The Postcolonial Predicament: A Search for Lost Identities

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To

Abaji & Ammi
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ABSTRACT

Biswas with his Indo-Caribbean birth in *A House for Mr Biswas* and the Indian judge, a returnee from England in *The Inheritance of Loss*, both face crises of identity. They feel inadequate and inferior in a postcolonial world. The judge appears to have turned into a “mimic man” while Biswas seems to struggle with unrealistic western ideals, in their respective native and diasporic surroundings. Consequently, with their colonial demands they become accomplices in their wives’ double colonization. Nimi, the judge’s wife in *The Inheritance of Loss* and Shama, Biswas’s wife, in *A House for Mr Biswas* have to live with men who are themselves colonized. Then there are the convent-educated Sai, Lola and Noni in *The Inheritance of Loss* who fail to become part of their native community. This group of women has to pay a heavy price for their westernized outlook. Moreover, the cook and his son in *The Inheritance of Loss* confront a world in which they have no choice but to work for a master, no matter a local one or a Westerner. The cook has to work incredibly hard to fulfill the demands of his colonial master, the judge, while Biju is constantly on the run as an illegitimate immigrant in America. In a so-called neo-liberal world, they seem to be doubly colonized as poor subjects. All these male and female characters, across diverse colonial backgrounds and classes, do not know how to relate back to a worthy self-image and deal with the question of selfhood.

Sara Suleri has her own story to tell in her memoir *Meatless Days*. She seems displaced and “meatless” after her immigration to America. Her early life in Pakistan was in a household which was modern yet pulsated with tradition and close familial ties. The loss of home exacerbated by the deaths of Mamma and Ifat, becomes a traumatizing experience for her. She does not come to terms with the vacuum of identity and the emptiness of a “meatless body” in her self-exile.

The postcolonial subject needs to embrace the reality of the self. Whether it is the judge or Biswas or Suleri, he or she has deal with the damaging sense of loss and respond to the identity that is true to the self. This is how the ailing soul will heal.
INTRODUCTION: THE MISLAID IDENTITY

It’s Not Over Just Because It Stops

Nothing’s over, ever. 2

The new narratives that challenge postcoloniality itself do not seem to respond to the problem of identity. Colonial behaviourism still defines the “post” post-colonial lived experience and the displaced subject faces a void of culture and tradition. The native experience is taken over and restructured in a way so that even the private and domestic space does not seem to remain unconquered and uncontaminated. Standing on the shaken platform of tradition and seeing home turning into a discursive contingency, the subject finds it difficult to live with his or her sense of belonging and self-worth. Though past and present, personal and national, local and foreign, history and memory, all converge in a crucial and decisive manner under forces of multiculturalism and transnationalism; the relationship between the ex-master and the ex-slave has not changed. Notwithstanding the adamant voices of rebellion and dissent and an increasing consciousness about history as is illustrated in The Arab Spring, the ex-colonized subject seems lost for his/her identity. The global shift towards neoliberalism and “an appearance of equalization of differences”, has made it even harder for him to realize the self from “what is not self”. The colonial subject feels inferior and inadequate and looks up at the westerner not just as his ex-master but as his superior.

The main contention in Postcolonial Studies is but to define identity since “the postcolonial quest seeks mastery not in the first instance over land or other people but of history and self.” For Said, Fanon and Nandy, the starting point remains the question of identity. Edward Said’s “own work of identity construction underlies the passion behind Orientalism”. His proposition invites
reconceptualization of identity as “the ability to read and write otherwise, to rethink our understanding of the order of things, contributes to the possibility of change”.11 The challenge for postcolonial thinkers has been but “to re-examine our received assumptions of what we have been taught as ‘natural’ or ‘true’”.12 If Fanon as “a key theorist of anti-imperial nationalism”,13 has grounded his argument in brooding inferiority in the black race, Said categorically exposes a schema of “desires, repressions, investments and projections” (Said, Orientalism, 1978) that has Othered the subject through inculcating inferiority in him and thus, securing an enduring and unquestionable superiority for the colonizer. Even Bhabha’s theory of hybridity seems to be the necessary working of defence mechanism for mitigating the disabling sense of loss and salvaging injured pride by finding a hole in the otherwise “immaculate” image of the colonizer.14

Diaspora Studies continue to be relevant when it comes to the overwhelming sense of loss experienced, especially by the South Asian or Indo-Caribbean subject. The discipline informs post-colonial fiction while most of the novels seem to be the focal point from where the whole debate may be started afresh. Crisis of identity appears to be the emblematic motif of diaspora writing. Contemporary postcolonial literature is particularly responsive to the dynamics of displaced identity resulting from mass migrations and immigrations. This is what Bhabha enunciates in, “what is striking about the ‘new’ internationalism is that [it] ------ is a process of displacement and disjunction that does not totalize experience”.15 The native in today’s world perhaps, lives in perpetual exile. George Lamming illustrates that “the exile is a universal figure ---- we are made to feel a sense of exile by our inadequacy and our irrelevance of function in a society .......... sooner or later .... we sign a contract whose epitaph reads: To be an exile is to be alive.”16 More so, the thrust of globalization has made the native a refugee in his own world. With easy access to “Western goods,
concepts, and culture,” the subject seems to dream of and cherish westernization and lives in the image of the Other.

Identity loss seems to have been internalized as an inherent lack since the “colonized peoples” “[are] taught to look negatively upon their people, their culture and themselves.” Ashis Nandy argues that “the second form of colonization” “colonizes minds in addition to bodies” and “releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all.” For him “the concept of the modern West” has changed from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category.” He maintains that “the West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds.” With the West in “in structures and in minds”, the once-colonized is left at the stage of Peter Pan and unable to think for himself. One of Rushdie’s characters articulates the bitter truth that “they describe us ---- That’s all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct”. In “a process, we may call ‘colonising the mind’”, deconstructing and disputing what has been “taught as ‘natural’” or “true”, seems problematic. Postcolonial discourse seems to open up a veritable can of worms as it remains a difficulty to see how much of this “truth” has been absorbed by the subject as the subject fails to disassociate himself from the historical reflections in his or her own mirror. In addition, he or she is easily lured into a world where the prospects for decolonization have been blurred by modern trends.

The issues around identity are central and may be pinned down as a common narrative strategy in the texts. My study explores the question of identity and belonging and the subject’s search for a self-image that may emancipate him from the projections of history and the Other. The foci of my dissertation are: the Nobel Prize winner V. S. Naipaul’s novel, A House for Mr Biswas; Kiran Desai’s Booker prize
winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* and Sara Suleri’s memoir, *Meatless Days*. Though *Meatless Days* is an autobiographical writing, yet it provides a good comparison with the other two novels. In a way, postcolonial fiction is autobiographical as it uncovers regional and personal trauma (Nayar, 2008). Despite the variance of form, style, narration and background; a crisis of identity and lack of selfhood seem to emerge as the common motif in all three books. A consistent and brutal sense of loss keeps visiting the characters through the course of events in all narratives. Biswas’s ambivalence towards his mirror-image in *A House for Mr Biswas*; the judge’s contagious sense of inferiority, Biju’s loss of self-dignity during illegal immigration, Sai’s, Lola’s and Noni’s westernized identities and the cook’s chase after a hyper-reality in *The Inheritance of Loss* and Suleri’s profound sense of loss as an émigré in *Meatless Days*; all point to the complexities of colonial identity. In the course of my study, what has remained of special interest to me is to see how the characters are to act under the pressures of an intercepted past and a present that keeps them in ignorant deception and away from the direction they are required to take. My research is a comparative study of a problematized identity in Caribbean diaspora as in *A House for Mr Biswas*; in Indian elitist urban and poverty-stricken rural classes like in *The Inheritance of Loss* and in self-exile of an intellectual Pakistani woman in *Meatless Days*. The diversity of my selection has provided me with an opportunity to compare and examine a large array of characters including males and females, in different situations and geographical zones, and look at the impact that the postcolonial order leaves on their private, social, physical and psychic lives. I contend that the loss of identity is the predicament of the ex-colonized subject who suffers from severe inadequacy, low self-esteem and frustration by setting out his ideals in the West and denying the reality to which he belongs. The protagonists appear to be less creatures of their own free will and more like slaves, after historical
manipulation of individualities by a fateful drama that becomes more complex as it unfolds unto the modern world. Self-denial seems to have become their fate. Pitched against a new form of colonial schema, the subject is left with very little option but to choose all that represents the colonizer’s image and which removes him from the self. However, through gaining insight, the subject may be allowed to enter into a dialogue with the self from which he is hiding. My research remains attentive to the question, to what an extent does the subject himself contribute to his colonization and fail to take his own self seriously, notwithstanding his exposure to the challenges of a diasporic world. Identity construction needs self-realization that must come from within, no matter what external pressures are there to deny and falsify them. Most likely, it needs an awareness and effort on the part of the individual to pull out of the quagmire of self-deception and self-negation.

My work draws on the work of Ashis Nandy, Said, Spivak, Bhabha, Lacan and Derrida as well as on other significant postcolonial critics. I will situate the argument within postcolonial discourse to validate genealogical emptiness and absence. The perspective of the founding critics and theory are helpful for a greater explanation of my argument. Moreover, in my thesis there are few cross references to Lewis Caroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass as I find an interesting allegory of the postcolonial plight in Alice’s crisis of identity. She seems to encounter an inverted reality and faces a series of misplaced self-identifications. Lewis Caroll’s classics appear to symbolize the interplay of constructed and imposed realities and enable much psychological, philosophical, literary and most pertinently, postcolonial discourse. A child’s tale seems to become the archetypal narrative of identity loss. The ex-colonized like Alice, after falling into a “rabbit – hole” or in other words into the colonial schema find themselves in a topsy-turvy world where their spatio-temporal reality is hijacked by the colonial past and “modern Western
colonialism” (Nandy, 1983). Alice seems to face a world of distracting mirror images and a reality to which she simply cannot relate. Biswas in *A House for Mr Biswas* and the judge in *The Inheritance of Loss* are constantly deterred by the question, “who am I?” while they are intrigued with unreal projections and assumptions with which they can neither defy nor identify.²³

My interpretative strategy involves a very close reading of the subject texts, especially some of the telling scenes and recurring metaphors which I believe point to the conflicts of the postcolonial lived experience. Seeing through allegorical and symbolical connotations in characters’ reactions and mannerism helps in developing a discourse and stylistic analysis of the narratives. To situate and criticize the significant moments within the broad interdisciplinary context, I may compare them with scenes from other postcolonial novels. I have taken into account how other critics have read and analyzed these texts and addressed the matrix of lacking selfhood. The notions of ethnicity, history, family, community, class differences and sexuality are addressed as these are the factors in which identity is grounded. My focus is on the characters’ reactions, inadequacy, inferiority complex, their self-denial and failures while facing the pressures of a postcolonial world. The psychoanalytic lens has helped me to trace the recurring patterns of colonial reactions plotted in a variety of ways in the texts; though my use of this technique is limited to the demands of fiction. This method is helpful for reading the conflicts in behaviours, psychic complexes and psychosomatic conditions while clarifying the arguments that I construct through my thesis. The characters’ uneasy relationship with their colonially distraught self-images is to be alluded to frequently in order to reveal the state of internal colonization.
The reading of the texts remains receptive to the underlying thematic structures of displacement, migration, diasporic living, self-exile and colonial ways of living while attending to the problems of identity. The writers’ perspectives and their variant treatment of the subject are taken into account as they add to the depth and currency of my study. The characters are compared and contrasted across the selected texts as well as with characters from other postcolonial novels. The comparative analysis aims to make connections between contemporary postcolonial writings in order to see how colonization has informed the dynamics of gender roles, daily behaviour, food habits and language choices; and how their private lives clash with the cultural, social and historical narratives in search of selfhood and newer boundaries of ownership. The psychosomatic illnesses also, seem to be caused by the unnerving postcolonial experience while the feelings of inferiority seem to develop into a whole syndrome that may well be identified through the commonalities of behaviour. The different levels of colonization of males and females, the sense of inadequacy, colonial attitudes towards food, undue pressure from a foreign language and the adverse effects on health are thoroughly explored. The complex effects of globalization that contribute to the overall postcolonial experience have been considered to the extent to which my argument allows. The thesis is divided into five chapters which are to be preceded by an Introduction and followed by a Conclusion. In the Introduction, I have tried to show the significance of my work against the background of a “post” postcolonial world. There is a brief account of the relevance of my argument within the broader postcolonial discourse and how the founding texts have helped me to build my critical and analytical outlook towards the complex subject of identity.

In the first chapter, I have illustrated the double colonization of female characters through a paradigm that traverses the conventional “double colonization”
by Anna Rutherford and Peterson. The female role is much more demanding and
difficult as ex-colonized females stand colonized by their very female identity as well
as by the oppressive ideals of anglicized men. The women are known to the readers
through their dominating and demanding husbands. Nimi, the wife of the Cambridge
qualified judge in The Inheritance of Loss and Shama, the wife of Biswas in A House
for Mr Biswas seem doubly burdened as the men judge them by colonial parameters.

Then, there is the group of anglophile women in The Inheritance of Loss; Sai, Lola and
Noni. They find themselves doubly colonized as due to their western manners they
are unacceptable to their own community and are humiliated by anti-colonialist
forces. Their femaleness adds to their misery. Sara Suleri’s situation in Meatless Days
is more subtle as she positions herself at the centre of a self-narrative in order to get
to know herself. In her account, the experience of being an independent woman
resonates powerfully along with the experience of being colonized by an “Eastern
skeleton”. She seems to dwell on a “meatless” identity after leaving home.

The second chapter focuses on how the male protagonist is afraid to live out
his masculinity and is rendered ineffectual and disabled. Biswas’s unacknowledged
diasporic birth in A House for Mr Biswas, “reflect[s] the futility of all attempts to
construct total systems, to assert the powers of the structuring subject.” 24 The
judge’s stay and education in England in The Inheritance of Loss comes at the price of
his name and dignity. These men suffer from a body-image fixation as well. They try
to wear the identity of the master but start to act like “mimic men” 25. It seems
“mimicry” is used as a mask of convenience for their injured manly pride. On the
other hand, in The Inheritance of Loss, there are the cook and Biju who are very poor
and under the double forces of colonization as well as that of globalization. Neither
their own country nor the developed world offers them any dignified way to live.
They are even more prone to the modern day temptations and get swayed away by
the promise of freedom from poverty and a better life; only to find that they are robbed and dispossessed in the end.

Culture and tradition are encoded in language. As Fanon believes that “[a] man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language” (Black Skin, White Masks, p. 18). English, as a signifier of authorial snobbery adds to the inadequacy and self-doubt of the non-native speaker. The postcolonial scholars are of the view that “European education and European cultural domination generally [are] the most important, lasting and damaging legacy of the colonial period.” The language of the colonizer has proved to be quite damaging “for the slaves, then, this was a language of division imposed to facilitate exploitation” and has negatively affected the self-confidence of non-native speakers. The object of the third chapter is to examine how the colonized are doubly lost for their meanings in a world controlled by the language of the Other. I have based my argument on Derrida and Lacan’s theories of language and supported it by Spivak for whom the use of knowledge as power is nothing less than “epistemic violence”. The colonial epistemic schema has been detrimental to the originality and creativity of the ex-colonized subject. Derek Walcott observes that “as strangers” in diasporas the “bodies think in one language” but “move in another.” A very personal experience cruelly gets sifted through a foreign language. The postcolonial writer writing in English is deterred by “the real language problem: how to bend it shape it, how to let it be our freedom, how to repossess its poisoned wells.” Biswas in A House for Mr Biswas experiences alienation and despondency while struggling with a foreign language. Following English models in his writing endeavours, his mind remains blank and sterile. On the other hand, the judge in The Inheritance of Loss is desperate to forget his mother-tongue only to learn English and “mimic” as a fake sahib. Then there are Sai, Lola and Noni in The Inheritance of Loss
who have to suffer immense harm and degradation for a missionary school education. Their different accent distances them from their community. In contrast are Sara Suleri, her father and brother in *Meatless Days*, who in hindsight, seem to be reproached for losing their unique Urdu expressions as they have thoughtlessly taken to English. Probably, their scholarly and professional pursuits have given them more insight into the value of their own language. Suleri’s English mother and Ifat have to speak different languages after their marriages into another culture and race, while they also seem to carry around the unease and awkwardness of being removed from their familiar environment. However, Suleri tries to recapture the very feeling of a sub-continental identity by amply using Urdu words without translation throughout her weighty writing. It appears she may not articulate identity better in any other way than by employing Urdu idioms and expressions.

A body does not lie. In chapter four, “Postcolonial Reverberations in Psychosomatic Ailments and Trauma”, I have highlighted the different reactions of the characters to their stressful lives and how their failures and break downs are manifested in psychosomatic illnesses, dreams and trauma. The degenerating, second hand colonial constructs add to the burden of anxiety and agitation in diaspora. In *A House for Mr Biswas*, Biswas who is concerned with self-definition seems to suffer from dependency and inferiority complexes. His acute stomach problem reflects his consistent insecurity and stressful living. After his stay in Cambridge, the judge in *The Inheritance of Loss* too, has started to show symptoms of psychosomatic illnesses. He suffers from stomach and sleep disorders and his chronic constipation may have been caused by severe sense of inferiority, developed while living amongst westerners. As a sick person, he has started treating others in a sado-masochistic manner. Both the protagonists seem to have symptoms of schizophrenia and depression. On the other hand, Sara Suleri in *Meatless Days*
appears to be tormented and disoriented as is revealed by her unusual dream. The imagery in the dream is a particularly strong indication of how victimized and disoriented she may have felt bearing grief for Mamma’s death, all alone. She seems to struggle to reclaim the lost pieces of a self which seems torn apart after receiving the news of Mamma’s and Ifat’s deaths in her exile. Leaving home seems to become a horrible experience for her as she has to deal with one loss after another. To interpret her traumatized state, I have drawn on Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: trauma, narrative, and history* (1996).

In chapter five, “We Are What We Eat”, it is demonstrated how food and food ways are the most potent metaphors for identity. The food people eat and the way it is prepared speak volumes about their relationship with their ethnicity, tradition, community and self-image. Food is associated with home and has the ability to reconstruct cultural memory and identity. I have examined the way the postcolonial texts use food to figure the protagonists’ distancing from their community and culture, and through that distance look at the ambivalence and discomfort that they may have had to experience while making food choices. My work also explores the dual role of food and cooking in maintaining class divisions on the one hand and in the struggle for redefinition of self against a colonial past and neo-colonial present on the other. The judge in *The Inheritance of Loss* seems to follow a strict colonial regime when it comes to food choices and in the way he requires it to be served to him. His dinners and tea times are the best illustration of “mimicry”. In *A House for Mr Biswas*, Biswas too, does not seem to come to terms with the staple Indian food served to him by his in-laws in Hanuman House. Then, Sai, Lola and Noni in *The Inheritance of Loss*, all have to pay a heavy price for sticking to their westernized food habits while living in an Indian town, Kalimpong. The cook and Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss* too, suffer in their own ways despite their English
and continental cooking skills. They remain poor despite the hard work serving English food to his master by the cook and serving in American restaurants by the son. However, Suleri’s memoir *Meatless Days* seems to be an extended food metaphor as she re-examines her identity in relation to the food tradition and more particularly, to the meat dishes and delicacies of Pakistan. It seems she uses “food voice” to relocate her identity. Nonetheless, her work investigates the relationship between food, culture, memory and physical and metaphorical borders in exile.

The study of the colonial attitude may help in decolonizing the mind and soul. To conclude, I have tried not to rely on unrealistic solutions for the complexities of postcolonial identity. A holistic view of my research and its future implications and applications should be taken into account. My thesis may provide newer insights into diaspora writing and help in furnishing a more comprehensive view of the identity battles that the colonial subject is pitted against in the present. The research is based on a close reading of the texts which essentially means listening to the stories, more thoughtfully and yet critically. I partake of Toni Morrison’s belief in the healing power of “the collective sharing”. A better understanding of the postcolonial narrative that emanates from historical conflicts and unrelenting colonial culture may encourage moving on. I have tried to unlock the subtle interplay of identity issues in the said texts and to make them re-echo. This sharing of perspective may prove helpful for recognizing and embracing the self.

Notes


For Dabashi, “the Arab Spring” has given a new direction to the world events: “There has always been a cosmopolitan worldliness about these cultures, which are otherwise hidden beneath the forced categories of ‘Religious’ versus ‘Secular’, ‘Traditional’ versus ‘Modern’, ‘Eastern’ versus ‘Western’. Such time-worn clichés have performed their service and done their damage in terms of representing and distorting the world they defined and have now categorically exhausted their possibilities. I believe the period of ideological contestations that produced such false binaries--- all manufactured under colonial duress—is over; and over also is the period we have known as ‘postcolonial’ ” (9).


Sunita Sinha observes that “it is crucial to note the ways in which the internalization of a colonized mentality is not lessened through the coming of ‘modernity’ and ‘globalization,’ but, in many ways, exacerbated in new ways that it had not been in the imperial/colonial ‘past’” (6). Sunita Sinha, “Globalization’s Discontents: Reading ‘Modernity’ from the Shadows”, *Critical Responses to Kiran Desai*, Sunita Sinha, Bryan Reynolds, (eds.) (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2009).

Dabashi; “... all of these counter-revolutionary (western) forces, frightened by the prospect of a free and democratic world outside their military power and impoverished vocabulary, are doomed to fail when vast waves of humanity have arisen to reclaim their history” (7).

Arif Dirlik says: “global motions of peoples (and, therefore, cultures), the weakening of boundaries (among societies, as well as among social categories), the replications in societies internally of inequalities and discrepancies once associated with colonial differences, simultaneous homogenization and fragmentation within and across societies, the interpenetration of the global and the local, and the disorganization of a world conceived in terms of three worlds or nation-states. Some of these phenomena have also contributed to an appearance of equalization of differences within and across societies, as well as democratization within and among societies”.


12 Ibid.


17 Sunita Sinha maintains that because “of the continued infiltration of and easy (or at least easier) access to Western goods, concepts, and culture, people of previously colonized nations nevertheless continue to find themselves inundated with the very aspects of “Westernness” that are intended to most “appeal” to them and thus convince them to “prefer” Western culture over their own” (6). See Sunita Sinha, “Globalization’s Discontents: Reading ‘Modernity’ from the Shadows”, *Critical Responses to Kiran Desai*, Sunita Sinha, Bryan Reynolds (eds.) (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2009).

18 McLeod, p.19.


20 McLeod, p. 18, 19.

21 Pramod K. Nayar is of the view that “the globe is now increasingly one social space where common consumer goods pervade diverse communities. Even as hybridized communities come into being, they constitute a common, homogenized space in terms of consumerism. However, what must be kept in mind is that globalization repeats the phenomenon of national markets. It is on a larger scale with a smaller number of beneficiaries, but is the same exploitative set of processes” (209). For further reading, see Pramod K. Nayar, “Hybridity, Diaspora, Cosmopolitanism”, *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (New Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008).

22 In the Lewis Carroll’s classics, I find many instances that support my argument, especially in the ingenious conversations:

“What do you call yourself?” the Fawn said at last ---!

“I wish I knew!” thought poor Alice. She answered, rather sadly, “Nothing, just now.”

“Think again,” it said: “it won’t do” (57).


25 Colonial mimicry is described in different ways by different writers. Nayar delineates that “the ‘mimicry’ of the Other (white) culture becomes a way of negotiating with this unstable state of non-identity” (Nayar, “History”, p. 46).


31 Toni Morrison says, “and no one speaks, no one tells the story about himself or herself unless forced. They don’t want to talk, they don’t want to remember, they don’t want to say it, because they’re afraid of it—which is human. But when they do say it, and hear it, and look at it, and share it, they are not only one, they’re two, and three, and four, you know? The collective sharing of that information heals the individual—and the collective”.

THE DOUBLY COLONIZED FEMALE

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,

Searching my reaches for what she really is.¹

An anglicized female, Sai, is in search of her mirror-image and struggles to find out who she is.² The image she gets of herself is unclear and distorted (IL, p. 32). She stands “without an answer” among negative reflections that are all around her. Her missionary school background and grandfather’s crumbling colonial house appear to lock her out of the gravity zone or a place with which she may associate herself. In “the thickening mist”, “when she [looks] back, the house [is] gone; when she [climbs] the steps back to the veranda, the garden [vanishes]” (IL, p. 2). The image is revelatory as she seems to be out of place with her colonial upbringing in an Indian town. In order to develop her relationship with a native man, she to step out of the small isolated world of her westernized grandfather. Her involvement with Gyan has made her feel lost as is suggested by her hide and seek game with “her face”.³ She may have started to feel anonymous even to herself after giving in to a man. Her identity may be compared with that of a Negro who “must be black in relation to the white man.”⁴ Against a man, she has to withdraw into the role of a traditional female and to disown the way she is brought up.

When her lover whimsically and abruptly abandons her after seductive acts and sexual advances, Sai becomes aware of her colonized status. What may have been most shocking for her is how a boy from the lower classes with a local education can overpower her female self. Instead of empowering her, her privileged anglicized position turns out to be an Achilles’ heel for her. For Gyan, a half-hearted
nationalist, it serves not just as an excuse but as the very justification for deserting her. When he apologizes, she easily accepts “his apology” to “turn away from the realization” that, for him, she is “not the centre of their romance” (IL, p. 175). Sai’s English ways exacerbate her vulnerability as a female and she remains “only the centre to herself, as always, and a small player playing her part in someone else’s story” (IL, p. 175). Even the robbers feel no shame in humiliating her as she is a young westernized lady and hence, does not belong to their community. They look Sai up and down and wink at each other which makes her feel “intensely, fearfully female” (IL p. 5). It may be very difficult for her to believe that she is merely caught in an illusion of identity and there isn’t actually one for her to hold onto. Probably, like the poor bitch, Mutt, she is deceived by one or the other “shadow” of identity.

The study of postcolonial female identity is quite challenging. Women have long felt “themselves as objects as opposed to active and agentic members of society” (Wooley, 1994). A colonial woman experiences this in a double way: as a woman, and as a colonized subject, both at the same time. Pramod K. Nayar delineates the dynamics of gender and racial colonization. His view is that “most women writers from former colonies see the woman as being continually colonized--by the European races and by their own.” In another place he sees women as multiply colonized; “Women’s literature from South Asia, Africa, South America, and African Americans in the USA see themselves as situated at the intersection of three repressive discourses and structures: racism, imperialism and sexism. Imperialism treated them as colonial subjects. Racism ‘othered’ them as ‘not-white’. Sexism, at the hands of an oppressive patriarchy even in native societies, reduced them to machines of reproduction and labour”. The same idea is expounded by Spivak when she says, “the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow”. For Peterson and Rutherford this oppression
becomes “double colonization” in reference to women writers from the colonial world. My argument builds upon the same paradigm of “double colonization” but it leads on to a study of the complexity of pressures exerted upon the female subject in a world controlled and divided by gender discrimination and colonial forces. The focus of this chapter is on the colonial and patriarchal and also on expatriate identities that are imposed upon her but to none of which she seems to belong. The conventional paradigm of “double colonization” can be charted out in the following diagram:

**Conventional Paradigm of ‘Double Colonization’**

I compare and contrast the double colonization of the female subjects to move on from the conventional module. My elaborate version of “double colonization” aims to capture the diversity, complexity and vulnerability of the colonized female subject and is summarized in the following paradigm:
The colonial woman has to live and struggle for her decolonization within a dual oppressive structure. In the first group, the women appear to be colonized by gender in the first place and then by their men who happen to be colonized themselves. Men with colonized minds tend to be inadequate, resentful and estranged and may therefore, be unable to help their surroundings and balance their relationships. In the second group, the women seem to be colonized not only by their female identity but directly by colonial forces. In the third group, Suleri too seems to be doubly colonized like the rest, but paradoxically, she cannot detach herself from the “Eastern skeleton” or from a sense of loss during self-exile. Probably, for all of them there is no escape from double colonization.

Nimi in *The Inheritance of Loss* and Shama in *A House for Mr Biswas* have not only to suffer oppression in the roles as daughter and wife, but also that of living
under colonized men. They do not seem to have an identity and are known to the
readers through their dominating and demanding husbands. The additional burden
they have to carry is the undiluted nonsense of the colonial expectations of their
husbands. Sai, Lola and Noni may also find themselves doubly colonized but their
extra burden is caused more directly by the colonial influences. Sara Suleri has a
story of loss, exile and self-torment to tell despite her freedom to choose a modern
world for herself to live in. She may have been successful in ripping of some of the
Eastern oppression through her immigration and resourcefulness, but to her
surprise, may have found herself being colonized by “emptiness” in her “body” and
the loss of home. Though she tells her students that there are no women in the Third
World, but paradoxically, she misses home and family, especially the women who
disappeared from her life taking bigger chunks of her identity. She appears to be left
“meatless” in the self without them. Her metaphor “meatless” seems to evoke
identity as a physical sense of deprivation; the way she feels herself tied down to her
loved ones. Neither can she lift the burden of a female self nor that of the haunting
Eastern connections from herself. In exile, she tries to tell existence from non-
existence in the intermingling experience of East and West through relocating her
Eastern and female identity into their proper pockets. Despite her cynical statement
about the plight of Pakistani women, she seems to be uncertain about her own
position in the transition from one world to another. She admits she is lost in the
West. Perhaps she knows what a woman may get at the end would be a meatless
and dead skeleton instead of self-identification, whether she lives in East or West.
My attempt to lump together the said female subjects may raise the question of
their individuality which obviously, they are not able to develop without realizing
identity. Unfortunately, within the tight and tough framework of double
colonization, they cannot be represented as individuals in their own right but only as parts of a colonial lore.

Sai, Lola and Noni in The Inheritance of Loss find themselves “naked” and vulnerable as mere women after their colonial projections are challenged. They are treated ruthlessly for their borrowed identities and may have found themselves being pushed back into their female bodies. Their westernization becomes the very point for the deprived and ignorant nationalists to exploit and insult. They get punished for their anglicized outlook and have to suffer alone for the age-long tumultuous clash of nationalism and colonization. What has made Sai acceptable to her grandfather is the very reason for a native to hate her.\textsuperscript{11} Her convent background is thrown back in her face and what she thinks to be her merit turns against her as she is degraded for being a woman and a modern one for that. She feels she has been “martyred” (IL, p. 273) to an unknown cause and seeks salvation from the trials and persecutions of a past she cannot account for. She explains to Gyan that it is unfair of him to hate her for “big reasons” “that have nothing to do with [her]” (IL, p. 261). Like Lola and Noni, she suffers “the rotten luck of being in the exact wrong place at the exact wrong time” and “generations worth of trouble [settles]” on her (IL, p. 241). She simply cannot make any claims for herself when she is discarded ignominiously by her lover. Like that of a prostitute, the very identity that is imposed upon her is used against her. She is also one of the “women who are required to submit to what has been invested in them and are made inadequate by this submission, feel shame”.\textsuperscript{12} Ironically, Gyan, asks her to feel double shame for the way the colonial forces have moulded her. Sai is too young to understand how she is victimized not only by the investments of sexism but by that of colonialism as well.
Like a still birth, she gets nothing out of the identities imposed upon her. She becomes restless and in order to save her dignity, she starts out on the “undignified mission” of chasing Gyan (IL, p. 252). Probably, at this point she tries to rise above the sexist identity, assert herself as a human being and make the executor accountable for the damage to her self-esteem. But Gyan humiliates her and repeatedly calls her a fool when she visits his house. To cover his guilt, confusion and awkwardness he recklessly throws her into bushes and walks away. Sai, unlike the oppressed native women, wants to retaliate before she has to stop herself. She has no way out but to keep living in an old colonial house.

The anglophile sisters, Lola and Noni are from “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect”. They live remote and distant from their own Indian community in a “rose-covered cottage”, named “Mon Ami” (IL, p. 41). The French name “Mon Ami” and a “rose cottage” both appear to be highly satirical about their “camouflaged” and sham living in an impoverished part of India. Their identities have shrunk into modern names, “Noni” for Nonita and “Lola” for Lolita. If Sai’s identity is locked away in a trunk those of Lola and Noni are hijacked by the colonial influence. They try to copy the English lifestyle but lose touch with real life characterized by poverty, deprivation and colonial prejudice around them. Their social circle consists of the few westernized people like Mrs Sen, Uncle Potty and an Indian foreigner named Father Booty. Forgetting their susceptibility as women, they have made themselves even more insecure by their “picturesque”, “conjured” up life (IL, p. 247).

Lola and Noni appear to be sold out to the cause of globalization. They are in the same state of listlessness in which Sai finds herself. Globalization with its slogan for modernity and development seems to make the natives live with double
standards. Sai’s toes through “the rotted fabric” may be a trope for the insidious forces of modernity affecting Sai, Lola, Noni and many others like them. Lola and Noni are also part of, “a space so big it [reaches] both backward and forward”. This leaves them “with only the promise of a shabby modernity --- modernity, as Desai puts it, ‘in its meanest form, brand-new one day, in ruin the next’.” The sisters behave in a manner as if they belong to the very developed world and not to their own impoverished town. Lola compares herself with “the princess and the pea” (IL, p.104) which turns out to be true as she remains insensitive to the miseries of the poor. Any harm to the English broccoli in her garden may cause her greater unease than the local uprisings of the nationalists which she tries to subvert with her drawing-room talk. Like ostriches, the sisters hide their heads in the sand and evade reality. They seem to be as ridiculous as “Tweedledum” and “Tweedledee”.

With her meanness and arrogance, Lola seems to play out the colonizer and becomes a party to the bourgeoisie’s disavowal of the local ethos. Her daughter’s BBC job gives her a kind of justification for enjoying privileges and luxuries which others cannot afford in a place like Kalimpong. She lives in a big house with a garden thinking she is the sole owner of an empire. Soon, the sisters are made to pay the price for historical injustices and “generations worth of trouble [settle] on them.” The English “talismans” like their camping supplies, their flashlights, mosquito netting, raincoats, hot water bottles, brandy, radio, first-aid kit, Swiss army knife, book on poisonous snakes” could not save them from the risks lying in store for them. Their safety measures start to speak of “cowardice” rather than their courage to face the reality (IL, p. 248). On seeing squatters on her big estate, Lola’s eyes are opened to the bitter truth that she lives among destitute and therefore, dangerous and revengeful natives. Now, she finds herself inferior and weaker than the gypsy women with “sweet wrinkling noses” (IL, p. 245). When she asks the so-called
nationalists to move out of her property, they start sizing up her body as if to remind her that as men they possess power over her, and her female identity is enough degradation for her. All of them take pleasure in a derogatory examination of her old female body through remarks like, “and you’re not much to look at, nothing up”----he [pats] the front of his khaki shirt----“nothing down”----he [pats] his behind, which he [twists] out of the chair-----“in fact, I have more of both!” (IL, p. 244). It is of no consequence that they are outcasts for they still can make fun of Lola as they enjoy the privilege of being men. The sisters have to suffer gendered transgression and male aggression and are penalized for colonial history. They are “trapped in shameful dramatics” (IL, p. 265) of clash of gendered and classed identities which is inevitable in postcolonial world.

Patriarchy already treats women as subjects of men. Nimi in The Inheritance of Loss and Shama in A House for Mr Biswas further become the objects of racism and are being hated for their Indian-ness by men who themselves are Indian but colonized. They are chastised and insulted by their husbands for their traditional demeanour. The society has groomed them to be Indian wives while their husbands pester them for learning Western ways of life. Biswas wants the support of his wife for rebelling against the traditions of Hanuman House while the judge dreams of transforming his pure Indian wife into an English lady overnight. Shama is able to bear this while Nimi collapses. They have no standing of their own and are merely faceless shadows in a colonial order.

The judge’s wife is long dead and the first thing that the readers learn about her from the cook is that the judge didn’t like her at all (IL, p. 88). As an Indian wife, she could not have her existence if her husband did not acknowledge it. The absolute
authority of her husband and his control over her life reminds one of the victimized and colonized Duchess in Browning’s “My Last Duchess”. This kind of exploitation of women in the role of wife is not uncommon but in her case, her husband’s hired Cambridge identity adds to her misery. He in public “never [speaks] to or [looks] in her direction” (IL, p. 170). Even the supposed act of love is carried out in a cold-blooded and loveless way which leaves her feminine pride injured. This cannot be counted as less humiliating than rape. The very act of intercourse seems to be a kind of vindication of his hatred and loathing for her “dirty” Indian self:

She grew accustomed to his detached expression as he pushed into her, that gaze off into middle distance, entirely involved with itself, the same blank look of a dog or monkey humping in the bazaar; until all of a sudden he seemed to skid from control and his expression slid right off his face. A moment later, before anything was revealed, it settled back again and he withdrew to spend a long fiddly time in the bathroom with soap, hot water, and Dettol. He followed his ablutions with a clinical measure of whiskey, as if consuming a disinfectant (IL, p. 170).

A point comes when the mere physical presence of an “illiterate village girl” (IL, p. 169) becomes unbearable for the judge. Forcibly, he sends her off to his uncle’s home but despite the tyranny of his beatings, threats and insults, Nimi cannot think of an escape; “I can’t go”. This seems to be the culmination of a dually oppressed and colonized life. She has no choice but to be weighed down by the horrors awaiting her in one or the other identities. Besides her perverted husband, she appears to be further crushed by the conservative and discriminating gender constructs that keep the female gender at the weak and vulnerable. Although to run away and hide in some dark corner would have been for her “like a balm”, she knows it would be dishonorable for her family (IL, p. 305). None of her relatives would be willing to keep her as her father was dead by then. Her uncle asks her to go back to
the judge and ask forgiveness from him. Her brother-in-law too is not ready to keep her when she has to live with her poor sister. Being abandoned by her husband, the common fate of an Indian woman looms around her. The rumour spreads that she has committed suicide by setting herself alight from a stove. Her destiny is not different from the naive Indian bride, Marinalini Devi who too, was “a simple, doting wife crushed by forces of which she had no comprehension” and “was made to pay for her ordinariness”.  

Like Nimi, Shama also exists in the narration with reference to her husband and has no voice of her own. This marks her gender colonization in the first place. Next, the man is unable to offer her any security or comfort as he himself feels inadequate about his identity. Identity gives a feeling of self-respect and of worth. Unfortunately, a person who fails to realize his own worth may not be able to project it and see it in the Other. Low self-esteem in men especially, may aggrandize the gender imbalance to the greater disadvantage of women. The colonized gaze of a man looks down upon a woman not once but twice and this time for her Eastern self. Under this double denigrated male gaze, she stands dually colonized. Moreover, very few details are given about the physical appearances of Shama and Nimi which confirms their subdued mirror-image. 

The first thing colonial men may desire for themselves would be westernized women. Absurdly and cruelly, they start to look for English ideals in their traditional and domestic housewives. Pathetically, Nimi’s Eastern self contradicts what the judge looks for. On entering the house, he finds his “wife rudely contradicting his ambition” and “his irritation [is] too much to bear” (II, p. 172). The height of brutality is that her mirror-image is snatched away by her westernized husband. He orders her not to “show [her] face outside [as] people might run from [her] screaming”. She
stops looking into a mirror and “dressing and combing”, as these activities are “only for the happy and the loved” (IL, p. 173). Making someone lose his or her “face” may be as inhuman and heinous as acid throwing, a crime much in practice in the impoverished and frustrated Third World. She was married to the future judge, Jemubhai Patel, when he was twenty years old and she was only fourteen years of age. But, the judge after living among the whiter and “superior” race can no more see his wife as the old beautiful face that “made his heart turn to water” but merely as “filth”. He seems to have acquired a new idea that “an Indian girl could never be as beautiful as an English one” (IL, p. 168).

Nimi defies the judge’s fake authority. Sanghita Sen reflects that “Jemubhai’s relation and treatment to his wife appears to be a combination of both class and gender issue. Jemubhai looks down upon his wife not only because she is a woman but also because she represents the Indian self Jemubhai himself is and which he despises so much.” At a point, Nimi also falls for a whiter and “superior” identity internalizing her husband’s racial and colonial subjugation to the dandy puff. The irony of the situation is that Nimi already has fair skin but still wants to exchange it with a “superior” one. Her age-long suppressed colonial desires are incited, seeing her husband’s weakness for dandy puff. In order to copy the “underwear-clad ladies wielding tennis rackets”, she powdered her breasts to make them look fairer and then “that puff, so foreign, so silken, she stuffed inside” her blouse (IL, p. 166). The trope is highly suggestive about the colonial desire and greed for a kind of “memsahib” identity (a title for the English ladies in colonial India) that comes to the surface. The Indian woman intrigued with the image of “underwear-clad ladies”, “[stuffs] inside” foreignness and otherness which again is unacceptable to her husband as an immodest act. The scene testifies to Nimi’s double colonization; the colonial forces colonize her by injecting her with a desire for a “superior” skin while
her husband chastises her for trying “stuffing foreignness” inside herself. A feminist voice may be heard when the author says that “from between her sad breasts” the husband snatches out “his dandy puff” like “a bursting ruined heart” (IL, p. 168). “Sad breasts” speaks volumes about her doubly colonized femaleness. Her husband later tortures her regularly due to his imported and inflated ego of dandy puff. The judge’s face which is “powdered pink and white” (IL, p. 176) is suggestive of the “mimicry” of colonial aggression against the subaltern, but by none other than the subaltern himself.23 The colonized judge severely abuses his wife and “any cruelty to her [becomes] irresistible. He would teach her the same lessons of loneliness and shame he [has] learned himself” (IL, p. 170). She becomes the recipient of the hatred the judge has brought from England, after spending years of alienation and isolation. Unfortunately, an Indian wife’s identity is carved out by her husband’s condescension to her mere presence and not by an acknowledgment of her existence. Nimi has to relinquish any kind of identity and becomes absent to herself; to her body; to her sensuality and to her happiness. She stops speaking to anybody. The servants would only clean the house only when the judge came back from his trips. Nimi remains oblivious to her surroundings and falls “out of life altogether” (IL, p. 172). Her character is an enigma which is scattered into bits and pieces along the narrative.

