne's "The Custom-House" (1850) and reads: "Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth." In the short story collection's title story, the main character Ruma's father helps her to plant flowers in the garden while her son plants Legos and other toys.

establishment, Bela chooses to build upwards from the grassroots level by helping the less privileged. She continues Udayan's work in a more constructive manner. Despite his short life, Udayan lives on in Bela and her accomplishments.

4.3 Concluding Remarks

Jhumpa Lahiri's writing may evade categorization, but it is safe to argue that there are two elements that are always present in her published fiction in English: families and migrant characters. I offer that in addition to the aforementioned, Lahiri's writing always includes dualities and juxtapositions in some form. Sau-ling Wong (1993, 83) writes that despite differences in focus and varying theoretical approaches to dealing with the double in literature, its method of operating remains the same: it represents psychogenic conflict. Wong (ibid.) adds:

> The resulting double figure may be a separate, autonomous character in the fictional world, or it may be a hallucination; some writers work within conventions of narrative verisimilitude, while others exploit the protagonist's psychological instability and emphasize the double's ghostly and ambiguous status. But a plurality of literary approaches is possible.

Wong (1993, 84) reminds us that classic stories of physical doppelgängers such as Dostoevsky's *The Double* or Poe's *William Wilson* should not be revered as the standard for the occurrence of literary doubles. Doing so might blind the literature scholar to the numerous ways in which the double appears in literature (ibid). The doubles in Lahiri's works are text-driven – the motivation to consider two characters a double is inherent in the text itself, even though the doubles are not physical doppelgängers. In "Hema and Kaushik," the main characters' bond and mutual involvement is underscored throughout the three stories, both on the story level, and in the narrative form. In *Lowland*, the duality and "twinness" of Subhash and Udayan is emphasized to the degree that the reader forgets that they are brothers with a fifteen-month age difference and very different personalities.

Feelings of nonbelonging and dislocation are common among Lahiri's characters. In "Hema and Kaushik," the main characters form a double that depicts the migrant's struggle with various degrees of cultural hybridity. To simplify, Hema, the more adaptive and grounded character, perseveres, while Kaushik, the rootless drifter, unable to latch on to any form of permanence, perishes. Motherhood is deeply entwined with cultural inheritance in the story, and Kaushik's inability to put down roots is magnified by him losing his mother at a tender age.

Lowland is not as focused on migration as "Hema and Kaushik," even though Subhash and Gauri, unwillingly exiled, both end up calling America home. Instead

of migration and its effects, the focus in *Lowland* is more on existential themes. It juxtaposes a long, peaceful life with a short one, a passionate personality with a deliberating one, biological parenthood with adoption, choices made on impulse with calculated ones, and contemplates how the passing of time shapes individuals' perceptions of events and their personalities. The entire novel is built on binaries, repetition, and irony.

In both "Hema and Kaushik" and *Lowland*, doubling is used in the representation of the effects of trauma. In "Hema and Kaushik," the trauma is Parul's illness and death, heightened by the secrecy surrounding them. In *Lowland*, the main traumatic events are Udayan and Gauri's involvement in the Naxal movement, and Udayan's death because of it. The family secret, in turn, is Bela's paternity, which is hidden from her for over thirty years.

Mishra (2007, 118) argues that the narrative transformation of a traumatic memory may be a cure in itself, but the post-traumatic moment produces diasporic narratives that are always haunted by the specters of trauma. The Naxal movement affected an entire generation of Indian students, and their families by association. At the same time, the violence related to the movement triggers the memory of colonial violence and the struggle for independence in India, as well as the communal violence following Partition. Mishra (2007, 10) situates the origins of trauma in diasporic fiction in the loss of the homeland inherent in diasporic subjects. The loss is abstract and surfaces in texts, but there is no cure (ibid.). Old traumas are triggered by their new manifestations. Diasporic subjectivity thus "works in the shadow of trauma and is always 'en route,' never 'rooted'" (Mishra 2007, 119). Regardless of its origins, the recovery from trauma is an ongoing process which will perhaps never be completed.