For Shama, there is no escape from the tight rope of dual oppressive roles or double colonization as she too, fails the English ideals of her husband.24 She sticks to her Indian identity despite her missionary schooling. “Hanuman House” is a familiar platform for Shama but Biswas is repulsed by her traditional self. However, Shama is continually in search of some female space between the conservative code of Hanuman House and the unrealistic expectations of Biswas from her. She seems to understand that this non-complicity with Biswas’s obscure ideals saves her from the
total disaster of losing her only sanctuary—Hanuman House, even with its own trials. In Hanuman House the daughters have to keep up with the patriarchal norms. Gordon Rohlehr reflects: “The Tulsi daughters have no choice since they have known no other world (---) they have little real say in the running of Hanuman House but vie for the crumbs of authority which Mrs. Tulsi allows to filter down to them from time to time.” Marriages are arranged and imposed on daughters and they have to bear with the “potluck” all their lives. It is humorously narrated that her identity is a series of negatives; not to be unmarried, not to be childless, not to be an undutiful daughter, sister, wife, mother, widow and also never to lose touch with the austere Indian Trinidadian identity. Identity for an Indian woman may unpack as a series of “threats” keeping her under great pressure all her life. Unwillingly and unhappily, Shama has to behave as a typical Indian wife like her other sisters and tolerate annoying, resentful and quarrelling Biswas. She tries to find some relief from him by running away to Hanuman House every now and then. It is observed by Paul Theroux that “the marriage is happy for Shama only when she is functioning as a part of the Tulsis, bearing children, paying visits, sharing grief and joy with the rest”. She is shrewd enough to hang onto the patriarchal order of Hanuman House, as it still offers more security to her than the insecurity of living with a man who has no platform to stand upon; “The Chase was a place where Shama only spent time; she had always called Hanuman House home and it was her home, and Savi’s, and Anand’s, as it could never be his. As he (Biswa) realized every Christmas” (MB, p. 198). Unlike Nimi, Shama is skillful in juggling many roles. For the colonized Biswas, Shama is “a puzzle”. Perhaps he is unable to understand why she has no Western imprint on her (MB, p. 163) despite the fact that she went to a mission school, wrote letters in English and still wears skirts (MB, p. 115). She cannot give up on her traditions as she tells Biswas to remember that “[he] may have lost all shame. But
everyone hasn’t” (MB, p. 184). Biswas can neither appreciate her nor her sagacity in sticking to her roots. Robert Hamner observes that Biswas “is so caught up in himself most of the time that he is brought up sharply from time to time with the discovery that Shama, whom he has taken to be bland and unthinking, has contacts with the outer world and ideas and opinions of her own”. Although she tries to resist Biswas’s borrowed lifestyle, she can only swap one kind of oppression for another as she has to play the role of an obedient wife for the sake of Hanuman House. She is supposed to behave like a good wife in the presence of her sisters, Chinta and Padma. In the company of other women, “Shama’s attitude [changes]” and “instead [looks] martyred” (MB, p. 114). She may need expressions of martyrdom (MB, p. 115,137,139) as she has to manage many subservient roles. In discussing her house with Suniti, she keeps to “her martyr’s way” (MB, p. 165). There seems nowhere for her to have space.

Despite her flexibility in playing many roles, she seems to suffer more as she remains painfully conscious of her husband’s dual character. Shama “[sighs]” often as this is her way of saying that “she [thinks] him stupid, boring and shaming” (MB, p. 148). Biswas remains critical of her Indian ways and disapproves of her idea of blessing her shop by inviting a pundit (MB, p. 154). This makes life really hard for her as this is how she has been raised. Biswas keeps fighting with her family and becomes a real nuisance at Hanuman House. Sometimes, her outbursts reveal how difficult it is to be a puppet to Biswas’s unreasonable demands; “‘go and get it yourself. You not going to start ordering me around, you hear.” She blew her nose, wiped it, and left’ (MB, p. 141). At another instance, she says; “think? Me? Since when you start thinking that I could think anything? If I am not good enough to go and see your house, I don’t see how I could be good enough to say what I think” (MB p. 5). Contrary to Nimi, she appears to be painfully aware of her very weak and
subjugated status and tells Biswas in a very bitter manner; “I don’t think anything. You have the money, you want to buy house, and I don’t have to think anything” (MB, p. 5). She knows she has no say.

The imposed identities do not seem to acknowledge women as humans in the first place. Shama sometimes, seems to be making little gestures of disapproval. When Biswas objects to her third pregnancy, she tells him that “[he has] nothing to do with it”. When he hits her it is related that “her silence and her refusal to retaliate [makes] his humiliation complete. She [dresses] Anand and [goes] to Arwacas” (MB, p. 200). Notwithstanding, her relentlessness grappling with some kind of freedom, she appears to continue with her bondages. Wearing one or the other identity may not be an easy task and her frustration is quite evident when once, she looks more relaxed in the bedroom of her makeshift accommodation than “in the lotus-decorated long room at Hanuman House” (MB, p. 148). Even Biswas notices her “duplicity” (MD, p. 232) as she behaves differently away from Hanuman House. She has to survive in some way in a double bind bearing her husband’s indecent, annoying and pushy presence, as well as Hanuman House’s rigid and forced role for daughters. Pathetically, she is caught oscillating between “houses” and seems to belong to none of them.

III

Sara Suleri in Meatless Days, in retrospect, seems to question her identity in transition from the world of tradition to modernity. She analyses what it means to be a female from a conservative background and tries to see what adjustments she has had to make as an Eastern woman in order to survive in a man’s world. She remembers being a woman in Pakistan meant to inhabit a female body as if by default. They “naturally thought of [themselves] as women, but only in some
perfunctory biological way that [they] happened on perchance. Or else it was a hugely practical joke, [they] thought, hidden somewhere among [their] clothes.” In a conservative society a woman may come across her sexuality only in theory or accidentally, without ever daring to acknowledge it as part of the self. Suleri gives beautiful examples from her juvenile days in Pakistan. She describes “golgappa” as a “small hollow oval of the lightest pastry” which “is dipped into a fiery liquid sauce made of tamarind and cayenne and lemon and cold water.” Once sitting with her family in a car, “the bowl of golgappa sauce” was knocked “all over [her] lap” by “a friendly elbow”. For the first time, “desire brought” her to “an instantaneous effect”. “[Her] groin's surprise called attention to passageways that as a rule [she] is only theoretically aware of owning, all of which folded up like a concertina in protest against such an explosive aeration. For days after, [her] pupils stayed dilated, while [her] interior felt gaunt and hollow eyed” (MD, p. 39). She also narrates another incident as an example of the suppressed female sexuality. She has come to realize after years that once, on seeing her brother naked accidentally, “something female in [her was] deeply shocked” (MD, p. 12). It is pathetic as well as humorous that only golgappa (a sub-continental traditional vendor’s food) or her small bother’s genitals could remind Suleri of her femaleness.

Her illustration of feeling her “interior” is highly suggestive. It may be a generic reference to an oppressive society where a woman’s body, “‘has been more than confiscated from her’ by patriarchy.” Suleri seems bitter and sarcastic over the subdued status of women and the denial of their legal and civil existence in the Third World. It may mean women in her part of the world are, “silenced, erased, invisible”.
Sara tries her best to find some polite, refined equivalent word for the meat dish of “kapura” in English but no one agrees on her western term “sweetbreads.” She is told by Tillat and others that the right word for “kapura” is either “testicles” or “balls, darling, balls,” and Suleri has to “let go of the subject” (MD, p. 22). The incident may be an allegory of how Eastern women have also played a role in their compliance with male hegemony. Perhaps, in the “Testicles-equal-Kapura” tale (MD, p. 39) Pakistani women know the dominant role of Kapuras and the futility of the efforts to change them into something like “sweetbreads”. Suleri repetitively names “Kapura” as a metaphor for the male dominance in the socio-cultural dynamics of Indo-Pak. Her mother, now she understands, must have known this difference between the roles of “sweetbreads” in Pakistan and in Wales. She could not expect sweetbreads to be “sweet” in Pakistan after closely observing the male dominance from her western perspective. Suleri too, born and bred in the same country knows this “sourness” and uses “grapes” as a signifier for male genitals (MD, p. 11). Nonetheless, she remained in touch with the “sourness” of the overall dogmatic atmosphere of Pakistan of the late 1970s and 80s and once, in complete abeyance ate the “grapes” offered by the taxi driver for breaking her fast (roza). She did not dare to say she was not fasting simply for the reason that she did not believe in it. The political oppression seems to seep into domestic boundaries and after Suleri and her siblings have left the country, “Islam predictably took to the streets, shaking Bhutto’s empire. Mamma and Dadi remained the only women in the house, the one untalking, the other unpraying” (MD, p. 16). Under the new military regime, the case of women’s freedom in Pakistan gets closed.

Her first chapter, “Excellent Things in Women”, ends in proclaiming non-existence of women in the Third World. In her country, women do not exist as individuals but either as “a sister or a child or a wife or a mother or a servant” (MD,
p. 1). She recounts her “reference is to a place where the concept of woman was not really part of an available vocabulary” (MD, p. 1). But it is women like Dadi, Ifat and Mamma from whom she cannot detach her identity. These women seem to have agency through their cultural and familial identities without any need for feminist claims or modernity. Perhaps, therefore she has to “look up, the horse’s mouth” to overlook these extraordinary women in order to make a generic statement about Pakistani women (MD, p. 20). Much of her narration is a back and forth movement between two intimate ends; Mamma and Ifat. Gabrielle Watling reflects that after “having said that leaving Pakistan was tantamount to giving up the company of women, she devotes the bulk of her book to recording and commemorating the network of women she has built up throughout her life, regardless of where she might have been ‘sitting’ at the time.”

As a professor at the Yale University she may have felt the women in Pakistan are not individuals in their own right, but paradoxically, she herself appears to be more comfortable within the past dissipated identity rather than the present “Resident alien” one. She may think the female space in Pakistan is repressed by the heavy burden of cultural and traditional identities. However, Gabrielle Watling seems to misread her approach towards a hybrid identity; “Sara’s own experiences as a migrant in the United States do not dominate Meatless Days. The book emphasizes the need for flexibility “wherever one is sitting”, and makes no special case for Sara’s American life”. But it appears to be not the “flexibility” but “rigidity” of a “meatless body” that prevents her from re-inventing herself. Her ambivalence is understandable as with the distance of time and space, she has lost the easy credulity which her sister Nuz possesses. She admires Nuz for “her capacity to be reassured by the world and take without a jot of embarrassment any comfort it is
prepared to offer” (MD, p. 32). However, her sense of loss between two worlds is her strength and makes her stand in “her bones” as realized by Watling:

>Suleri, on the other hand, keeps alive her ties to ‘home’, which she suggests may remain a sustaining and strengthening notion --- albeit mobile and indistinct--- for post-colonial migrants. And while Suleri’s particular flexibility perhaps reflects her position of social and professional privilege, her ability both to retain her heritage and adapt to a new culture has allowed her productively and creatively to link worlds without having to choose between them, without having to kill off a substantial part of who she is.37

She finds a voice for herself through the voices of her loved ones. Perhaps her family members define her, fitting well into the jigsaw of her “body” and render her disabled from framing a separate identity for herself.

She starts off her story of self-imposed exile from a point of actual loss when “leaving Pakistan was tantamount to giving up the company of women” (MD, p. 1). Suleri makes a paradoxical statement of how she misses not the presence but “the absence of women”, who were connected to her past. The expression is ingenious as her “presence” is locked within that “absence”. Probably, colonization itself is a locked position and mere “presence” of an “absence”. Ifat and Mamma, the women who dominate her narration continue to negate two kinds of absences; that of the “Third World women” and that of their physical existence. They appear to have lived with strong individualities within the Eastern set up, secure from the colonial displacements. The civil or legal status of women in the country does not seem to affect the women in Suleri’s household. She remembers Dadi with her goat, her Welsh mother standing detached and self-involved in the garden, Ifat with her imperial air and even Halima, the cleaning woman who seemed to be in a constant
“battle” with others for “precedence” (MD, P. 20). These women appear to be quite strong in defying the social norms of the times and even escape Salman Rushdie’s description about Pakistani women. They seem to have had enough liberty due to her father’s strong standing as a renowned journalist despite the oppressive times of martial law in Pakistan in the late 70s and 80s. The family continued to enjoy their freedom within secure walls until the final disaster of Mamma’s and Ifat’s deaths, which occurred one after another.

The sense of loss after the deaths of Mamma and Ifat remains immittigable and ferocious as the tragedies occurred in Suleri’s absence which makes her feel really homeless. Without these two women, “who always gave [her] pleasure” (MD, p. 88), she may have turned horribly “meatless” and dismembered in her own eyes. With multiple losses of home, mother and sister she may have felt bare to bones and her expatriate life may have become a journey into the void. Writing a memoir seems to provide her with the opportunity to see her loss and bring her past identity into a dialogue with the present emptiness. But she also seems to be struggling for liberation from the “X-rayed” or “meatless” identity.

Suleri appears to have refused the traditional Pakistani marriage to the son of a father’s friend. Traditional wedlock could offer her, “the stringent graces of monogamy”. She imagines this would allow him to “have a hand upon [her] head that shapes itself unwittingly to someone else’s cranium” and “every nerve end of fidelity in [her] leaps up to exclaim, ‘This is not the cup my skull requires’?” (MD, p. 83). But her father and sister remain worried, telling her constantly, “Sara, you must learn how to settle now” (MD, p. 83). Though Suleri seems to be westernized; with her smoking habit, not keeping fasts, and making important decisions on her own; she still appears to bear the brunt of life as a woman. Her colonized female space is
highlighted when she remarks, “till I had served my part in someone else’s tale” (MD, p. 83). Her position may not be different from Sai who too is “a small player in someone else’s story” (IL, p. 175). Suleri’s female identity could not make any claims for itself as she realizes, “my own framework in someone’s else’s building” (MD, p. 79) and seems unable to liberate herself from the colonized identity. Despite their Western education, both women are afraid of being easily abandoned. Suleri in her female identity may not be different even from Nimi, as both of them appear to lose their “relevance”. Nimi loses it as the judge has “forgotten he [has] a wife” (IL, p. 166) while Suleri loses it for herself. Tom had to “fly away” from her and she was, “being methodically slapped by the inevitability of [her] own irrelevance”. Years later [she is] still surprised to see how something as innocuous as an airline schedule can resound in [her] head like an echo chamber or the transient memory of tears” (MD, p. 82). Notwithstanding her empowerment, she cannot assert her own gaze and can only “mourn”, “making of him a mourning place, a monument before his time” (MD, p. 79). Like any oppressed woman, she remains at the receiving end and cannot negotiate her happiness. Obviously, the option was open for Tom and Suleri might have withdrawn to save her self-respect. Mustafa could not understand that even buying a bed would not have made any difference.

Her female self appears to conspire with her “Eastern skeleton” to keep her doubly colonized. In the expatriate enterprise of displacement and losses, Ifat’s absence seems to be the missing link as Suleri does not seem to come to terms with her death. Perhaps, more than anything else, “Imperial Ifat” is the one who kept her (identity) colonized; “In the month following Ifat’s funeral a brittle gaiety became my wont, as though I had folded up my aura (---) so little did I want to be seen of me” (MD, p. 65). Suleri seems to find her own reflection incomplete after losing Ifat. What she tells Richard about the eternal presence of his mother around him seems
to be the revelation of her own state. Ifat continues to “invade” her life with “unburied” and “warm” memories:

Ifat still felt unburied—to me she still was warm—and, somewhere south, Richard’s mother lay dying, causing him tight-lipped pain. It could end tomorrow or drag on for years, which is why she could not come to stay with him for good. “Why not?” I asked. We were driving through the hills, as was our wont, and I was smoking cigarettes. “Because it would ruin my life”, he flatly said. I admired him, then, for facing that gray guilt and the twist of pain that it set throbbing in his temple, though I knew it was easier to be invaded by a body than by a notion, and Richard bore the notion of his mother perpetually around him, like a plea. It made me grip his thin thigh in pity for us both, thinking, “Don’t you see? She already has moved in, sweetheart; she will be with you for your life” (MD, p. 67).

Ifat seems to live in Suleri’s bones. She seems much impressed with Ifat’s audacity and courage and appreciates her extraordinary qualities like the woman in Theodore Roethke’s poem, “I Know a Woman”. Ifat was rebellious, as she eloped to get married at a young age, and her “masculine wrist” may underpin her unconventional attitude towards life:

Of all her haunting aspects that return to me, I often am most pleased when I recollect her wrist. Ifat imposed an order on her bones that gave her gestures of an unsuspected strength: her wrists were such a vessel. There was no jar, no bottle in the house which could resist that flick of wrist, and in arm wrestling once she dropped Shahid down, to cries of everyone’s amazement. We liked to watch her wield her slender tools with efficient hygiene, so “Let Ifat open the olives,” we’d agree, and when of course she
Memories of Ifat seem to proliferate for Suleri and she remembers her in multiple presences. For Suleri, she was always two or more than two as she seems to look up to Ifat and adores many a quality of her person. Ifat returns to her in many reflections, with her “beauty”, her “grace” (MD, p. 134), her “leopard’s skull” (MD, p. 136) and her discourse. This reinstates Ifat as a haunting presence and yet an absence in Suleri’s dislocated life.

Suleri, in her exile, attempts to sort out her identity around a rubric of dispersal and fragmentation. Bharati Mukerjee reflects that immigrants have “traded their certain place (sometimes humble, sometimes exalted) in a fixed society for a crazy chance at something elusive called personal happiness (---) it’s enough that they try (Bharati Mukherjee 2003: A8)." Probably, like Ifat, Suleri’s mind also has to pay the price for living in an “exiled” body; “Ifat’s story has nothing to do with dying; it has to do with the price a mind must pay when it lives in a beautiful body” (MD, p. 132). Suleri may have turned historical as her “body” belongs to the past. She feels it is “love [that] renders a body into history. Like litmus, apprehended love can only turn historical, making of desire a social nicety, companionable” (MD, p. 165). In the chapter, “Papa and Pakistan” she repeats her becoming “historical” (MD, p. 127). In a candid manner she tells herself that “you were born fit; you rendered yourself unfit” (MD, p. 127). The guilt she faces on leaving Ifat’s motherless children behind is perhaps, a resurfacing of an earlier repressed guilt when she had left behind the people she loved only to follow her own volition as she uses words like “vanity” and “pretense” (MD, p. 127). What she relates about Dadi that “she was always outside our ken, an anecdotal thing, neither more nor less” (MD, p. 19) appears to be her own story. Suleri may have turned “anecdotal” to herself in exile. Probably, she
needs some “sweet reassurance of reality” while writing her autobiography. She tries to deal with the loss logically and admits that “trying to find it is like pretending that history or home is real and not located precisely where you’re sitting” (MD, p. 20). Struggling with “the unhealable rift” from “history or home”, she faces exile.43

She stays connected to her culture and its paraphernalia through a poignant trail of loss. Writing a memoir may be an attempt on Suleri’s part to cure the emptiness in her “body” and piece together the dismembered identity. Identity may be felt physically. In Cesaire’s treatment of the postcolonial space, the resonance of Suleri’s voice may be heard. In his writing, “the body has the last word. In his poetry and theatre he re-enacts the need to reintegrate the exiled subject in the lost body -- The end of exile, the triumph over the estranging sea, is only possible when the subject feels his or her bonds with the lost body of the native land”. In the colonial world, it is the “body” that is chastised, persecuted and enslaved either for its race, colour or gender.44 Frantz Fanon’s dwells on the tortures of living “with” a black “body”. His mind seems to pay the price for being placed in the “body” of a black person. If for Frantz Fanon “body” is a cultural and racial signifier,45 for Suleri it is symbolic of identity. Perhaps, Suleri’s tragedy of displacement is the same as that of a Negro; “I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am a Negro”.46 Suleri’s ambivalence may have been the same for living with a different “body” on a different land. Her mind has to pay the price since her very “body” rebels against the unfamiliar contexts. If for an African his “body” tells upon his race, Suleri’s “body” betrays her in her new adjustments and she has to play tricks to find it some comfort. One day, she and her siblings promised that all of them would only use a particular perfume that each had agreed upon:

It was several years ago—decades, I imagine---that my sisters and
I decided that each of us would always wear the same perfume (---
We must have come to this decision on some summer afternoon in Lahore, which spread its solitude around us. I said yes to my sisters, what a jolly idea, how I would love to pick up a sock or a frock or a scarf and make of those items the touch of my desire.47

“Body” holds a special significance in Suleri’s idea of identity. She admits courageously that “there was a voice that used to say to me, ‘put back your body where your life belongs’, but I have never been particularly good at heeding that piece of advice, happy instead to let life and body go grazing off to their own sweet pastures” (MD, p. 67, 68). She appears to be colonized like Frantz Fanon by her very “body” as there is a thread of physical metaphors running through her narration; “gravel in my skin” (MD, p. 75); “when I have washed my hands of sequence” (MD, p. 76); “at that point my body must have been craving simplicity”; “for those quick shifts of need that kept my genes in marching order” (MD, p. 77). For her, identity is housed in a “body” which again is connected to her family. She makes a point in talking about the bodies of her family members as if to vindicate her own identity; “Our bodies, no less than anything else that is human, are constituted by culture.”48

Again, Suleri speaks of her step-sister, Nuz’s baldness (MD, p. 42, 43), which may suggest their intimacy as a family. In a mood of self-reproach, she seems to miss the physical presence of all of her family members. With Ifat she acknowledges a bond as strong as that of an umbilical cord in the chapter, “The Immoderation of Ifat” (MD, p. 131). Probably in over-identification with Ifat she tells her that when she looks at her, “[she feels she is] in home’s element!” (MD, p. 147). Home houses identities and Ifat’s death may not have been less than a recurring loss of home for Suleri. But Ifat has her own story of homelessness:
“Although,” she added, “a woman can’t come home (---) Oh, home is where your mother is, one; it is when you are mother, two; and in between it’s almost as though your spirit must retract----” she was concentrating now, in the earnest way she concentrated as a child__ “your spirit must become a tiny, concentrated little thing, so that your body feels like a spacious place in which to live __is that right, Sara?” she asked me, suddenly tentative. “Perhaps,” I said, “perhaps” (MD, p. 147).

The analogy is apt and relates the whole story of a woman. The “spirit” has to “retract” only to be alive like a foetus in the body. The female soul has to go through a reduction process to find some space in a female body. It is a woman’s body that is targeted, territorialized and humiliated to the negligence of her soul:

Indeed, female bodies have historically been significantly more vulnerable than male bodies to extremes (---) Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that women, besides having bodies, are also associated with the body.59

Suleri is in need of a feminine language of the “body” but is defeated by “home” as “‘home’ and ‘nation’---masculine concepts—imply ownership and patriarchal protection, fragile though the notion may be; the women’s lives have no such grounding.”50 Suleri’s “body” too does not seem to “come home”, neither as a woman nor as a migrant. Perhaps, her new place makes her partake in the disavowal of identity while her “body” holds out to the truth of the Eastern skeleton. It is her “body” that craves for the ease of, “sitting on the edge of [her brother’s] sweet-smelling nivar rope bed,” (MD, p. 63) as by now she has lived “many years as an otherness machine” (MD, p. 105) in a foreign land with a “meatless” body.

An exiled “body”, perhaps, holds in a lacerated identity. The “body” shows resistance to displacement and cannot break with the habit of living in a home and
within an identity. Perhaps, home instincts keep the “body” colonized. Suleri talks of the “body” instead of herself, as if her very “body” has caused her discomfort as a mere skeleton through the “meatless” experience as an expatriate. Suleri tries to pull her own identity from a plethora of family identities but is unable to do it as the loved ones keep hanging on to it with tags like: --- “Ifat”, “Mamma”, “Pip”, “Shahid”, “Nuz”, “Irfani”, “Tillat” and of course, “Tom” (MD, p. 154). In other words, her loved ones do not let her become part of the new world.

One can see Dadi, fully immersed in Indo-Pak culture and its age-long rituals. She appears to be quite settled in tradition and might have wished the same kind of destiny for her granddaughters. She gave them the title, “Begum” (Eastern lady). Not only the grandchildren but even her son, Pip (Suleri’s father), could not exhibit faith and stability in politically heady times like his mother. Dadi’s confidence and ease with herself becomes the yardstick against which the wavering and dwindling identities of her progeny may be weighed. Dadi seemed to hang on to her identity and religion even more aggressively after losing one son to the West and the other to a “white-legged woman” (MD, p.3). She did not mind if for others she was only a “persona non-grata” and went around “declaring” that “the world takes on a single face” to which Suleri agrees as “it did” for Dadi, at least (MD, p. 6). Even the Indo-Pak partition could not uproot her as she only changed locations but not the cultural contexts that she carried around as valuable possessions. She remained “bitterly” vigilant over the paraphernalia of her identity and moved around with her “pure” Quran, a basin, a waterpot and baskets of her writing and pungent oils, which kept her connected to her historical and religious background. With her expression, “Dadi-like bitter oils” Suleri spills out unease about Dadi’s self-sufficiency and hard-core habits. Dadi in her defiance to the half-westernized ways of her grandchildren stood as a strong post among them despite her weakening memory. Perhaps, she
was reduced to trusting instincts and could stay immune to the threats to her identity. Her reactions were very natural and undiluted. Unlike her son, she was totally untouched by the post-independence waves of modernity in her new country; “but there was something else that she was eating with that meat. I saw it in her concentration; I know that she was making God talk to her as to Abraham and was showing him what she could do --- for him --- to sons. God didn’t dare and she ate on alone” (MD, p. 5). Among them, Dadi like the last Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah Zafar seems to be the last upholder of a firm, undivided identity, “since something of Dadi always remained intact, however much [they] sought to open her” (MD, p. 6). Probably, she could sense disbelief and listlessness in the air and a time came when she moved only between her son’s room and her own. On Dadi’s death, Suleri admits that they “all forgot to grieve”. Her death did not only fall between two stools of Mama and Ifat’s griefs (MD, p. 19) as Suleri expostulates, but also between the two worlds of East and West. Her son and grandchildren were on foreign shores and only Irfan could attend her funeral. After her, there were only colonially displaced generations. Watling reflects:

The family continues to divide their time between Pakistan and England and, with the exception of Pip, none of them really adopts either country as ‘home’ --- or any of the many other countries their professions, marriages or travels take them to.53

However, Suleri’s Mamma keeps her own space though she lives in a Pakistani household. She does not take part in the rituals of animals’ sacrifices on Eid and does not try to adopt what she can’t follow. She seems to be comfortably placed in her own demeanour and understands where she actually belongs to:

There in Wales one afternoon, walking childless among the brambles and the furze, Mamma realized that her childhood was
distinctly lost. “It was not that I wanted to feel more familiar”, she later told me, “or that I was more used to feeling unfamiliar in Lahore. It’s just that familiarity isn’t important really”, she murmured absently, “it really doesn’t matter at all” (MD, p. 12).

It is Mamma who tells them only familiarity with a new place is not enough and there is something more to it. Suleri may also have realized the truth of her words. As an “alien resident”, her past “space” is still “intact” but “vacant”:

I have always liked to see a vacant space intact—a room disinterested in seeming furnished—which surely shows the influence of growing up in houses built around courtyards (---) I still miss it, the necessity of openness that puts a courtyard in the middle of a house and makes rooms curl around it (MD, p. 174).

Home becomes a fictionalised space to which it is impossible to return fully. Unlike her mother, she doggedly remains hooked to the loss and cannot learn the tact to “unplot” herself between familiarity and unfamiliarity like, keeping “a room disinterested in seeming furnished” in her heart. For her an “aching distance”

lingers between the two worlds. With a Welsh mother, she was expected to show greater adaptability to the two worlds, but she and her brother find themselves lost, soon after they touched foreign shores. Suleri repeats after his brother, “we’re lost” (MD, p. 19).

Migrations have dire and profound effects as the displacement dismembers identity in the first place. A continual feeling of loss is probably the predicament of the emigrants and therefore, for Josef Conrad it is nothing else but to experience exile itself. V.S. Pritchett writes about him that “he was one of the great moralists of exile. And exile is not emigration, expatriation, etc. etc., but an imposing Destiny”. After her emigration, Suleri’s identity may have fractured into “pockets” as she uses
the word “pockets” (MD, p. 6, 54, 65) quite often through her narrative. The “pockets” of memories define her; yet keep her colonized and stuck at the point of “leaving Pakistan ----” though she had already left it ages ago. Her departure is still not complete.

Mamma’s bearing is resonant of the imperialist ways; it is distant and aloof yet overwhelming. She seems to have great influence on her children. The chapter “What Mamma Knew”, acknowledges and appreciates her intellect and good “tact” (MD, p.160) in adjusting herself with an oriental man, Suleri’s father, who happens to be of boisterous and sentimental nature. He was a renowned journalist but Suleri seems to be more impressed with her mother’s scholarly bearing and logical approach towards life. The clash between the East and the West which is symbolized by her parents, Z.A. Suleri and Maira Jones, is quite striking. Suleri addresses Mamma in her narrative that “it was most incongruous, most perverse of you to take to Pip” (MD, p. 165). For Suleri, it is as incongruous as “squirrel” and “marmalade” but for her mother it was “bearing---even posture, perhaps” (MD, p. 165). Suleri tends to suggest her father was not able to colonize Welsh identity; Maira Jones had her own way of sticking up for herself; “Did she [Suleri’s Mama] really think that she could assume the burden of empire, that if she let my father colonize her body and her name she would perform some slight reparation for the race from which she came? Could she not see that his desire for her was quickened with empire’s ghosts, that his need to possess was a clear index of how he was still possessed?” (MB, p. 163). In the whole account, her mother is always there, whether it is a chapter about Dadi, Pip or Ifat and seems to be doubly resourceful as a mother. One may assume that the colonial awe may also contribute to Suleri’s adoration and affection for her mother. But Suleri gets an allowance here; the representative of the English, after all, is her mother, and a learned lady in her own
right. Her intellectual congruence with Mamma is reflected in her remark that she “could be her need to think in sentences” (MD, p. 167). Again, she may have been the motivation for the children to flee to the Western world where they considered it a second home. However, Mamma appears to have lived within a shell of privacy in her married life in Pakistan. She was in the habit of sitting down “at his (her father’s) piano”, while Suleri “watched her play ----- see her spine swaying with loyalty.” Suleri “felt startled” to see her “paying a compliment to some lost moment of her life” and “to observe such privacy” (MD, p. 161, 162). Maira, later renamed as “Surraya Suleri” might have lived only physically with them, “a guest”, “a guest in her own name” (MD, p. 163).

Western feminism and its notions of gender equality do not seem to help Suleri in shaping her identity. Though she understands home is not a physical but a metaphysical reality, she appears to fail in separating faces from their contexts. This ambivalence keeps her colonized while she continues to live in other geographies. Suleri, “in simpleheaded fealty, [worked] at making Ifat [her] geography, [her] terrain of significance, on which [she] thought, and slept, and breathed. Now context becomes a more abstracting thought” and she finally admits that she “never lived in Ifat anyway; [she lives] in New Haven” (MD, p.182). She cannot be two persons at the same time and very soon, realizes the futility of trying to find herself in the loss that circumnavigates continents.

The whole memoir seems to be a desperate attempt to relive an identity that is left far behind. Krishnendu Ray is of the same opinion:

Travelling, of course, entails infidelity. It is undertaken with the sly hope of interrupting domesticity. But the search for home reasserts itself like a riptide, drawing us toward the hearth as if it
were an elemental force, particularly when we have left it behind.\textsuperscript{57}

In the last chapter, Suleri points to the differences of time and place that may have kept her exiled, stirring in her an utter sense of waste and loss. This is how her last chapter begins, “each year, an hour gained” (MD, p. 170). She relishes the idea that she did not have to “put back” the time as long as she was at home but now she has to keep adjusting her “time” to the Western surroundings (MD, p. 169). She lives “stripped to the bones” (MD, p. 171) surrounded by foreign seasons, unfamiliar “interstices” (MD, p. 85) and different lengths of day and night. It is possible that, she has spoken through a narrator or persona in her writing in order to confront her emptiness and failings headlong; while also coming to terms with her present.

Suleri remembers her loved ones by “proper names of pain”; “Mamma pain suggests the immorality of absence. Nuzzi’s pain draws on her bravery: something must be suffering, each time that she laughs. And an Ifat pain inhered in the hilarity of her brooding manner, the one that darkly looked up through her brightness, saying, ‘Love me, while you can’” (MD, p. 173). She seems to be in search of a “proper name” for her own pain. Although there is an underlying anguish in her narration, she narrates her own grief and mishaps or that of her siblings. She appears to have surrendered to this negotiation of memory with a disfigured and dismembered “body”. In the “strip-tease” of identity she may find a naked, “meatless” skeleton of herself at the end. Perhaps, the women of her past act as a shroud for her “dead” identity. Suleri, through her own narrative voice, has tried to face the self-image which otherwise may have been terrorizing and horrifying like “her skeleton” in her own cupboard.
Notes


2 “But how did she appear? She searched in the stainless-steel pots, in ----- spoons and knives, in the polished gompa butter lamps, in the merchants’ vessels in the bazaar, in the images proffered by the spoons and knives on the dining table, in the green surface of the pond. Round and fat she was in the spoons, long and thin in the knives, pocked by insects and tiddlers in the pond; golden in one light, ashen in another; back then to the mirror; but the mirror, fickle as ever, showed one thing, then another and left her, as usual, without an answer”(74).

Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* (London: Penguin Books, 2006). All further references will be abbreviated to IL and will be cited in the text.

3 “Sai washed her feet with whatever piddled into the bucket, but she forgot her face, wandered out, remembered her face, went back in and wondered why, remembered her teeth, put the toothbrush into her pocket, came out again, remembered her face and her teeth, went back, rewashed her feet, reemerged-----

Paced up and down, bit off her fingernails-----

She prided herself on being able to take anything-----

Anything but gentleness.

Had she washed her face? She went back into the bathroom and washed her feet again” (IL, p. 120).

4 Frantz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness”, p. 110.

5 “Mutt, catching sight of the shadow of her own tail, leapt and caught it, began to whizz around and around, confused as to whose tail it was. She would not let go, but her eyes expressed confusion and beseeching--how could she stop? ----- What should she do? ---she had caught a strange beast and didn’t know it was herself. She went skittering helplessly about the garden” (IL, p. 105).


7 Nayar, “Gender”, p. 118.

8 Ibid., p. 120.


10 Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford are of the view that “the colonial world was no place for a woman, let alone a lady; it was a man’s world, demanding pioneering, martial and organizational skills, and the achievements of those in the shape of conquered lands and people were celebrated in a series of male-oriented myths: mateship, the mounties, explorers, freedom fighters, bushrangers, missionaries. At a later stage the same skills were
used to overthrow colonialism, thus reinforcing the ethos of the colonies as a predominantly male domain, both in reality and in the popular imagination which was both formed by the myths and in turn shaped reality. The male ethos has persisted in the colonial and postcolonial world long after the reality which formed it had ceased to exist. The effect of this on colonial women was no longer a question of ‘no place for a woman’, since they were palpably there, but of a place denied in the imagination” (9).


11“But Sai, it had turned out, was more his [grandfather’s] kin than he had thought imaginable. There was something familiar about her; she had the same accent and manners. She had a westernized Indian brought up by English nuns, an estranged Indian living in India------This granddaughter whom he didn’t hate was perhaps the only miracle fate had thrown his way” (IL, p. 210).


13“Sai began to follow [Gyan and his] sister but then stopped. Shame caught up with her. What had she done? It would be her they would laugh at, a desperate girl who had walked all this way for unrequited love. Gyan would be slapped on the back and cheered for his conquest. She would be humiliated. He had hit on the age-old trick that remade him into a hero, “the desired male ------ the more the men would cheer, the more his status would grow at Thapa’s Canteen, the more Sai would be remade behind her back into a lunatic female, the more Gyan would flatten with pride------ She felt her own dignity departing, watched it from far away as Gyan and his sister walked down the path. As they turned into their house, it vanished as well” (IL, p. 262).


15There are two trunks with two different labels of “Miss S. Mistry, St. Augustine’s Convent” and of “Mr. J. P. Patel, SS Strathnaver” (IL, p. 37) on them. They get robbed by the nationalist robbers. The metaphor is ingenious as the hired identities are only baggage which the natives carry to their utmost discomfort. They also remain exposed to the threats outside.

16“When Sai [moves] her foot, her toes [go] silently through the rotted fabric. She [has] a fearful feeling of having entered a space so big it [reaches] both backward and forward” (IL, p. 34).


18“Oh, they had been wrong. The real place had evaded them. The two of them had been fools feeling they were doing something exciting just by occupying this picturesque cottage, by seducing themselves with those old travel books in the library, searching for a certain angled light with which to romance themselves, to locate what had been conjured only as a tale to tell before the Royal Geographic Society, when the author returned to give a talk accompanied by sherry and a scrolled certificate of honour spritzed with gold for an exploration of the far Himalayan kingdoms---but far from what? Exotic to whom? It was the centre for the sisters, but they had never treated it as such” (IL, p. 247).
"Do you think it’s going to rain?"

Tweedledum spread a large umbrella over himself and his brother, and looked up into it. “No, I don’t think it is,” he said: “at least—not under here. No-how.” “But it may rain outside?” “It may—if it chooses,” said Tweedledee: “we’ve no objection. Contrariwise” (Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, p. 70).

These people could name them, recognize them—the few rich—but Lola and Noni could barely distinguish between the individuals making up the crowd of power. Only before, the sisters had never paid much attention for the simple reason that they didn’t have to. It was natural they would incite envy, they supposed, and the laws of probability favored their slipping through life without anything more than muttered comments, but every now and then, somebody suffered the rotten luck of being in the exact wrong place at the exact wrong time when it all caught up—and generations worth of trouble settled on them. Just when Lola had thought it would continue, a hundred years like the one past—Trollope, BBC, a burst of hilarity at Christmas—all of a sudden, all that they had claimed innocent, fun, funny, not really to matter, was proven wrong” (IL, p. 242).

Nandy, “The Uncolonized Mind”, p. 91.


“then almost immediately he began to hate her. Her pregnancy was grotesque; he hated the way she sat down; when she ate he listened for the noises she made; he hated the way she fussed and clucked over the children; he hated it when she puffed and fanned and sweated in her pregnant way; he was nauseated by the frills and embroidery and other ornamentation on her clothes” (285).

V. S. Naipaul, A House for Mr Biswas (London: Picador, 2003). All further references to this edition will be abbreviated to MB and will be cited in the text.

Hanuman House follows a typical patriarchal structure and therefore, the boys of the house are given priority over the daughters of the House; “The brothers often did the puja in the prayer-room. Despite their age they were admitted into the councils of Seth and Mrs Tulsi and their views were quoted with respect by sisters and brothers-in-law. To assist their scholarships, the best of the food was automatically set aside for them and they were given special brain-feedings meals, of fish in particular” (MB, p. 106). Hence, they keep a conservative set up and could not allow the girls to become westernized. Shama objects to her daughter’s education; “so you want girl children learning to read and write and picking up boy-friends? You want to see them wearing short frocks?” (MB, p. 127).


fully grown, it seemed, just waiting to be released: the wife, the housekeeper, and now the mother” (MB, p. 165).


30Sara Suleri, Meatless Days (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 1. All further references will be abbreviated to MD and will be cited in the text.


33“It was my mother, after all, who had told me that sweetbreads are sweetbreads, and if she were wrong on that score, then how many other simple equations had I now to doubt?------maybe my mother knew that sweetbreads are testicles but had cunningly devised a ruse to make me consume as many parts of the world as she could before she let me loose in it.---------------For of course she must have known, in her Welsh way, that sweetbreads could never be simply sweetbreads in Pakistan” (MD, p. 230).


36Watling, p. 69.

37Ibid., p. 70.

38Amina Yaqin reflects that Rushdie “is concerned to highlight the specificities of gender oppression in his version of Pakistani society, which are to do with women’s domestic roles, child-bearing and socially enforced passivity in relation to active male characters” (65). See Amina Yaqin, “Family and Gender in Rushdie’s writing”, The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie.

39Emphasis my own.

40Suleri relates: “It’s done, Mustafa,“ I breathed out, “it’s finally done.” And, looking at the brighter side of things, “Now I can buy a bigger bed.” Mustafa was curious. “Why didn’t you before, in all those years?” “Because Tom would have thought I was doing it to make him feel at home, which of course I wanted to, but the notion of my wanting to would have just felt too oppressive.” Mustafa glanced up at me, and then away. “Strange girl,” she quietly said (MD, p. 84, 85).


Edward Said in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Culural Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) remarks that exile is “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (173). “…Our age,” says Said, “is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration” (174). Thus, “exile” is a state in which “the unhealable rift” and “its essential sadness” can never be overcome.

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Fanon says “consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer on the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly. And all these movements are made not out of habit but out of implicit knowledge. A slow composition of my self as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world-definitive because it creates a real structuring of the self and of the world-definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world—” (Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness”, p. 110).

Dash, p. 325.


Bordo, p. 230.


“Of those middle years it is hard to say whether Dadi was literally left alone or whether her bodily presence always emanated a quality of being apart and absorbed. In the winter I see her alone, painstakingly dragging her straw mat out to the courtyard at the back of the house and following the rich course of the afternoon sun. With her would go her Quran, a metal basin in which she could wash her hands, and her ridiculously heavy spouted waterpot, that was made of brass. None of us, according to Dadi, were quite pure enough to transport these particular items, but the rest of her paraphernalia we were allowed to carry out. These were baskets of her writing and sewing materials and her bottle of pungent and Dadi-like bitter oils, with which she’d coat the papery skin that held her brittle bones. And in the summer, when the night created an illusion of possible coolness and everyone held their breath while waiting for a thin and intermittent breeze, Dadi would be on the roof, alone. Her summer bed was a wooden frame latticed with a sweet-smelling rope, much aerated at its foot. She’d lie there all night until the wild monsoons would wake the lightest and soundest sleeper into a rapturous welcome of rain” (MD, p. 6).

Watling, p. 67.
54 Suleri, Boys will be Boys, p. 1.


56 “How would I define her soundness? By the time I came to consciousness she had long since intuited the rules of Pakistan---those hidden laws that people would not tell her---and had come to terms with the ones she could and could not keep” (MD, p. 165).

THE INADEQUATE MEN

All I wanted to be was to be a man among other men.¹

Biswas in *A House for Mr Biswas* is born with “the sixth finger of misfortune”², which seems to signify an unnecessary appendage of a colonial past. The “sixth finger” which he sheds later is buried not far from his navel string. The navel-string serves as a metaphor for a supplanted identity that becomes useless after enacting a relationship of dependence and contingency. Biswas’s birth which is “in the wrong way” and the extra appendage continues to weigh him down all his life (MB, p. 11). “The sixth finger” though redundant leaves behind a vacuum not so very different from the void of identity experienced by postcolonial generations. There is some connection between “this appendage” and Biswas’s insignificant life as he appears “to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated” (MB, p. 8). His predicament may be compared with that of the judge in *The Inheritance of Loss*, as both fail to define their selfhood against a colonial background. The judge too, has become totally dependent on the English “powder puff”³ or to what Frantz Fanon has called “white masks” (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952). The harrowing experience of living in England has made him lose his self-esteem and he has started hiding behind a white cosmetic “mask”. Since then, he has become distant from everyone including himself (IL, p. 111).

The judge who “stumbled onto” SS *Strathnaver* and Biswas who “tumbled forth” into a Caribbean diaspora at midnight, “the inauspicious hour”, like Saleem in *Midnight’s Children⁴*, seem to face crises of identity. They project their loss through a sense of inadequacy and both fail to make masculine imprints on their roles. My argument focuses on how colonization has been detrimental to manhood and has
rendered the ex-colonized males impotent and powerless. Biswas and the judge present themselves as case studies of men who are involved in self-defeating search for identity. They are hostile to the Eastern traditions and standards but end up divested of a worthy self-image. I may allude to other characters from contemporary writings to exemplify how the loss reflects itself as an inherent lack in colonized men. My contention, in addition, considers another class of very poor men, the cook and Biju, who are made inadequate not only by the forces of colonization but by that of globalization as well. They are easily lured into the attractions of a commercialized world which treats them ruthlessly, and as mere commodities. In other words, they are lost as poor natives and as immigrants. This chapter also takes into account how the disadvantaged become victims of so-called neo-liberalism. They appear to be dually colonized and displaced in a modern world.

The dissipation of Biswas’s umbilical cord in the earth symbolizes the obscure existence enacted on diasporic subjects and may be compared with the transferred umbilical cord of Saleem in *Midnight’s Children*. It is with hindsight, that Saleem learns of “the occult powers of umbilical cords” as they are buried away to give foundation to “a new beginning”. In this passage, migration and settlements are depicted as ruthless and “grotesque”. Biswas too, loses his identity through a series of migrations. His Caribbean background makes the case even more complex. The diaspora he is attached to “is characterized by a refusal to belong to any nation or racial community, and stresses the migratory, transnational character of [his] personal history which [he sees] reflected in the history of the Caribbean itself”. He can never relate to any place:
Mr. Biswas could never afterwards say exactly where his father’s hut had stood or where Dari and the others had dug (---) when Mr Biswas looked for the place where he had spent his early years he saw nothing but oil derricks and grimpy pumps (---) His grandparents’ house had also disappeared (---) His navel-string, buried on that inauspicious night, and his sixth finger, buried not long after, had turned to dust (---) The world carried no witness to Mr Biswas’s birth and early years (MB, p. 39).

The colonial establishment has turned Biswas’s “navel-string” and existence “to dust”. The narrative begins with his death before narrating his obscure birth. He is introduced with reference to an address in which identity does not seem to house well; “TEN WEEKS BEFORE he died, Mr Mohun Biswas, a journalist of Sikkim Street, St James, Port of Spain, was sacked” (MB, p. 1). As a West Indian he is a refugee and Port of Spain only offers him settlement in a metropolis. In his peripheral life, he is already “sacked” and evacuated by the Caribbean history of transportations and indentured slavery and does not exist much “before” his death.

If Biswas is thrown out of a life of meaning and belonging by his life “Abroad”8, the judge’s case is not so different. Both have lost their “Paradise” of “innocence and belonging”. On his journey towards Cambridge, the judge locks away his name into a black-tinned trunk with a label in “white letters”. At this point he drops his birth identity, “Jemubhai Popatlal Patel” (IL, p. 56) and starts carrying around the burden of a trunk that shows “Mr. J. P. Patel, SS Strathnaver” in white letters (IL, p. 8). This association with the sailing vessel rather than a geographical reference of birth may symbolize his break with his country, family and his own self. He chooses an unstable and imaginary identity over what he really is. “SS Strathnaver” seems to become an insignia of institutionalized colonial authority that sets him off on a “a journey [which] once begun has no end” (IL, p. 111). Henceforth,
he would never be the same again. Though his journey is in the colonial era, the scene may suggest the wide-scaled post-independent migration of people towards the Western world in search of better lives. Perhaps, the judge’s journey symbolizes a journey of “self-discovery---- from a search for identity to the full desolation of a realisation of permanent exile.”9 As a result, in his own country he would forever be a migrant as “all migrants leave their pasts behind (---) because it is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history, to stand amidst the scorn of strangers upon whom they see the rich clothing, the brocades of continuity and the eyebrows of belonging”.10 The “empty” trunk that gets robbed seems to be trope of stolen identity. It is ironic that after the Western encounter the judge has nothing to lose but a labelled name. Moreover, his trunk proves to be a “similar poor native’s trunk” in England as all immigrants are known by their “inadequate clothes”, “native’s trunks” and “empty rooms” (IL, p. 118). Alice’s journey in Through the Looking Glass is a good comparison with the judge’s study trip. Amidst illusions, Alice can still see where she belongs to, and unlike the judge, is not completely swept off her feet on her new journey.11 The judge is “travelling the wrong way” and cannot understand that he does not belong to “this journey” at all.

Meddling with names may run high risks of which the protagonists appear to be unaware. Upon losing identity, Alice comes to realize that she is “sure [she] shouldn’t remain!”12 but the characters do not seem to reach this kind of self-realization. With borrowed titles they are left with, “no knowledge of [themselves] and, [are] brutalised by unselfconsciousness”.13 Probably, the judge has had to disown “Jemubhai”, a naïve villager, when Mrs. Rice calls him “James” (IL, p. 39). Names may provide a frame of reference, but for the colonized men their own names are a cause of discomfiture. No trace of “Jemubhai” can be tolerated by the judge after anticipating a different reference for himself through his Cambridge
degree. It appears that the judge is playing tricks not on his ancestral name but on himself. He “secretly” buys a “gravy boat” in a second-hand shop, sold by a family whose monogram is “JPP”. He, then, hides it within a bag, so that his “painful pretension” may not be revealed. From now onwards, he may be called “James Peter Peterson” or Jemubhai Popatilal Patel (IL, p. 171). His own Indian name embarrasses him and he makes sure not to associate with it and looks forward to “the future judge” who was once “Jemubhai” or just “Jemu” (IL, p. 36). Interestingly, he keeps juggling with his name. He would lock it away or paste another label over it or hide it under the title of “the judge”. He may need other names as he has severed his ties with his own community, his family and with himself. He seems to be desperate for an English “badge” and tries his best to underscore and undermine his original self. Likewise, Biswas is removed from his origins. Perhaps, he is ashamed of “Mohun” and has therefore swapped it for the English title “Mr”. From early on, the narrative voice calls him “Mr Biswas” as this is what Biswas prefers for himself. His full name “Mohun Biswas” rarely occurs in the text and sounds to have been made redundant by an invasive past and creolized constructs. On one occasion, Biswas uses his first name for his role as a father, “Mohun Biswas, father” (MB, p. 168) as if all of a sudden, he remembers that the colonial “Mr Biswas” has no roots. Still, he lived all his life with a surname, while as an Indian he should have been using his first name “Mohun” rather than Biswas. “Mohun” is acknowledged at the time of his tentative birth registration or in reference to his death as “three weeks before he died Mr Mohun Biswas (---)” (MB, p. 1). The colonial verdict of “Mr Biswas, as he is called from infancy to death” seems to have left no place for the Indian “Mohun”.

The loss seems to speak through Biswas’s obsession with names. Strangely, “on the back end-paper of the Collins Clear-Type Shakespeare”, he writes the names of the children who are not yet born; in “large letters” as if his “succession [has]
already been settled” (MB, p. 166). He meticulously makes lists of male names before the birth of his daughter. His interest in male names may demonstrate his ambivalence towards his own name. At the same time, it may bare his unconscious complicity with Indian traditions where sons are preferred over daughters. Although he disagrees with Hanuman House’s privileged treatment of sons, he appears to be unable to break with Indian prejudice. Perhaps there is a hard core self, one cannot tamper with. Later on, he surrenders to the Hanuman House’s name for his son and does not try to name him from the list he has prepared “on the back end-paper of the Collins Clear-Type Shakespeare” (MB, p. 191). Instinctively, he might be aware that “Collins Clear-Type Shakespeare” would not provide an identity for future generations.

Homelessness serves as trope of colonial lived experience. As the saying goes, “there is no place like home” and losing identity may not be less uncomfortable than being homeless and experiencing “the ache of not-belonging”. The two colonial figures are displaced and dislocated though they reside in their native towns. The judge’s exile does not end on returning home while Biswas has a rootless survival in “the West Indies [which] are paradoxically the home of exile. West Indians, whether they are Negroes or Whites or Asians----are all exiles, born into exile.” Consequently, Biswas only lives with an imagined homeland while the judge as a migrant lives “on the borders” of India. Biswas’s search for a house becomes an allegory of loss and rootlessness. The protagonists do not come home for an identity. They face a world in which “home has become such a scattered, damaged, various, concept in [their] present travails”.

Biswas who is, “a stranger in his own yard” (MB, p. 156) ultimately builds a small house for himself. It cannot have any worth to a migrant however, who has
passed his whole life feeling “unnecessary” and “unaccommodated”. Finally, he is able to make half-claims to a piece of land but still not to selfhood. Elleke Boehemer has the opinion that focusing “on the strivings of an insignificant and impetuous West Indian to find fulfillment as a writer and a householder, A House for Mr Biswas comments on the dilemmas of colonial dispossession, the need for a ‘portion of the earth’ to call one’s own”. Biswas seems to replicate Naipaul’s own sense of loss who himself “remains an utterly deracinated man, truly homeless, an absolute exile.” Naipaul laments that he would “never become a culture hero anywhere.” Probably, diasporic subjects are unable to reconnect to their heritage and do not have culture and tradition at their disposal.

The judge lives in “Cho Oyu” (the name of a mountain on the borders of Nepal and Tibet) which was built by a Scot. He actually, seems to hang onto the threshold between East and West as he “could live here, in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country” (IL, p. 29). Selecting “Cho Oyu” as his abode speaks of the judge’s colonial insecurity. In “trusting [an English] man’s word---the famous word of a gentleman---despite all that had passed” (IL, p. 28) he has laid himself open to risks from the nationalists. He stays here with his dual identity under “the twin roof” that “rattles” in the wind while the very structure of the house seems as “fragile” as “a husk” (IL, p. 34). The old, colonial house is like an archeological site where “the door [has] been closed forever on a storeroom where the floor [has] caved in” (IL, p. 7). Like a graveyard, the driveway “is overgrowing with weeds” (IL, p. 25). “Cho Oyu” wastefully showcases the remains of colonialism; a rusted gun, stored empty bottles of Grand Mariner, amontillado sherry, Talisker and “a certificate issued by Cambridge University that [has] almost vanished” into the brown stains of the damp wall which itself, billows “forth like sails” (IL, p. 7). The judge’s residence has always been a matter of curiosity for the poor natives and
everyone wants to see inside the place which appears to be so foreign. Colonial remnants prove to be an attraction for the poor masses (IL, p. 11). Nonetheless, this house exhibits the judge as “Westoxicated” and distant like the “the German Aziz” in Midnight’s Children who has been “branded” as an alien, “and therefore a person not completely to be trusted.” If Biswas sees himself as a stranger in the land of his birth, the judge finds the colonial structure “crumbling” and “being gouged by termites from within” (IL, p. 233). He along with the other members in the house, seem to have been outlived by the colonial legacy that has turned them into “shadow puppets”. This image arrests the judge as a colonial “puppet” in the “flickering” reflection of the past. Playing out a duplicate life on a chessboard seems to be his only sanctuary in which to hide from his life of affectations (IL, p.1, 61, 89, 92, 264, 282).

To become English gentlemen, paradoxically, the men have to lose masculinity. Biswas behaves absurdly and silences “the rattle of the belt buckle” which may sound threatening to him as it “[is] such a precise, masculine sound” (MB, p. 141). The judge also keeps “a buckle to the side” of his trousers’ belt (IL, p. 33). Manhood projects itself and to dislike a “masculine sound” or to keep “a buckle to the side” may underline suppressed manhood. Back home, the judge is “a terrible shot”; one who misses his targets. Something is always missing in his case like “the proof of the pudding” or like “the prize of the action” or “the manliness in manhood” or “the partridge for the pot”. Above all, on his hunting trips, he returns with “Nothing!” (IL, p. 62). He is bandy-legged and his physical disability also seems to be a metonym of his dysfunctional manhood. His shame over “the rotten banana” on “SS Strathnaver” intimidates how he is on board for a colonial journey that might rip his manly courage from him. The “banana” in his packed lunch which has started to seem rotten in the heat (IL, p. 38) may symbolize his waning masculinity. Jemu may
have felt his manhood and courage slipping away from him as “no fruit dies so vile and offensive a death as the banana” (IL, p.37). Even his physical intimacy with his young wife is now something of which he feels ashamed. He appears to denounce the very role of an Indian man who values his domestic and community life and acknowledges his responsibility towards his family and fellow beings. From the Lacanian perspective, at this stage in the narrative he seems to enter a “symbolic” order that is dually cruel and irrevocable, and doubly removes him from the “real”.27 He leaves his parents, his world and everything else for his full immersion in the Western world, which however, could never happen.

Biswa feels disgust for his wife as she is the epitome of Indian-ness and seems to defeat his western ideals (MB, p. 154, 285). He hates her Indian manners and the way she carries herself. Her pregnancy, the way she manages children and her ornamental dresses are repulsive for him.28 It sounds like the colonial gaze of men obstructs them from appreciating the compliance, loyalty and obedience of their Eastern brides. Probably, Biswa fosters hostility for Shama as she is well grounded in Indian heritage and he has to combat the strong pull of Indian identity from her who is “the thorough Tulsi”, or rather “the antagonist” that the family has assigned to him (MB, p. 105). Biswa tends to act out his manliness by abusing and beating his wife. He kicks her in the stomach when she is pregnant (MB, p. 288). He only has a short period of premarital attraction towards Shama but “it was temporary like his temporary abodes” (MB, p. 86). He feels an inner rejection as soon as he is married and carries himself around as “unchanged” and “unmarried” (MB, p. 99). He treats his wife in a ridiculous manner and remains distant from her. The scene in which he tells Shama that she has “got a double chin” when he visits her after childbirth, speaks of his failure as a caring husband (MB, p. 168). He abandons her often after arguments and there is “little friendliness between them”

Men are identified by women and it is not surprising that these men with their manhood in jeopardy fail to enter balanced relationships with women. It is only late in his marriage when Biswas notices a certain “pleasure in the curve of [Shama’s] back” (MB, p. 157). It may suggest he is rendered disabled from drawing pleasure from anything, not least from sex. Strangely, sometimes he cannot even tolerate Shama’s touch. A non-reciprocal and frustrating sexual relationship may be implied when Shama points to the “pot without the handle”:

“--- and to use the blue pot without the handle”.

How often, crouched before the chulha fire, she had said to him,

“just hand me the blue pot without the handle” (MB, p. 166).

This scene may be an allusion to his passive response to sexual and feminine gestures from his wife. The metonym of “blue pot without the handle” and Shama’s crouching position may have strong sexual overtones. It may reflect her frustration with a man who does not seem to have much interest in her. In their sexual relationship, he seems to remain passive and only take instructions from her. Seeing her crouching or “bunching her long fingers” does not arouse his sexuality (MB, p. 166) and is not different from that of Naipaul’s other protagonists. He seems to outlive castration like Rushdie’s males as he too portrays “the lack of male figures” in “the oppressed sections of the society”. Biswas’s arrested confidence may be traced back to his youth when he could not participate in sexual fantasies with other boys of his age and “could never strike the correct note” (MB, p. 62). Probably, his sense of inadequacy makes him clumsy and awkward. Instead of feeling excitement, he felt embarrassment over women or love. He has lost his manly confidence at “the
stage when a girl [is] something of painful loveliness”. “Some features” of girls always repel him like “a tone of voice, a quality of skin, an over-sensuous hang of lip” (MB, p. 79). He only considers some ideal woman who is “fresh, tender, un kissed,” “slim,” and “almost thin” or “an untouched barren heroine” to be attractive. In his stories, he invites an unknown girl from the “advertising department of the Sentinel” but whenever the girl accepts his invitation, “his passion at once died” (MD, p. 363). He can never acknowledge his desires and has developed a habit of deferring all his pleasure until the day when his unrealistic expectations of “sweetness and romance” and that too, (in western fashion), may be realized (MB, p. 80, 318).

For the judge in The Inheritance of Loss, Nimi’s Indian-ness is a handicap for his westernized self. Perhaps, his Indian wife reminds him that he is only a fake sahib. Sexual intercourse for him appears to be an act of chastisement for Nimi’s Indian-ness as “he [stuffs] his way ungracefully into her” (IL, p.169). He, like Biswas, seems detached from the image of an overpowering, dominating and over-protective Eastern husband. If they have behaved as traditional husbands, their exercise of power would have been far more understandable and bearable for their Indian wives than their perverted behaviour. The judge seems to have been castrated by his time abroad and perhaps, does not see himself any more as a man against his wife (IL, p. 111, 118). He could relate to his wife before leaving for England as he remembers “a moment long ago when he had indeed liked her. He was twenty, she fourteen. The place was Piphit and they were on a bicycle, traversing gloriously down a slope through cow pats” (IL, p. 308). Now confronting his wife, he appears to be reminded of some lack within himself and tries to redeem it by “[teaching Nimi] the same lessons of loneliness and shame he [has] learned himself. In public he never [speaks] to or [looks] in her direction” (IL, p. 170). The judge’s behaviour testifies to what Ashis Nandy has observed that “colonialism as a
psychological process cannot but endorse the principle of isomorphic oppression.”

The judge seems to see his identity shattered when he reflects on the natural bearing of his wife. She with “her silent resistance to Jemubhai’s oppressive behaviour appears as a constant reminder of Jemubhai’s powerlessness/impotency, conformity and subjugation that he makes himself subject to for inclusion in the mainstream. Jemubhai’s inherent vulnerability is exposed through his act of violence as a result of his inability to face the truth about his own callous submission to the system geared by her comment---‘you are the one who is stupid’.” He therefore, terrorizes Nimi and finally, abandons her. Interestingly, his cook refers to two snakes in the backyard as mia-bibi (husband-wife) but does not describe the judge and his wife in the same terms. It may suggest that even snakes can be mia-bibi but not the judge and his wife, in their colonized household (IL, p. 1, 13). Colonial poison has possibly divorced human relationships over time. Ironically, later on the judge gives his attention and love to a crossbreed pet bitch, called Mutt who has taken the place of “an adoring spouse” (IL, p. 34). He calls Mutt his love (IL, p. 308). The preference of a mixed breed bitch over his pure Indian wife seems to reflect his pathetic bid for mongrel identity.

Identity has a strong instinctive pull. The colonial aspirations and life choices of Biswas and the judge, appear to be wasteful and annihilate their existence. Biswas starts calling Hanuman House “the monkey house” (MB, p. 123) as it is over-crowded and orthodox but he does not understand that he himself blindly follows an English lifestyle. He does not appreciate that the residents of Hanuman House speak in English and observe Christmas but do not compromise on their family name and identity (MB, p. 196). Their West-Indian assimilation may only be superficial as Mrs Tulsi is the epitome of Indian-ness. Biswas though a product of the same creolized culture reacts very oddly. He feels suffocated in the “Rose room” which is used by
Tulsi, his mother-in-law, for her massage and bay rum soaking of hair. Contrary to the symbol of “Rose”, “Lotus” flowers that are painted on the walls seem to annoy Biswas the most. He is in the habit of pressing “his foot against the wall” and drawing circles with his big toe “around one of the faded lotus decorations” (MB, p. 120, 141). The particular Hindu “smell of incense and sandalwood” is very unpleasant (MB, p. 104, 105) for him. He finds the other room with “large brass pots”, “marble-topped tables” and “many statues of Hindu gods, heavy and ugly” very “oppressive” as well. Culture and religion seem to have an adverse effect on Biswas who is already living a displaced life.

Biswa’s denunciation of Hanuman House, where his in-laws live, may be considered a way of saving himself from slavery and moving towards independence. But on closer reading, he appears to be on the run not actually from Hanuman House but from an Indian tradition manifested in the Tulsi’s lifestyle. He defies the Tulsis’ authority but has otherwise, proclaimed his allegiance to the colonizer. Seth in Hanuman House has granted Biswas a job on the grounds that he is an Indian and a Brahmin (MB, p. 82) but Biswas seems to be doing his best to renounce these orthodox connections. He feels the Hindu religion reflects a “spiritually backward society” and proclaims that “I just don’t believe in this idol worship, that is all” (MB, p. 133). Shama’s brothers have started calling him “you Christian” and an Aryan convert (MB, p. 134). But such labels do not define Biswas as he does not seem to belong to any religion except to an English ideal with which he keeps desperately grappling. He has an unreasonable and unnecessary reverence for everything that is English; be it the school rhymes in English primers, English novels, Macleans’ brand stomach powder or a Slumberking bed. Moreover, he constantly questions the customs and values of the Trinidadian Indian community, but is unable to rescue himself from history or the clutches of a greater slavery. He perhaps, does
not understand that his cultural associations may still provide him with self-respect and self-recognition and that life at Hanuman House is still better than being subjected to the ghosts of colonial masters. His ambitions are out of place and he fails everywhere. The only job that he manages with great difficulty is that as a reporter for the *Trinidad Sentinel*. All that he achieves at the end of the day is “to console himself in later life with the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius”, while resting on the “Slumbering bed” in a room that contains most of his possessions (MB, p. 20) Probably, he imagines himself at the centre and not on the periphery, sitting on a western mattress and reading an English book.

Bipti, Biswas’s mother, seems to be central to identity. Biswas “[grows] away from Bipti (his mother)” (MB, p. 38) and thus, away from his origins. Indians interpret their “country as Mother.”  

Not surprisingly, Biswas, who inherits the wounds of indentured slavery is in an uneasy relationship with his mother and in her company he has “to struggle against anger and depression” (MB, p. 47). This could be why she is named Bipti and not referred to as his mother, except in one place in the novel, where it states that “[his] own mother, neglected by himself, [has] died five years before in great poverty” (MB, p. 5). He knows that she makes “him feel helpless and unhappy” (MB, p. 61). In order to escape from the typical Indo-Caribbean matriarch he pathetically, runs into the patriarchy of the colonial world or like Saleem Sinai has, “created a new father” (*Midnight’s Children*, 2006: 403) that leaves him even more vulnerable and debilitated. Ashis Nandy is also of the same opinion that “it was as part of this process that the colonies came to be seen as the abode of people childlike and innocent on the one hand and devious, effeminate and passive on the other.”  

Biswa may feel as abandoned as the boy in a remote village which he has seen from a bus. He remembers that “a boy leaning [was] against an earth house that had no reason for being there, under the dark falling sky, a boy who didn’t know
where the road, and that bus, went” (MB, p. 197). The image left a deep impression on him as he seems to relate easily to this lost soul.

Identity drift has made the males selfish, self-centered and non-intimate. Their insincerity and meanness is contrary to the very idea of manhood. With an anti-social attitude, they have become their own enemies. The judge becomes very unreasonable in treating the Other, while Biswas has become estranged from the Other. The Other may also be the mirror-image of the subject as he can have interaction with others only when he is confident about his self. They do not come to terms with the Other while “the construction of identity involves establishing opposites and ‘others’”. The sustaining web of family and community seems to collapse for them. Biswas could neither turn to the needs of his wife nor of his children and “in himself he [remains] aloof” (MB, p. 195). He cannot handle his social roles despite the fact that, “Govind, Seth, Owad, and the others show him what role is expected of him as a man, a husband, a son, an employee, a brother-in-law.” Similarly, the judge is a loner and sits all by himself (IL, p. 56). He has severed his family bonds and his father has to regret that “it was a mistake to send [him] away. [He has] become like a stranger to [them]” (IL, p. 306). Biswas had only one friend from his school days, Alec, while the judge could only make one friend in England. Neither could keep track of their friendships. The judge feels annoyed when he has to dine out with his friend who is now just an acquaintance from the past (IL, p. 12). He has possibly disowned his parents on boarding the “SS Strathnaver”. When he looks back at his father he appears to be, “a barely educated man” and “the love in Jemubhai’s heart [mingles] with pity, the pity with shame” (IL, p. 37). He feels his father had not been there for him. Later on, when his grand-daughter joins him in his lonely house, he does not seem “to have noticed [her] arrival” or to have felt any joy on meeting her (IL, p. 33). The judge is not able to acknowledge or befriend others.
and no longer knows “love for a human being that [isn’t] adulterated by another, contradictory emotion” (IL, p. 37). To live up to the colonial standards, he has to push against the grain and to play “against himself” (IL, p. 1) because to deny the Other is to negate the self.

The problem is that the colonial subject looks at his self through the eyes of colonizers and “this is always negative” (Du Bois 1969: 3). Being caught in the colonial gaze, the colonial subject seems to be struggling to live up to the idea of what the colonial idols would expect from him. Biswas’s confidence as a married man seems to get its first setback when Tara whom he idealizes, does not approve of his marriage. For him Tara’s lifestyle is classy and unlike Trinidadian shabby living. After getting married to Shama, he asks Tara in English; “You like she?”’. Tara’s disinterest hurts Biswas and makes him feel worthless. Her interest in his bride “might have made everything more bearable” (MB, p. 102) for him. This incident stands out as an allegory of how the colonized are always seeking the approval of some superiors and would even invent them for themselves. It seems as if the life of a colonized subject like Biswas is a mockery for he cannot even appreciate his bride without the good opinion of the people that he looks up to. Perhaps, he has not developed his own gaze and looks out to other sources for support and encouragement. Frantz Fanon, therefore, feels the need “to rewrite the body of colonized man, creating a new subject from the dismemberment and castration inflicted by the colonizer’s destructive gaze”. However, the subject does not seem to be able to break free from the “destructive gaze”.

The protagonists with low self-image may neither face up to nor like themselves. They appear to have severely disturbed body-images and see their bodies as external to themselves. It may happen when the mirror-image is deemed
non-worthy to one’s self. With trivialized body images, they may not feel different from Alice who is confronted with a literal manifestation of a diminishing body. The judge is only a “shadow puppet” (IL, p. 33) with an opaque existence. He does not seem to be happy with his self-image. With his severely cold and inconsiderate behaviour, he seems to ignore his social reflection. He has withdrawn “into a solitude that [grows] in weight day by day”. The solitude has become his habit, “the habit [becomes] the man, and it [crushes] him into a shadow” (IL, p. 39). He may be the caricature that Said has described as “an accepted caricature as the embodiment of incompetence and easy defeat”. His Western experience seems to have petrified him. With “the wide hairless forehead” and “the introverted nose” and “the introverted chin” he is compared to a reptile. The very image questions his identity or impact factor as a human; “Oh, grandfather more lizard than human” (IL, p. 33).

His gaze is fixed and there is lack of movement (IL, p. 33). The “fixed gaze” and “lack of movement” may signify the locked position the judge finds himself in since his Cambridge stay. The “introverted” chin and nose illustrate his introverted manhood, and an experience of navel-gazing that may engage him. His frozen expressions are the casket for a dead inner self. Biswas’s case is not much different. He is uneasy with his “face”. He hides it as a shame and “[pulls] his hat low over his forehead and [thinks] that in the dark he [may] just get away with his face” (MB, p. 142). Seeing himself for the first time in an old photograph, Biswas is “astonished at his own smallness”. The sores and eczema marks show clearly on “his knobbly knees and along his very thin arms and legs” (MB, p. 31). Perhaps, Biswas sizes himself up through colonial parameters; something which is reinforced by the teacher Lal when he asks him to write down, “I AM AN ASS”. This image which he appears to project throughout his life is “now fixed. He [is] troublesome and disloyal, and could not be trusted. He [is] weak and therefore contemptible” (MB, p. 103). In Tara’s house, he
feels comfortable and secure as there “his status [is] raised as a Brahmin or a reader” (MB, p. 49); otherwise he sees himself belittled under a colonial gaze. He cannot accept his self-image whenever he remembers “Samuel Smiles”. He finds his own clothes, “which hung so despairingly from the nail on the mud wall” that “of a small man [;] comic, make-believe clothes”. Again he thinks “what Samuel Smiles would have thought of him” (MB, p. 162).

At times, he seems to play “cat and mouse” with his own mirror-image (MB, p. 142) not unlike Aimee Liu who feels caught up in the mirrors around her (1979: 75). Gordon Rohlehr has also realized this alarming level of inferiority in Biswas who looks at his “comic make-believe clothes” and examines his body with disgust. He swings his loose calf like a hammock or probes a stomach too distended to be fat. He is unhappy that he “[doesn’t] look like anything at all.” The question of who he is continues to baffle him. First, he scribbles and “overwrites” on his daughter’s birth certificate and then does the same for his occupation. He objects when his in-laws call him a labourer (MB, p. 168). He then calls himself the proprietor of the Tulsi store which he is not. In a ridiculous move, he paints and hangs “a sign” to identify himself:

THE BONNE ESPERANCE GROCERY

M. Biswas Prop

Goods at City Prices   (MB, p. 156).

He does not know what to call himself and what role he should take on.

Biswas’s image has been an issue since his birth and his father was advised by the Pandit not to look at him in a mirror but in a well-scoured brass plate. The diasporic subject is deprived of a worthwhile image as if historical displacement has made him ominous and his “face” needs to be covered:
Mr. Biswas, hidden from his father by the hat, and well wrapped from head to foot, was held face downwards over the oil (---) The oil rippled, clear amber, broke up the reflection of Mr Biswas’s face (MB, p. 16).

The scene seems to be a premonition of Biswas’s bleak prospects of self-recognition and his disappointment with his own self. Reflected through second-hand traditions, his self-image is not much of a comfort. He may only find a broken reflection for himself or in other words may not be able to evolve to self-definition. His identity is “already distorted” by historical forces.

Interestingly, the protagonists have to use “masks” to become babus and stand in “the line of descent of the mimic man”.48 For Bhaba, they are “the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English”.49 Biswas uses the title “Mr” as a “mask” while the judge puts on the “mask” of a cosmetic “powder puff” and yet both are far from what they want to become. They may have assumed superiority through “masks”. The judge is glad that at least, he could disguise “his inexpertness, his crudity, with hatred and fury”, and that this trick would serve him well “throughout his life” (IL, p. 169). The “powder puff” is aggressively used to defend the snobbish image of a Cambridge qualified judge and tuck away a demeaned colonial self. Back home, the judge gets furious when he finds his “powder puff” is missing (IL, p. 166). For him his hard-earned “whiter skin” is an epitome of civilization symbolizing his power over others. But for others his face with “white powder over dark skin” looks as distanced and unreal as “just the vapour”. And from him comes a “faint antibiotic whiff of cologne” that is far from perfume and “too close to a preserving liquid” (IL, p. 33). His “powdered” face is repulsive to others and especially for the nationalist, Gyan (IL, p. 176). He plays at a façade that fools no one but himself. Ironically, in order to wear the “white mask”,

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he has to lose his “face” for “mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask”. His “face” is to be abandoned to keep up appearances. Once while he is asleep and gravity acts upon “the slack muscles”; pulling “on the line of his mouth” and “dragging on his cheeks”, he seems to show how he would look if he were dead (IL, p. 2). Perhaps, in his “face” he is already dead. The judge’s distance from his “face” may be compared with Gyan’s uncle who had served in the English army his whole life but went blank in the “face”. He would sit on “a folding chair” and silently move “an expressionless face like a sunflower” with “a blank handicapped insistence” following the sun. It seems that the only goal left in his life is “to match the two, the orb of his face and the orb of light” (IL, p. 143). Similarly, the judge has to put on a blank face after treating identity as a “folding chair”. Probably, the judge is also under a “handicapped insistence” to match his face, but unfortunately not with the “Eastern” orb of light but with an artificial mask. After the disavowal of the ancestral truth, he lives in a cocoon, as the risk is that his relatives “would show up reproachful” and point out to him “the lie” that he has become (IL, p. 306).

The characters with unrealistic aspirations, find themselves at the same place where they started. It may feel like Alice’s futile run as she finds herself at the same point despite wandering “up and down”. In the struggle for identity, the men attach peacock’s feathers to themselves but keep stumbling across this labyrinth of recognition and identification. They are supposedly playing a game of “snakes and ladders” like the one in the Midnight’s Children and are lured into “seemingly random choices”. The men naively think that the English lifestyle promises security, glory and comfort but they seem to reach “cul-de-sacs” or closed ends with their colonial attitudes. Like Alice, they find all doors closed to them and “to get through [is] more hopeless than ever” (Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, p. 22). Strangely, both protagonists suffer from “constipation’. This seems an apt metaphor.
for how bloated they are with westernization and their inability to rid their systems of it. Biswas seems to have realized to some extent how his colonial pursuits have failed him, but then there is no time to reverse things. He tells his son that he doesn’t want him to be like his father and hopes that at his age, he “wouldn’t care for Westerns” (MB, p. 394, 492). Paul Theroux elucidates that Biswas “considers himself a failure and confides to Anand that “[he doesn’t] want [him] to be like [himself]”.53

The judge too does not get anywhere and ends up in a house that sits “in the middle of nowhere” with a gate that also “lead[s] nowhere” (IL, p. 72). He suffers from self-loathing and realizes that he is mistaken as “a man of dignity” by others which he is not (IL, p. 119). After the loss of his pet bitch, Mutt, his agitation gets worse. He thinks of his family “that he [has] abandoned”. He regrets to remember that his father “whose strength and hope and love he [has] fed on, only to turn around and spit in his face”, and how ungratefully he “returned his wife, Nimi” (IL, p. 302). Unfortunately, his experience of England has made him a misanthropist, a misogynist, a cynic, a snob and a tyrant. It seems his “powder puff[ed]” face is not a mask of agnosticism but of westernization that he has to throw away to redeem his sins of a borrowed self. It is a significant moment in the text when “the judge got down on his knees”. He prays to God, “he, Jemubhai Popatlal the agnostic”, who has made a long journey “to jettison his family’s prayers” and “refused to throw the coconut into the water and bless his own voyage” once he was on the deck of the SS Strathnaver (IL, p. 301). But it seems that no identity or faith is left for him to revert to. He can neither be English nor Indian; neither faithful nor rebellious; and is tortured by skepticism.54
The postcolonial experience is disabling for the protagonists to perform their roles. They remain confused and uncertain and do not know what they really lack in order to evolve as proactive and effective individuals. They deal with the question of identity with staggering ineptitude. The issues of heritage and tradition continue to cause them distress. They find it difficult to face and accept the fundamental differences between a slavish and a liberated self. They cannot draw dividing lines and appear to fall through the cracks. Pathetically, they fail to understand they cannot find their identity in colonial culture but may benefit from the knowledge and expertise of the developed world. They are inextricably left in the same state of limbo.

Don’t you have any pride? Trying to be so Westernized. They don’t want you!!!! Go there and see if they will welcome you with open arms. You will be trying to clean their toilets and even then they won’t want you.

----- The Inheritance of Loss (2006: 174)

In Desai’s narrative, the experience of being poor resonates powerfully with the experience of being colonized, and the complexities of identity in modern times are most prominently written onto the lives of the cook and Biju. The cook and his son, Biju are dually colonized as they struggle for agency in a world which is under the forces of colonization as well as of globalization. They are the poorest of the poor and hence, inadequate. Cook’s name is not important; he is just a cook. He “[is]
a powerless man” who has “worked like a donkey all his life” and lives “on only to see his son” (IL, p. 10, 11). Ironically to find employment the cook needs to get behind a colonial “mask” of “Solomon Pappiah”, or “Sampson” or “Thomas” and shed off his identity like a stigma. His father would happily substitute his name with any name that may somehow, connect him to the colonial masters. The father tells the judge that “out of love” they (the English) “called him Thomas” (IL, p. 63). Perhaps, the poor cannot afford the luxury of identity. The cook then has to work for a master who is worse than the colonial one. Ashis Nandy (1983) maintains:

A violent and aggressive society (---) ensures a certain continuity between the victor and defeated (---) So even when such a culture collapse[s], the psychology of “victim hood” and privileges continues and produces second culture which is only manifestly not violent and oppressive.55

The local bourgeoisie seems to share high stakes in the New World Order and in this case, the judge seems to have swapped the colonizer to retain the system of “‘victimhood’ and privileges.” The emancipation of the cook is not possible as he is under the command of two fascists; global powers making his son “nonexistent” (IL, p. 321) for him, and a master, who in the desperate attempt, to follow the imperialists has become a greater persecutor.

Under mass migration, the poor who leave their homes for Western countries find themselves more miserable and displaced in the end. “Infected by the desire to leave home among the people he sees around him” the cook “who has lost his wife, also sends his son Biju off to work on a cruise ship which deposits him in New York”.56 The cook “deposit[s]” his son only to fantasize about a better life as his plans are never realized. This he has “done for Biju, but also for himself”. He desires a “modernity” that may bring in “toaster ovens, electric shavers, watches, cameras,
cartoon colors” (IL, p. 55) to his life. Interestingly, the modern world sells best-seller dreams (Naomi Klein, No Logo, 2001). The cook lives in the delusions of “sofa TV bank account” and the dreams cost him a lot (IL, p. 17). As a poor native, he is more easily lured into the dreams of modernity. After visiting a doctor, he “[emerges] with his medicines feeling virtuous”. He thinks that if he invests in modern world, “it would inform [him] that [he is] worth something” (IL, p. 72). Pathetically, the cook is led by the nose by the commercialized world more than his tyrant master.

The colonial forces in the garb of globalization are perhaps, exploiting the colonized in a more insidious manner than ever. As an illegal immigrant in New York, Biju feels threatened at every moment while struggling for placement. Like a fugitive on the run, he has to keep changing jobs to escape the green card check by the American authorities. Ignorantly and naively, the cook goes around boasting in the market, “he works for the Americans” (IL, p. 14) and keeps his son’s letters safe (IL, p. 20). The hopes of the cook have robbed him of his only son. He has to wait endlessly for the time when his son will be back with a lot of money and with “each letter the cook” takes a step towards the future (IL, p. 17). However, the reality is that “there [is] literally an ocean between him and his son” and that he has nothing to look forward to. Every day “he [shifts] the burden of hope” from one day to the next and keeps dreaming “onto his pillow ---- he [has] recently had the cotton replaced” and mistaking “its softness for serenity” (IL, p. 120). Maybe, the cook is merely surviving on the imaginary softness of a neo-colonial hyper-reality. Nonetheless, he has lost the company and support of his son at an age when he needs him most. He cannot evade the trans-Atlantic distance for long. The reality remains that they are no longer relevant to each other “except for the hope that they would be relevant” (IL, p. 232). Sadly, the realization strikes him that his son is no more a physical reality and completely out of his poor reach. At times, he does
not “mention his son”. The long absence makes him feel that “he [has] none—[he] never had one” (IL, p. 321). His intuition tells him something is wrong and in no time, he gets upset with the thought that he is holding “two kilos of his son’s [dead] body” (IL, p. 178). Immigration seems to call for parting with loved ones.