In *Lowland*, then, the reader is exposed to Subhash's struggle to find his own identity, and to create a fulfilling life for himself on his own terms after Udayan's death. For most of his life, Subhash's life choices have been a reaction to his brother's. Bela, too, says that everything in her life has been a reaction; she lives as she does because of Gauri (*Lowland*, 259). After Udayan's death, Subhash first attempts to replace him by marrying Gauri and raising Bela, but ultimately finds true happiness and a satisfying life only after Gauri has moved away and Bela has learned the truth about her paternity.

Several scholars of the double have suggested that the doubled protagonist strives towards self-reintegration. Claire Rosenfeld (1963, 319) speaks of "personal coherence"; Clifford Hallam, of "psychic integration" (1981, 20). Keppler (1972, 195) goes as far as to advocate that "every second-self story, so far as the first self is concerned, is to one degree or another a story of shaping, a Bildungsroman," and the aim is toward an "expanded rather than contracted being" (Keppler 1972, 208). All these claims certainly apply to *Lowland*, as Subhash's story is indeed one of shaping,

finding his own identity, and staying true to it, despite him striking the reader as an unlikely protagonist at first – but turning out to be a quiet hero in the making. His character also corresponds to the idea of an expanded rather than contracted being, as after Udayan's death, he is first reduced to a mere fraction of what he used to be, but by the end of the story, his identity is likely to have been enhanced by the loss of his brother. In the end, Subhash has gained a daughter, a wife (and her family), and a new homeland. Most importantly, he has learned to value and respect life.

Fratricidal rivalry still often leads to the demise of twins and doubles. Juliana de Nooy (2005, 24) suggests that in the Romantic period, twins and doubles were usually identical in appearance, but "diametrically – even diabolically – opposed in character. The divide is primarily a moral one." Myths of doppelgängers and brotherly rivalry have evolved into more complex stories of the human condition, but brother doubles nevertheless continue to be a common trope in contemporary fiction. Despite their strong bond and love for each other, Subhash and Udayan are also rivals, competing first for their parents' love and recognition, later for Gauri, and even for Bela.

Both death and birth are associated with doubles (Rogers 1970, 9). De Nooy (2005, 22) agrees with the observation that "stories about twins are short on survivors. From Romulus and Remus to popular film today, a high proportion of twin tales conclude with the death of one or both twins. […] Twins who are not separated early, but whose lives are entwined are frequently doomed." De Nooy (2005, 121) concludes that "one twin must die before the other can accept and recognize her own identity." Hema is able to reconcile the past and settle down with Navin after Kaushik's death. Udayan's death is the catalyst that drives Subhash to find himself, creating a whole from a fragmented identity.

The double in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri depicts fragmented identities, aiming to heal and create integrated entities. However, individual peace can be achieved only through accepting a great degree of fragmentation and hybridity, and embracing the concept that humanity is built on imperfections. Both works carry the strong message that family secrets have adverse effects on offspring, whereas letting them out into the open can be a cathartic experience and a source of healing for the individuals involved. Similar complexities caused by family secrets are evident also in the works of Divakaruni and Mukherjee, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively. In *Sister* and *Vine*, the secret is Sudha's father Gopal's relationship with the Chatterjee family, as well as the concealment of Singhji's identity. The catalyst for the events in Mukherjee's *Daughters* and *Bride* is Tara's sister Padma's illegitimate child.

The outlook on life and the human condition in *Lowland* is best expressed by Subhash in the last chapter – the realization that when something is given, something is taken away (*Lowland*, 331). Udayan has a charmed life but dies young in a brutal

manner. Subhash has a close relationship with his brother but loses him early. Gauri has a fulfilling academic career, but no partner or family. Bela has a loving father and later a family of her own, but no mother. The clichéd expression of something given, something taken away feels fresh in the context of Lahiri's novel, crystallizing the winding routes of its main characters and contemplating on temporality. Offering wisdom only in retrospect, it is a view saturated in irony.