A crippled body seems to symbolize an inadequate and colonized self. Fanon too alludes to this trope. He relates that “the crippled veteran of the Pacific war says to [his] brother to “resign himself to [his] color the way [he] got used to [his] stump; [they’re] both victims.”57 The cook’s bandy-legged and hunch-backed (IL, p. 33) body may be a strong metaphor for his colonized and victimized state. He even gets more hunched after a brutal beating from his master (IL, p. 323) It seems he is a slave not just of the judge of the first world as well. Both appear to be stake holders in keeping him without the basic necessities of life and dependent upon hyper-real dreams. He is very much impressed with New York and sometimes naively hopes his son will take him there. On looking at the “inflated globe” the cook feels inflated as he thinks that “somewhere on this glorious orb was Biju” (IL, p. 18).

Such inflated opinions about the West keep the cook colonized in an undue awe till the end. The apathy of the state is that “the great global multinational and decentered communicational network”58 does not even provide him a facility of talking to his son on telephone. He keeps on pushing his son for making more money and looks forward to a comfortable and better livelihood on his return. Although “Biju’s letters [trace] a string of jobs”, they are more or less a kind of repetition except for the change in the name of his employer (IL, p. 17). Still the repetition provides a “coziness, and the cook’s repetition of his son’s repetition double-knit the coziness” (IL, p. 17). Perhaps, the father and son “double-knit” each other, as subjects of one or the other master. The father’s poverty keeps the son colonized
while the son’s “illegitimacy” makes his father’s desires “illegitimately” impossible. If the son is exploited by westerners, his father is crushed by a native master. The journey to America makes Biju exposed and vulnerable to humiliation in the same manner as the cook stands stripped of his self-respect when the police searches his hut in suspicion of the committed robbery. The police uncovers “the cook’s poverty [and] the fact that he [is] not looked after, that his dignity [has] no basis; they [ruin] the façade and [throws] it in his face” (IL, p. 18).

The colonized can only buy into a greater frustration from the hi-tech commercialized world. The cook is betrayed by the prospects of immigrations to developed countries. He starts looking forward to a restful retirement and that “eventually Biju would make enough and the cook would retire.” He has started to dream of a daughter-in-law who would serve him food and “crick-crack his toes”, and of grandchildren who would “swat like flies” (IL, p. 17). Nonetheless, neither the modernized, developed world nor his master would provide him the resources to materialize his simple dreams of his son’s marriage or to secure a comfortable retirement and pension. His salary has hardly been raised and the last raise was only twenty-five rupees (IL, p. 54). On the other hand, poor Biju reaches home robbed of and that too, by his own countrymen. He is stripped of his belt, jacket, shirt and jeans as they are too tempting for the locals as American products; “the quality is very good” (IL, p. 317). The frustrated third world masses may start robbing and killing each other to materialize their dreams of a life which they think they are entitled to somehow. Modern gadgets and hi-tech goods appear to have become irresistible, especially for the younger generations around the world.

As an illegal immigrant, Biju stands at the threshold (IL, p. 48) of two worlds -- one global, the other colonial. He is a transplanted Indian waiter and may not feel
himself more significant than a transferred insect. He keeps “cultivating self-pity. Looking at a dead insect in the sack of basmati that had come all the way from Dehra Dun”, he weeps “in sorrow and [marvels]” at its journey and his own (IL, p. 191). The incident is reminiscent of Kafka’s “Metamorphosis”. Gregor Samsa, the protagonist, tends to identify himself with a cockroach in a society that has been mechanized and commercialized and has done away with family structure and relationships. When he stops earning money, he is no more important than “a cockroach” even for his own parents. Biju too is hammered by the dehumanizing forces of a world in which he must earn “a dollar a day” no matter at what cost it comes. He remains in hiding and belongs to “the shadow class [that is] condemned to movement” (IL, p. 102). Identity may not be an issue when the subjects can only identify with insects. The kitchens of the restaurants where Biju works operate on racial lines. The above portions in the kitchen are for French workers while the below ones are for Mexican, Indian or Pakistani (IL, p. 23). The employers take benefit from Biju’s “illegitimate identity”. He is underpaid and insulted by everyone. Still, he is unacceptable as he is a smelly Indian. The manager of the restaurant is “kind enough” to employ Biju “although he [finds] him smelly” (IL, p. 23). Even for low paid, “basements” jobs, he has to depend on the kindness and generosity of American masters. The narrative voice in the novel proclaims this to be a modern form of “colonial exploitation and the rapacious ruin of the third world” (IL, p. 102).

Such immigrants have no future, neither in the Western country nor in their own. Alice in wonderland seems to allegorize the paradoxical and elusive distance an immigrant is unable to cover. She runs very fast along with the “Queen”, but finds herself at the same place “displacing air” like Biju (IL, p. 268). The cook sends his son abroad for a short cut to better living but despite all the hassles and afflictions that they bring upon themselves, they remain “in the same place”. He, in the single
picture that he is ever photographed, is “dressed to leave home” (IL, p.14) and his “frozen” or “X-ray stiff” posture bespeaks of the status quo in which the colonized like him are born and likely to die. All the immigrants like him smell already of the “ancient sweat of a never-ending journey” (IL, p. 182). Biju is not alone as a lost self in New York; there are others like Nandu “from [his] village in the same city” (IL, p. 18). He seems to represent a bigger segment of the third world population who are desperate to leave for the developed countries to realize their dreams but face hardships all along. The narrative is a good demonstration of “Biju’s typical aloofness and alienation in New York ------ as symbolic of the whole Indian diasporas by extension”60. Hence, many others like the cook and Biju may feel inadequate and useless as the “reward” of the present day consumers’ culture.

The father and son seem to live in, “imaginary homelands”61 as they are in “double exile”.62 For Biju, chased by his illegitimacy, it is impossible to place himself in the first world and “the rats of his earlier jobs” never “forsake” him (IL, p. 147). His father too, does not belong to any land. All his life, he used to think that he is securely living in “basically a civilized place” where there is room for everyone but it is revealed upon him very late that he has been wrong about “a sweetness of crabbiness”. The bitter fact is that he isn’t “wanted in Kalimpong” and he doesn’t belong to this place either (IL, p. 278). At the end, the façade gets ruined both for the cook and Biju and they fail to call any place home. For Biju there is “no purity in this venture. And no pride” and he reaches “no clarity of vision” (IL, p. 148). There is no identity for a poor man’s son. Notwithstanding, Biju’s cynicism has provided him a clearer vision, his predicament may not be different from the other displaced ones; “‘It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home--- what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution.’”63 He travels back to India and chooses to keep living with a “robbed of” identity rather than being tortured and humiliated in the basements of
New York kitchens. Despite working very hard, the poor subject stays displaced. In the colonial mayhem of lost identities, where Biswas and the judge seem to be struggling for self-recognition, the cook and his son have no claim upon human dignity in their obscure existence.

Notes

1 Frantz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness”, p. 110.

2 V. S. Naipaul, A House for Mr Biswas (London: Picador, 2003), p. 18. All further references will be abbreviated to MB and will be cited in the text.

3 Kiran Desai, The Inheritance of Loss (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 166. All further references will be abbreviated to IL and will be cited in the text.


6 Saleem, the protagonist, narrates:

what, pickled in brine, sat for sixteen years in my father’s almirah, awaiting just such a day? What, floating like a water-snake in an old pickle-jar, accompanied us on our sea-journey and ended up buried in hard, barren Karachi-earth? What had once nourished life in a womb—what now infused earth with miraculous life, and gave birth to a split-level, American-style modern bungalow? ---- Eschewing these cryptic questions, I explain that, on my sixteenth birthday, my family including Alia aunty assembled on our plot of Korangi Road earth; watched by the eyes of a team of labourers and the beard of a mullah, Ahmed handed Saleem a pickaxe; I drove it inaugurally into the ground. ‘A new beginning,’ Amina said, ‘InshAllah, we shall all be new people now.’ Spurred on by her noble and unattainable desire, a workman rapidly enlarged my hole; and now a pickle-jar was produced. Brine was discarded on the thirsty ground; and what-was-left-inside received the mullah’s blessings. After which, an umbilical cord—was it mine? Or Shiva’s? —was implanted in the earth; and at once, a house began to grow. There were sweetmeats and soft drinks; the mullah, displaying remarkable hunger, consumed thirty-nine laddoos; and Ahmad Sinai did not once complain of the expense. The spirit of the buried cord inspired the workmen; but although the foundations were dug very deep, they would not prevent the house from falling down before we ever lived in it.
What I surmised about umbilical cords although they possessed the power of growing houses, some were evidently better at the job than others. The city of Karachi proved my point; clearly constructed on top of entirely unsuitable cords, it was full of deformed houses, the stunted hunchback children of deficient lifelines, houses growing blind, with no visible windows, houses growing mysteriously blind, with no visible windows, houses which looked like radios or air-conditioners or jail-cells, crazy top-head edifices which fell over with monotonous regularity, like drunks; a wild proliferation of mad houses, whose inadequacies as living quarters were exceeded only by their quite exceptional ugliness. The city obscured the desert; but either the cords, or the infertility of the soil, made it grow into something grotesque.


8Gurnah says, “the loss is associated with Abroad, a metaphorical and physical location of unsettling knowledge whose outcome is division and doubt, ‘that middle place’ of unbelief. Before travelling, the world is a Paradise, a condition which ‘diaspora’ transforms into loss of both innocence and belonging” (Gurnah, “Themes and Structures in *Midnight’s Children*,” *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*, p. 92).


11“But the gentleman dressed in white paper leaned forwards and whispered in her ear, “Never mind what they all say, my dear, but take a return-ticket every time the train stops.”

“Indeed I shan’t!” Alice said rather impatiently. “I don’t belong to this railway journey at all—I was in a wood just now—I wish I could get back there!”

All this time the Guard was looking at her, first through a telescope, then through a microscope, and then through an opera glass. At last he said, “You’re travelling the wrong way,” and shut up the window and went away.

“So young a child,” said the gentleman sitting opposite to her (he was dressed in white paper), “ought to know which way she’s going, even if she doesn’t know her own name!”


12Ibid., p. 148.


14“After he had spoken Pankaj Rai distributed copies of his book, *Reform the Only Way*, and Mr Biswas asked for his to be autographed. Pankaj Rai did more. He wrote Mr Biswas’s name as well, describing him as a ‘dear friend’. Below this inscription Mr Biswas wrote: ‘Presented to Mohun Biswas by his dear friend Pankaj Rai, BA LLB’ ” (MB, p. 119).
“The more endemic the experience of deracination the more magical the connotations of the word ‘home’. It becomes a symbol of all that has been lost, of ancient certainties, of faith and of security. In our century, the exile, far from being a solitary and exotic figure, has become the type of modern man. It is to this worldwide crisis of homelessness that Naipaul’s work is a sensitive response—taking into its sweep both the causes and the consequences of the situation. He has no comforting message, only the bleak knowledge that in today’s rapidly changing world the yearning for permanence can never be more than an unfulfilled ache—“everyone is far from home” (Joshi, “The Voice of Exile”, p. 4).


Joshi, “Metropolitans and Mimics”, p. 178.


“they were four shadow puppets from a fairytale flickering on the lumpy plaster of the wall——a lizard man, a hunchbacked cook, a lush-lashed maiden, and a long-tailed wolf dog” (IL, p. 33).

Lacan remarks: “It began, naturally enough, by presenting, in relation to symbolic substitutions and imaginary variations, a function of constancy: ‘the real is that which always returns to the same place’. It then became that before which the imaginary faltered, that over which the symbolic stumbles, that which is refractory, resistant. Hence the formula: ‘the real is the impossible’. It is in this sense that the term ---- [describes] that which is lacking in the symbolic order, the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped: the umbilical cord of the symbolic” (X).


“the way she [sits] down; when she [eats] he [listens] for the noises she [makes]; he [hates] the way she [fusses] and [clucks] over the children; he [hates] it when she [puffs] and [fans] and [sweats] in her pregnant way; he [is] nauseated by the frills and embroidery and other ornamentation on her clothes” (MB, p. 285).
Cudjoe states: “in Naipaul’s work, not one character enjoys a sexually satisfying experience. In fact, each sexual relation is perverted. The manner in which these relationships are depicted gives us a good clue as to what is at stake in his work: that repressed sexuality subverts Naipaul’s understanding of the nature of the subject’s construction and tends thereby to falsify his depiction of the emerging subject in postcolonial societies” (193, 194).


Rohlehr says: “but on closer examination, Hanuman House reveals itself not as a coherent reconstruction of the clan, but as a slave society, erected by Mrs. Tulsi and Seth who need workers to rebuild their tottering empire. They therefore exploit the homelessness and poverty of their fellow-Hindus, and reconstruct a mockery of the clan which functions only because they have so completely grasped the psychology of a slave system. Like the West Indies, Hanuman House is constructed of a vast number of disparate families, gratuitously brought together by the economic need of a “high caste” minority. Men are necessary here only as husbands for the Tulsi daughters and labourers on the Tulsi estates. To accept Hanuman House is to acquiesce in one’s slavery” (87).


Nandy, “The Uncolonized Mind”, p. 92.


Fanon has borrowed his idea of Other from Hegel. He maintains: “Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed” (Frantz Fanon, “The Negro and Recognition”, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 216, 217).

Lacan maintains that the mirror image “would seem to be the threshold of the visible world, if we go by the mirror disposition that the imago of one’s own body presents in hallucinations or dreams, whether it concerns its individual features, or even its infirmities, or its object-projections; or if we observe the role of the mirror apparatus in the appearances of the double, in which psychical realities, however heterogeneous, are manifested” (3).


Hilde Bruch reflects: “whenever there is an unworthy self-concept, the subject may start to disown it”; For example, “fat people tend to talk about their bodies as external to themselves. They do not feel identified with this bothersome and ugly thing they are condemned to carry through life, and in which they feel confined or imprisoned. An English writer, Cyril Connolly, himself a fat man, expressed this graphically: “imprisoned in every fat man a thin one is wildly signalling to be let out”. Another English writer, Kingsley Amis, paraphrased this: “outside every fat man there is an even fatter man trying to close in” (223). The colonial subject too is removed from his body image as he sees it very negatively. See Hilde Bruch, “Body Image and Self-Awareness”, Food and Culture; A Reader, Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (eds.), (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

“What a curious feeling!” said Alice; ‘I must be shutting up like a telescope’.

And so it was indeed: she was now only ten inches high, and her face brightened up at the thought that she was now the right size for going through the little door into that lovely garden. First, however, she waited for a few minutes to see if she was going to shrink any further: she felt a little nervous about this; ---------------------------------

After a while, finding that nothing more happened, she decided on going into the garden at once; but, alas for poor Alice! When she got to the door, she found she had forgotten the little golden key, and when she went back to the table for it, she found she could not possibly reach it” (18,19).


In the different case studies, one woman who is unhappy with her figure says: “the mirrors, this one and another large wall mirror over the sink in the bathroom, play an important part in my life now. For hours I hold court through them with myself.” (114).


“Much of the evil this boy will undoubtedly bring will be mitigated if his father is forbidden to see him for twenty-one days” [says the pundit].

“That will be easy,” Bissoondaye [Biswa’s grandmother] said, speaking with emotion for the first time.
“On the twenty-first day the father must see the boy. But not in the flesh.”

“In a mirror, pundit?”

“I would consider that ill-advised. Use a brass plate. Scour it well.” (MB, p. 13)

Bhabha maintains: “the line of descent of the mimic man can be traced through the works of Kipling, Forster, Orwell, Naipaul, and to his emergence, most recently, in Benedict Anderson’s excellent work on nationalism, as the anomalous Bipin Chandra Pal”. Hence, Bhabha confirms the “mimicry” of the colonial subject as reflected in the writing of many modern writers (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Men: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”, p. 87).

Ibid.

Ibid. p. 88.

“she “wander[s] up and down, and [tries] turn after turn, but always coming back to the house, do what she would” (Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 81).

The narrator narrates: “The moment I was old enough to play board games, I fell in love with Snakes and Ladders. O perfect balance of rewards and penalties! O seemingly random choices made by tumbling dice! Clambering up ladders, slithering down snakes, I spent some of the happiest days of my life. When, in my time of trial, my father challenged me to master the game of shatranj, I infuriated him by preferring to invite him, instead, to chance his fortune among the ladders and nibbling snakes” (193).

See Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. Throughout the book, “snakes and ladders” seem to be an allegorical reference to the wasteful endeavours of the colonial subject.


“Then he got up. He was undoing his education, retreating to the superstitious man making bargains, offering sacrifices, gambling with fate, cajoling, daring whatever was out there-----

Show me if you exist!

Or else I will know you are nothing.

Nothing! Nothing! --- taunting it.

But by night, the thought reentered his mind-----

Was this faith that he had turned away, was it paying him back?” (IL, p. 301).


Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness”, p. 140.

“Well, in our country,” said Alice, still panting a little, “you’d generally get to somewhere else—if you ran very fast for a long time, as we’ve been doing.”

“A slow sort of country!” said the Queen. “Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!”

“I’d rather not try, please!” said Alice. “I’m quite content to stay here-----!”

(Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, p. 42).


Spivak relates: “in September 1989, [she] heard Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, the Kenyan writer and political exile, speak on Exile and Displacement at a panel on Third World Film in Birmingham, England: He spoke movingly of his sense of double exile, in his own country because of its betrayal of the democratic ideal, and in Britain, where he has sought refuge, because the worst elements in his country are collaborating with Britain”. (161). See Gayatri Chakravotry Spivak, “More on Power/Knowledge”, *The Spivak Reader*, Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (eds.) (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). In relation to the cook and his son, I have used Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s term of “double exile” in a slightly different context.

The line is spoken by the elderly, ailing Mrs Rooney in Beckett’s 1957 radio play where she is heard lamenting and dragging herself to a mysteriously delayed train from Dublin.

LANGUAGE IN POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXTS

Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?  

With his registration in English, “official notice [is] taken of Mr Biswas’s existence” and he is hurled into the colonial world. It happens to be a peremptory requirement for him as an Indo-Caribbean subject to read from English primers and struggle with lessons set on the denominator of an English word. He has to keep repeating “One twos are two” and “Two twos are four” (MB, p. 43) and confronts a world that is too remote and unreal for him. In the process of learning “other things” which he has never seen and cannot be sure about, he is removed from reality and loses sight of who he is. Lessons to be learned and copied may cause harm rather than good. Biswas remains at a loss how to define and prove himself in a language that has to be learned by cramming. He may be compared with Alice in wonderland who also finds her self-identification contingent upon lessons that are to be learned by heart. She worries that if she is not able to answer the questions correctly, she may lose her self-worth. The confusion about her lessons makes her ask the question, “Who am I then?” Identity may get muddled up with lessons. Biswas too starts looking for his identity in English books and not in the factual world that offers him the real experience of life. Ngũgĩ has discussed the complex influence of colonial education at length in *Decolonising the Mind*. When learning “for a colonial child, [becomes] a cerebral activity and not an emotionally felt experience”, he is “being made to stand outside himself to look at himself.” Derrida’s reaction to his French schooling in Algeria is not much different. For him “it was the experience of a world without any tangible continuity with the one in which [he] lived, with almost nothing in common with [his] natural or social landscapes.”
In a world where “anglicization especially in education has always been welcome”, colonial language easily takes over like the “Dodd’s kidney pills”. The schoolchildren have started “peeing blue” after taking the foreign remedy and the incident appears to stand as an extended metaphor for the way the English language has taken over culture and tradition; selling as a popular commodity and sabotaging the indigenous mind. Once the scene is set with colonial education, slavish adherence to Western ideas and standards seems to be the norm and is unquestioned by natives. The episode may be an allegory of the subjects’ scramble to become “blue-blood[ed]” and superior by using a household English name but ending up in practice as “mimic men”. However, it is “pee” and not “blood” that becomes “blue” as what the natives get engaged in is mimicry only. The subjects after taking a fancy to “Dodd’s Kidney Pills” “[have] written the makers profusely letters of the utmost articulateness” (MB p. 45) yet they don’t know how to relate to the outer world nor to the inner self through a foreign language. English was the means of communication and correspondence across the colonial world. The ambivalence of “peeing blue” makes it difficult for natives to understand whether they are salvaged or chastised by the wasteful practice of thoughtlessly following something they do not understand. At the same time, their experience with a product known by its English name, may symbolize how “the insignia of authority becomes a mask, a mockery” as this is all they can do with something with which they are unfamiliar. Moreover, the sister-in-law’s “red bodice” which is usually worn by Alec seems to be an allusion to the loss of propriety and tradition, as the process of adapting to a “hired” language has moments of embarrassment and clumsiness in store for the struggling subject. Judith E. Welsh has made a worthy analysis of the frustration and identity battles triggered by “the English educational system” and how it leads to “conflicting attitudes” and “identity confusion”, producing a negative
self-image in Indian children which they cannot discard till late in their lives.\(^{11}\) The system may obstruct the independent thinking of individuals and appears to be coercion. Learning a foreign language sometimes does not serve its purpose. Orhan Pamuk, in his autobiographical novel *Istanbul: Memories of a City*, woefully remembers that in his city, “the bored high-school students”, remained uninvolved “in never-ending English classes where after six years no one has learned to say anything but ‘Yes’ and ‘No’”.\(^{12}\) He illustrates how painful it was to discover that “[he] did not, in fact, live in the centre of the world, and that the place where [he] lived was not---this [was] more painful---the world’s beacon. Having discovered the fragility of [his] place in the world, and at the same time the vastness of that world (he loved getting lost in the low-ceilinged labyrinths of the library built by the American secular Protestants who had founded the college, breathing in the pungency of old paper) [he started to feel] lonelier and weaker than ever before.”\(^{13}\) Frantz Fanon reflects that it is colonial education which has infused a dependency complex in the ex-colonized pupil. He argues that the school inspectors and government functionaries have failed in their role. After trying very hard for twenty years to turn “the Negro into a white man”, they dropped him, in the end and told him; “You have an indisputable complex of dependence on the white man.”\(^{14}\) For him, the colonizer’s language is his best tool for enslaving others.

The inability to speak out may problematize confidence and self-identification to a great degree. Most probably, a non-native speaker faces the discomfort of thinking in English but experiencing things through his/her mother tongue. Much is left unspoken and unexpressed in the process of adjusting his meanings to a language code that is not his own. This “Otherness” of the colonizer’s language is well articulated by Derrida in *Monolingualism of the Other or The Prosthesis of Origin*; “yet it will never be mine, this language, the only one I am thus destined to
speak, as long as speech is possible for me in life and in death; you see, never will
this language be mine. And, truth to tell, it never was ---- I wonder if one can love,
enjoy oneself, pray, die from pain, or just die, plain and simple, in another language
or without telling anyone about it, without even speaking at all.”\textsuperscript{15}

For poststructuralists, there is no central signified, as language itself is a
system of differences\textsuperscript{16} and “meaning depends on difference”.\textsuperscript{17} Derrida maintains
that language is “a system in which the central signified, the original of
transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of
differences”\textsuperscript{18}. The non-native speaker appears to be doubly removed from his
meanings as he is set against “a play of differences and a multiplicity of conditioning
contradictions” that is altogether foreign to him. He is perhaps, under greater
obligation from “the repressed differences that exist within language”.\textsuperscript{19} However,
Lacan seems to take a more radical view of the relationship between the subject and
language. The subject is colonized by language itself and has to lose “his being” in
the first place on attempting to become a “speaking subject”.\textsuperscript{20}

When “Humpty Dumpty” or anyone else is himself not the master of the
signifier, the colonial subject appears to be dually removed from a signifier which is
foreign and unknown to him. He is a double slave who may not think he can ever
master the language of the masters. Due to “the interdependence of language and
identity”\textsuperscript{21}, the colonial speaker festers in vacuum as his meanings are perpetually
colonized and deferred by a foreign signifier. He has to take pains “to make words
mean” something for himself, yet stands defeated by what is imposed upon him.
Perhaps the conversation between Alice and Humpty Dumpty is a narrative of
bondage which is sustained through language:
“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master— that’s all.”

As a metaphor for the colonizer, “Humpty Dumpty”, seems to refer to the arbitrariness of the English signifier and the way it controls the colonial subject. The subject loses his I in the process of projecting an I that does not reflect him and a foreign signifier for which he can only imagine the signified. Meaningful communication and expression becomes a remote possibility as he fails to “make words so many different things”. In Lacanian terms, it is the “symbolic” or the “name-of-the-father” that dually disappoints him. The incident in which Biswas causes the death of his father may be a symbolic manifestation of his rejection of the “Name-of-the-Father” or in other words of his own language (MD, p. 28) only to find himself under the tyranny of a foreign one. The judge too seems to have lost his voice after exchanging the father figure or “name of the father” with the Oxford English Dictionary. Once aboard with the OED, he finds “his father [disappearing]” from his sight. His father too, realizes that he “has [failed] his son”. The colonial subject is set for a journey that would get the tongue “enjailed”. He can’t “play” the system and may feel like, “you can’t communicate, explain to other people.”

For Spivak, losing voice is equivalent to “epistemic violence” while for Salman Rushdie it is not in any way less cruel and violent than “tongues torn out”. For him “to lose [one’s language] is to suffer that “unthinkable thing”. If the gap between the Western language and the indigenous experience has reduced Biswas to a
morose Charlie Chaplin, the judge too appears to be no less truncated after spending all his life learning the colonizer’s language (IL, p. 33). Like Margaret Atwood’s characters, the protagonists are under “the strain of the language problem; they must be horribly repressed”.\(^{30}\) Moreover, Biswas and the judge both suffer from constipation which may serve as a common trope of their suppressed voices.

After taking into account the wider connection between the loss of language and identity, I move on to explore more specific issues relating to the adoptive language and its usage by non-native speakers in the texts. My take is that for a colonial subject there is no escape from a world where the dominant language of the colonizer continues to destabilize identity and challenge all that is important to him or her. The loss of voice poses attitudinal conflicts\(^{31}\) and the subject finds it even more difficult to come to terms with his dismantled physical, cultural and social representations. Biswas and the judge are under the oppression of a language that not only distances them from reality, but also deprives them of a voice and keeps them in self-denial. Sai, Lola, Noni and many other characters have also strayed from the indigenous lived experience and have to pay a heavy price for living in a hyper-real world created from a foreign language. However, Biju uses his language to express a profound sense of loneliness and frustration, while the other immigrants have come up with a hybrid language that speaks of their “copy and paste” identity and is of no comfort. Suleri’s as an émigré who comes from an enlightened Pakistani background has a different narrative. Despite the bilingual and unorthodox aura of Suleri’s home, the family is reproachful over being deprived of their local language. Her Welsh mother has no means of expressing her sense of “Otherness”\(^{32}\) rather than keeping a posture of reticence. However, Suleri due to her academic brilliance seems resourceful enough for taking liberties with English and using an idiom that
powerfully evokes eastern imagery. She appears to be skillful in handling her cravings for a language she simply could not leave behind.

It remains a challenge for Biswas in *A House for Mr Biswas* to prove himself in English. It is the expression “I love you” that he seems to have fallen for rather than for Shama. Very soon he realizes that he was seduced by the language itself and has to regret all his life the words that he thoughtlessly scribbled on a piece of paper for Shama; “I love you and I want to talk to you” (MB, p. 85). He may have been impatient to test his English skills by writing a love letter. He passes “Shama’s counter” in the shop and as soon as he places the note there for her, he feels “exceedingly foolish”. Right away, he wants to take it back and “abandon Shama at once” (MB, p. 84). After their marriage, he starts seeing her as “the prankster”, “the server of black stockings”, and an ordinary Indian woman who produces many children (MB, p. 92). It is quite disappointing for him to see that she does not fit into the hyper-real English world in which he himself appears to live. Paul Theroux is of the opinion that Biswas does not make a conscious decision to get married. He was probably searching for the right expression in English to refuse to his potential in-laws but the words did not come to rescue him. He has regrets and hates himself later on for “his weakness, his inarticulateness, that evening” and hurriedly consenting to the marriage proposal (MB, p. 92). Later on, he makes sure to preach to them of his Aryan beliefs in English (MB, p.121, 122) but fails to make any impact. No matter, how much he speaks against Hanuman House and his in-laws (MB, p. 106, 113, 114, 119, 123), he remains ignored. Since his childhood, he can only “expel air” when he wants to whistle as he has a “lecherous gap” in his upper teeth (MB, p. 83). This feature appears to be a symbolic premonition of a kind of colonial
inarticulateness that he has to fight against all through his life. He seems to think that he can do away with all handicaps by using the grand language of the master. He lives in servitude to a language rather than trying to appropriate it to his needs and the values of Hanuman House. The verdict of the English language seems to be written over the life of Biswas. Regarding his children’s registration, he “[asks] in English, ‘they [have] it register?’” (MB, p. 167) as if it is only English that could validate an Indo-Caribbean birth.

Biswas’s preference for Ajodha’s house over Hanuman House may underpin his belief in the English books that he finds at his home. He envies Ajodha who listens daily to the American column That Body of Yours being read out to him and keeps twenty big volumes of the Book of Comprehensive Knowledge on his bookshelves. These books have not cost Ajodha anything (MB, p. 253). Perhaps, the books do not “cost” Ajodha as he does not read them, and has never been influenced by them. Contrarily, for Biswas, the foreign knowledge comes at a high price. He remains unaware that Ajodha, despite his modern housekeeping is only interested in the health tips from the column That Body of Yours and he listens to it with “gravity, concern, alarm” (MB. p. 48). Ajodha’s interest in the information makes it solely a relaxation exercise. Otherwise he has no intention of reading the western volumes that are kept in his “back verandah” (MB. p. 61). Biswas is unable to appreciate how Ajodha and Tara are well-grounded and seem to enjoy the best of both worlds notwithstanding their possession of many English books. Perhaps, they are the ones who are able to break the nexus of “power=knowledge” that is elucidated by Bhabha and thus “disarticulates the structure of the God-Englishman equivalence.” Nonetheless, Biswas seems to live with some colonial myth that if he does not know English, he is worthless. The books which he carries around everywhere, some of them as unread, are only a burden, as he does not benefit from
them in any way. He uses Shakespeare’s anthology for building himself a heritage and uses *Bell’s Standard Elocutionist* to spit out anger, instead of using them as a resource or for pleasure.35 He has a very strange relationship with these books and feels “defeated” by them. The books are irrelevant and dysfunctional while it seems they are very the reason for the frustration in his life.

The adoptive language has infused alienation and estrangement in the colonial lived experience. Strangely, a colonial subject may speak English when he wants to keep a distance or has to tell lies. As the language of the master, it probably signifies a rupture of communication for non-native speakers. Biswas’s estrangement and unfamiliarity with Hanuman House is reflected in his constant use of English. One reason for his inability to develop a relationship with Hanuman House may be that Biswas “always [speaks] English at Hanuman House, even when the other person [speaks] Hindi: it [has become] one of his principles” (MB, p. 121). Miss Blackie’s presence in Hanuman House confirms its bilingual aura. The children normally use English, even broken English, and the boy would “[wail] in English ‘I [amn’t] doing nothing Ma’” (MB, p. 158). The residents keep switching from Hindi to Pidgin English without any scruples. Interestingly, Mrs Tulsi, who represents tradition and culture also needs English to assert and maintain her authority. In broken English she preached and advised others saying, “the Lord gives” or “until the Lord sees fit to take you away” (MB, p. 171). She laughs at herself when she cracks her first joke in English (MB, p. 213) and therefore, does not consider it as a matter of ego unlike Biswas. Though she speaks in Hindi but in order to add authority to her words, “her last sentence” is in English. Biswas sticks to English as if he is in competition with others and remains unaware that he can only distance others by this practice. However, he feels bad when Seth speaks to him in English as this is meant to be a warning for him (MB, p. 144, 87). To his wife in particular he speaks English, in order
to keep a distance from her Indian self and therefore, “there [is] little friendliness between them” (MB, p. 105). Ridiculously, Biswas speaks English even when angry or when giving examples from Indian history. He would blurt, “What the hell you think I look like? ------ the Maharajah of Barrackpore?” (MB, p. 152). English comes in handy for lying, as he lies to his daughter that he hasn’t beaten her mother when in fact he has (MB, p. 202). Once when Mrs Tulsi was ill, to his surprise, Hindi words came out of his mouth when he had to inquire after her health (MB, p. 207). Perhaps, for a short while, Biswas could not help the ease and originality of his mother tongue. The scene is significant, as it exposes English as a skin of pretension which a non-native speaker can easily shed whenever he wants to be honest with himself. On the other hand, Shama is comfortable with both languages. She speaks in English with her husband and writes in basic English but does not consider it inevitable in itself; nor has any complexes attached to languages like her husband.

The English language seems to have become the marker of excellence that the subject strives to achieve in all his life. Not unlike Selvon’s Moses, Biswas’s ambitions and aspirations are “constantly [dismantled]” by the Western language itself but he remains unconscious of the bitter truth. He keeps humming “in the snowy and the blowy/ in the blowy and the snowy” and copying the tune of “Roaming in the Gloaming”, which was once sung in Lal’s school by a choir to entertain important Canadian visitors (MB, p. 134). He doesn’t know any Indian verses and seems to have been robbed of his own folklore which according to Wole Soyinka is the whole “uniqueness” of one’s world.

Biswa faces problem not only with the spoken word but with the written one as well. He seems to wrestle to put down his ideas. Though he wants to be an English writer but seems unable to pour his immediate experience and feelings into
English script. Perhaps, he is stuck among colonial stereotypes and can never move beyond, “amazing scenes were witnessed yesterday when” (MB, p. 220, 237). It does not appear to be writer’s block but colonially arrested skills as “he [talks] to himself, [shouts], [does] everything as noisily as he [can]. Nothing [replies]. Nothing [changes]. Amazing scenes were witnessed yesterday when. The newspapers [remain] as jaunty as they [have] been, the quotations as sedate” (MB, p. 237). He does not know how to begin to say something in his own voice. It seems to be a battle against silence, but his sentences pronounce his own annihilation as he struggles to write in the first person and express what he really feels. He keeps stumbling across the patent lines as a reporter and can neither apply the bookish, narrative register to the everyday events of his life, nor use it to report his own observations. Perhaps, at the peripheries of the West his perceptions do not get a chance to develop and all he can do is copy. Elleke Boehmer believes that Mr Biswas is “stumped” as he is required to write about English seasons he has never experienced. The “imported idiom robs the society of relevance: things seem shallow, provisional, without history. The once-colonized country clearly needs its writers to give it imaginative form. But because of physical and psychological deprivations, such as those suffered by Mr Biswas throughout his life, colonial writers lack the confidence and the means to develop their skills”.

Despite his aspirations to become a writer, with colonial schooling, Biswas can merely take his place as a sign-painter. It is “sign-writing [that has] taken him to Hanuman House and the Tulsis ---- [to] the Sentinel.” But he is paid at neither place (MB, p. 340). The “sign-writing” does not “pay” him anyway. It has neither supported him nor elevated his status but has rather blemished his chances to become a future writer. It is not actually the “thick ugly columns,” of the shop that “dismays” Biswas but seeing himself in a job where he has “to paint signs on all of them” (MB, p. 82).
The editor of the *Sentinel* gives him paint and a brush to paint sign-boards when he meets him for the first time when searching for a writing job (MB, p. 338). Perhaps, as a subject, he needs to be disciplined by “signs” and cannot be involved in intellectual mind-expanding pursuits. The narrative may also imply that the poor man finds “signs” at his disposal rather than a language in which to freely communicate.\(^\text{39}\) The language of the master seems to throw the non-native speaker into a quagmire of confusion and uncertainty and he is left searching for his meanings around the peremptory and impermeable colonial “signs”.\(^\text{40}\) A good illustration of his search for personal meaning may be seen when more than Shama’s behaviour, it is the word “nagging” that keeps him “puzzled”. He tries desperately to look for the relationship between “Shama”, “nagging”, “exceptional women”, “Sushila” and his role in “a wife-beating” colonial society.\(^\text{41}\) Interestingly, he thinks “nagging” is “an alien skill” and may not describe a woman who “[blows] her nose repeatedly” in silent protest and knows nothing about “nagging”. He remains lost as to what role he should take in relation to the English words, as the language he uses has no configuration within an Indian ethos.

Culture and civilization perhaps, keep diminishing around colonial “signs”. Seeing himself engulfed by western “signs”, a colonial subject tends to lose track of himself. For Pamuk the very “signs” that have taken over his town spell out degeneration and deterioration.\(^\text{42}\) If in Istanbul the “signs” and billboards highlight lost glory, in Biswas’s life they leave a brutal impact on his tenor of expression. The “old signs” that “still [serve]” seem to highlight the loss of “gaiety” and emptiness in his private life:

Mr Biswas's old signs still served. They had faded (---) Punch had lost a piece of his nose (---) Savi knew (---) but their gaiety puzzled her; she couldn't associate them with the morose man (---) She
felt, with a sense of loss (---) that the signs had been done some
time beyond her memory when her father lived happily (---)
Christmas was the only time of the year when the gaiety of signs
had some meaning (MB, p. 220, 221).

The “old signs” becoming meaningful around Christmas may highlight the apathy of
the foreign characters, spawning disappointment and frustration across the
indigenous lived experience. These “signs” which are a source of temporary “gaiety”,
stand in contrast to the “dingy barrackroom” (MB, p. 220) and “morose” Caribbean
background. Becoming more symbolical and abstract with the passage of time may
be an allusion to their lingering and ambivalent role in the postcolonial shabby
background. However, Biswas has a great reverence for these obscure “signs” and is
still under the awe of the “symbol of authority”. He has not succeeded in reducing
them from the “symbol of authority” to “the sign[s]” of difference. Despite the
appropriation of colonial signs or what Bhabha has called hybridization, they stand
out either as “symbol of authority” or “the sign” of difference and cannot be linked
to the local signified. They are still far from the self-representation of the non-native
speaker. In Biswas’s case, their “gaiety” cannot be associated to the “morose man”.
Nonetheless, Punch’s loss of “a piece of nose” seems to signify the loss of identity
amidst foreign “signs”. In Midnight’s Children “nose” is a strong metaphor for
identity and it is something which Biswas may also have lost while living up to
colonial “letters”. “Punch” seems to replicate the narrative of identity crisis in
Biswas’s life. Biswas is no less a puppet than “Punch” but with the loss of a “nose”,
neither does he belong to the English nor to his own race.

To speak out is to be free. Rushdie argues that the power of speech is the
greatest power of all. Language “is at the heart of the human enterprise, the tool
that must be left free, even when it is trivialized and abused.” Boehmer reflects
that Biswas may want to write to heal the “fractures” that divide [his] lived experience from “his fantasy of metropolitan life.” For this he has to make “[his] adopted language [his] own” to be able to speak about “such fractures” and to “bring the discordances into prominence” in his work.”47 He may aspire to break with the historical stagnancy through his writing, but finds himself an amateur at the task. Moreover, he writes with a “pencil” and has no writing desk of his own. His un-resourcefulness may also symbolize the disadvantaged and under-privileged status of an Indo-Caribbean writer. The English writings from the colonial world are possibly “in pencil” as they are assumed to be unimpressive, non-assertive and flawed. Again, these may compromise on truthful representations, as the writers have to deal with the indigenous, personal experience but in a foreign medium. Raja Rao points to the linguistic difficulties faced by postcolonial writers:

One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own (...) [English] is the language of our intellectual make-up (...) but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians.48

Against such an overpowering epistemic schema, a subject has to define himself. He can neither “write only as [an] Indian” or a Caribbean nor as English but will keep faltering within a limited space. His expression has been disabled in trying “to reconstitute experience through an act of writing which uses the tools of one culture or society and yet seeks to remain faithful to the experience of another.”49 Biswas appears to be strained by this duality of expression with which he has to catch up. An allegorical representation of the plight of the colonial writers can be seen when the king in Through the Looking Glass finds his own feelings being manipulated whenever he tries to write them down.50 In a similar vein, Biswas too can never transfer his true feelings to script. He may feel his pen is controlled by “demigods”
whom he can neither copy nor ignore. The need for “a double act” (Boehmer) is an uphill task and “far from easy”. Biswas is unable of “a double act” as he wants to communicate meanings that were unique and personal to him. But then “the standards set” by Western writers are also too important for him. He mostly feels like the persona in the poem, “Theme for English B” who finds it very difficult to write something that “comes out” of him:

The instructor said,

Go home and write

A page tonight.

And let that page come out of you—

Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it’s that simple?

For Biswas it is really difficult to make “a page come out of him” as he is vainly conjuring up reality from “reading the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius and Samuel Smiles,” and “trying to be different from the Tulsis, from the people he knows, from his own parents”. This is simply self-negation as the personal and subjective elements remain unexpressed. The Book of Comprehensive Knowledge, Bell’s Standard Elocutionist, and novels by Hall Caine, Marie Corelli and Samuel Smiles fail to benefit him and continue to drain happiness and hope from his life. He keeps fantasizing and yearning “after the outside world”, as the novels that he reads take him there (MB, p. 215). He cannot give any grounding in reality to his stories. Probably, his readings bind him to looking through a peephole and turning his back on his own world and who he really is. He aspires to become a great novelist like Samuel Smiles but cannot do better than being a struggling reporter, dictated to and
corrected by an English editor (MB, p. 341). Without any prospect for developing his viewpoint, Biswas has to follow English models and take dictations from his boss willingly. His writing is strained by two versions of the same story. He frets about the identity of his characters. What happens is that sometimes “his hero has a Hindi name; then he [is] short and unattractive and poor, and surrounded by ugliness, which [is] anatomized in bitter detail. Sometimes his hero has a Western name; he [is] then faceless, but tall and broad-shouldered; he [is] a reporter and moves in a world derived from the novels Mr Biswas has read and the films he [has] seen. None of these stories [get] finished, and their theme [is] always the same.” (MB, p. 363). Perhaps, it is his own persona that is under grotesque transformation and as he tries to turn himself into a dashing Western hero, he becomes “faceless”. He can neither fit himself into Indian identity nor into a western one. No matter, “whatever [is] his mood and however painful his subject [is], he [becomes] irreverent and facetious as soon as he [begins] to write, and all he can manage are distorted and scurrilous descriptions of Moti, Mungroo, Seebaran, Seth and Mrs Tulsi” (MB, p. 190). His characters are named as “Mr John Lubbard” or “Sybil” after the names from Warwick Deeping’s novel. He does not know how to avoid the stylistic as well as the structural mistakes while reporting on an incident. Then his cultural prejudices do not let him write fluently.54

The question of race, colour and representation is hard for Biswas to deal with in his writing. The bits and pieces “from the Daily Express” and Mr Burnett’s corrections do not seem to help and make the task much more challenging. Then he has to worry constantly about his “limitations” as a writer, more so as a postcolonial writer. It seems Naipaul declares his own battles and ordeals in many an episode of A House for Mr Biswas.55 He like Conrad may have “experienced the lack of an originary tradition, [and] used English to give expression to a translated and
transnational vision.” The internal split of “man” and “writer”, as he acknowledges, could be healed only when his suppressed “colonial-Hindu self” has been made to surface in his writing. He has learned to adapt the foreign material after a long process of trial and error in which he not only “copies but also subtly adapts the language and literary styles taught to him as part of a colonial schooling.”

If for Naipaul it was so difficult to find his expression and articulation, then how can a man of ordinary merit like Biswas overcome cultural and linguistic barriers. It is pathetic that Biswas “[sits] before the typewriter on the green table, [inserts] a sheet of Sentinel paper, [types] his name and address at the top right-hand corner, as the Ideal School, and all the books [has] recommended, and [writes]:

ESCAPE

by M. Biswas (MB, p. 362).

Desiring “escape” from the Eastern experience and considering it as an obstacle for his ambition, Biswas may not be able to be creative as it is his society that he can easily relate to and get inspiration from. The irony is that he thinks, by following English elitist models he may become a writer and does not understand that what he actually needs is self-acknowledgement; to return to the world of sound, smell, taste and feelings. He has to declare what he means. But this is what he can never do.

In the last stage of his life, coming back from hospital, Biswas finds his existence has been reduced to a couple of English labels which are simply useless. There is “the Slumberking bed, where he [can] no longer sleep because it [is] upstairs and he [has been] forbidden to climb steps ----- and the morris suite (for which he never got a chance to wear): the last acquisition, it [has] belonged to the solicitor’s clerk and [has] been left by him as a gift. And in the garage outside, the Prefect
(which he can’t drive anymore)” (MB, p. 8). The mere possession of Western paraphernalia bespeaks of postcolonial dispossession. The subject still cannot “lay claims to [his] portion of the earth” (MB, p. 8) but remains busy collecting western “names”, merely to add weight to his self-image. The scene may also be an allusive gesture to the broader question of post-independence nationhood, self-sufficiency and ownership in once-colonized countries.

The judge in *The Inheritance of Loss* is a textbook case of colonial breeding. His identity, as a retired Chief Justice, is now an inscription, and that too, is on the record of a missionary school:

Name: Justice Jemubhai Patel

Relation: Maternal Grandfather

Position: Chief Justice (Retired.)

Religion: Hindu

Caste: Patidar  (IL, p. 28)

Late in life, his preoccupation with the game of chess may suggest his failure to communicate with others. His physical appearance sketches him as a maimed person like that of Beckett’s characters, who bears an inarticulate existence with no movement or lips and a “fixed gaze” (IL, p. 33). Moreover, the backdrop of *National Geographics* and the empty wine bottles in his house circumnavigate emptiness of a westernized life. The *National Geographics* with the gilded letters occupy a central position in his abode and may signify the western institutionalized knowledge that has overwhelmed him. The “key” to the cabinet that is “hidden behind” the English magazines (IL, p. 7) may be a metaphor for the loss that is caused by making English the centre of his life. He may have learned the foreign language but has lost the
“key” to a productive, social life. The “locked cabinet” in his house may be a symbol of a “locked” self under western influence.

English, the very tool of colonization, has evolved as a symbol of power and is the very prerequisite for success in a world that continues to follow colonial rules, but under new slogans. Dragged along WYSIWYG—whizzywig—“what-you-see-is what-you-get”, the judge, as a child, has had to pass under the big portrait of Queen Victoria, every morning in the school building. He “found her froggy expression compelling and felt deeply impressed that a woman so plain could also have been so powerful”. With every passing day, “his respect for her and the English grew” (IL, p. 58). Since his early years, English becomes a symbol of authority for him. He is to follow “an Indian middle class trajectory” of learning an English way of life to gain status and respect in his own society.57 If self-betrayal and self-estrangement are the pre-requisites to assimilation in the Western culture, then learning the language is its very vehicle. Doggedly following the colonial standards, the judge has lost his “I” and has started to use the third person for himself (IL, p. 111). Shut out of the world under the awe of the master’s accent, the judge finds that “nobody [speaks] to him at all, his throat [jams] with words unuttered” (IL, p. 39). When speech becomes lethal to self-esteem, silence is preferred over language. Perhaps, the language of the Other58 makes him mumble instead of speaking up (IL, p. 40) and except for exchanges with landladies and in shops, he hasn’t spoken to anyone in years (IL, p. 165). However, it seems to be a “catch-22” situation as silence also means compliance. Accent has been a problem for aspiring colonial men.59 In the interview for ICS, before a panel of white men, the judge can only reproduce a piece of medieval poetry and becomes the butt of ridicule for his Gujerati accent. The reason is that all through his stay in Cambridge, Jemubhai has hardly “opened his mouth for whole years” and covers his strong accent “behind a mask of quiet” (IL, p. 112, 119).
Derrida is able to liberate himself from the bogey of the colonizer’s accent despite the fact that he has to learn and speak French in Algeria. He recollects that in school they used to make “fun of the French from France. When a teacher [arrives] from the Metropole with his French accent [they find] him ridiculous!” However, the judge lacks this kind of courage and keeps working towards the Queen’s English and to evolve from a “mimic man” to pure English breed which seems to be a far-fetched goal anyway. With the help of a friend the judge has started copying the white man’s accent but becomes an outsider to everyone including himself. He envies the English but detests the Indians. Though he works “at being English”, but “would be despised” by “English and Indians, both” (IL, p. 119).

The “loss” is more than he can understand or assess and back home while “[checking] on his belongings, he [uncovers] the loss” (IL, p. 167). He readily forgets Hindi during his stay in England as an affirmation of his newly acquired identity. On his way back, he “[sips] beef tea [religiously forbidden for Hindus] and [reads] How to Speak Hindustani” as he cannot use English when posted to remote Indian areas. Still, in the company of the English, “he [sits] alone” and feels “ill at ease” (IL, p. 119). Unfortunately, he can neither relate to English nor to Hindi and can be compared with the African slaves who experience “the cruel pressure of an imposed language and the loss of their own ‘voice’, a loss incurred, moreover, in an alien landscape”.

The obsession with language proves contagious and the judge turns his wife into a dumb figure as well. A time comes when Nimi stops speaking to everyone (IL, p. 172). The man and wife both are terrorized into silence one way or the other.

Indian-ness in any form becomes unacceptable for the judge since he has started to think in English. He can very easily reject his wife for her Indian shape and demeanour because through his western lens, she appears to be a woman with a
“typically Indian bum”. Perhaps, her “bum” looks “lazy” and “wide” like that of “a buffalo” as he compares it to the bottom of an English lady, usually tightly clad in trousers or skirt (IL. p. 168). If he could think about her in Hindi, these objectionable features would make her a beauty. A thin, slender woman is considered to be unattractive and unfeminine in the traditional India. The bangles which are an essential accessory for an Indian bride are to be abhorred and he commands her to “take those absurd trinkets [bangles] off.” The language is so important for him that he removes a “bread roll” from his wife’s plate, telling her that if “[she] can’t say the word, [she] can’t eat it.” (IL, p. 171). To prove the superiority of the language seems to be the sole aim of his life.

The resourceful natives exert the English language as their power. When his servant wails in Urdu, the judge silences him by using the popular colonial expression, “shut up”. Through English he projects himself as a master. He has to think in English to keep his distance from the “damn servants born and brought up to scream” (IL, p. 8). It seems it is English that has made him into a snob. He finds his rudeness justified if he speaks in English and calls others, “ignorant people” (IL, p. 168). By distancing himself from his mother tongue, he has no need to speak in an open and frank manner. On retirement, he seems to seek asylum in his detached house where he can live as “a foreigner” without any need to learn the local language while he never goes back to the “court” (IL, p. 29). The “court” may carry a dual meaning here, as to deal with native cases in a foreign language may have been as testing for the judge as his own trial. Ironically, he struggles to deliver justice under “language confusions” with “leaf shadow on him”. With the “splotch” also on him, he works towards “a second” script of justice amidst “tenuous” translations. He “heard cases in Hindi, but they were recorded in Urdu by the stenographer and translated by the judge into a second record in English, although his own command
of Hindi and Urdu was tenuous (---) the truth had fallen between languages (---) the clarity that justice demanded was non-existent” (IL, p. 62). His translations jeopardize the very sense of justice and fair play and contaminate “the clarity” of verdicts. What is not understood cannot to be challenged by the naïve natives. With copies of translations around him, the judge appears to be one from “a class of interpreters” and “a mimic man” who Homi K. Bhabha has alluded to in reference to Macaulay’s educational system in colonial India. However, he may sound fake to himself.

The colonizer’s language continues to be a source of distrust for the nationalists. The judge is understood to be treacherous by his own people because of his foreign education and hired accent. It appears the salutation of huzoor used by the robbers is a satirical blow aimed at his Anglophile sham dignity. He remains unaware that Gyan, a local tutor, finds his own Cambridge certificate something of which to be ashamed rather than proud (IL, p. 176). Ultimately, he has to call himself “a fool” before natives and still does not realize how much he has faltered in making life choices (IL, p. 1, p. 7). The paradox is that the judge rebukes Gyan for lack of knowledge of English poetry while he himself is mocked by the Whites as well as the natives. The nationalists consider it their patriotic duty to laugh heartily at the judge’s accent and scornfully mimic him (IL, p. 176). Perhaps, “mimicry” works as a chain reaction and in this case, is used as a voice by the nationalists.

Anglicization proves to be a hard bargain either way. The ones who are able to get some command of the foreign language start occupying a zone apart from their own people and are disowned by them. The judge appears to be the “Missing Person” of Adil Jussawalla’s poem:

You’re your country’s lost property
with no office to claim you back

You’re polluting our sounds. You’re so rude.

“Get back to your language,” they say.64

The tragedy is that there is no language left for the judge to represent himself. He stands apart from the English as well as from his own people.

II

In Desai’s text, the characters are shown to occupy a grey space at the borders. There are more boundaries than during the colonial era; yet the peripheries seem to lose their character in “the mist charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders” (IL, p. 9). Perhaps, it is “the mist” of colonial language that is “charging down” and undoing linguistic and ethnic “borders”. “Dragon” is a negative image. The colossus of the English language under the pretext of transnationalism and cross-culturalism has eaten up culture and tradition and led to new divisions in which class and western education and mannerisms play major roles. Robert Phillipson (1992; 1999; 2003) is of the view that “linguistic imperialism” continues to challenge ethnic and cultural identities for non-native end-users.65 At the outset in The Inheritance of Loss, Sai is shown as reading from an old National Geographic which reveals her class and the language to which she has been exposed. Notwithstanding she “[hates] the convent” (IL, p. 27), she has to attend it in compliance with the colonial decorum of the upper middle class. The local bourgeoisie seems to have swapped for the colonizer’s privileged position over the masses through English schooling. Sai’s grandfather has decided not to send her to a government school as she would come out of it speaking with the wrong accent (IL, p. 34). However, learning the right accent makes demands on Sai for total immersion in western culture. She has to accept that “cake [is] better than laddoos,
fork spoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body [is] more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English [is] better than Hindi” (IL, p. 30). Sai is meant to leave the school speaking in a way that will distance her from the community. Her elitist education causes embarrassment and unease to the man she loves. The fact that she speaks “no language but English and pidgin Hindi [and cannot] converse with anyone outside her tiny social stratum’ (IL, p. 176) becomes the very reason for the break-up of her relationship. Perhaps, Noni has realized this bitter fact to some extent, as she complains she could never find romance or get married after her confidence was crushed by the “mean-spirited educational system” (IL, p.68). She is not wrong in foreseeing the same kind of destiny for Sai.

The imperial language leads to a new division between “superior” and “inferior” non-native speakers. It exacerbates the delusions of the upper middle class making them relish their apparently lofty position over locals. Lola and Noni used to visit the British Council when young, and the English novels and classics read has created a difference between them and the rest of the people. They are “the class that reads Jane Austen” (IL, p. 130). Their reading seems to have blocked their sight of reality and make them live vain lives. In Kalimpong, their hyper-real life is dependent upon multi-national brands as “Lola’s suitcases [are] stuffed with Marmite, Oxo bouillon cubes, Knorr soup packets, After Eights, daffodil bulbs, and renewed supplies of Boots cucumber lotion” (IL, p. 46, 47). For fighting back a sense of lack, Lola and Noni need the products from “Boots” and “Marks and Spencer” all year round. Perhaps, they get a sense of power from wearing M & S lingerie and through it can connect themselves with “the queen” (IL, p. 47). Anything that can be related to the queen may make provision for their self-respect. They desperately need “Marks and Spencer underwear” as if it could make them hold onto “the
essence,” and “quintessence” of Englishness and hide an inferiority which is deeply rooted. It is ridiculous that the vision of the Westernized women is essentially through the “large leg portholes” of M & S underpants (IL, p. 44).67 For Lola, her daughter’s BBC English voice seems to redeem the ills, deprivations and threats that hang around her house. She fights the fear of the unknown by listening to “nothing but the sanitized elegance of her daughter’s voice, triumphant over any horrors the world might thrust upon others” (IL, p. 47). Nonetheless, the ladies are made to realize the insecurity of a life charted out by the English novels, the BBC and To the Manor Born or Yes, Minister (IL, p. 45), and their “false ideas of retirement, sweet peas and mist, cat and books” (IL, p. 245) by the nationalists’ aggression. The English accents of which they are so proud is detested by the rebels who cannot bear “the thought of those Mon Ami sisters with their fake English accents blanching and trembling” (IL, p. 260). The language the rich sisters speak is interpreted as a show of deterrence and treachery. Ultimately, Lola seeing the threat lying in store in speaking English, starts pretending that it is English she can’t speak properly rather than Nepali (IL, p. 242, 243). However, pretensions are bound to fail in the case of accents. The local men still understand Lola’s English but it is she who doesn’t understand their language (IL, p. 238). The English brands, books and imported items do not help the sisters in any way and they appear ridiculous not being able to communicate in their own language.

English as a global language offers “the homogenization of world culture----spearheaded by films, pop culture, CNN and fast-food chains”.68 The migrants are more affected by “world culture” and turn their ethnicity into a good joke. They do not mind their disastrous identity as they are now a class “of the English-speaking upper-educated”.69 The (im)migrants do not merely exchange languages but make bargains over values and morals as well. They spew out a distorted mix of two
languages, “Dhanyawad. Shukria. Thank you. Extra tip --- topi-muffler-gloves---” only to propose a sham lifestyle (IL, p. 50). Seeing English as a survival tool, the settlers give in to a life of duplicity and make perverted choices while doing their best to pretend to be native speakers. The acquired language instead of representing them, misrepresents what they really are. Migrants like Harish-Harry are skilled in juggling tones and accents and identities all at the same time. They may not help “a panic” while trying to be more than one person at the same time. Though they cover their self-doubt and embarrassment by “Hallo, Hallo” and “Shuddap”, they appear to turn vulgar and comical, all the more so with their “skeleton grin” (IL, p. 147). Languages may help the migrants weave in and out of two cultures and two identities, but they may sound like strangers to themselves.

It is language that probably makes or distorts reality. In referring to America, “awe [swells] words” like the first-world currency, but for Russia “words again become deflated” like the “third-world, bad-luck money” (IL, p. 24). Language plays a major role in the master and slave relationship. The cook and his son stand “X-ray stiff” closer to the “National Geographics” or “enclosed within” a scene decorated with western products such as a “Campa Cola bottle” (same as Coca Cola) and “props of a tape player”, as “a backdrop [they] found suitable” (IL, p. 14) for their photographs. They are unaware that the imported “props” cannot bring any improvement to their impoverished lives except keeping them “frozen” in the status quo. The cook has to keep track of western names instead of his son. Biju works “at Don Pollo---or [is] it the Hot Tomato? Or Ali Baba’s Fried Chicken?” but that the poor cook cannot “remember or understand or pronounce”. The poor boy has to run from one job to another “like a fugitive on the run---no papers” (IL, p. 3). Above all, Biju like all other illegal immigrants is tortured through compulsory silence. In his struggle to find a passage to the Western world, his very right to speak out is as illegitimate
as his residential status. In utter frustration and disappointment, he hurls wild abuse in his mother tongue and spits out at “the green card” (IL, p. 190). He seems starved of self-respect and swears in his own language which gives him some strange kind of satisfaction. At least, something remains “unadulterated” when the Indian waiters secretly call the Indian customer “sala”, who is accompanying a white girl in the restaurant (IL, p. 148). Probably, abusing someone in English may be tantamount to self-abuse for an immigrant. The subject makes sure to use his own language for asserting his ethnic background otherwise he may not be in a position to argue with anyone. “Pigs, sons of pigs, soaar ka bacha” Biju shouts at the Pakistani while the Pakistani swears back, “Uloo ke patha, son of an owl, low-down-son-of-a-bitch Indian” (IL, p. 23). Ridiculously, both of them give vent to their frustration, the cause of which lies in the abstractions and manipulations of history and is well above their laymen’s understanding. On the contrary, Biswas who is under the affectation of English does not switch back to his mother tongue even when angry. In order to lose no chance to prove himself superior, he abuses his wife’s family in English, calling her uncle, “the bull” and her mother, a “bitch” or “the old queen” (IL, p. 120). In a similar manner, the judge remains on guard for his acquired identity even when in bad temper and shouts, “damn it” (IL, p. 34) in utter exasperation. However, to his own distaste, his native self comes popping out, no matter how much he tries to suppress and hide it. Sometimes he can be heard scolding his cook in Urdu: “bar bar karta rehta hai” (IL, p. 11).

The language of the colonizer lives on as a legacy of division and discrimination. Sai is far removed from the cook and “their friendship [is] composed of shallow things conducted in a broken language”, for she is “an English speaker” while “he is Hindi-speaker” (IL, p. 19). They cannot communicate in an easy manner and the cook appears a “difficult man” to Sai as she only superficially understands his
language. The cook, the “taxi walla” and the robbers who speak Urdu (IL, p. 5) point to the fact that the less resourceful are at the losing end in a world that is virtually controlled by a colonially implanted epistemic schema.

III

In order to avail of the freedom of expression, the ex-colonized subject, paradoxically has to experience a kind of linguistic exile. Sara Suleri and her family in *Meatless Days* appear to have paid a heavy price for their scholarly pursuits and making their way in the Western world. As an aspiring Pakistani, she chose a scholarly career in English Literature for herself; but choosing to live in a foreign country, may have made her realize that her identity needs Urdu to speak back to her. Suleri seems ambivalent about the impact of English on her life as like Assia Djebar, it turned her into “a cultural, linguistic” and “a literal exile from the land of her origins”.  

Suleri and her family remain painfully conscious of their negligence of Urdu, a language close to their hearts and peculiar for its refined and subtle expressions. The emptiness is felt strongly and Suleri’s father, Z.A. Suleri laments; “I did myself disservice when I gave up my tongue”. Suleri shares his remorse but very well understands the good reasons for his preference of a language that promises financial security and political authority, over a South-Asian language. She reasons on his behalf that as “a young man of his times [he] hardly had a choice when he found himself seduced by history but to give up Urdu or Hindi in the service of English, which was history’s language then. Generations of Urdu conversation in his genes must have shuddered with desertion as Papa’s imperatives sent him off, away from poetry, into an English daily”. However, it is very strange and agonizing that he relapses into Urdu in amnesia:
Shortly after Mamma died, Tillat and I both noticed and wondered at Papa’s latest nervous quirk. He had begun to use his index finger as a pen, making it in constant scribbles write on each surface it could find (---) Tillat marvelled. “It must be something Urdu, for he’s moving from right to left.” (---) “I could swear that it looked like Urdu” (MD, p. 130).

“Search for My Tongue” has the resonance of Papa’s reversal to Urdu:

Every time I think I’ve forgotten,
I think I’ve lost the mother tongue,
it blossoms out of my mouth.73

In keeping with his rebellious nature, he cannot be restrained for long by the Queen’s English and probably, his bizarre “shorthands” are an attempt to break with the colonial decorum. Instead of bothering himself with the tri-syllabic ‘another’ he repeatedly chants abbreviations like, “Anther?” “Anther?” in place of “another” or “bigning” instead of ‘beginning’ (MD, p. 109) in his Punjabi accent. It is probable that as a non-native speaker he could never pick the right accent. Ashis Nandy has accepted this kind of inaccuracy as part of his postcolonial Indian identity:

English is not my language. Though I have developed a taste for it, it was once forced upon me. Even now I often form my thoughts in my native Bengali and then translate when I have to put them down on paper. Now that after thirty years of toil I have acquired reasonable competence in the language, I am told by the progeny of those who first imposed it on me that I have been taught the wrong English by their forefathers; that I must now relearn the language. Frankly, I am too old to do so.74

Moreover Shahid [her brother] after spending a long time in London, tells Suleri that Urdu is the only poetry for him and he seems to miss the comfort and freedom that
are inextricably linked with one’s mother tongue. He admits; “I could never take to English” (MD, p. 100).

Mamma and Ifat suffer in their own ways by losing a voice through their “displacement” in marriages. Nonetheless, much is given away by Mamma’s reticence:

My mother (----) had no language in which to locate its functioning
but held it rather as a distracted manner sheathed about her face,
a scarf (---) So of course she never noticed the imprint on her face
as it wore, for she was that imprint (MD, pp. 168, 169).

Mamma’s “distracted” manner speaks through her “scarf” and the “scarf” becomes a symbol of repression and of a subdued voice. Suleri now, in her exile can easily relate to her mother as she was a woman who spoke “precisely”. She “must have hated her sudden linguistic incompetence: languages surrounded her like a living space, insisting that she lived in other people’s homes.” Her mother became “a guest, then, a guest in her own name” and lived “in a resistant culture that would not tell her its rules” (MD, p. 163). It appears that her mother takes refuge in a “posture of disinterest” not much dissimilar from her composure when “she did not really fret over the wearing and tearing of her lovely things as they were shipped from town to town, getting lost and broken on the way” (MD, p. 167). Suleri and her mother, both as émigrés have to live with languages that do not reflect their souls. Their plight may not be different from Alice on whom the fact dawns that anything can be meaningful for her when it is held up to the “glass” of her soul. A language may “go the right way again” when one is able to find one’s voice through it. Suleri’s mother appears to have withdrawn into a language of patience in order to get along with a boisterous, headstrong and impatient man. The daughter recalls seeing “the crossing of patience on her (Mamma’s) face, making her at once abstracted, faraway.” She
adds on; “to mock him (Suleri’s father) would be too simple: he demanded to be mocked, and had enough detractors as it was, proliferating through his day. So [she] gave him the seriousness of her concern, following the self-interruptions of his talk to say, “I see, I see” (---) as I watched their conversation, I was struck. No wonder my mother sought to teach me, with oblique urgency, the necessity of what it means to live beyond affection. No wonder she said to me --- startlingly, incongruously ---- ‘You can’t change people, Sara’” (MD, p. 158, 159). Her mother seems to have surrendered to “I see” instead of speaking out with “I say”, sacrificing her vocal self to save an unlikely marriage.

Ifat too has to experience this “linguistic exile” when she gets married into a Punjabi conservative family. After learning the local Punjabi dialect, “Nikki Pikki stuff”, she appears to be a stranger to her own family:

First [Ifat] learned how to speak Punjabi and then graduated to the Jhelum dialect, spoken in the region from which Javed’s family came. She taught herself the names and stations of a hundred-odd relations, intuiting how each of them would wish to be addressed (---) Entire conversations, entire lives, are devoted to the act of naming people (---) “Puppo and Lola?” (---) “Bunty’s cousins?” (---) “Lali and Cheeno” (---) “Dipoo’s closest friends” (---) For everyone has a family name and then a diminutive name (MD, p. 142).

For them, Ifat’s shift to a “cockney” language was somewhat painful (MD, p.142). On the other hand, Suleri’s exile seems to have been kick-started with the loss of Urdu, despite the fact that English is her forte and the language of her mother. Notwithstanding her excellence in academic English, she seems to enjoy Urdu more than English, and appears to blame English for contributing to her “meatless days”.
Despite her childhood experience with “Mamma, Marmalade, squirrel” (IL, p. 169) she keeps returning to Urdu idioms, “Khala-love”, “heady smell of water on hot dust” (MD, p. 9, 10), “Hanh, hanh”, “Alu ka bharta” and “Aba Ji” all through her narrative. She may be striving to fill the “meatless” hole in her identity through the meaty appropriation of English. The Eastern beds are described in three different ways as if she draws comfort from the mere illustration of the native rope beds. She appropriates English to evoke the very sense of comfort embedded in “her [Dadi’s] summer bed [which] was a wooden frame latticed with a sweet-smelling rope, much aerated at its foot” or in a “chitchat bed” or in “sweet-smelling nivar rope bed” (MD, p. 6, 57, 63). Urdu terms keep surfacing periodically in her narration.

The memoir sets an example of the appropriation of English for a fuller and lively representation of Pakistani family life. Suleri seems conscious of the urgency which English users may “reconstruct their languages, cultures and identities to their advantage.” She beautifully coins a “new idiom of cultural compassion” that recognizes “the commonality of loss” and for which The Rhetoric of English India is also much appreciated. She re-invents a narrative paradigm without using any self-censoring South Asian techniques. She appreciates Urdu, both emotionally and intellectually and the vindication of this is most evident in Boys will be Boys. In this book, she has started each chapter with an Urdu couplet of Ghalib and it is difficult to say whether she is paying tribute to her father or to Urdu poetry itself, though she calls it “a daughter’s elegy”. She has no inclination to translate many Urdu words like, “Aloo ka bhartha” (IL, p. 3) or “begum” (IL, p. 7) and comes up with a striking amalgamation of many western and eastern images, like the way she compares her father to “a playboy of the eastern world” (MD, p. 61). Interestingly, she likens her mother to a character from Pakistani folktales as she “rises before [her] eyes” like Hir “living in a stranger’s village, moving in the decorum of a repudiated name” (MD, p.
Suleri’s allusion to folklore reveals how much she is still rooted in eastern tradition. She cannot disassociate herself from Urdu and “recites Ghalib, Iqbal and many more ---- narrating nuggets from randomly picked pages” in a cracked voice whenever she gets an opportunity. In moods of desperation when “the circle of life” grows “tighter and tighter” for her, she seems to fall back on Urdu expressions to have some peace of mind.

However, she lives between two languages and Urdu reprimands her in its own way:

Coming second to me, Urdu opens in my mind a passageway between the sea of possibility and what I cannot say in English (---)

Speaking two languages may seem a relative affluence, but more often it entails the problems of maintaining a second establishment even though your body can be in only one place at a time. When I return to Urdu, I feel shocked at my own neglect of a space so intimate to me: like relearning the proportions of a once-familiar room, it takes me by surprise to recollect that I need not feel grief, I can eat grief; that I need not bury my mother but instead can offer her into the earth, for I am in Urdu now. But just at the moment I could murmur, “the stillness of a home,” Urdu like a reprimand disturbs my sense of habitation; “Do you think you ever lived on the inside of a space,” it tells me with some scorn, “you, who lack the surety of knowledge to intuit the gender of a roof, a chair?” Surely I can live in courtyards, afternoons, I muse in departing, arenas of regressed significance—a soothing notion, genderless! (MD, p. 177).

Through Urdu she wants to re-own the “once-familiar” voice to display her home not as a “contested ideal” common to postcolonial narratives, but as her identity with its permanent abode in “arenas of regressed significance”. On stepping into the
world of Urdu, she finds a whole different layout and nouns are to be marked as either masculine or feminine. As an expatriate, Suleri feels less confident in the proper use of ‘gendered’ Urdu, but seems to enjoy that “space” which is much more accommodating and poetic with subtle idioms in store like “eating” and grief that can be expressed. Her memories are laid out in her mind in Urdu and the language helps her to re-visit the good old days of long summer “afternoons” spent in “courtyards”, and to reconnect to the remnants of her existence. Without the zest of Urdu in her writing, she may lose the very platform from which to speak even if she is using English as the medium. It is not just Urdu, but the whole culture around the classical language which keeps her sensitive and responsive to the smallest details of Oriental living.

Suleri relates how her brother finds the greeting card from Pakistan so refreshing and pleasing although written in English. She was in London with him and “never saw Shahid’s face lit up so brightly as when he showed [her] a card that read in florid script, ‘Greetings from Pakistan’, beneath the image of some bustling Pathan dancers”. Inside it, Nuz, their sister had written, “Dearest Shahid, I am so sorry to hear of your divorce my mother has had a brain hemorrhage and I am completely shattered, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, Love, Nuz” (MD, p. 43). Interestingly, eastern relationships are to be reshaped and re-modeled around, “Merry Christmas” or “Happy New Year” in configuration with the New World Order that is structured in English. Probably, the East lives on as an image while the West is alive in script. However, Suleri demonstrates how the postcolonial world is finding new ways of representation as the “Pathan dancers” too, seem to have a claim on English. But, keeping in view the role of English as a global language, Biswas and the judge still have a long way to go to make themselves heard and acknowledged in the language of the Other. They fail to speak with their hearts and minds and stay lost.
Notes


2V. S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* (London: Picador, 2003), p. 43. All further references will be abbreviated to MB and will be cited in the text.

3“Mr Biswas was taught other things. He learned to say the Lord’s Prayer in Hindi from the *King George V Hindi Reader*, and he learned many English poems by heart from the *Royal Reader*. At Lal’s dictation he made copious notes, which he never seriously believed, about geysers, rift valleys, watersheds, currents, the Gulf Stream, and a number of deserts. He learned about oases, which Lal taught him to pronounce ‘osis’, and ever afterwards an oasis meant for him nothing more than four or five date trees around a narrow pool of fresh water, surrounded for unending miles by white sand and hot sun. He learned about igloos. In arithmetic he got as far as simple interest and learned to turn dollars and cents into pounds, shillings and pence. The history Lal taught he regarded as simply a school subject, a discipline, as unreal as the geography; and it was from the boy in the red bodice that he first heard, with disbelief, about the Great War” (MB, pp. 44, 45).

4Alice finds her identity connected to the lessons she has memorized; “I’m sure I’m not Ada ---- I’m sure I can’t be Mabel, for I know all sorts of things, and she, oh! she knows such a very little! Besides, she’s she and I’m I, and----oh dear, how puzzling it all is! I’ll try if I know all the things I used to know. Let me see: four times five are twelve, and four times six is thirteen, and four times seven is-----oh dear! I shall get to twenty at that rate! However, the Multiplication Table doesn’t signify: let’s try Geography. London is the capital of Paris, and Paris is the capital of Rome---no, that’s all wrong, I’m certain! I must have been changed for Mabel! I’ll try and say “How doth the little---” and she crossed her hands on her lap as if she were saying lessons, and began to repeat it, but her voice sounded hoarse and strange, and the words did not come the same as they used to do --- -------“I’m sure those are not the right words,” said poor Alice, and her eyes filled with tears again as she went on, “I must be Mabel after all, and I shall have to go and live in that poky little house, and have next to no toys to play with, and oh! Ever so many lessons to learn! No, I’ve made up my mind about it; if I’m Mabel, I’ll stay down here! It’ll be no use their putting their heads down and saying “Come up again, dear!” I shall only look up and say ‘Who am I then?’ ” (Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 24, 25).


6Derrida says: “As some people have already begun to do here and there, we could also “recount” infinitely what was being “recounted” to us about, precisely. The “history of France”; understanding by that what was taught in school under the name of the “history of France”: an incredible discipline, a fable and bible, yet a doctrine of indoctrination almost ineffaceable for children of my generation. Without speaking of geography: not a word
about Algeria, not a single one concerning its history and its geography, whereas one could
draw the coast of Brittany and the Gironde estuary with our eyes closed. And we had to be
familiar with them in depth, in bulk, and in detail; indeed, we used to recite by rote the
names of the major towns of all the French departments, the smallest tributaries of the
Seine, the Rhone, the Loire, or the Garonne, their sources and their mouths. These four
invisible rivers had nearly the allegorical power of the Parisian statues which represent
them, and which I discovered much later with great hilarity: I was confronting the truth of
my geography lessons” (44, 45).


8“IT was to Mr Biswas that Alec first revealed his secret, and one morning recess, after Alec
had given his demonstration [peeing blue], Mr Biswas dramatically unbuttoned and gave
his. There was a clamour and Alec was forced to take out the bottle of Dodd’s Kidney Pills.
In no time the bottle was empty, except for half a dozen pills which Alec said he had to
keep. The pills, like the red bodice, belonged to his sister-in-law. ‘I don’t know what she
going to do when she found out,’ Alec said, and to those boys who still begged, he said,
‘Buy your own. The drugstore full of them.’ And many of them did buy their own, and for a
week the school’s urinals ran turquoise” (MB, p. 45).

9This is how V.S. Naipaul has titled his novel, *The Mimic Men*. Bhabha too, has developed
his argument on this idea in “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial
Discourse”, (*The Location of Culture*, 1994).

10Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders”, p. 172.

11Judith E. Walsh says: “the negative cultural identity created by the foreign ideas, values
and prejudices of the English educational system added a new element to the psychological
development of some Indian children. Negative images of what it meant to be an Indian
pervaded the conscious and unconscious identifications of many Western-educated Indian
children and became catalysts for intense confusion, ambivalence and self-hate. In the
autobiographies of Banerjea, Bose, and Chaudhuri uncertainties about adult careers, and
conflicting attitudes towards father and son are continuing motifs. It was these authors’
ambivalence, more than any preexistent or specifically individual psychological problem that
precipitated the crises they faced in late adolescence. For these Western-educated Indians,
and for many of the other autobiographers, identity confusion was more than a single stage
along the path of normal development. It was a period of special psychological vulnerability
and danger. Men, like Surendranath Banerjea, who successfully negotiated its crises and
went on to later fame and success, carried the ghosts of their early struggles with them well
into later life” (116).

Judith E. Walsh, “Fathers and Sons: The Second Generation”, *Growing Up In British India:
Indian Autobiographers on Childhood and Education under the Raj* (New York & London:

12Though Turkey was never directly colonized, it did come under the onslaught of

14 Fanon, p. 216.

15 Derrida, Monolingualism of the Other, p. 2.


18 Derrida, p. 281.


22 Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, p. 100.

23 Lacan says: “It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law.” This is the Symbolic order which the subject, as an adult must embrace to become a “speaking subject”.


24 Kiran Desai, The Inheritance of Loss (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 37. All further references will be abbreviated to IL and will be cited in the text.

25 “Within my mouth you have enjailed my tongue”. See William Shakespeare, Richard II, l. 3. 160.

26 Derrida says, “centre is not the centre”. As there is no centre in the structure of language, there is no fixed meaning either. He calls it “play” between the signifier and the signified (Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”, p. 278 -293).


32 Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin are of the opinion that “the new settlers [are] to demand a language which will allow them to express their sense of ‘Otherness’”. See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, “Introduction”, The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures, p. 11.

33 Theroux says: “Neither Ganesh nor Mr Biswas makes a conscious decision to marry” (Paul Theroux, “Householders”, V.S. Naipaul: An Introduction to his Work, p. 53).

34 Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonder”, p. 172.

35 “And on the back endpaper of the Collins Clear-Type Shakespeare, a work of fatiguing illegibility, he wrote the names in large letters, as though his succession had already been settled. He would have used Bell’s Standard Elocutionist, still his favorite reading, if it had not suffered so much from the kick he had given it in the long room at Hanuman House; the covers hung loose and the endpapers had been torn, exposing the khaki-coloured boards. He had bought the Collins Clear-Type Shakespeare for the sake of Julius Caesar, parts of which he had declaimed at Lal’s school. Every other play defeated him; the volume remained virtually unread and now, as a repository of the family records, proved to be a mistake. The endpaper blotted atrociously” (MB, pp. 166, 167).

36 In Samuel Selvon’s novel Moses Ascending that “disentangling the interweaving ironies of this novel is a fascinating process, but the entanglement itself is focused in the language, which constantly dismantles the aspirations and values of Moses himself” (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, “Re-placing language: Textual strategies in post-colonial writing”, p. 69).

37 Soyinka writes: “Man exists, however, in a comprehensive world of myth, history, and mores” (xii).


40 “signs and signwriting are, of course, very important in Naipaul’s work”. See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, “Re-placing language: textual strategies in post-colonial writing”, The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures, p. 54.
“The very word, nag, was known to him only from foreign books and magazines. It had puzzled him. Living in a wife-beating society, he couldn’t understand why women were even allowed to nag or how nagging could have any effect. He saw that there were exceptional women, Mrs Tulsi and Tara, for example, who could never be beaten. But most of the women he knew were like Sushila, the widowed Tulsi daughter. She talked with pride of the beatings she had received from her short-lived husband. She regarded them as a necessary part of her training and often attributed the decay of Hindu society in Trinidad to the rise of the timorous, weak, non-beating class of husband.

To this class Mr Biswas belonged. So Shama nagged; and nagged so well that from the first he knew she was nagging. It amazed him that someone so young should show herself so competent in such an alien skill” (MB, p. 152).

Pamuk recounts: “I hate them as much as I hate the taxis and little trucks that service these places and that clog up the traffic. I see them and the anger brewing up inside me makes me hate the city as much as I hate myself, all the more so when I look at the huge and brilliantly coloured letters of signs by which the gentlemen of the city advertise their names, businesses, jobs, professions and successes. All those professors, doctors, surgeons, certified financial consultants, lawyers admitted to the bar, happy doner shops, life groceries and Black Sea food stores; all those banks, insurance agencies, detergent brands and newspaper names, cinemas and jeans stores, the posters advertising soft drinks; the stores where you can buy tickets for the football pools, lottery tickets and drinking water; the stores that announce themselves as licensed retailers of propane gas in signs festooned above their names in huge proud letters--- all these give me to know that the rest of the city is as confused and unhappy as I am, that I need to return to a dark corner, to my little room before the noises and signs pull me under” (Pamuk, Istanbul: Memories of a City, p. 287).

Bhabha is of the view that the symbol of authority in the native surroundings changes into signs. However, this does not seem to happen for Biswas. See Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders”, pp. 162-165.

Saleem also seems to take pains to trace the genealogy of noses in his family; “I wish to place on record my gratitude to this mighty organ ---- if not for it, who would ever have believed me to be truly my mother’s son, my grandfather’s grandson? ---- this colossal apparatus which was to be my birthright, too. Doctor Aziz’s nose ---- comparable only to the trunk of the elephant-headed god Ganesh ---- established incontrovertibly his right to be a patriarch” (Salman Rushdie, Midnight’s Children, p. 9).


“Rushdie’s shortest novel asks the question-----” (140).


“Alice looked on with great interest as the King took an enormous memorandum-book out of his pocket, and began writing. A sudden thought struck her, and she took hold of the end of the pencil, which came some way over his shoulder, and began writing for him.

The poor King looked puzzled and unhappy, and struggled with the pencil for some time without saying anything; but Alice was too strong for him, and at last he panted out, “My dear! I really must get a thinner pencil. I can’t manage this one a bit; it writes all manner of things that I don’t intend-----”

“What manner of things?” said the Queen, looking over the book (in which Alice had put ‘The White Knight is sliding down the poker. He balances very badly ’). ‘That’s not a memorandum of your feeling!’ (Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, p. 26).

“Dissenting intellectuals of the decolonizing era thus faced a stern imaginative challenge ----- making a post-colonial world meant learning how to live in and represent that world in a profoundly different way. But this was far from easy. Though they may have taken a more oppositional stance vis-à-vis empire than their predecessors, the new generation of nationalists continued to wrestle with the problems of colonial dependency. As before, national ideals and cultural values tended to be moulded in the image of the West. Of growing up as a black South African in the 1920s Peter Abrahams wrote that he ‘desired to know himself’ in terms of the standards set by Shakespeare and English poetry (Tell Freedom, 1954). Again a double act was required: to remain vigilantly critical of the legacy of colonialism, but also, because it could not be entirely eliminated, to discover how to accommodate that legacy even while reinterpreting it (Boehmer, “Independence”, pp. 186, 187).