5 Conclusion: Narrating Deliverance

In this dissertation, I have explored the occurrence of the literary double in contemporary Bengali American fiction by analyzing post-millennial works by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Bharati Mukherjee. In the Introduction, I advocated for studying the aesthetic in South Asian American fiction and exploring the concept of a postcolonial poetics instead of focusing only on the material aspects of the narratives from a sociorealist perspective. My main argument, supported by the writing of such literary scholars as Elleke Boehmer and Andrew Hock Soon Ng, is that combining the analysis of formative characteristics and a psychological reading enables the uncovering of complexities that have been overlooked in the position of diaspora individuals. Through its portrayal of fictional diasporic subjects, literature can generate empathy in readers and provide insights on the intricacies of migrancy. Shedding light on these complexities, in turn, may reveal issues that are bubbling under the surface and add depth and new perspectives to our understanding of the position of diaspora subjects on a global scale. Examples of global problems related to migrancy that would benefit from a more in-depth examination are the political and religious radicalization of young people as a consequence of displacement and racism, and the ethnic, linguistic, and professional exclusion of migrant women from developing countries in Europe and North America. One such complexity raised to the forefront in my dissertation is the concept of subjectivity, which is reflected in the occurrence of the literary double in Divakaruni, Lahiri, and Mukherjee's novels. The double emerges from the margins between the individual and the plural; margins that are not defined as clearly in this genre of fiction as they usually are in Western cultural traditions.

An individualized model of self-writing is often not an option for marginalized subjects. Edwards (2011, 148) argues that just as feminist theorists in the 1970s rejected the binary oppositions that structure language and disempower women, women's autobiographical writing questions the binary of 'I' and 'we' as simple structures between which one can choose at will. In the novels by Divakaruni, Lahiri, and Mukherjee that I have examined in this dissertation, the questioning device is the literary double.

The double evades definition, it reflects its era and is altered by it; it adopts varying forms and functions. My analysis demonstrates that despite its elusiveness, the literary double is rich in meaning. In these Bengali American fictional works, the double expresses what the singular 'I' cannot; it becomes an extension and/or amplification of the individual, forging a new mode of selfhood.

Literary scholars have often reduced the double to a trope almost exclusively connected to the gothic genre. The postcolonial often includes gothic elements. An attempt to separate the double from the postcolonial gothic generates a debate of which preceded the other, the chicken or the egg; the horror and terror that gothic authors conjured with the aid of a vivid imagination is inherent in postcolonial contexts. The double becomes an embodiment of trauma, a vehicle to deliver the individual of repressed or unacknowledged pain.

I proposed in the Introduction that not only a postcolonial context, but a dual heritage invites the double. In the novels analyzed in my dissertation, the characters strive to resolve issues of identity and belonging, to determine to which family they belong, to which culture, and to which country. Some characters, such as Kaushik in "Hema and Kaushik," are overwhelmed by the dilemma of belonging, others, for example, Anju and Tara, embrace modes of mobile hybridity and thrive. Both characters discover their own voice through writing fiction as a form of therapy, reaffirming Mishra's (2007, 114) argument that writing is a cure for overcoming a traumatic memory. Both Divakaruni's *Vine* and Mukherjee's *Daughters* and *Bride* also support the idea that women can assert themselves by narrating their stories and the stories of others.

In my analysis of Divakaruni's *Sister* and *Vine* in Chapter 2, I demonstrated how the literary double provides a multidimensional view of the challenges of being a woman in a communal, patriarchal culture. Anju and Sudha's story illustrates the complexities of women's friendship and kinship, and the struggle to find a balance between romanticized codependence and providing the other with healthy emotional support. By the end of the narrative, the two women are able to acknowledge each other as individuals and not only as reflections of themselves in each other's eyes. The Anju/Sudha double also takes a stance on the question of blood being thicker than water, proving that families are the people we choose.

My analysis of Divakaruni's novels illustrates that her women characters belong to intricately woven webs of society, in which an individual 'I' cannot exist. For example, the focalization, and often narration, in *Vine* is shared by nearly all the characters. With a story punctuated by global events, Divakaruni reminds us of the interconnectedness of our existence despite our feelings of isolation.