Theroux, “Householders”, V. S. Naipaul: An Introduction to his Work, p. 64.

“Good, good,” Mr Burnett said. “But heavy. Heavy. Why not “I am able” instead of “I am in a position”? 

“I got that from the Daily Express.”

“All right. Let it pass. But promise me that for a whole week you won’t be in a position to do or say anything. It’s going to be hard. But try. What sort of baby?”

“Sort?”

“Black, white, green?

“White. Blueish when I saw it, really. I thought, though, that we didn’t mention race, except for Chinese.”

“Listen to the man. If I ran across a black baby on the rubbish dump at Banbury, do you think I would just say a baby?”

And the headlines the next day read:
“Just one other thing,” Mr Burnett said. “Lay off babies for a while” (MB, p. 342).

He (Naipaul) approaches literature as a means of connection with a British cultural heritage experienced but never fully understood as a colonial schoolboy. From the time that he arrived in Britain all his effort was to distance himself from the West Indies. His work however is rarely set in Britain. Most of his novels and travel writings are devoted to minute dissections of the cultural paralysis (recalling Joyce) and the hypocrisies (recalling Conrad) of once-colonized nations. His willed alienation, though often singularly hostile, bears the symptoms of a first-generation colonial seeking distance from origins and the freedom of self-expression. Indeed, he has himself acknowledged that his identification with English culture is a product of growing up on the colonized periphery” (Boehmer, “Metropolitans and Mimics”, p. 177).

Bhabha relates: “setting out from Bombay in the 1970s to study English at Oxford was, in many ways, the culmination of an Indian middle class trajectory where formal education and ‘high’ culture concluded in emulating the canons of elite ‘English’ taste (or what we know of it) and conforming to its customs and comforts” (Bhabha, “Preface” p. x).

Derrida states: “It is the mono-language of the other. The of signifies not so much property as provenance: language is for the other, coming from the other, the coming of the other” (Derrida, Monolingualism of the Other, p. 2).

Walsh recalls: “Back in 1880s, a Bombay student made his teachers worried as “his inaccurate accent was a sign that his education had been incomplete” (Judith E. Walsh, “Schoolboys”, Growing Up In British India: Indian Autobiographers on Childhood and Education under the Raj, p. 35).


“He also corrected his pronunciation: Jhelee, not Giggly. Yorkersh. Edinburrah. Jane Aae, a word let loose and lost like the wind on the Bronte heath, never to be found and ended; not Jane Aiyer like a South Indian. Together they read A Brief History of Western Art, A Brief History of Philosophy, A Brief History of France, etc., a whole series. An essay on how a sonnet was constructed, the variations on the form. A book on china glass: Waterford, Salvaiaiti, Spode, Meissen, and Limoges. Crumpets they investigated and scones, jams, and preserves” (IL, p. 119).


“The absurd extravagance of Macaulay’s ‘Minute’ (1835) – deeply influenced by Charles Grant’s ‘Observations’ ---makes a mockery of Oriental learning until faced with the challenge
of conceiving of a ‘reformed’ colonial subject. Then, the great tradition of European humanism seems capable only of ironizing itself. At the intersection of European learning and colonial power, Macaulay can conceive of nothing other than ‘a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern— a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect —— in other words a mimic man raised ‘through our English School’ as a missionary educationist wrote in 1819, ‘to form a corps of translators and be employed in different departments of Labour” (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”, pp. 124,125).

64Bhabha, “Interrogating Identity”, p. 84.


66McLeod says: “In the late twentieth century, it is argued, Western multinational companies are the new ‘colonialists’ ” (McLeod, Beginning Postcolonialism, p. 253).

67Klein expounds on the idea that the world is in control of a new kind of colonialism marked by Western brands.


68Pennycook, p. 117.

69“They had a self-righteousness common to many Indian women of the English-speaking upper-educated, went out to mimosa brunches, ate their Dadi’s roti with adept fingers, donned a sari or smacked on elastic shorts for aerobics, could say ‘Namaste, Kusum Auntie, aayiye, baethiye, khaiyie!’ as easily as ‘shit!’ They took to short hair quickly, were eager for Western–style romance, and happy for a traditional ceremony with lots of jewelry: green set (meaning emerald), red set (meaning ruby), white set (meaning diamond). They considered themselves uniquely positioned to lecture everyone on a variety of topics: accounting professors on accounting, Vermonters on the fall foliage, Indians on America, Americans on India, Indians on America, Americans on America. They were poised; they were impressive; in the United States, where luckily it was still assumed that Indian women were downtrodden, they were lauded as extraordinary——which had the unfortunate result of making them even more of what they already were” (IL, p. 50).

70Toward his staff Harish-Harry was avuncular, jocular, but he could suddenly become angry and disciplinary. ‘Shuddap, keep shut,’ he’d say, and he wasn’t above smacking their heads. But when an American patron walked through the door, his manner changed instantly and drastically into another thing and a panic seemed to overcome him. ‘Hallo, Hallo,’ he said to a pink satin child smearing food all over the chair legs, ‘Ya givin your mom too much trouble, ha ha? But one day ya make her feel proud, right? Gointa be a beeeg man, reech man, vhat you say? Ya vanna nice cheekan karry?’ He smiled and genuflected” (IL, p. 147).

71Dorothy S. Blair writes: “she (Assia Djebar) resents the fact that her early exposure to a French education made her a cultural, linguistic and, for a time a literal exile from the land of
her origins; at the same time she appreciates that French has been the gateway to freedom, denied to many of her countrywomen” (2).


72 Sara Suleri, Meatless Days (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1991), p. 112. All further references will be abbreviated to MD and will be cited in the text.


75 “There was a book lying near Alice on the table ------ she turned over the leaves, to find some part that she could read, “----for it’s all in some language I don’t know,” she said to herself  ----------------- she puzzled over this for some time, but at last a bright thought struck her; ‘why, it’s a Looking glass book, of course! And if I hold it up to a glass, the words will all go the right way again” (Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, pp. 27, 28).

76 Pennycook, p. 117.


79 Ibid.

POSTCOLONIAL REVERBERATIONS IN PSYCHIC AND PSYCHOSOMATIC CONDITIONS

Meredith, the only sane person in the novel, [Guerillas] concludes that it is “madness [that]
keeps the place going” (G, 157). There is no way out of the darkness that had descended upon
postcolonial peoples.¹

The imperialism ---- leaves in its wake here and there tinctures of decay which we must search
out and mercilessly expel from our land and our spirits.²

Living under colonial shadows, the subject faces emptiness and denigration and
is a stranger in his own world. Not being able to draw comfort from anywhere, he
ends up where “to be unhappy is to hate oneself and one’s city”.³ In Istanbul:
Memories of a City, the overall dull vacancy of a city that has lost its identity and
traditional touch is intrusive and difficult to ignore for the subject. In his
autobiography, Pamuk’s reflections are a good peep into a soul that is in discomfort
and unsettled in his own city. The lived experience of Biswas in Caribbean diaspora in
A House for Mr Biswas or of the judge in a small Indian town in The Inheritance of
Loss may not be much different. For them too, it may be difficult to tell “the defeat”
from “the soul” or “the melancholy” from “the corpse” in a world blighted by a
vague past and shrouded up in loss. It may be very distressing for the protagonist
when he/she stands disappointed in his/her hometown and experiences “the
feelings of self-hatred”.⁴ Lost for social, cultural and physical identification, the
protagonist does not know how to own and be owned by “an alien place” (Pamuk, p.
286). “The darkest, most murderous and authentic strain of melancholy” appears to
be malicious and he/she remains caught in a negative attitude towards the self and
his/her identity and thinks “there’s nothing [he/she] can do” about it (Pamuk, p.
Sara Suleri’s experience in Lahore, the city she lived in, and well-known for exhibiting Mughal heritage, art and architecture at its best, is not an exception. She remembers the city through a trail of “structural disappointment in the heart of pomp and circumstances” and has started to recognize it as intrinsic to the city’s character. Notwithstanding her immigration, she may not be able to relate back to the city which is supposed to be her home. No matter, in what part of the world the subject is living ----- either for its loss of tradition and culture as experienced by Pamuk and Suleri, its diasporic aura as in the case of Biswas, or for the “crumbling” colonial structures that surround the judge----- an internal process of demoralization and historical deprivation do not let him/her have peace of mind or self-esteem. The despair and desolation that he/she experiences as part of his/her milieu seem to be a reflection of his/her inner self.

The insidious and unpleasant effects of postcolonial living cannot be diagnosed as a clinical disorder; yet these may be discerned from the inner battles of the characters and their disturbed states of mind. Probably, Biswas feels his life is a mere waste in diaspora and is disgusted with his community. As an escape, he either “lock[s] himself in his room” (MB, p. 247) or like Pamuk, “always, at the end he return[s] to his shabby room” (MB, p. 48). Strangely, in the “back trace” where he used to live with his mother, he gets “increasingly impatient” (MB, p. 77). He finds the environment inimical to his dreams and “despair[s] after the realization that cherishing great ambitions and romance is not possible on this hot land” (MB, p. 77, 78). The Indian lotus logo on the pale green wall in Hanuman House are particularly depressing for him and he makes sure to kick at them every time he is angry (MB, p. 140, 141). Cudjoe argues that Biswas’s “inability to situate himself fully in his world leads to further alienation from that world and to the deepening psychological crisis this condition engenders”. He tries to manage his stress through his writing job for
the “Trinidad Sentinel” and [that] allows him to make some sense of his mental chaos and to deflect the anguish he feels in Port of Spain”. The only way he knows how “to console himself in later life” and deal with restlessness is by withdrawing to his bed with Epictetus, and Meditations of Marcus Aurelius which he regards as therapies for his ailing soul (MB, p. 20). However, neither these occupations nor foreign books can draw him away from the “dull” and “hot settlements” for long. Now he finds the books irrelevant as “the shop [awaits]; money problems [awaits]; the road outside [is] short, and [goes] through flat fields of dull green to small, hot settlements” (MB, p. 189).

It is not only Biswas who feels like this. The judge too, finds his world less appealing and of less value than the Western world. After living in England, his life back home has become miserable. Seeing the house crumbling around him, his mind too, seems to lose its composure and starts “giving way”. He seems “grumpy”, for “the heat remind[s] him of his nationality” (IL, p. 70) and that he belongs to a very small, insignificant part of the world. He especially hates the wet season. It angers him and makes “a mockery of him”, and of his western ideals. Finding “mold in his toothbrush, snakes slithering unafraid right over the patio, furniture gaining weight, and Cho Oyu also soaking up water”, he feels he is “not in charge”. With every storm, his house seems less “habitable” (IL, p. 110). He finds the local weather and his surroundings, as well as the natives very annoying. His life is a demonstration of privation and loss and he looks like a corpse, buried under colonial “residue of distress”.

The subject remains vulnerable to psychic issues as he cannot help his sense of inadequacy and inferiority. Fanon with a good knowledge of the human mind, finds a higher chance of psychosis in a post-independent subject whose self-
confidence does not help him when he wants to know “where am I to be classified? or, if you prefer, tucked away?” It is hard to ignore the trajectory of self-doubt and ambivalence which keep pestering the subject as he remains exposed in a world where “no exception [is] made for [his] refined manners, or [his] knowledge of literature, or [his] understanding of the quantum theory”. Fanon has observed some violent reactions in slaves when the news of their liberation was delivered to them. As a psychiatrist, he found it challenging to create self-confidence for them and develop their positive thinking. Although the subject has been physically liberated, he does not appear to release himself from mental colonization. Nandy too, asserts that “colonialism is an indigenous process released by external forces. Its sources lie deep in the minds of the rulers and the ruled. Perhaps that which begins in the minds of men must also end in the minds of men.” The colonized continue to judge themselves against western standards and remain intellectually and morally dependent. In postcolonial literatures, the colonized are often represented as “stunted, alienated half global citizens” or “massed, shadowy figures in the background” rather than free and productive individuals. Living as “shadows” they are the ones who do not find “protection against failures of intimacy and nurture, against meaningless silence and emptiness, and against the innermost separations and disjunctions the West [has] induced in [them].” Perhaps, they are “the shadow class” (IL, p. 102) or “shadow puppets” (IL, p.33) as they have fallen out of the mirror and lack definition as individuals. Chandra B. Joshi argues that Naipaul “has most concerned himself with ‘shadows of existence.’” The subject is simply unable to pull himself out of mental slavery and his self-recognition continues to be in the shade. A belittling self-image, seen against a cultural and historical vacuum, seems to be enough reason to cause the subject unease and anxiety. Finding it difficult to avoid depression and anxiety, sooner or later, he may start to suffer from related
physical and psychological complications. The psychotic chaos cannot be warded off, which invariably starts manifesting itself in stomach pains, headaches, depression and insomnia. This vital link between mind and body has been acknowledged by Psychosomatic specialists and it has been well-established that “somatic diseases and psychological disorders are closely related. On the one hand, patients suffering from mental illness report more physical complaints than ‘average’ patients when visiting a doctor, and many psychiatric out-patients and hospitalized psychiatric patients are also physically ill.”

In this chapter, I have considered how the pressures of a complex and strenuous colonial experience may cause mental problems that are further complicated by psychosomatic conditions. My view is that a sense of loss, displacement and alienation may deprive the subject of his peace of mind and positive thinking and make him prone to anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, phobias, psychosis, neurosis and OCD. Unfortunately, these psychic problems easily develop into psychosomatic illnesses. In the cases of Biswas and the judge in A House for Mr Biswas and The Inheritance of Loss respectively, an acute sense of inferiority seems to have aggravated their psychic and psychosomatic conditions. Then, there are poor immigrant workers like Biju in The Inheritance of Loss who also suffer from anxiety. Over the past few decades, mass migrations towards western countries in pursuit of promising careers and financial security, have posed new challenges and given place to other conflicts and issues. Exile, displacement and homelessness appear to have devastating effects on the subject’s general well-being. Biju is hunted down, tormented by his illegitimate status and has to face exploitation and racial hatred in America. For him, the stay is nothing less than trauma. However, he is able to save his health and sanity by taking his journey back to poverty and home; a circle that still offers him peace to be himself.
In a broader postcolonial scenario, if the natives are ill at ease, depressed and disoriented in their homes, the (im)migrants are even more disconcerted and traumatized after the disavowal with the self and renouncement of all that is important. In *Meatless Days*, after Suleri’s immigration, it may have been so shocking seeing home painfully dwindling into unreality, as she expostulates that trying to find home is, “like pretending that history or home is real and not located precisely where you’re sitting” (MD, p. 20). Far away from home, the two accidental deaths of Mamma and Ifat turn out to be quite traumatic: “Ifat died precisely a day after the second anniversary of [her] mother’s death” (MD, p. 125). It is possibly hard for her to acknowledge and accept that she chose to be absent from their company when it still could have been enjoyed and cherished. Her exile attended by self-reproach seems to become monstrous. She dwells heavily on the loss and seems to have succumbed to grief and remorse. Suleri’s nightmare is a manifestation of Cary Caruth’s “returning events” and of a traumatized mind. Struggling with a “meatless”, displaced self, she seems to work towards exorcising her ghosts by writing them out.

A severe sense of inferiority is cultivated by Biswas and may be anticipated in the details of his assumed luckless birth and problematic childhood. His inferiority seems malignant (MB, p. 162) because for him, everything that belongs to his community and race is worthless. He may feel his native background belittles him and “as soon as he [steps] out of the yard [of Ajodha’s and Tara’s place]” he returns to nobody, in the backdrop of the rumshop and the hut in the “back trace” (MB, p. 197). When his sister treats him deferentially, the poor man cannot accept it. In her house, he is “stripped off his ragged trousers and shirt, and in a clean dhoti, he
[becomes] a different person”. He thinks that the only person who can respect him “should be his own sister” (MB, p. 47). It is his own self-deprecatory attitude that seems to harm him. Usually, he goes over “to the cheap mirror hanging at the side of the window. He [has] never been able to see properly in it. It [is] an idiotic place to put a mirror, and he [is] mad enough to pull it down. He [doesn’t]. He [steps] to one side and [looks] over his shoulder at his reflection.” What surprises him is to see that his face looks “so absurd” (MB, p. 141). He likes neither “the cheap mirror” nor the “idiotic place”, as they do not reflect his best profile but only re-confirm his “absurdity”. He looks “over his shoulder” and seems to lack the courage to face the self. Probably, his self has lost touch with the self and the mirror may only confirm self-alienation. Fraught with perpetual struggle with the self, Biswas’s health seems to deteriorate.

The question of identity is not easy to deal with and seems to affect Biswas in the stomach. Medical research states that “psychological stress, or a depressed or anxious personality, have been implicated as the cause of gastric ulcers.”21 He seems to carry the acute loss in his gut and his stomach periodically hurts. It started to hurt for the first time when he was being trained as a pundit (MB, p. 54). This career choice was averse to his westernized aspirations. A case can be made for his stomach representing his repressed voice which seems to revolt on his behalf. The stomach cramps possibly stagger Biswas whenever he feels helpless, angry, boxed-in and impatient with “the two ropes around his neck”. The undue pressure of colonial choices is wonderfully illustrated by Rushdie in his autobiographical story, “The Courtier”:

But I, too, have ropes around my neck, I have them to this day, pulling me this way and that, East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, choose, choose (---) I refuse to choose.22
The tension created out of vacillating between two identities seems to develop into anxiety syndrome. Biswas’s dilemma may be compared with Derek Walcott’s experience of finding “one tradition inside him ‘going one way, and another going another [way]’”. Walcott’s memorable phrase, “divided to the vein” seems to describe Biswas’s condition best.\(^\text{23}\) The crisis probably, keeps “twist[ing] in [Biswas] like a knife”,\(^\text{24}\) making him a regular consumer of “Macleans Brand Stomach powder”. Whenever he becomes stressed, he mixed “doses of Macleans’ Brand Stomach Powder” (MB, p. 232). His upset stomach seems to be more than a symptom of his agitation and disturbed state of mind, but also speaks for him. Most of the time, he suffers from constipation and “his stomach swell[s] until it [is] taut with pain” (MB, p. 54). Again, it seems it is his overstuffed foreign identity that makes him feel bloated rather than some physical cause, though he blames Hanuman House’s starchy food of rice and potatoes for his bowels’ irregularity (MB, p.135). It is very obvious that this problem keeps recurring even when he is no longer living at Hanuman House. He may have enjoyed and benefited from “prunes, lentils, and coconut chutney” which are regularly served in Hanuman House to relieve his constipation, but for him the indigenous food is worthless. “Indigestion” is part of his life (MB, p. 366) and “from time to time he [inclines] his head, [arches] his back and [gives] a series of small belches. This [gives] him some relief” (MB, p. 201). During the incident when Owad leaves for the UK, Biswas’s severe reactions may point to his own frustrated colonial aspirations and how much he is deeply hurt. It is likely that his stomach has started to hurt more as he sees someone else realizing his dreams. He even cries at Owad’s farewell but his tears are, most probably, shed for his own colonial failures rather than for his brother-in-law for whom he never showed any warmth (MB, p. 382). Biswas’s stomach problem seems to be part of his life and the readers are not intimidated when it is mentioned that there is “a hole in
his stomach” which makes him “want to climb mountains, to exhaust himself, to walk and walk and never return to the house” (MB, p. 382). This “hole in the stomach” is perhaps a postcolonial wound. Aziz also feels such a hole in Midnight’s Children and rants, “can’t you see there’s a hole in the middle of me the size of a melon?” But this hole is, probably, in the heart of the postcolonial lived experience as even the grandfather in the novel suffers from “permanent alteration: a hole.”

Though Biswas’s stomach problem seems to have worsened into a peptic ulcer as such patients “show an insatiable craving for real superiority and a determined defiance of their environment, including their illness ----- the emotional patterns which [are] fundamental in the production of ulcer [are] the intensive drive and the tension it [creates], the inborn craving for superiority together with the worries generated by small failures, and particularly, the anxiety which [results] from anticipated failure or future insecurity.” More so, he feels nausea at the mere thought of an Indian birth. Gordon Rohlehr has noticed that “he develops nausea at the idea of birth” and “this nausea never quite abandons him.” Strangely, his wife’s pregnancy for him is “grotesque” and “he hated the way she sat down” and carried herself around in that period (MB, p. 285, 286). His nausea may suggest how much he is repulsed by the petty prospects and insignificance of colonial births. Seeing a new baby coming may give him indigestion as he may not be able to anticipate a life different from his own.

Biswa’s psychosomatic state lies undiagnosed and he has to suffer further complications. He tries to cure his stomach problem with English medicine (MB, p. 189, 232) though it is one of the “so-called psychosomatic disorders” and has a lot to do with his state of mind. He suffers from fatigue and headache and it is more probable that these conditions are also caused by anxiety (MB, p. 285, 307, 392). It is quite concerning that he is “always tired and always restless” (MB, p. 237). The
impact of agitation and inner turmoil on his health has been observed by many. Lillian Feder maintains that, “[Biswa’s] need to compromise results in headaches and depressions”. The way Biswas bites his nails is also an obvious sign of anxiety (MB, p. 315). His inability to express his feelings may also be due to the same reason. Pathetically, the pain of not being able to communicate and the boredom and tedium of “AMAZING SCENES WERE WITNESSED YESTERDAY WHEN” are felt in the stomach gut, “[leaving] him with the feeling that he [has] drunk gallons of stale, lukewarm water” (MB, p. 220). The anxiety continues to be an obstacle to his potential and impairs his performance. Possibly, this is why he cannot prosper as a writer or a reporter.

For Biswas, the unhappiness and loss are translated into depression. Like any depressive, he cannot pull himself out of the quagmire of “lethargy, sullen mood and withdrawal” and remains depressed (MB, p. 134). What is most striking is that in his mother’s company, he “ha[s] to struggle against anger and depression” (MB, p. 47) and just “at the sight of Shama, his depression turn[s] to anger” (MB, p. 135). Perhaps, it is his depression that weighs down heavily upon him making it difficult for him to appreciate and value his close relations. He “feels inadequate and insecure in the world” and is not different from other “depressed people [who] find the world drab and meaningless because they are unable to infuse their existence with meaning by living according to their values and exercising choices that lead to fulfillment. Human beings’ search for meaning gives colour and substance to their lives. Guilt may arise in the recognition that one has failed to live up to his or her potential and make meaningful choices.” Time and again, in the text, there is reference to his depression or what is called “Samuel Smiles Depression” (MB, p. 135, 165, 162) which again seems to be related to his stomach disorder. Probably, Biswas’s envy for Ajodha’s comforts is due to his own sense of discomfort which
does not let him enjoy anything. For him it is an ultimate luxury to sit like Ajodha “relaxed in his rocking-chair, his eyes closed, listening perhaps to That Body of Yours” but this is what he never tries himself.

Biswa’s secret apprehensions and anxiety seem to have taken the form of neurosis\(^{36}\) as “the future he fear[s] [is] upon him. He [is] falling into the void” (MB, p. 227, 228). He feels a void is all around him which seems related to his homelessness (MB, p. 135). His phobias are typical of neurotics:

> And always the thought, the fear about the future. The future was

> (...) a blankness and void like those in dreams, into which, past tomorrow and next week and next year, he was falling (MB, p. 197).

It seems to be a bottomless pit that funnels him in. Perhaps it is a vacuum of identity and “a void, a psychological abyss between cultures”\(^{37}\) into which Biswa feels like falling. The sense of loss seems to become physical as he feels “nothing would arrest his descent into the void” (MB, p. 247). His imagined fall may be into a chasm between two worlds which makes him “feel that [he straddles] two cultures; at other times, that [he falls] between two stools.”\(^{38}\) This seems to be the realization of a huge genealogical disruption and Cudjoe is of the opinion that this is the base line of insecurity as “the uncertainty [that Biswas] feels in the Wilderness is exemplified by a feeling of void.”\(^{39}\) Then, personal insecurities like, “Anand would leave him and he would be left alone” (MB, p. 295) and “fear led to fear” (MB, p. 388) keep him quite disturbed. However, it seems to be colonial neurosis as it is not his future but a collective past that keeps him dislocated and unsettled like other migrated Indians.\(^{40}\)

The subject may also suffer from depersonalization in neurosis and lose conviction with his identity. This state may affect his “general functioning, including
social and work activities and relationships”. He has quarrels ready to hand and sometimes it seems as if he enjoys being a trouble-maker in the family. It is surprising that “he [stands] before the shop, fondling his belly under his shirt and working out the quarrel he [will] have with Shama afterwards” (MB, p. 156). Quite interestingly, he blames Shama and his in-laws for everything, and at times he himself is puzzled by his own acts, all of which reflect problematic and depersonalized behaviour. Interestingly, for Ashis Nandy, depersonalization is the very condition of post-colonial survival. He reflects that “the conversion and the humiliation would be happening to a self which is already seen and felt as somebody else or as somebody else’s. This is a self from whom one is already somewhat abstracted and alienated (---) It is an attempt to survive by inducing in oneself a psychosomatic state which would render one’s immediate context partly dreamlike or unreal.” Biswas has the same kind of attitude. He seems to mention his wife’s family as “the children”, “the widows” and “the readers and learners” and never by their individual names as if he does not know them. But he is probably detached from his own self, as one evening “biting his nails”, “[he breaks] off a piece of a tooth”. He places that piece on his palm and finds it “yellow”, “quite dead” and “quite unimportant” (MB, p. 282). This bizarre act is a clear indication of his detachment from himself and how “unimportant” and unreal his own self appears to him. The worst thing is that this kind of state may further develop into schizophrenia. He also has fits and panic attacks and becomes aggressive, but then gives in to “screaming and crying”. There are phases when, “he goes mad briefly and in his period of madness sits in the dark and writes on his head with his finger”. Like a schizophrenic, he feels intimidated by the people around him, keeps his guard and strangely, remains “cautious about revealing information which might later be used against him” (MB, p. 105). At times, he cannot even tolerate his own
children. Once he even considers killing them and has visions of Anand and Savi being “poisoned” and “strangled” and “burned”. (MB, p. 284, 285). Occasionally, he loses control, beats his wife and sends his family away (MB, p. 284---291). When his schizophrenia sets in, he is to be seen openly fighting with himself as a rival while his daughter feels scared to see his perverted behaviour. Sometimes, especially during walks under the trees, “he suddenly [seems] to forget her, and she [hears] him muttering to himself, holding bitter, repetitive arguments with unseen persons. He [is] “trapped” in a “hole”. She hears him say “trap” over and over. His mouth twists in anger. She [hears] him curse and threaten; “that’s what you and your family do to me. Trap me in this hole.” When they [get] back to the barracks he [asks] her to mix him doses of Macleans’ Brand Stomach Powder (MB, p. 232). His upset stomach seems to be not just a symptom, but a revelation of his agitation and disturbed mind. Considering his wife and her family as his enemies without any good reason also reflects a sick mind. His attitude remains offensive and challenging as he does his best to break his wife’s heart and “create trouble in the family” (MB, p. 99). He is always ready to start fighting or arguing with any of Shama’s family members.

It is not a house but a sanctuary that Biswas needs as he remains anxious and restless wherever he goes. In Hanuman House he either becomes hysterical or rather affects hysteria as if to save himself from its oppression. His attitude is that of “fight-or-flight” which may release in him “stress-induced analgesia” making him “less sensitive to pain”. Often, he is seen performing acts of self-harm “and there [are] whole weeks when he [devotes] himself to some absurdity. He [grows] his nails to an extreme length and [holds] them up to startle customers. He [picks] and [squeezes] at his face until his cheeks and forehead [are] inflamed and the rims of his lips [are] like welts. When his skin [becomes] pitted with little holes, he [studies] these with interest and [finds] the perfection of their shape pleasing. And once he dabbed
healing ointments of various colors on his face and went and stood in the shop doorway, greeting people he knew” (MB, p. 190). This attitude is far from normal and he seems to invite serious concern over his mental health.

He tends to take pleasure from scratching and bruising his face, as if it provides him with identity instead of anonymity. Perhaps, he is at war with himself and wants to scrape off the historical labels of slavery. The second-hand “mix-n-match” diasporic identity is unacceptable to him and he tries to substitute it with some other “colors on his face”. Nonetheless, he seems hopelessly aware of a changeable and unstable identity. At the same time, he appears desperate to have some security and place himself within the multiplicity of Caribbean culture. Gordon Rohlehr reflects that “beneath this self-laceration and play-acting, this assumption of the grotesque mask lies a fear of the future, of objects, of people: of time, place and mankind.”

Biswa appears fed up, not only of the crowded, noisy and ritualized life of Hanuman House but of himself as well. With a past that is threatening his existence, he is a loner and somehow seems reminiscent of Beckett’s characters, Vladimir or Estragon. He, in a way, questions himself more than anybody else and appears to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He also attempts suicide (MB, p. 287, 288).

Relying on English supplements, he has started to pay regular visits to a physician and also to a thaumaturge. Though he spends all his money on “Ovaltine, Ferrol, Sanatogen; the doctor’s fees ---- the thaumaturge’s” and Macleans’ Brand Stomach Powder, none of these do him any good (MB, p. 317). Sometimes, he seems not only addicted to supplements but to the very feeling of anxiety and, “the familiar constricted turmoil in his mind” (MB, p. 290). Somehow, the anguish may be a familiar platform for him against loss and emptiness. He “[welcomes] the stomach
pains. They [have] not occurred for months and it [seems] to him that they [mark] the return of the wholeness of his mind, the restoration of the world; they [indicate] how far he [has] lifted himself from the abyss of the past months, and [remind] him of the anguish against which everything now [has] to be measured” (MB, p. 333). Probably, the stomach pain is a constant in his life against which he evaluates his failures and successes. It is in a strange way, a reminder of his struggle for something superior and escape from the Indo-Caribbean box which he, therefore, welcomes.

The constraints and frugality of an impoverished world seen against the opulence and prosperity of the West has badly affected his peace of mind. Probably, this is where his claustrophobia comes from and seems unavoidable as he considers the diasporic “façade” around himself. For him the Tulsi store “is disappointing. The façade that [promises] such amplitude of space [conceals] a building which [is] trapezoid in plan and not deep. There [are] no windows and light [comes] only from the two narrow doors at the front and the single door at the back, which [opens] on to a covered courtyard. The walks of uneven thickness, [curve] here and [jolt] there, and the shop [abounds] in awkward, empty, cob-webbed corners” (MB, p. 82). His suffocation in a “trapezoid” and “shallow” place with no windows and “empty, cob-webbed corners” may be read as his reaction to a world in which he does not find enough space for himself. In Hanuman House, he finds himself threatened and trapped in “the world [that is] too small” for him while “the Tulsi family [is] too large” (MB, p. 92). Locked up in a “small world”, Biswas feels helpless and claustrophobic. Every time he is in Hanuman House, “he want[s] to leave” (MB, p. 237). His claustrophobic feelings never leave him and from “the large, musty hall with the sooty kitchen at one end (---) the dark, cobwebbed loft on the other”, he wants an escape (MB, p. 92). The recurring motifs of “trap” and “corrugated iron” in the text may symbolize his constricted breathing space. His
unusual reactions are noted by most critics. Lillian Feder maintains “his life has become a “trap” among “faceless, insignificant” hybridized people. His created characters speak for his mental distress and whether “Hindu or Western, his hero (character) like Mr Biswas, feels trapped by his obligations to his wife and children.” Cudjoe points out that “with the birth of his fourth child, Mr Biswas begins to feel trapped by a future that is closing in on him. The romance, sense of invention, and reflective wisdom of philosophical discourses cannot dissipate his gloom.” Biswas with his inhibitions and phobias “[lives] to an extreme degree the anxieties of the uprooted man. His elaborate poses, daydreams, assertion of self and evasion of responsibility, are a result of the cultural social and psychological nowhereness ------ he is appropriately an orphan”. Biswas’s aspirations in the Western world do not change anything for him other than keeping him anxious and restless. Lillian Feder seems to sympathize with him and maintains that he “[is in] contest with the fate assigned to him by the lore of his people and the meagre opportunities open to a poor, ill-educated Trinidadian Indian.” His struggle is not only to elevate his status in Hanuman House but with the very identity of a “Trinidadian Indian” and all this cause him undue stress.

Some psychotherapy might have helped Biswas in coping with his psychic problems and thus curing his psychosomatic conditions as well. What he tries, aggravates his suffering rather than giving him any relief. His pursuits remain self-defeating as he becomes discouraged while reading Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and the big volumes of Hawkins’ Electrical Guide (MB, p. 364). Again, the undue stress is from thinking “what Smiles would have thought of him” (MB, p. 162). Feder observes that since his youth, identifying himself with “Smiles’s portraits of humble, self-taught young men struggling to succeed, [makes him realize] that these heroes, unlike him, lived in countries where ambitions [can] be pursued and [have] a
meaning.” Later in life, “for consolation he turns to the works of the Stoic philosophers Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, who teach acceptance and endurance, and to Dickens in whose ridicule of his ‘grotesques’ he is able to displace his own fear and anger”. Yet the relief is temporary, as “nothing could distract him from the deeper pain” (MB, p. 298). His prognosis seems hopeless.

Likewise, in The Inheritance of Loss the judge also appears to be seriously ill, both mentally and physically. His “warped” (IL, p. 40) outlook on life can be described in three words; disbelief, anger and despair. A bitter colonial seed that has been planted in the judge’s mind seems to have disabled any positive attitude towards others and to himself. In his bearing, the judge remains irritated and sulky (IL, p. 172). He only “[thinks] of his hate” (IL, p. 165) and cannot handle his indignant self and injured ego. The metaphor of scorpions reproducing babies in his kitchen may symbolize his poisoned mind and displaced rage (IL, p. 1). His arrival back home can be compared with the grandfather’s return in Midnight’s Children who comes back with an “altered vision” after spending “five years, five springs, away from home. Now, returning, he [sees] through travelled eyes. Instead of the beauty of the tiny valley circled by giant teeth, he [notices] the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon; and [feels] sad, to be at home and [feels] so utterly enclosed. He also [feels] --- inexplicably --- as though the old place [resents] his educated, stethoscoped return.” The judge too, is no longer his old self and has become a stranger to his own presence. For his relatives, his “new ideas of privacy” on his return are incomprehensible and unacceptable (IL, p. 167). His anti-social attitude is an abnormality of which he himself remains unaware. Later on, his “lack of movement” and “fixed gaze”, exhibit him as a man who is still in shock (IL, p. 33). Pathetically, the repressed “unpleasant thoughts” which cause him unease also cause physical discomfort. Whenever he thinks of the past, “he [begins],

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mysteriously, to itch. Every bit of him [fills] with a burning sensation. It [roils] within until he [can] barely stand it” (IL, p. 56). He gets restless in his own skin and hides his sense of inferiority like a filthy secret by keeping an “immaculate silence” (IL, p.208). His bitterness cannot be washed out and seems to remind us of Lady Macbeth who moves around crying, “all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand” (Macbeth, Act 5: Scene 1). He feels pursued by a trailing “stink of fear and loneliness” (IL, p. 111) and there is no solace for him.

Seeing himself as inferior, the judge has become a sick person in every sense of the word. His experience of England has turned him, more or less, into a psychotic (IL, p. 113). During the traumatizing stay, “he felt barely human at all, leaped when touched on the arm as if from an unbearable intimacy, dreaded and agonized over even a ‘How-do-you-do-lovely-day’ with the fat woman dressed in friendly pinks who ran the corner store” (IL, p. 40). If someone was kind to him, he would “[dissolve] into tears of self-pity at the casual affection” (IL, p. 40). His behaviour remains offensive and aggressive towards his wife, his age-long servant and almost everyone else. There are meticulous details in the text about his perverted behaviour and hypocritical needs. His sense of inferiority may have been devastating to his good sense as he, like other migrants, was “told to stay within bounds, to go back where [he] belonged”. Even small children in Cambridge were, “jeering”, “throwing stones”, and “making monkey faces” at him in the street (IL, p. 209). As a result, he has lost “all his courage” (IL, p. 39). Back home, he takes refuge in the home of a Scot as he needs to recover his sensibility and self-esteem by finding a “superior” place in which to live (IL, p. 38). The ICS job is useful to camouflage his acute sense of inferiority and “the tight calendar calm[s] him, as [does] the constant exertion of authority” (IL, p. 61). Bose, his old friend, knows everything about his Cambridge life and therefore, the judge feels claustrophobic and restless (IL, p. 208) in his company.
Probably, he cannot afford to see the boundaries that he has “worked so hard” to construct between the two selves, dissolving into a “nightmare” (IL, p. 113). In situations where some good response is expected of him as a human, he on remembering “his personality,” would get back into his stiff posture behind “a mask -- [and] to his game of chess” (IL, p. 264). Sticking to his fake pride, he does not want it to be tumbled into a “melodrama” at the very end while any confession “would cancel any hope of dignity” (IL, p. 208). He remains aggressively on guard to save a hoax knowing that there is something unoriginal about the whole enterprise. However, the way he remains in the grip of “the burning memory of his beginnings” (IL, p. 61) with “periods of stupor [that] shift abruptly to periods of extreme agitation” may demonstrate that he is a schizophrenic.60 It appears to be colonial schizophrenia as he desperately tries to hide away from a self that shames him. In these two persons, the colonial one detests the original self:

Thus Jemubhai’s mind had begun to warp; he grew stranger to himself (---) found his own skin odd-coloured, his own accent peculiar. He forgot how to laugh, could barely manage to lift his lips in a smile (---) began to wash obsessively, concerned he would be accused of smelling (---) To the end of his life, he would never be seen without socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight might reveal him, in his hideousness (IL, p. 40).

The repulsion for the “hideous” self, perhaps, has not only turned him into a schizophrenic but also into a depressive. He suffers from insomnia which happens to be a common complaint of depressives61 and schizophrenics62. The judge has life-long dependency on “Calmpose” (IL, p. 35, 117) and now even the tranquilizers don’t work for him. His sleep is disturbed and he is tortured by nightmares (IL, p. 40). In
the nightmare he sees himself as “healthy”, ever since “Uncle Potty” has [turned him upside down], and emptied “the bluebottles in his bottom” by spraying “Flit” (IL, p. 41). This particular nightmare shows how desperate the judge is to return to normality. “Nightmares are releases” according to Sylvia Browne.63 In dream transference, the dream may mean that he can be treated if he is “turned upside down” and emptied out of the colonialism with which he is stuffed. His chronic constipation may also be a reason for his sleep disorders and that can be traced back to his foreign residency when he has had to work really hard to win the favours of the English. This paragraph64 is a good example of how stress makes his body suffer enormously.

He seems to have been through a difficult time trying to maintain English standards of excellence. Since boarding the English ship, he “has started to find his “own organ odd”. It felt “insistent” and “cowardly”; “pleading” but “pompous” (IL, p. 38). He is overcome by a sense of impotency. Probably, this is why he appears to take pleasure in insulting and torturing his wife. Like a sadist, he can’t stop himself from hurting her during sexual intercourse and the more he hates “the gutter act”, the more he continues. The “tedium” of his “persistence” at something so distasteful makes him more cruel and dangerous (IL, p. 170). Like a psychotic, he tries to satisfy his injured ego and avenge his defamed brown Indian status through domestic violence. During the incident when his wife is dragged into a political protestation without his permission by Mrs Mohan (IL, p. 302, 303), he beats her in a brutal manner. His wife’s bruised body mocks his pretensions of civilization and modernity and unveils his vulnerability to committing violence. After the incident, “blotchy bruises” on his wife’s body are in sharp contrast to the “civilization” of having breakfast with “eggs in eggcups, tea cozy on the pot, newspaper”. The “ten blue and black fingerprints” on his wife’s arm and “a thunder-dark cloud” looming up “where
he has pushed her into the wall” do not fade for weeks (IL, p. 305). His loss of control has become very dangerous. Even murderous tendencies can be seen in him, as his anger, once unleashed is like “a genie from a bottle” which he cannot curtail. The “quieter she [is], the louder he [shouts] (...) his hatred [is] its own creature (...) and in her he [seeks] only its justification”. There are moments when he “[imagines] himself killing her” (IL, p. 305). Perhaps, in order to make up for the past humiliations, he is always ready to torment others (IL, p. 11).

The judge is an extreme example of a colonial victim who is in need of psychotherapy and counselling. His behaviour is very harsh towards his cook and he beats him badly because of the missing dog. He seems to have a long history of temper-tantrums as “the surge of anger [is] familiar” to him (IL, p. 320). His anxiety is intimidating and everyone knows he cannot bear to lose his dissimulation. When he is insulted by the robbers, Sai and the cook have to look away because they know the judge is a proud man and may “kill the witness” who saw him insulted (IL, p. 8). Like a criminal psychotic, he remains particular about appearances and concerned about loss of control. He has become “meticulous” about “his work, his bath, his hair-combing” only to hide how susceptible he is to “skid from control and jeopardize his career to commit a final violent act” (IL, p. 304-305). It is noticeable how the judge has developed Obsessive Compulsive Disorder Syndrome. His hatred of his origins seems to be tantamount to self-rejection and costs him his health and happiness. After sexual intercourse with his “Indian” wife, he washes constantly with disinfectant (IL, p. 70). Once after shaking hands with his friend Bose, he wipes his hands on his trousers (IL, p. 208). The servants have to provide water for him after “a twenty-minute boil” and “fruit soaked for the prescribed number of minutes in solutions of potassium permanganate”. They also have to “wipe everything with
Dettol to kill germs” (IL, p. 172-173). The judge is still not happy nor at ease for a single moment.

Biswas and the judge can neither understand their own behaviour nor the way their bodies suffer from the stereotypical colonial problems. According to Joan Jacobs Brumberg, a patient’s responses to illness are shaped by identity. For him, “the symptoms of disease never exist in a cultural vacuum. Even in a strictly biomedical illness, patient’s responses to physical discomfort and pain are structured in part by who the patient is, ------- and the ideas and values at work in that society.”66 Due to lack of self-identification and self-knowledge, Biswas and the judge are themselves the causes of their own illnesses. They mistreat their bodies and misinterpret their own identities. The judge takes “Calmose” to calm himself, thinking he is disturbed by his granddaughter’s arrival (IL, p. 35). It is in fact the bitter memories triggered by her presence that cause him unease. He abused his wife but now when she is dead, he is surprised that the picture of her which comes to his mind is “surprisingly gentle” (IL, p. 89). In the same thoughtless manner, Biswas keeps using Beechams Macleans Brand Stomach Powder and does not understand that its overuse has made him immune; without treating the root cause of his ill health. These men neglect the needs of the body and desires of the self. Self-denial is an open invitation to poor health:

The most important thing you can do for your health is to listen to your body. If you feel bloated after you eat asparagus, then don’t keep eating it. If radishes upset your digestion, avoid them --- your body is telling you that this food isn’t right for you (---) when your body is ill, your brain suffers, too. When you don’t feel well, you can’t think, and you can’t perform at your highest level.67
The protagonists are totally ignorant of the demands of their bodies and soul and seem to be trapped in a vicious circle of self-negation.

Negative attitudes can ruin families and communities. The judge’s unhealthy mental state goes viral. The family members cannot remain healthy while they live with a sick person. The judge’s wife is pushed into a state of utter depression and she also develops some skin disease as a silent reaction. It has been acknowledged by medical science that, “in consequence, eruptions of well-recognized and common type e.g. seborrhoeas, psoriasis, etc., might sometimes appear as the psychosomatic stress results of anxiety in unstable individuals.” Moreover, the judge’s wife would not have to leave home or get killed if her husband was not suffering mentally and physically.

The condition of poor natives is even worse due to all the modern day temptations into which they are lured. Without the means to maintain good health, their postcolonial priorities may not help. The cook might have been better off if he could live with his son and not have had to send him abroad. Sadly, he looks for security and comfort in the modern world and asks his son not to return home but to keep earning money in the West. Neither he nor his son could afford to live in the natural atmosphere of their village and enjoy its uncontaminated food and fresh air. He is pitifully unaware of how much he longs for his son and has put his son’s health and peace of mind at stake for happiness that is contingent on the white man’s will. He does not understand that his dreams have cost him his own contentment and relaxation. The factual distance between him and his son cannot be evaded. The reality strikes back like “a habit of thought” (IL, p. 278). As a lonely, old, poor and hunchbacked man with weak legs who works hard for a cruel master, it is very unlikely that he will be able to keep illness at bay. Some of his problems also seem to
be psychosomatic ones and appear to be caused by extra stress. Like his master, he too, complains of severe constipation and even of cramps in his limbs (II, p. 72). It appears constipation in the once-colonized communities is not an uncommon complaint. Interestingly, the cook regularly visits the doctor for Western prescriptions to revive “good sense” and “feel virtuous” (II, p. 72).

Unfortunately, the protagonists seem to suffer from anxiety, frustration, claustrophobia and despair, not to mention physical infirmities. They fail to alleviate gloom or fight back phobias. They have nothing to empower them; comfort them; inspire them; sustain them; bring them joy and diminish their fear. Perhaps, all that these suffering men need to do is to face themselves and their insecurities as “weeds keep multiplying in [their] garden, which is [their] mind ruled by fear.” They need to “rip them out” and claim their independence. However, that would be possible only if they are able to identify themselves in the first place. Stripping life down to essentials, and valuing the right things in life are what is required. Sadly, the very basics of life are not clear but confusing and seem to damage their well-being. Their predicament is nonetheless, painful and tragic.

II

Under pressure to make a living in a Western country, the postcolonial subject faces a new kind of colonization. He is more vulnerable and insecure than ever in the uprooted existence of present times. Going through numerous traumatic experiences of visa violations, immigration irregularities, assimilation and settlement issues, he feels victimized. Ethnic hate, racism and marginalization add to the burden of his poverty and an illegitimate status while making him suffer from, what Kiran Desai describes as “the enormous anxiety of being a foreigner”. Biju feels sick and “[emptied] out”. His “expanded” self-pity weighs him down. Due to the raised
stress level, he has started “to grind his teeth through his nightmares [and wakes] one morning with a tooth that [has] cracked across.” He does it so often that his co-workers have started complaining that at night he “[sounds] like a cement mixer” which prevents them from sleeping (IL, p. 190). It is too difficult for him to pull himself together and keep his nerve when he is abused all the time by employers and everyone else. The fellow workers throw beer bottles at him at night shouting and swearing, “shut the fuck up, motherfucker” (IL, p. 190). He appears to face victimization and gets “so restless sometimes [that] he [can] barely stand to stay in his skin” (IL, p. 81). What ails him the most is “the green card, green card” which does not let him think of anything else and also makes him “throw up sometimes” into the toilet “like a drunk.” In addition, the letters from his father and his high expectations prove to be an extra stress. When “he [picks] them up, he [cries]. Then he [reads] them and [grows] violently angry” (IL, p. 190). On the verge of a nervous breakdown, Biju is like a hunted animal and has to keep his senses “perpetually on the alert to escape from the toils of the hunters.” Perhaps, he suffers from depression. The physical pain may leave him, but the green card is persistently on his mind. This makes him unwell (IL, p. 190). Due to depression, he seems to have lost all motivation and purpose in life. The displaced life seems worse than death to him and thinks he is “manufactur[ing] a fake version of himself” like that of “Harish-Harry” (IL, p. 268). There is no substance to his life. Said reiterates that “the un-healable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted”. Biju’s anxiety is that of a “near-neurotic [immigrant]” who faces “the tension” of living “between the two socio-cultural environments and between the feelings of rootlessness and nostalgia and the desire to assimilate the new way of life” which “leaves him with a lacerated self, trying to piece itself together.” The freezing winter comes as the final blow to
his composure and self-control and “he [begins] to weep from the cold”. He is shocked to see himself groaning and realizing that “his sadness [is] so profound” (IL, p. 51). In “the first of the snow”, he realizes that it is “the same pricking, difficult smell” that is there “inside the freezer”. Biju may feel the “Thermocol scrunch” not only under his feet but inside himself and the cracking ice reminds him of his abysmal loneliness (IL, p. 51). It appears that all the hardships make him feel more abandoned and useless. He fails to interact with others and when people, sitting on the sidewalk, “[nod] kindly at him ----- [he does] not know what to say to them”. Even his tiny brief “hello” is uttered so softly that it is not heard by others (IL, p. 99). Strangers frighten him and he seems to get claustrophobic as “the unease ---- [is] no longer something in the pit of his stomach; it [has] grown so big (IL, p. 266). However, he succeeds in saving himself from further suffering and insanity and comes to realize “that retreat is the only solution to escape the trauma of [emotional, legal and cultural] crisis”. 75 The greatest attraction for him back home is “to experience that greatest luxury of not noticing himself at all” (IL, p. 268). Perhaps, he is tired of looking around to find out who he is. He takes a journey back home after struggling with immense stress and anxiety.

III

Postcolonial narratives relate traumas. 76 Suleri’s trauma seems to be of the present day as she has to pay the price for living in times when leaving home has become a compulsion for many. In her case, she leaves to fulfill educational and intellectual needs if not for financial security. The title, “Meatless Days” suggests personal tragedies, as being away from home has left her grief-stricken and in a state of self-laceration. Being “meatless” reflects a traumatized soul. The loss of her loved ones exacerbates her sense of displacement and proves to be a high price for her
“pound of flesh”. The bizarre metaphor of flesh and meat may have been used in an attempt to lay open the wounds of her soul. She is haunted and chased by reverberations of multiple losses --- home, family life, Mamma and Ifat --- and through the narrative, the reader finds her speaking about one loss or the other. The accidental deaths of Ifat and her mother occur one after another which Suleri finds hard to come to terms with, and the trauma is helplessly relived over and over as “[she] was not there when Ifat died, although in some strange way [she thinks] she dies inside [her] daily.” She might have felt suddenly homeless and unprotected. Her absence from the funerals is another agonizing inevitability of living far away from her nearest and dearest. She seems to have missed being with her family in the mourning period and the emotional support one can get from this. As a suffering soul, she remembers that “she had not gone home for [Mamma’s] funeral and needed a fund of stories told [to her] to acclimatize [her] mind to the turns of that strange plot” (MD, p. 103). She could not find their graves when she visited the graveyard and leaves the flowers on the grave of a renowned Pakistani TV actor which she accidentally finds. Suleri tries to deal with this incident of fruitless search for the graves of Mamma and Ifat using dark humour, but the joke is something for which reason fails her. She acknowledges it is no use looking for a “sealed door” to bless when she already does the same upon “the unreflecting recollection of [their] love” (MD, p. 87).

Negotiating with a new life in a strange land, her resilience seems to ebb and she appears to be following “a one-way street” (IL, p. 32) of self-reproach. She is unrelenting in her sorrow when a friend tries to help her out of distress and stop her “driving down a one-way street”. Her friend suggests that her mourning may “arrest [her] in a prosopopoeic posture that retards [her] from real work?” Suleri remains stubborn and her answer is that “maybe this is [her] work?” while “looking out the
window at people shovelling hateful snow” (IL, p. 132). Her refusal to move on, probably, underpins her helplessness to recover and the overwhelming nature of the experience. Her suffering may be better understood in the light of Cathy Caruth’s theory. She describes trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomenon.”78 The devastating impact on her mind cannot be easily ignored or underestimated by the reader, as she consistently alludes to one or the other loss and dives in and out of a sea of painful memories. She keeps returning to the loss with fetish obstinacy and appears to be trapped “in a painful repetition of the event” (Abigail Ward: 196). In Toni Morrison’s novel Beloved, Sethe’s memory of the past which “is at once a release and a bondage”,79 exemplifies Suleri’s struggle with disturbing and intrusive thoughts. Nonetheless, “this release from ‘rememory’” does not seem to happen in her case as the loss in a strange way, has become Suleri’s identity --- I am the one who misses everything terribly. Her identity proves to be “another kind of prison” as she seems caught in a “claustrophobic introversion’.80 However, as a writer and an intellectual, she may have expected some kind of comfort in the process of sharing it with an imagined readership and thus to “shovel hateful snow” off her soul.81

An interface identity of two sisters seems complex. At times, it seems Suleri treats Ifat as her Double or twin sister and plays hide and seek with the memory of her “burnished” image; which somehow reflects her own soul.82 She says, “since there was so much of [Ifat] inside me (---) Ifat belonged to a more burnished complexion and was the golden apples of my soul” (MD, p. 131). The emotional dependency and intimacy between the sisters may invoke Sylvia Plath’s idea of Double and the way “Two Sisters of Persephone” share a “duet” identity:
Two girls there are: within the house

One sits; the other, without.

Daylong a duet of shade and light

Plays between these.

The first two lines set up the dichotomy between two selves or two sisters. They are incomplete without each other even if one of them is not physically present. Suleri also cross-examines herself and interrogates “[is] she twin, or is that merely my imagination?” (MD, p. 131). She keeps alluding to Ifat as if she has lost part of herself in her death. Sometimes, the reader feels as if this is Ifat’s biography rather than Suleri’s. Sara Suleri followed Ifat in the womb with a gap of four years and feels a bond with Ifat but while she also realizes that she has a “yellow and persistent” influence on her life. Before her “mechanical bellows hit the air to take up their fanning habit, Ifat had preceded [her], leaving her haunting aura in all [her] mother’s secret crevices: in the most constructive period of [her] life she lay around [her] like an umbilical fluid, yellow and persistent. [She] was asleep inside her influence when [she] did not yet know how to sleep” (MD, p. 131). Under a strange kind of obligation, Suleri acknowledges that she “will begin [missing her] again tomorrow” (MD, p. 175). Ifat’s grief feels as stubborn as “lymph” in her body:

I miss her body, of course, and how tall she was, with the skull of a leopard and the manner of a hawk. But that’s aesthetic, and aside from it, Ifat is just a repository of anecdotes for me, something I carry around without noticing, like lymph (MD, p. 42).

Suleri sees the harrowing effect of Ifat on her life. She says “Idiotic girl, to have needed apocalypse to allow her being: look at the price that we are paying now!” (MD, p. 173) but cannot help herself like a post-traumatized patient. At one moment
she says in exasperation, “so no flowers for you this year, Ifat: already we have spent enough on fetishes” (MD, p. 175) and longs for “some insignificant shore” where she is “bleaching in sea salt, [would be] crying, “Cure me, cure me, salt”; “Mollusk, make me empty” (MD, p. 175). The metaphors she uses are subtle and apt as she seems to carry the grief as an inward burden and one of which she wants to be relieved. She is aware how the emotional harm sticks to her like fungus, as Ifat “runs through the sentences of sleep, a medium something other than itself, refracting, innocent of all the algae it can bear and capable of much transmogrification” (MD, p. 186). The mystery around Ifat’s death has added to her distress, as “the tales of that body’s death, the angle of its face, the bruise upon its neck” are for her intolerable and unimaginable (MD, p. 148). Suleri articulates trauma as she remembers that “now it is sweet relief to me to know I need not labour to describe what happened in my mind when Ifat died. I was in surprise. The thickness of event made me a rigid thing, whose thoughts came one by one, as if in pain. I found myself inhabiting a flattened day in which nothing could be two: where is the woman of addition? My mind inquired of me” (MD, p.147). It is Ifat’s haunting multiplicity of presences that continue to challenge Suleri’s control of her life. Perhaps, Suleri hallucinates that Ifat, “[leaves her body sitting by the fire and [saunters] off to stare out the window in the opposite direction, for there [are] always several Ifats with us in a room. Hinged to her like a hotel door, what [can] I do but keep ushering them in, those successions of her face?” (MD, p. 139). She keeps on mourning and “ushering in” “successions of her face” that do not seem to leave her alone. Some sense of guilt keeps her in its grip as “[Ifat’s] water laps around [her] almost in reproach; “You were distracted, when I requested your attention. You were not looking. I was milk.” (MD, p. 186). Suleri finds it “most vain” on her part that she could not do enough “for [Ifat’s] strong heart when doing was open to [her]” (MD, p. 148).
Then, there is the loss of Mamma. She might have lost Mamma in the first instance when she left home to pursue her studies in America, generally regarded as a significant achievement in educated Pakistani families. Far away from home and Mamma, the sudden news of Mamma’s accidental death would have been an even greater shock. At this point, the whole family seems to get shattered into pieces. The nightmare Suleri has had is quite revealing about how traumatized and terrorized she may have felt in a stranger’s land, this time deprived of Mamma:

I dreamed a dream that left me reeling. It [was] in London, on (---) some unlovely street (---) A blue van drove up (---) it was a refrigerated car and my father was inside. He came to tell me that we must put my mother in her coffin and he opened the blue hatch of the van [so that I could] reach inside, where it was very cold. What I found were hunks of meat wrapped in cellophane, and [all the pieces] felt like Mamma, in some [strange] way. It was my [job] to carry those flanks across the street and to fit them into the coffin [which was] at the other side of the road, like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. Although [I do not remember] how many trips I made, [but my hands were cold and] when my father’s back was [to my side], I [started stealing] – for the sake of Ifat and Shahid and Tillat and all of us (---) a portion of [Mamma]. [What I found was] a piece of her foot, [seemed like] a small bone like a knuckle [and] I quickly hid [that] inside my month, under my tongue. [After that] I and the dream dissolved, into [a sea] of tenderness (MD, p. 44).

One can read in her dream narrative how she feels herself to be painfully and forcefully torn apart from her mother and her own “meat”. This scene captures her trauma. It exhibits the agony of feeling that “each of [them] died in some way the day they buried Mama.”

Mother is the symbol of home, settlement and identity
and her death turns into a true exile. The setting of the dream is “London” which suggests Suleri’s displacement and loneliness. The city as a symbol of western imperialism adds to the overall chilling atmosphere of indifference and holds out the finality of a verdict that seems to have thrown her onto the streets. The task seems to terrorize in some unknown, “unlovely street” where she is a lonely soul handling the huge loss alone. In the dream, one may “find missing pieces of [her] life’s puzzles.”

The narrative probably, reflects her endeavour to write her life history and deal with the painful job of fitting the “flanks” into “the coffin” of her past family life which in posterity may feel like putting together “pieces in a jigsaw puzzle” (MD, p. 44). She tries to recollect the memories of Mamma, Ifat, Pip, Dadi and other siblings, who were all tied down in a blood relationship but now have to be picked up from a hazy, refrigerated past like dead portions of meat. Suleri scrambles for the fragments of a centre that held them together. She craves for that security, as now she faces the harsh reality that “[she has] eaten, that was all, and woken to a world of meatless days” (MD, p. 44). The “small bone like a knuckle” may point to her discomfort and sorrow as she has to live with the “hard remnants” while the “meaty” succulent parts are lost. The way she is involved in anatomizing the grief reflects her tormented mind to which the “knuckle” bone “inside” her mouth points. Doggedly, she remains woé-stricken, as traumas are obstinate and cannot be tackled easily. However, her case is more serious and it seems that it took more than a decade to “reach inside” herself where it is “very cold”. The dream seems to leave her in panic as she has to rush back and forth whereas her cold hands are suggestive of a soul turned “frozen”.

With the “algae” of guilt and grief growing in her mind, she is unable to have peace of mind (MD, p. 186). Her mental performance seems affected and she discloses that at the age of forty-nine she has become so forgetful that “they tell [her
that her brain can no longer sustain another injury.” The dark interior of New Haven may have been stifling her and she is left longing for her airy, spacious domestic place. Visiting her childhood holiday resort, Murree, she felt her “lungs could breathe as they have never elsewhere breathed” (MD, p. 86). Even seeing her step-sister Nuz in Karachi appears to be therapeutic for her. Nuzi seems concerned about Sara’s health but Sara relates, “and yet how could I not be well when I was looking at her?” (MD, p. 86). Suleri’s narrative unveils her exposure to stress and the probable risks to her well-being. The loss has been overwhelming and her mind seems to be seized by some blankness as she says, “it reminds me that I am glad to have washed my hands of my sister Ifat’s death and can think of her now as a house I once rented which is presently inhabited by people I do not know” (MD, p.42). The emotional damage caused during the period is difficult to assess, especially when she has difficulty in recalling when she was in or out of the house she “once rented” and when the evacuation from her favourite house started to appear as a blessing.

Healing the wounds and exorcising the ghosts of painful memories which keep visiting her seem to be the motivation behind her writing. She tries to find “relief from her deep inner hurt” (Assia Djebar, 1989) but keeps self-pity at bay and underplays her misery and anguish by using metaphors. In her non-linear narration, she has tried to title different chapters with the names of her relations but the grief seems to draw on many losses. It is possible that the traumatized would relate painful accounts in bits and pieces. It is not easy to articulate trauma as “that what remains to be phrased exceeds what [one] can presently phrase, and that [one] must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist.” Suleri’s trauma is identifiable as she too sees herself reduced to skeletal remains while being placed in a world that has separated her from her loved ones. The story has to be related to
relieve the trauma and to “get something off her chest”. She “bears witness” to “the unfolding drama” of her own life.

Dispossession and disconnection are the painful consequences of leaving home. Salman Rushdie equates the experience to “discontinuity” of “being” and argues that “the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being ‘elsewhere’.” Suleri’s painful state of her “being elsewhere” bears resemblance to an early migrant, Susanna Moodie in Margaret Atwood’s “First Neighbours” who is asked to “go back where [she] came from.” However, “Moodie knows that is impossible; the displacement is too complete”:

I tightened my lips; knew that England

Was now unreachable.

The question of staying connected to the past becomes formidable once home is abandoned. Suleri seems “overwhelmed by nostalgia for a country [she has] not yet left.” The estrangement and alienation of the new world might have shocked her like Margaret Atwood in “Disembarking in Quebec”:

Is it my clothes, my way of walking,

The things I carry in my hand

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this space cannot hear
Losing touch with all that is intimate and known to be one’s identity may not be less than a shock in itself. Suleri has to struggle with a broken narrative and therefore with a dismembered identity. She does not know how to find her self-image in a void, as she has remained “out of touch with Pakistan when it worked like a dream” (MD, p. 86). With a vacuum in her historical memory, home may have started to sound like a dream to her. Removed from familiar contexts and scenes, and living with silenced voices may have made her memory create even bigger chronological gaps. Like a ghost with her “meatless skeleton”, she stumbles around her old home. Nonetheless, she is painfully conscious of the delusion a home has become for her as she battles with an “empty shell” and “a vacant space” where very familiar names sound “hollow”. She reclaims a vacant, colourless structure that was once home:

But surely it was preferable to pick up an empty shell, a structure bleached with the promise that it once was home? (---) [names] are the words most shaped like beds, and I am glad to find them empty, attendant on my rest (MD, p. 174).

Suleri wants “emptiness” to get “attendant on her rest”, which is probably a euphemistic way of saying “emptiness attendant on my dead body”. Alienation and bereavement seems to be her lot; as she has to balance different worlds and a divided self around “hollow names” and “empty beds”.

She celebrates the cheerful memories of home and tries to take a matter-of-fact and critical view of the alterations in her life; yet a thread of self-reproach consistently runs through the narrative. She admits her core is adamant and sustains itself as “habit”. For her, “significance is that which must be bailed out all the time; it must be peeled away with onion tears in order that habit can come bobbing up like mushrooms on the surface of a soup. When I have lived with other people, one of me is always bailing out with a maniacal devotion, night and day, another of me with
great forbearance weeps over the onions; while the last is on the crow’s nest of my mind, clinging onto the expectation of the day when it can cry out, in some drama, “Habit ahoy!” (MD, p. 178). This “habit” of living in an identity may be very hard to break with, keeping an expatriate in a shell and in discomfort. She needs some relief from the “crow’s nest” that continues to keep her petrified, but then “damage feels a necessary repair” (MD, p.186) as she may have let a huge burden off her shoulders by writing about it. In sharing with an imagined audience, she has probably found some kind of “bail” from the confinement of a “meatless” existence. It is at the very end of her narrative that she seems to move on to a therapeutic, broader and somewhat religious zone that may make her forego her intruding identity in order to join the vast humanity of “Adam’s” progeny (MD, p. 186). She seems to find this release from every other identity than mere human more soothing and relaxing. Perhaps the judge, Biswas and the cook, all need to refer and resign to the elemental self to cure themselves and be at peace. This identity is colourless and has space for everyone. It has to be acknowledged and embraced first and last if the subject has to save him or herself from unnecessary stress and anxiety and allow the deeper wounds to heal.

Notes

3 Orhan Pamuk says: “sometimes one’s city can look like an alien place. Streets that seem like home will suddenly change color; I’ll look into the ever mysterious crowds pressing past me and suddenly think they’ve been there for hundreds of years. With its muddy parks and desolate open spaces, its electricity poles and the billboards plastered over its squares and its concrete monstrosities, this city, like my soul, is fast becoming an empty-a very empty-place. The filth of the side streets, the foul smell from open rubbish bins, the ups, downs, and holes in the pavements, all this disorder and chaos, the pushing and shoving that make
it the sort of city it is -- I am left wondering if the city is punishing me for adding to the squalor, for being here at all. When its melancholy begins to seep into me and from me into it, I began to think there’s nothing I can do: like the city, I belong to the living dead, I am a corpse that still breathes, a wretch condemned to walk the streets and pavements that can only remind me of my filth and my defeat. Even when I peer between the hideous new concrete apartment buildings (each one crushing my soul) and catch a glimpse of the Bosphorus shimmering like a silken scarf, hope still eludes me. The darkest, most murderous and authentic strain of melancholy creeps in from streets too different to see, and I can almost smell it: just an experienced Istanbullu can tell from the soft scent of algae and sea on an autumn evening that the south winds are bringing us a storm; like someone who rushes home to take shelter from that storm, that earthquake, that death, I, too, long to be back within my own four walls” (286).

Orhan Pamuk, “To be Unhappy is to hate Oneself and One’ s City”, Istanbul: Memories of a City, trans. Maureen Freely (London: Faber and Faber, 2006).

4 Nandy, “Preface”, p. xiii. Nandy focuses on the negative impact of colonization on the subject’s mind and personality.

5 Sara Suleri reflects: “How many times have we driven down from Rawalpindi, fatigue in the marrow of our bones, to cross the full Ravi and then the empty Ravi riverbed, finally to see the great luminous minarets of the mosque rising in our vision like a gasp or a plea? Of course, nothing in the city quite lives up to the promise of such a welcome, so that somehow one is always expecting to find Lahore without quite locating it. I used to find it perverse myself, that aura of anticipation, until it occurred to me that the town has built itself upon the structural disappointment at the heart of pomp and circumstances and since then I have loved to be disappointed by its streets. They wind absentmindedly between centuries, slapping an edifice of crude modernity against a medieval gate, forgetting and remembering beauty, in pockets of merciful respite” (54).

Sara Suleri, “Mustakori, my Friend: A Study of Perfect Ignorance”, Meatless Days (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987). All further references will be abbreviated to MD and will be cited in the text.

6 “Every man and woman he saw, even at a distance, gave him a twist of panic. But he had already grown used to that; it had become part of the pain of living. Then, as he cycled, he discovered a new depth to this pain. Every object he had not seen for twenty-four hours was part of his whole and happy past. Everything he now saw became sullied by his fear, every field, every house, every tree, every turn in the road, every bump and subsidence. So that, by merely looking at the world, he was progressively destroying his present and his past” (281).

V. S. Naipaul, A House for Mr Biswas (London: Picador, 2003). All further references will be abbreviated to MB and will be cited in the text.


8 Ibid. p. 57.

9 Kiran Desai, The Inheritance of Loss (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 110. All further references will be abbreviated to IL and will be cited in the text.

Frantz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness”, p. 113.

Ibid. p. 117.

Frantz Fanon, “The Negro and Recognition”, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Plato Press, 1986); “Just as when one tells a much improved patient that in a few days he will be discharged from the hospital, he thereupon suffers a relapse, so the announcement of the liberation of the black slaves produced psychoses and sudden deaths.” (Frantz Fanon, “The Negro and Recognition”, p. 220).

Nandy, “The Psychology of Colonialism”, p. 3.

Boehmer, “Colonialist Concerns”, p. 64.

Nandy, “The Uncolonized Mind”, p. 96.

Joshi compares Naipaul with Conrad and refers to Conrad’s remark that “the shadows were to be the main area of existence in the twentieth century” (5). See Chandra B. Joshi, *V.S. Naipaul: The Voice of Exile* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1994).


“Patients, doctors, and even judges are perplexed by conditions of uncertain existence or etiology, which may affect both mind and body. “Psychosomatic” conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, premenstrual syndrome, chronic fatigue syndrome, “repetitive strain injury,” and other chronic pain syndromes are common, but do not easily fit into a medical philosophy of a separate and divisible mind and body. In this schema, patients suffer from either physical disease or mental illness. The stigma attached to mental illnesses understandably leads many patients to seek a physical diagnosis. Physical diseases will be excluded perhaps by referral to a general physician. The patient may then be told that there is nothing physically wrong. This explanation may be angrily rejected, especially if the physician suggests that the symptoms are “all in the mind” and that the patient should see a psychiatrist. The patient feels accused of either madness or malingering. If he or she then overcomes the stigma and receives psychiatric intervention, they may be told that there is “no formal mental illness present.” The patient and general practitioner are back to where they started, with no adequate explanation, diagnosis, or treatment. The frustration and “heart-sink” felt by both patient and doctor is understandable” (329-332).


24The expression is used in Salman’s Rushdie’s Fury in a different context, but to me it best describes Biswas’s psychosomatic gut pains. See Amina Yaqin, “Family and Gender in Rushdie’s writing”, The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie, p. 62.


26Ibid., p. 5. The hole in the grandfather’s “in that middle place” seems to allegorize an ancestral loss of heritage and faith in the Indo-Pak lived experience. Biswas’s “hole in his stomach” does not seem to be much different. The lack of a sense of belonging seems to get so intense that he may start feeling it physically.


29“The somatic diseases that are considered the result of mental distress are partly ill-defined conditions and partly the formerly so-called “psychosomatic disorders,,” such as migraine, gastrointestinal disorders, etc.” (261-273).


32“Anxiety tends to produce psychological symptoms, because the patient becomes more responsive to incoming stimuli. This increased distractibility makes it difficult for the patient to register new events, so that he may have trouble with his memory. Once he begins to worry about this he becomes more anxious and the memory difficulties increase. The patient also finds it unusually difficult to attend to any intellectual task, so that his intellectual performance declines. In view of these memory and intellectual worries, anxious patients have a general sense of being muddled and bewildered” (12).

Huma Qayum, “Anxiety Disorder”, Dr Rahat Dar and the final year (clinical), Classification of Mental Disorders, Vol.1 (University of Peshawar: Department of Psychology, 1998).


34Ibid.

35“Some depressives are very anxious and they complain of jumpiness, ‘butterflies in the stomach’ and tremor. Often they do not say they are depressed” (13-14).

36“There are three major key factors of neurotic nucleus: Feelings of inadequacy and anxiety; Avoidance instead of coping; Self-defeating behaviour and blocked personal growth” (10); “It is the fundamental concept of psychodynamic theory that anxiety is at the root of neurosis” (Huma Qayum, “Anxiety Disorder”, p. 12).


40Jon Mohd Bhat “Caught in the Mire of Colonial Neurosis—— An Analysis of V.S. Naipaul’s House for Mr Biswas” in The Criterion- an International Journal in English, Vol. 3, Issue. 3 (2012), p.1; “Furthermore, because the Indians came to the Caribbean much later than the Africans, it was harder for the Indians to shake off a sense of transience and homelessness. The African West Indians settled in the West Indies in a way that the West Indians were not able to. The latter were far more dislocated and ambivalent and remained homeless.” For further details, see http://journaldatabase.info/articles/caught_mire_colonial_neurosis_analysis.html accessed on 27/6/2015.


43“Depersonalization is a feeling of detachment from oneself. In a state of depersonalization, (schizophrenics) may feel detached from their minds or bodies. They may have the sense of not being able to believe that they are where they are or that they are doing what they are doing; so they may feel as though they are preserving themselves or their thought process from outside. They may feel like robots, as though they are operating on automatic pilot. They may feel as if their movements are impaired, as they might be in walking underwater or in a dream” (231).


44“Seth and the land and the corrugated iron; Hari and the black box; the blessing; and now, since Shama had come, this fatigue.

He was dying.

They were killing him. He would just remain in this room and die.
'Don’t come into this room. Don’t set foot in it again.’ He waved the stick. He moved to the window and, looking at her, waving the stick, began to draw the bolt. ‘Don’t touch me,’ he bawled, and there were sobs mixed with his words.

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He began screaming and crying” (MB, p. 287).


49“Patients with this condition (Phobic anxiety state) are usually anxious, but also have an abnormal fear.” (A Short Guide, p. 15).


51Ibid.


53Rohlehr, “Character and Rebellion in A House for Mr Biswas”, Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul, p. 86.


55Ibid, p. 175.


57Such patients “become, ‘autistic’ in the sense of losing touch with the outside world” (424). There is little doubt, that the judge has lost touch with the outside world and this is a symptom of an abnormality in clinical psychology.


58“Schizophrenics may show highly excited or wild behavior, or slow to a state of stupor. They may exhibit odd gestures and bizarre facial expressions, or become unresponsive and curtail spontaneous movement. In extreme cases, as in catatonic schizophrenia, schizophrenics may seem unaware of the environment or maintain a rigid posture. Schizophrenics may speak in a monotone and maintain an immobile or expressionless face or ‘mask.’ He appears to be in a stupor and may not experience a normal range of emotional responses to people and events” (Ibid).


61 “sleep is nearly always disordered and the typical disturbance is waking early in the morning between 2 and 4 a.m. with difficulty in falling asleep again. If anxiety is marked there will also be difficulty in falling asleep initially. A few depressives wake later between 5 and 6 a.m. and lie awake until they rise for the day, while the others spend the whole night waking and sleeping” (A Short Guide, p. 33).


64 “Mid-morning he rose from his books, went to the lavatory for the daily trial of his digestion, where he sat straining upon the pot with pained and prolonged effort. As he heard others shuffling outside, waiting for their turn, he stuck a finger up the hole and excavated within, allowing a backed up load of scropulated goat pellets to rattle down loudly. Had they heard him outside? He tried to catch them before they bulleted the water. His finger emerged covered in excrement and blood, and he washed his hands repeatedly, but the smell persisted, faintly trailing him through his studies. As time went on, Jemubhai worked harder” (IL, p. 111).

65 “For the first time he hit her, although he had wanted to before and fought the urge for some time. He emptied his glass on her head, sent a jug of water swinging into the face he no longer found beautiful, filled her ears with leaping soda water. Then, when this wasn’t enough to assuage his rage, he hammered down with his fists, raising his arms to bring them down on her again and again, rhythmically, until his own hands were exhausted and his shoulders next day were strained sore as if from chopping wood. He even limped a bit, his leg hurting from kicking her” (IL, p. 304).


71 “Biju walked back to the Gandhi Café, thinking he was emptying out. Year by year, his life wasn’t amounting to anything at all; in a space that should have included family, friends, he
was the only one displacing the air. And yet, another part of him had expanded: his self-consciousness, his self-pity—oh the tediousness of it” (IL, p. 268).

72 Nandy, “The Uncolonized Mind”, p. 110.


76 Abigail Ward says: “Postcolonial creative acts [are] attempts to discover new modes of expression which attend to, and seek to move beyond, the pain and the trauma of the past (and in some cases of the present) (Ward, “Psychological Formulations”, p. 197).

77 Suleri, Boys Will Be Boys, p. 39.


80 Ibid.

81 Ward remarks: “Cathy Caruth is one of the most well-known writers in the field of ‘trauma studies’ ----- The overwhelming traumatic experience cannot be grasped during the moment of its occurrence, but only belatedly—through hallucinations, flashbacks and nightmares. In her works Caruth writes about Freud’s contention that belatedness, or Nachtraglichkeit, is a critical aspect of trauma, and argues that ‘the history of trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another’ (11). This notion that trauma may only be understood as it is enunciated and, crucially, as it is heard by another is also suggested by the research of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. In Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (1992), Felman and Laub write that it is necessary for trauma to be heard in order for the victim to work through the traumatic experience. Unheard testimony does not enable healing to begin, but instead traps the survivor in a painful repetition of the event” (Ward, “Psychological Formulations”, p. 196).

82 In The Magic Mirror, Plath hypothesizes that the literary phenomenon of the Double is related both to “contradictions in man’s character” and to “the complex question of identity”.

83 Received from http://www.sylviaplath.de/plath/dividedself.html accessed on 6-06-2013

84 “For if the return of the traumatizing event appears in many respects like a waking memory, it can nonetheless only occur in the mode of a symptom or a dream” (Caruth, “Traumatic Departures: Survival and History in Freud”, p. 60).
Suleri, *Boys Will Be Boys*, p. 16.

“As a Black woman, some pieces of my puzzle will relate to my African ancestry; some pieces will relate to the Black struggle in U.S. history; and other pieces will relate to my female identity”. See Marvelene H. Hughes, “Soul, Black Woman, and Food”, *Food and Culture: A Reader*, Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (eds.) (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 272.


Suleri, *Boys Will Be Boys*, p. 113.

Italics are mine.

“in its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (Caruth, “Traumatic Awakenings”, p. 91, 92).


Suleri’s abstract but compelling loss can be compared with “the story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience ------- rather attests to its endless impact on a life”. See Caruth, “The Wound and the Voice”, p. 7.

“so these city ladies sit there and bear witness, as best as they can, to the unfolding drama of their own lives.

At every one of these gatherings, they are trapped in the web of impossible revolt; each woman who tells her tale—loud exclamations of the one, rapid whispers of another---- gets something off her chest ----- In speaking to the listening group every woman finds relief from her deep inner hurt.

--------- the women dramatize their fate, or exorcize it, but never expose it directly” (154, 155).


WE ARE WHAT WE EAT

“Come to Pakistan,” I announce, “if you really want to eat a mango!”

When he buys an item of food, consumes it, or serves it, modern man does not manipulate a simple object in a purely transitive fashion; this item of food sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes an information; it signifies.

Food does not only satisfy the stomach but also provides a sense of fulfillment and is nourishing to selfhood. There is some occult power in food and it “is more than an amalgam of biochemical nutrients. What we eat has enormous significance as a medium for personal recollection and collective identity.”

Anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz maintains that “eating is never a ‘purely biological’ activity ---- nor is the food ever simply eaten: its consumption is always conditioned by meaning” (Tasting Food 7). There is little to doubt that “what we eat, when we eat, where we eat, and with whom we eat all reveal something about ourselves.” Perhaps, “food and eating are central to our subjectivity, or sense of self.”

For self-identification, food might be recognized as an all-important metaphor. Cafecito “at the omnipresent coffee stand” becomes identity for a Cuban. In postcolonial narrative strategies, food becomes a powerful voice for an emptiness which lives on as a physical craving and a continual sense of discomfort. Interestingly in some contexts, cuisine identifies with the character of the cook or his/her inner conflicts. In Midnight’s Children, Amina “herself [stirs] her ‘disappointments into a hot lime chutney which never [fails] to bring tears to the eyes’ of anyone who [eat] it.” Saleem also appears to feel Aunt Alia’s vengefulness in her furniture and food and “while [they] lived in her Guru Mandir mansion, she fed
[them] the birianis of dissension and the nargisi koftas of discord”.\(^8\) Moreover, food appears to lose its capacity for gratification and either acts as a catalyst for evoking disappointment, or a metaphor for a sense of betrayal that is usually experienced by the displaced subject. In *Meatless Days*, Suleri reflects that “food can be cruel and unusual.”\(^9\) Unfamiliar tastes and eating manners jolt an immigrant’s identity every now and then. Coming to terms with a whole new culture of food and drink, much of which are either forbidden or unpleasant for him, remains but a challenge for the migrant. On the other hand, in today’s world, a native’s satisfaction with his own food has also been undermined. He is lured into preferring western food over local cuisine and tends to forget that history changed when the white man desired to serve his palate with Eastern tastes. In order to cover his colonial inadequacy, the South Asian subject may often deprive himself of the food that has been satisfying both to his palate and his stomach. But in some cases he is rather forced to do it. The judge is chastised and held up to ridicule for eating curry. These days, “curry” has become a symbol of a multicultural society and is widely served not only in Indian but in western restaurants all over the world, yet the judge had to disown and disclaim it straight away when in England. The girls, “held their noses and giggled at him, ‘Phew he stinks of curry!’”.\(^10\) The very reasons which once made Europeans hungry to explore South Asian lands were later on, to be used against natives as the relationship between the two turned contingent and colonial.

In postcolonial narratives, food takes on a new resonance highlighting loss, absence and displacement. All of the texts in their engagement with colonial practices, underpin an interesting interplay of food and identities around the characters’ appetites and choices of meals. The once-colonized appear to wage their most severe emotional battles in the realm of food. They find their sensibilities strained in a world in which little room is left for tradition and customs due to the
ever-increasing temptations of a westernized culture. My contention is that food in the postcolonial moment offers interesting ways of manipulating, adopting and disclaiming identities. The characters remain ambivalent and confused about who they are while struggling to take to foreign food and eating mannerisms. They appear to be in a negative relationship not just with food, but with themselves. The judge, Lola, Noni and Sai in *The Inheritance of Loss* seem to emerge as a group who are Asian in blood but English in taste. Specific colonial dynamics can be traced around the kitchen and the dining table, as the characters doggedly trail western food and cookery at the expense of their own comfort, relationships and social bonds. On the other hand, in *A House for Mr Biswas*, Biswas shows a stern colonial attitude towards food. He is one of those who “don’t always want to eat ‘what [they] are’”. In the case of (im)migrants like Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss* and Suleri in *Meatless Days*, I will attempt to show how food remains an unrelenting part of their identity. Away from home, the migrant seems to reconstitute identity by taking pride in his traditional food and mealtimes, and it appears, “food is a myth of stability in a world that is perpetually changing. Food, and especially nostalgia about home cooking plays a crucial role in anchoring [them] in a world that refuses to stay still”.

My study takes a broad view of how Suleri plays on the metaphor of “meat” and in search of her distinct identity traverses the moments when meat starts to function as a symbol of power and male dominance. It seems that her autobiography is more of a food memoir in which she has been able to relate back to the self through an extended use of the term “meat”.

Cooking and family meals cultivate tradition and are vitally linked to the image of home and mother. For Warren Belasco mother is central to nurturing and “given that one’s first conscious experience is usually at the maternal breast (or bottle), mother-related madeleines seem less likely to evoke a particular place or
event than an ongoing process of parental nurturing.”