In Chapter 3, I provided evidence for the double as a medium for narrating deliverance from colonial trauma. In Mukherjee's *Daughters* and *Bride*, Tara Lata needs her descendant double to write down her story, carry out proper funeral rites,

and release her into the afterlife. Tara Chatterjee is able to negotiate her identity with the help of her ancestor's narrative and realizes very literally, when her house is bombed by an ancestral enemy, that she, too, is a postcolonial subject. Despite considering herself an "ethnically ambiguous" (*Daughters*, 25), modern American woman, she has a personal relationship with India's colonial past that she can no longer ignore.

Section 3.2 elaborated on doubling by splitting through the character of Anjali/Angie, who, like Tara Chatterjee, is confronted by India's colonial history and must construct her identity and redefine her goals in life in relation to it and her current neocolonial reality. Furthermore, I examined Mukherjee's usage of a doppelgänger character, Husseina, as a more traditional plot device, and a reflection of the global, political unease in the aftermath of 9/11. Through my analysis of the doubles in Mukherjee's Bengali trilogy, I demonstrated how the postcolonial permeates the present, and how individuals unwillingly, and often unknowingly, carry the past with them.

I explicated how doubling is used to represent the effects of personal trauma in Chapter 4. The doubles in Lahiri's "Hema and Kaushik" and *Lowland* are masters of evasion; adverse repercussions that last for decades in the narratives could have been avoided had the characters not been trapped inside a culture of silence. In these fictional families, difficult emotions are not discussed, and failure is considered unutterable. Characters who keep secrets to keep up appearances are a common denominator in the writing of all three authors. Divakaruni, Lahiri, and Mukherjee's doubles are burdened by family secrets, often involving the true parentage of various children. In Divakaruni's *Sister*, Sudha's father was an illegitimate child of Anju's great-uncle, which complicates both women's lives. In Mukherjee's *Daughters* and Bride, Tara's sister Padma's illegitimate child sets the plot in motion. In Lahiri's "Hema and Kaushik," Hema and Kaushik's families' relationship is strained due to secrecy regarding Parul's illness, and in *Lowland*, the familial shame related to Udayan's death, and Subhash's failure to disclose Bela's true parentage, cause distress and sorrow.

Emerging from the margins between the individual and others, the 'I' and 'we', the double gives voice to that which has been silenced, and becomes a means to narrate deliverance from the past. The literary double in Bengali American fiction is more than a trope; it functions as a combination of the aesthetic and tangible societal realism, narrating plural subjectivities.

To explore the occurrence of the double in South Asian American literature further, future scholarship could focus on a wider selection of authors and/or explore the possibility of gender-dependency in the occurrence of the literary double, or investigate the occurrence of the literary double in LGBTQI+ narratives through queer theory. Another avenue for approaching plural subjectivities would be to study

autobiographical or autofictional texts instead of works categorized as fiction as I have done (though undoubtedly these works, too, include autobiographical elements).

To contribute to the construction of a postcolonial poetics or postcolonial aesthetic, one could research fiction from other regions in the context of the double, perhaps from countries that have gained their independence more recently, for example, works by African or Caribbean authors. It would be equally intriguing to revisit Wong's theory of the double as a racial shadow in Asian American fiction through post-millennial writing and assess possible changes regarding the internalization of racism in individuals of Asian American ethnicity.

The future of postcolonial literary criticism has been a source of debate in recent years. I contributed to this discussion by arguing that as long as the postcolonial continues to inform the writing of authors who are second- and third-generation Americans or Europeans, writing thousands of miles away from their previously colonized, ancestral homelands, there is still a need for this investigative approach. The potency of postcolonial theory lies in its ability to diversify and suffuse, to disrupt and fracture rigid and static ideologies, such as the idea of an undivided, unitary subjectivity that is questioned in my dissertation. Any critical approach will offer answers only if we ask the right questions.

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