The poor colonial figure after turning his back on home-made food appears to lose his sense of security, usually associated with a mother. The judge goes astray at the point when he throws out his mother’s food and thus, kicks out his Indian identity once and for all. He does not want to be called an Indian and the first thing he does is to disown his mother’s food. At this point, the judge severs love bonds and familial relations. The allusion is significant as it was a choice of food that made Adam and Eve lose paradise. The judge kicks out the “extravagance” of Indian food but soon starts missing his mother’s choorva. He could not then realize just how reckless this act could be, as no food in the world can compete with the comfort of a mother’s food. The food he has had at home was pure, delicious and healthy. It made him feel special and fulfilled.

In contrast, the scanty “breakfast” offered for dinner to the judge by his landlady comes as the first setback in losing home (IL, p. 59). He gathers up courage to request a proper dinner and the scene is reminiscent of Oliver Twist. Never before would the judge have experienced such feelings of timidity and helplessness. Losing control over the quality and quantity of what he wished to eat proves to be the first crack in a wholesome self. His stomach which used to be “full of cream” remains half-empty and craves for full, rich Indian meals. However, under the new pressures, he gets used to neglecting the needs of his body and soul. Pushed into a quagmire of confusion, he starts to misinterpret his own gut feelings. Once back home, he finds “he [is] a foreigner--- a foreigner--- every bit of him [screams]. Only his digestion [dissents] and [tells] him he [is] home”. But still he mistakes himself for a foreigner and his good digestion as “Western transportation” (IL, p. 166,167). Probably, the metamorphosis that he keeps imagining for himself could never occur. He continues to sees himself as “Western transportation” and does not let his inner person for which his stomach speaks take control of this estranged self. On the way
to assimilation, he forces his cravings in a way similar to the abrupt adjustment usually made by foreigners in their manners of dress:

The physical symbol of acculturation was most often the Western suit, just as its educational equivalent was the proper intonation of an English accent. Dress was equally a matter for concern and self-consciousness. “I started on this trip in pure Indian costume,” one author wrote of a journey to Europe in 1911, (---) in London, however, I made a sudden change to European dress. I bought everything readymade in all a hurry."17

Hurriedly, the judge has made changes to his food preferences and despite, being an Indian Hindu, has started to eat Shepherd’s pie in England (IL, p. 119). Perhaps, he tries to improve his relations with the master and fight his sense of inferiority through food. Whenever he smells racism in the air or that he may be targeted by street children, he holds out a pork pie in his hand as a symbol of his changed loyalties or as an olive branch. But, the pork pie simply symbolizes his cowardice as he cannot react or call for help when bullying children openly humiliate him, knock down and start pissing on another Indian boy in front of his eyes. He just “[turns] and [flees]” back to his “rented” room with the pie still in his hand (IL, p. 209).

The first scene in The Inheritance of Loss opens with the judge’s unreasonable demands for afternoon tea to be served in an English manner with freshly baked confectionery. As a colonial practice, he wants to celebrate his teatime and demands a cake or at least some “macaroons” or “scones” or “cheese straws” (IL, p. 3).18 On eating “chocolate pudding” which has been warmed “in a frying pan” on wood fire, his face takes on “an expression of grudging pudding contentment” (IL, p. 3, 4). He pesters his cook for English snacks but then has to cook pakoras (local deep fried snacks) for the intruders as there is no stock of English groceries in his home. It may suggest the miseries faced by westernized natives in keeping up an artificial lifestyle
in indigenous surroundings. Ridiculously, the judge expects his cook to bake cookies, cakes, and make puddings on a wood fire when there is no gas or electricity in the house. This may also be the reason that the judge remains grumpy while waiting for the impossible to happen. He is never satisfied with how his native cook serves him, no matter how much he tries to please him with soups, mashed potatoes, baked snacks and desserts instead of local rice and daal. The judge is probably resentful, as he knows at heart it is all pretense, as no matter how much his cook struggles to serve him continental food by keeping and reusing scraps of aluminum foil (IL, p.33), warding off ants and vermin by putting water into four bowls for the legs of the food cupboard to stand in (IL, p. 113) and burning damp wood (IL, p. 1). He never utters a word of praise either for the prepared food or for the poor, hardworking cook. The hoax of juggling English civilization with a frugal, retired life is spelled out at the fussy tea-times when “Marie and Delite biscuits” have to be served with the teapot and cups, “upon the tray” (IL, p. 3). The tea that is served to him with dirty saucers, a sticky sugar pot and hard, local biscuits is “a travesty and it [undoes] the very concept of [English] teatime.” This “travesty” nonetheless, is what defines him.

Around the kitchen and at the dining table, the judge’s life appears to be a comic-tragic episode. Perhaps, by giving in to “mimicry” in eating, he has allowed perverted food preferences to take over his private and marital life. He forces his wife to drink Ovaltine (IL, p. 171) and gets angry at her if she does not appear to like it. The “tablecloth” in his household holds the evidence of his unreasonable and unfair demands for westernization from his naïve wife. On the dining table “[there is] a “garnet stain” on the white tablecloth, “as many years ago”, he had thrown “a glass of port” at his wife, furious at the way she chewed her food (IL, p. 8). The “alcoholic garnet stain” on the tablecloth, serves as a seal of stubborn colonial table manners that may outlive generations of colonized households. Though his wife is
now long dead, there are still no signs of repentance or regrets noticed in the judge’s bearing and the foreign cooking ways and means of serving food are to be observed in the house, ridiculously and incessantly.

Inviting someone to dinner or to lunch is as a gesture of friendship and goodwill. The judge remains ill at ease at the only dinner to which he has reluctantly invited his friend, Bose. Strangely, the judge loses his appetite on seeing the portrait of Gandhi in the restaurant replacing that of the Queen of England (IL, p. 203). Even the dinner with Gyan is used as an opportunity by the judge to show him to be an inferior native and make him feel unworthy. His awkward table manners are scrutinised according to English standards, with a total disregard for his presence as a guest. The judge distastefully notices that he is unfamiliar and hesitant with the cutlery and the English food, “and an old emotion [comes] back to the judge, a recognition of weakness that [is] not merely a feeling, but also a taste, like fever. He [can] tell Gyan [has] never eaten such food an in such a manner and “bitterness [floods] the judge’s mouth” (IL, p. 109). Gyan is unbearable for him as he seems to remind the judge of his own embarrassment and acute inferiority while eating with English people. He appears to have lost his ability to socialize even over meals and criticizes Gyan for what he himself is but covers with Western garb. Nonetheless, the judge himself feels vulnerable while eating with others. In an Indian setting, it is the judge who is an outsider as he eats “meat chops” in an unusual and non-native manner. He picks up a bit of meat with his fork, “dunks it in the gravy” and piles it on a bit of potato. Then he mashes on a few peas over it and pushes the whole thing into his mouth, “with the fork held in his left hand” (IL, p. 109). When the judge looks “irritably across the chops at Gyan”, the “chops” appear to be a barrier between him and Indian vegetarians (IL, p. 109). He sits removed at the dining table with his prejudice, without any acknowledgement of the food or the people eating
with him. Moreover, the stored empty wine bottles (IL, p. 7) seem to be a personal reminder that he is the one who eats and drinks like Westerners. The meals are laid out on a dining table and eaten with a fork and a knife, yet fail to evoke domestic bliss.

Caught in a colonial past, the judge seems to be out of place and time. He takes bed tea in a country where the native servants call it “baad tea.” Even in a tent on his professional tours, he would keep up pretensions and eat burned toast, “toasted upon the flame,” and spread “marmalade over the burn” (IL, p. 61). His meals are to be served at an accurate clock time and he makes sure to have his dinner in a black dinner jacket with a bow tie even when his posting is in a jungle (IL, p. 60). To serve him an English roast, the servant has to follow a strict regime.

Eating “roast bastard” appears to be a test of the judge’s authenticity as is illustrated in the paragraph below. In absolute “mimicry”, he seems to have fallen prey to self-contempt, illustrating that there is no fool like an old fool. He feels as “if he [is] eating himself” no matter how much he tries to shove the unpleasant reality along with the “roast bastard” down his throat. Though he wants to become an absolute master, he surprisingly finds himself again to be a victim. He easily loses control on finding a hair of his Indian wife in the bowl of “cream of mushroom soup”; even more so because it is a strand of Indian dark hair and turns the high seriousness of keeping up appearances into a burlesque (IL, p. 172). However, on his return journey from England, he is seen to be sipping “beef tea” and yet, sitting at a distance from the white man (IL, p. 119).

Later in retired life, the judge could easily have reverted to healthy eating after risking his health and peace of mind in his earlier life. The vegetables that are grown in his garden and which he starts using only in the time of trouble (IL, p. 281)
should have been his first preference. Instead of fattening chocolate puddings, cheese straws, macaroons and “roast bustard[s]”, the local vegetables would have been a much more healthy and nutritious option for him and something he might have enjoyed in their first freshness. As an Indian, he may have found western food insipid but seems to sacrifice his taste buds in order to continue with his bland taste for everything other than Englishness itself.

On the other hand, in *A House for Mr Biswas*, the Hanuman House food is used as a means of power and politicized housekeeping. Ellen McWilliams is of the opinion that complex politics underlie food and eating and its representation in literature. She maintains that “feeding is established psychologically as the locus of love, aggression, pleasure, anxiety, frustration and desire for control. Precisely, in other words, the ingredients for power relations.” In the East, food is supposed to bind one’s loyalties to the host and “food refusal (---) is denial of relation”. Biswas does not tend to show any respect for his in-laws’ food as he may not want to subscribe any loyalty to them, as the principle is that “a man does not eat with his enemy” (Mauss, 1967: 55). After a good fight with his in-laws, he orders Shama, “go and get me a tin of salmon. Canadian. And get some bread and peppersauce”. He then throws home-cooked rice and lentils out of the window. At “eating sessions” Biswas is ready to “take his revenge on the Tulsis” (MB, p. 105). Perhaps he wants to reclaim his autonomy and manhood by spitting into the food that they provide. Power politics seem to underpin his denial of food, as “refusal of food produced and given by others is (---) a refusal to be beholden.” But he does not understand that ultimately he remains “beholden” as a colonial consumer to “Ovaltine” and English supplements.
As a signifier of social and financial status, food is important. It is food that seems to cause disputes, and also influences Biswas’s relationship with his wife and in-laws; “‘rice, potatoes all that damn starch’. He [taps] his belly. ‘You want to blow me up?’” (MB, p. 135). Biswas considers potatoes and rice as an inferior diet, which is regularly served to him, different from the special “brain-feeding meals, of fish in particular” that is set aside for his brothers-in-law (MB, p. 106). The typical everyday food consumed each single day appears to add to his hatred for Hanuman House. He prefers salmon but that is offered “only on Good Friday” (MB, p. 142). It is respect rather than some special food which he wants as he knows this is seriously lacking, as he is fed by his in-laws. He may feel starved of self-integrity while gulping down his meals and conveniently starts criticizing the food to make himself appear superior and one with western tastes.

In a conservative society, food is a strong gender marker and has been used to privilege men at the expense of woman’s basic nutrition. In Hanuman House “the best of the food [is] automatically set aside for [the boys] and they [are] given special brain-feeding meals, of fish in particular” (MB, p. 106). The daughters are complicit in this house rule, but for Biswas, if not for the other sons-in-law, it is an outright humiliation and something that he cannot bear. This discrimination with food seems to trigger Biswas’s hatred towards his brothers-in-law. The poor man is not able to see that beggars cannot be choosers. He seems to be colonized by insufficiency of resources and is no different from the “subaltern” spoken of by Spivak. It seems it is the scarcity of food that makes one “subaltern”.

What—and how--- we eat, signify different things from table to table and has strong social and symbolic significance. Unsurprisingly, as a colonial subject, Biswas is a lonely eater and does not take joy from eating together with his wife or family. This
kind of “self-denial of food and refusal to eat with others represents a severe rupture of connection.” Though he finds the meals from Tara satisfying, notwithstanding, even there, he eats alone. Moreover, eating seems to serve as a metaphor for the breathing space which has been denied to a colonial subject:

The barrackyard, with its mud, animal droppings and the quick slime on stale puddles, gave him nausea, especially when he was eating fish or Shama’s pancakes. He took to eating at the green table in the room, hidden from the front door, his back to the side of window (---) as he ate he read the newspapers on the wall (MB, p. 218).

At the time of eating, Biswas’s hatred for colonial surroundings turns to nausea and seems to contaminate his instincts for tradition. His state is so pitiful that he has to read English newspapers to wash down his food and still finds the eating stressful.

Dissatisfaction with food is a trope of Biswas’s eternal unease. Surprisingly, he finds his mother’s tea that is “lukewarm, with too little tea, too much milk and a taste of wood-smoke” unwelcoming, especially when she adds, “he needn’t drink it” (MB, p. 199). The disappointment with his mother’s tea is a good reflection of his insecurity and discomfort around identity. However, he enjoys meals at Tara’s and Ajodha’s house and perhaps, the good meals help him fight his demons of low self-esteem (MB, p. 254). The “unadulterated” dream of his youth was that “when he [becomes] a man it would be possible for him to enjoy everything the way Ajodha did, and he [promises] himself to buy a rocking chair and to drink a glass of hot milk in the evenings” (MB, p. 196). But in adult life, he seems to misunderstand his gut feelings. He misinterprets his needs and starts overfeeding himself imported supplements. His search for western brands reveals his discontented soul more than his poor health. He keeps on mixing and drinking “Sanatogen”, “tablespoonfuls of
Ferrol and in the evenings, glasses of Ovaltine” (MB, p. 315) instead of grabbing “a hot glass of (fresh) milk” which would have satisfied his dreams, nourished his body more economically as well as soothed his nerves.

Biswa’s under-nourished body corresponds to his colonial self-image. Malnutrition has given Biswas “the shallowest of chests, the thinnest of limbs; it [has] stunted his growth and [has given] him a soft rising belly” (MB, p. 18). He may also find it difficult to deal with the collective memory of an under-fed slave, especially with the Caribbean history of indentured labour. His weak body, “soft calves” (p. 83, 142) and his overall health remain his main concern. He used to read out an American column _That Body of Yours_ to Ajodha which “[deals] every day with a different danger to the human body.” Though he wants to break with the Trinidadian food stereotypes and poor standards of living, he overlooks the secret of Ajodha’s health and contentment. Though “Ajodha [listens] with gravity, concern, alarm” (MB, p. 48) to the informative column, he keeps himself fit through a regular intake of fresh milk and good home-made meals. Contrarily, Biswas relies on popular brands of food supplements and drinks. Nonetheless, reading from _That Body of Yours_ is a privilege for him, as his community in general cannot afford health concerns. It is possible that this is where he has picked up his anxiety about his physical condition.

As the most potent voice of identity, a colonial subject may find his actual cravings difficult to suppress or deal with. Biswas hates fish as it is a Trinidadian product, but then he is not able to substitute it with something that he likes. His occasional experimentation with food is neither acceptable to his stomach nor to his soul (MB, p. 144) as “one’s stomach is one’s ancestor—- it rumbles like a lion, refusing to be ignored.”27 His failures and estrangements might be demonstrated in
his chaotic way of eating and in the way his stomach reacts. Once he rebelled from rice and curry but was still not sure what else could be palatable. First he ate oysters from a shop but “the raw, fresh smell of oysters was now upsetting him. His stomach was full and heavy, but unsatisfied. The pepper sauce had blistered his lips. Then the pains began” (MB, p. 143). Next, he stuffed “salmon” and “shop bread” into a full “distressed” stomach. In his fight against everything that is local, he keeps harming himself.

It is quite probable that an over-fed western identity turns Biswas’s stomach more than anything else. He is frustrated by experimental “secret eating” as he remains unfulfilled, perhaps more for self-knowledge. His colonial aspirations are in conflict with the needs of his body and cause him mental and physical “distress”. In his case, “food as an access point creates an awareness of the estranged position [he finds himself] in and the incompleteness of [his] cultural memory. Instead of feeding a hunger [for identity], it exposes a void”. The eating disorders seem to project Biswas’s colonial ambivalence and insecurity as “psychological disorders are expressed through eating”. It is possible that he suffers from food anxiety symptomized by severe stomach pains, nausea and “diminished appetite” of which he suffers (MB, p. 154). His food anxiety seems related to his emotional detachment, un-relatedness, dependency and feelings of worthlessness situating identity-loss as a multi-determined disorder. To stomach the foreign, stuffed-in identity may have been daunting and regardless of what he forces into his body, he continues to feel empty and dissatisfied. To adopt newer food habits, Biswas needs ascetic measures and not the duplicity of diasporic practices. Regardless of his anger and frustration, his body is comfortable with the simple, home-cooked food of Hanuman House while the restaurant food simply upsets his stomach. It seems pointless for him to stuff the secret hole in his identity with stale “shop bread”. He may also find some
liberation in food, as it offers him quite a few choices in contrast to the limited prospects of living on a far-off island. He tends to use food as an escape from his oppressive diasporic life, but is left feeling sick and guilty.

In his preference for English supplements and medicines, Biswas chases colonial myths without actually deriving any benefit from them. Through “Ovaltine”, Biswas wants to secure a more secure future for his children than that of other Trinidadians. It is thoughtless of him to buy Ovaltine to improve his children’s minds when he cannot otherwise nourish his family. He has told his children “to keep the milk and the prunes secret, lest Owad [their cousin] should hear of it and laugh at them for their presumptuousness” (MB, p. 378). Perhaps, he wants to cure the troubling sense of ancestral inferiority by injecting English supplements into a new generation. When Shama tells him that her family believes that fish brains are good for the human brain, he bursts out that “[her] family just eat too much damn fish brains,” (MB, p. 193). He hates fish and condensed milk, which is served to children in Hanuman House. For him it is only English brands which promise health and better mental performance. He appears to be under the impression that it is food that has made the colonizer intellectually superior to him. It may have been a thorough internalization of how the ex-colonized has always been seen by the Other. 

Perhaps the depraved subject has to start trusting his own circumstances and not to confuse indigenous value with Western brands and labels. Respecting the local food may be the first step towards gaining self-esteem.

As the saying goes: the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach; but neither Shama nor does Nimi try using their skills to this end. They know it may have an adverse effect. For their men, anything that is Indian is not good enough. Shama, like the African women, keeps to the traditional style of cooking that “[defies] the
rules of measurement and scientific cooking precision” and may use expressions like “‘handful’ of, a ‘pinch’ of, a ‘dash’ of ---”33. Her recipes instruct Biswas to “throw in just a little pinch of salt” (MB, p. 166). She never has any problem with the food served in her house unlike Biswas. Similarly, Nimi cannot bring herself to sip Ovaltine, no matter how much her autocratic husband pushes her. Perhaps, food choices prevent them from getting closer in their relationships.

II

In relation to Sai in The Inheritance of Loss, food may be acknowledged as a metaphor for class differences and prejudices that replicate colonial order. Her western food habits seem to have ruined her chance to find love. She is also a foreigner in her own country as she can’t follow traditional cooking nor indigenous customs of serving guests. As the robbers demand a drink, Sai with shaking hands, “stews tea in a pan and strains it” and has no idea how to make the local tea, as she can only brew English tea (IL, p. 6). In the convent, she is introduced to a new religion through food and is led to see that “cake [is] better than laddoos, fork spoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds” (IL, p. 30).

The cook intuitively knows what Sai might prefer to eat and he welcomes her with a mashed potato car on her arrival, a skill that has come down to him from his ancestors who served the British, and which he still finds useful to satisfy his westernized masters.

Eating habits are important for Sai’s family to mark out their difference from locals. Sai is proudly raised by her grandfather on his principles. The judge who “[eats] even his chapattis, his puris and parathas, with knife and fork [insists] that Sai in his presence, does the same” (IL, p. 176). Perhaps, the upper middle class deem
themselves superior to the poor while they eat with “knife and fork” and not with their hands. Gyan finds Sai’s identity — “she who [cannot] not eat with her hands” — daunting once he pulls himself away from her. Their relationship was possibly destined to fail as they could not eat together, no matter how close they had been. While “eating together they [have] always felt embarrassed ---- he, unsettled by her finickiness and her curbed enjoyment, and, she, revolted by his energy and his fingers working the dal, his slurps and smacks” (IL, p. 176). Even for a so-called nationalist, her food habits are equivalent to betrayal. It may be seen as treacherous for Gyan that she “never chewed a paan and [has] not tried most sweets in the mithaishop, for they [make] her retch; ----- [feels] happier with so-called English vegetables, snap peas, French beans, spring onions and feared---feared---loki, tinda,kathal, kaddu, patrel, and the local saag in the market” (IL, p. 176).

It is difficult for Gyan to understand that Sai is not westernized by choice but is born into an educated family, under the command of a Cambridge qualified grandfather. When Gyan calls her “Kishmish”, she calls him “Kaju” in their exchange of nick names and does not use any western salutations such as “sweetheart” or “darling” or “love” for him (IL, p. 140). However, the contrasting food preferences remain an issue. He is ashamed of the English snacks that he has eaten in her company once he has joined a nationalist group. For him the memory is quite embarrassing, as now “it [is] a masculine atmosphere and Gyan [feels] a moment of shame remembering his tea parties with Sai on the veranda, the cheese toast, queen cakes from the baker” (IL, p. 161). Nonetheless, Sai is ostracized for the food she has generously and courteously offered to him as her tutor and as her guest.

Neither Lola nor Noni are aware of the costs and consequences of what they eat. They try to act as bohemians but in essence, their English supplies are a display
of colonial hunger. Lola exaggeratedly describes English “strawberries and cream” after her recent visit to England (IL, p. 46). Even Noni finds her exultations and exhortations ridiculous and tells her plainly that she can get strawberries and cream in her hometown too. It seems that for them it is food that keeps them under the illusion that they are superior to the deprived masses. They make sure not to run out of the imported food stuffs they need for their dining table. Perhaps, a hoax is sustained by showcasing an empty “jam jar on the sideboard” in the dining room that says “by appointment to Her Majesty the queen” inscribed “in gold under a coat of arms” along with “a crowned lion and a unicorn” (IL, p. 44). To look after the English “broccoli patch” and make pear stew and wine in their house seems to be their main preoccupation while they keep bringing over “Marmite”, “Oxo bouillon cubes”, “Knorr soup packets” and “After Eights” in their suitcases probably, more to feast their colonial hunger rather than for the taste (IL, p. 46). They watch English TV programmes that show “gentlemen” whose faces look like “moist, contented hams” (IL, p. 45) in order to make themselves imagine sharing their contentment and plenitude against an air of social and political unrest, in which in reality, they had to breathe. Importing “seeds” to grow “the country’s only broccoli” (IL, p. 44) is symbolic of their efforts to preserve English heritage and to overlook their own roots. Their food indulgences have made a spectacle of their lifestyle and exposed them to many a threat in “a rice and dal country”. 34 It is the poignant smell of mutton being cooked that attracts the starving nationalists to climb through their kitchen window. The sight of “intestinal-looking Essex Farm sausages, frozen salami with a furze of permafrost melting away” is irresistible to the rebel fighters and they forcibly start eating to their heart’s content in the kitchen (IL, p. 238, 239). The sisters are made to pay for their food extravagances. Even the judge has to pay a price for keeping a dining table at the centre of his house, and is ordered by the
robbers to “prepare the table” for them with his own hands (IL, p. 6). The disadvantaged ones appear to feel avenged to some degree by eating at the dining table in a westernized home. However, when there is the temptation of good food, identity or any other cause may be easily thrown away.

The sisters know that “chicken tikka masala” is gaining popularity over fish and chips in Britain (IL, p. 46) but still fail to enjoy their own food. They do not seem to understand that spicy food is in greater demand in the markets of Europe and trans-Atlantic countries. Vegetarian and halal food needs are difficult to ignore by businesses competing in the international food market. A newly evolved spicy and vegetarian food culture is in return “handicapping” the western market. It seems that the “civilizing mission” that Ashis Nandy once referred to, has started to take its toll on the colonizer. “Chicken masala”, “chicken tandoori”, “kebabs” and “doners” seem to be on restaurant menus as well as on the shelves of the supermarkets across the Western world. Krishnendu Ray observes that “the local and provincial penetrates the global and reconstitutes the latter. It brings the Orient home and in the process disorients the Occident. It is not a very assertive reorientation yet, but a slow, seeping corruption of Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the world.” However, a colonial subject still feels displaced in the realm of food. With his acquired eating habits, he may neither enjoy his own food in its purity nor the Western burgers and pizzas. He remains unfulfilled after replacing homemade food with the fast food in a search for westernization and modernity. But, to follow the English food culture is an anachronism in itself, as the West has taken to spicy food and curry. Therefore, it seems that the colonial food habits of Lola, Noni, Sai and the judge instead of modernizing them, have pushed them back into past. Their blunted tastes make them stand out as living archives.
In *The Inheritance of Loss*, in relation to the cook and Biju, food seems to emerge as a vehicle for slavery. The mass-marketed food chains or McDonaldization has further complicated and manipulated not only the equal distribution of resources, but of labour as well. This time, the relationship seems to have turned contingent between the western employer and the immigrant as “there [is] a whole world [working] in the basement kitchens of New York” (IL, p. 23). There are “perfectly first-world on top, perfectly third-world twenty-two steps below”, comprising of waiters, cleaners and cooks (IL, p. 22) working in western restaurants. Warren Belasco observes that “compassion tends to diminish as one moves up the corporate food chain. Migrant workers and hardscrabble farmers receive the most sensitive attention.” Once the search for taste enslaved the East and now the native is again dependent on the Western employer to feed himself.

In his naivety, the cook is unaware that western restaurants and fast food chains run on the sweat of people like him. Despite his success cooking continental food, he feels inadequate and thinks his son is doing a better job than he is. In America he handles “Angrezi Khana” only, no Indian food“ and above all his employer is not an Indian but an American (IL, p. 14). The cook constantly boasts about his son’s American job. It is a matter of pride for poor locals to work for anyone “Angrezi”. The cook keeps imagining “ham roll ejected from a can and fried in thick ruddy slices, of tuna fish soufflé, Khari biscuit pie [and is] sure that since his son [is] cooking English food, he [has] a higher position than if he were cooking Indian” (IL, p. 17). The reality is that the cook’s son is not legally allowed even to wait on tables. The cook is unaware that there is no *Angrezi Khana* as such, but a continental menu which caters to consumers from all over the world. All kinds of food are
making their way into American or English kitchens and there is an increasing
demand for Asian, Italian, Turkish, Lebanese, Mexican, Arabic and Chinese cuisine on
the world food market. The food is all processed and canned which is gobbled up
hurriedly as a reward in busy and modern lives. The new fast food takeaways though
bad for one’s health are cheaper and therefore, compete with restaurants
brandishing continental or ethnic food. Biju realizes that the processed food does
not taste anything like the natural, fresh and pure food from his village. He g
gets even
more homesick when he remembers “how good the roti tastes [in his village]! It is
because the atta is better than anything cooked on a gas or a kerosene stove----
Fresh roti, fresh butter, fresh milk still warm from the buffalo” (IL, p. 103). Even a
poor native longs for these pure tastes despite living in a well fed country.

Biju feeds on mounting worries and does not seem to enjoy sumptuous food,
even if it is widely available and more affordable. He finds that in America even the
poor eat like kings as, “Szechuan wings and French fries” are just for $3.00, “fried
rice” for $ 1.35 and “pan-fried dumplings” for only a dollar (IL, p. 49). He cannot
imagine finding this rich food at home, let alone eating it. Still, he cannot eat
properly and has lost his appetite. He has started to be sick (IL, p.190), perhaps, as a
silent reaction to seeing himself devoured by a consumer culture. Then, watching
Indians eating forbidden beef in restaurants also makes his blood “bubble and boil”
(IL, p. 48). He “struggles to buy into the American immigrant dream and is confused
by the “made good” Indian Hindu businessmen eating “rare” steaks in one of the
restaurants where he [works]”.38 The food he cooks challenges his religious beliefs
and makes him sceptical if all that he is doing is actually worthwhile.

The cook himself seems to be a metaphor for the deep rooted colonial
culture. If he had not had the skills in English cooking, he wouldn’t be working in an
upper middle class household. He has inherited these colonial cooking skills from his father and can shape “the mashed potatoes into a motorcar”, though it is now a “long-forgotten skill” (IL, p. 33). He does not mind the unreasonable demands of his master and rather regards it as a privilege despite the fact that he has to work harder to provide chocolate puddings and scones sometimes by burning damp wood. In fact, with no sense of identity as a Third World inhabitant, he wants to earn at least some distinction for himself and his son through western cookery. Even the cook’s father does not introduce his son by name but by a long list of European puddings which seems to annihilate their very existence:

- Bananafritterpineapplefritterapplefritterapplesurpriseapplecharlo
- teapplebettybreadandbutterjamartcaramelpuddingtartcaramelcustardtipsypuddingr
- utumpuddingjamrolopolygingersteamdatepuddinglemonpancake
- eggcustardorangecustardcoffeecustardstrawberrycustardtrifleba
- kedalaska---------------(IL, p. 64).

Even Biju has to sell himself by “Baked Alaska, floating island, brandy snap” (IL, p. 180) to find work in American restaurants. The rattle of colonial desserts and western cuisine as an introduction seems to defeat them through the generations. Biju appears to have realized the threshold he can never cross and cries out in frustration to his employer:

> Without us living like pigs. What business would you have? This is how you make your money, paying us nothing, because you know, we can’t do anything, making us work day and night because we are illegal (IL, p. 188).

The cook and Biju appear to be enslaved by cooking as, “professionally, [it] is a position of servitude both economically and politically”.39 When the robbers forcibly
send the cook’s master to do some cooking for them, it is shocking for the reader as well as for his fellow residents. The incident is described with dark humour:

The judge found himself in the kitchen where he had never been, not once (---) Sai and the cook too scared to look, averting their gaze.

It came to them that they might all die with the judge in the kitchen; the world was upside down (IL, p. 6).

The judge with his colonial prejudices regards working in the kitchen as beneath him. Nonetheless, the cook and his son earn themselves “a position of servitude” whether they work in a local kitchen or in New York. In the balance of power, not having enough to eat is still a form of servitude in any way.

The Western world of ample resources and multiple opportunities has probably become indispensable for the colonial subject to earn his bread and scrape some savings. The mere rhetoric of nationalism and freedom cannot feed and support the dispossessed subject. Fatness is a sign of prosperity in poor countries and the cook asks his son if he is growing fat; “to which the son replies, “I am growing fat--- ten times myself” (IL, p. 233). Even the neighbours try to comfort the cook by telling him that they all get fat in that part of the world (IL, p. 232). The cook is happy that his son is “in that country [where] there is enough food for everybody” (IL, p. 84). The father and son’s relationship cannot thrive, as they are struggling for food in two different ends of the world. But the paradox is, no matter how much the cook uses his skills in the service of western food, his “core” stays local and he “[feels] hurt to his chutney (Eastern sauce) core” (IL, p. 143). Not surprisingly, he can relate to the local “chutney” when he feels crushed, and not to the English sauces. Biju too, despite living in a prosperous world seems to be losing weight and has to
buy clothes for himself from the kids’ section of a ninety-nine cent store (IL, p. 233). Food itself stands as the main difference between master and slave.

IV

Memory is Hunger

Earnest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast (1996:57)

Anthropologists building on structuralist arguments demonstrate that foods convey symbolic messages. Both meals and categories of food have a definable structure, and the patterns so formed carry substantial social and cultural meanings (e.g., Douglas 1972, 1981; Firth 1973).40

Food is loaded with meaning about relations, communion, home and identity. Identity seems to become physical and instinctive when it comes to food. The struggling eastern immigrant finds that it is food where dissatisfaction and non-fulfillment stay in the taste buds and linger on in the pit of the stomach. It is difficult to disagree that “cuisine, like religion, is one of the sites where the migrant turns away hesitatingly from the embrace of the metropole”.41 Food has associations with the emotional moments of our lives and at times trigger intense feelings of déjà vu.42

Suleri’s narrative emerges as a complex and extended food metaphor. In her case, it seems “we are what we ate.”43 The very title suggests that Suleri wants to make use of a “food voice”.44 “Meatless Days” seem to paint an intense and intimate picture of a displaced self which craves for “soulful home cooked meal”.45 She seems to look forward to feeding her heart in writing down a “food memoir”.46 Though apparently “[her] parable has to do with nothing less than the imaginative extravagance of food and all the transmogrification of which it is capable?”47
However, it becomes a process of reading the self in “the grain” for her. Krishnendu Ray observes:

Galvanized by voluntary exile, it is an attempt to read the grain for the encounter between cultures buried in the depth of hearth and home, not simply between East and West but also within ourselves --- the colonized and decolonized fragments of our minds and the complicit and resistant practices of cooking and eating.

The increased appetite for “hearth and home” underlies Suleri’s longing for savoury home-made meat dishes. In her writerly negotiations with the food metaphor and domestic realities of kitchen and table; as a migrant, she perhaps tests the boundaries of identity and representation of the self.

The memories of the indigenous rituals of butchery and meat preparation seem to get filtered through a sense of hygiene which Suleri may have acquired during her stay in America. She vividly remembers the striking sights at butchers’ shops of “carcass”; “blood”; “blood would briskly flow --- carrying with it flotillas of chicken feathers ---- and little bits of sinew and entrail”; “a bladder full and yellow that a butcher had just bounced deftly into the drain”; “on meatless days that world emptied into a skeletal remain”; “odors and liquids of slaughter”; “chopping blocks”; “the last curlcues”; “organic”; “refrigeration”; “meat”; “flesh and fowl” and “sundry organs” (MD, p. 31, 32). If she had not lived in America for so long, these customs would not have struck her. She remembers how “big meat”, “little meat” and “chicken” were more than available in prosperous homes on meatless Wednesdays and Tuesdays after the cooks had stocked it in all forms in refrigerators. Despite her western lifestyle, she tends to celebrate and share Pakistani ways of eating meat in its absolute freshness, with her reader. She lucidly remembers how soon after Eid
animal sacrifices, there would “rush out of the kitchen steaming plates of grilled lung and liver of a freshness quite superlative” (MD, p. 4). Like other immigrants, she articulates her repulsion at the very sight of market meat. Krishnendu Ray has studied this aversion by South Asian immigrants:

Most of the negative stereotypes about American food centers not only on meat cooking but also on market versions of it, such as hamburgers and hot dogs. I heard numerous colorful stories about the “shocking appearance of ‘uncooked’ hamburger and its smell.” One woman said, “Steak looks barbaric!” Another explained that “getting used to cold meat took me a long time, especially beef,” and still another recoiled from “cold turkey sandwich” and “cold milk.” One said, “I have never tried to eat hot dogs. The very sight and smell turns me off.” Another exclaimed, “I was shocked by the appearance of a medium rare steak—to see how uncooked it was.”

It seems like other Asian Americans, “the very sight” of chicken is quite unpleasant for Suleri:

But here I must forget my American sojourn, which has taught me to look on chicken as a notably undignified bird, with pimply skin and pockets of fat tucked into peculiar places and unnecessarily meaty breasts. Those meatless day fowls, on the other hand, were a thing apart. Small, not much bigger than the average quail, they had a skin that cooked to the texture of rice paper, breaking even over the most fragrant limbs and wings. Naturally we cherished them (MD, p. 32).

Suleri seems to have reduced her meat intake after leaving home. She evokes identity of a privileged self against “pockets of fat”, “meaty breasts” and the “undignified bird” of the western meat market. The West is synonymous with
forbidden meat and drink for Indo-Pakistani immigrants. They cannot enjoy meat without scruples in the Western world. Perhaps for this reason, Suleri seems to dwell on the traditional meat cuisine, as this is where she finds the greatest difference between the cuisine of two worlds. “Meatless” may also underline the restraint and abstinence from many other kinds of meat like pork and bacon that is normally exercised by immigrants in the West. There are repetitive allusions in her narrative to meat cuisine, offal dishes and Eid festivity when meat is eaten as a sacred duty by Muslims. She belongs to a particular culture in which people “take the world on their tongues” and cook so many organs that they may “know the flavor of each part of the anatomy” (MD, p. 28). The sensory details unveil her longing for fresh, juicy, unrefrigerated meat chops and the different meat delicacies for which Pakistani food is famous.

Meat has a mythical status as a food and is considered a symbol of life, vitality and health despite the growing trend of vegetarianism across the world. Suleri seems to find shreds of herself to be left behind in “organic” and raw contexts and may feel herself being torn apart in the “inorganic” and developed world. Nonetheless, for her with her Pakistani ties, “meat” becomes a metaphor for the love and warmth of family and the security drawn from the physical presence of loved ones. She appears to feel the intense loss in her gut and tries to handle emptiness through a process in which above all, “meat” seems to take on a life of its own. Even in her dreams she sees portions of meat all around her Mamma’s coffin. The meat of her account dwells on an existence infested with loss. The chapter entitled “Meatless Days” reveals her cravings for “meaty, succulent” bonds with parents and siblings. It is the bodily presence of her blood relations that she in a strange way associates with “carnivorous households” (MD, p. 31). The taste of meat seems to merge with the flavour of family reunions. Though she may have become
accustomed to Western living, there is a pronounced hunger for intimate, “meat and blood” relations through her “meatless” stay in a foreign world. She appears to miss family in the same measure as Ifat’s daughter misses her mother. She discovers that “[her] aunt [Suleri] smells like [her] mother” (MD, p. 40). Perhaps, to fill the void Suleri has come up with very meaty figurative language.

“Meat” appears to serve as a metonym of patriarchy, and its affordability “has long served as a badge of success, health, and power, especially for men.” Suleri feels embarrassment about bluntly naming offal dishes like “kapuras” or “kirnees” but still allows them to dominate her narration as a show of liberation from the oppression of Eastern modesty. For her, these dishes somehow invoke the playfulness and excitement of cooking together with her sisters, but also seem to trigger mixed reactions in her towards the unchallengeable authority of “kapuras” (testicles), or in other words men’s authorial role in Pakistani society. Suleri may not be at ease with the overplayed role of “kapuras” in an orthodox world, but still she does not complain of their taste nor find them nauseating. Despite her refuge from “kapuras”, she seems to have come to terms with the paradox that, no matter how much she reacts and objects to patriarchy, as a Pakistani woman she has to remain hushed about “kapuras.” She may not be able to disconnect herself from this identity which is evident from her instinct for the metaphor of “meat” and the way she relates to it. Suleri seems to crave the sight of dishes full of raw, fresh meat as at “Eid”, but at the same time, appears to find insipid “meatless” days in the West to be liberating also. Nonetheless, she may have enjoyed her empowerment in defiance of the conservative, patriarchal Eastern constructs in her “meatless” trans-Atlantic lived experience.
Summers celebrated with mangoes, “lassi” and “Golguppas” are the memories which help Suleri anchor her displaced self. She recalls with excitement the festive mango season and describes the recipe for an indigenous “lassi” drink in such a tempting way that anyone reading it will feel thirsty:

And summer is of course lassi time. What a marvelous lunchtime drink that is. Made of crystal water, yogurt, and salt, blended to perfection with some ice! Sometimes to the consternation of my husband, I make myself a large glass of lassi for breakfast, but it is not quite the same. For one thing an electrified blender tends to neutralize the liquid, robbing it of the surprising consistency created by expert palms wielding a riruk. A riruk is a wooden instrument, with a stem and then some surprising wooden fins that are rotated in the yogurt and water to produce a beverage unchallenged in its succor and delight. I should have asked Tillat to bring me a riruk when she was last in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{51}

The sub-continental “Lassi” is no doubt an exotic drink with its cool, refreshing effect in the sultry and scorching summers of the region. A blender-made drink is no comparison for the manually made “lassi”. Though she looks forward to asking Tillat for a “riruk” but it is unlikely that an imported “riruk” drink would satisfy her homesick palate. Perhaps, she knows that she may never get that taste of Lahori “lassi” in America though she keeps stirring in a glass of plain yogurt for herself to the surprise of her western partner.

Her food cravings seem to portray her as a woman with strong senses which inadvertently contribute to intensifying her sense of loss. Recurring food imagery may suggest that her senses have a strong role in making her situate her emptiness as painfully literal. It is pathetic that “each time [she] returns to Pakistan, [she realizes] that [she has] quite forgotten what it is, the fragrance of real tea” (MD, p.
She can very easily relate to her smaller brother “so poor Irfani”, and the way he missed local tastes and “how much his infant taste buds must have colored his perception of the grimness of each day” (MD, p. 28), as he was born in England.

Due to the heavy drudgery of cooking desi dishes and long ceremonious meals, cooks are a necessary part of the rich and upper middle class South Asian household. The cooks in the Suleri household appear to be indispensable and according to Sangeeta Ray, they seem to assume an authority that surpasses their position;52 “Food certainly gave us a way not simply of ordering a week or a day but of living inside history, measuring everything we remembered against a chronology of cooks” (MD, p. 34). Suleri relives “inside” history through food and cherishing every moment that was spent around the kitchen and dining table. Nevertheless, mealtimes have an air of sanctity about them in the East and Suleri as an immigrant seems to be longing for such significant periods. She belongs to a kind of world where the kitchen remains busy and provides ample opportunity for the family to spend time in each other’s company. On leaving Pakistan, the very kitchen becomes a site of loss (IL, p.36) and makes her cross-examine herself about “how to conceive of a kitchen as a place where [she] actually could be private” (MD, p. 36). Her memoir is a narrative of some deep cravings, not only for home-cooked dinners, but for the comfort that is associated with cooking and eating together along with the conversation that takes place at family meals.

Suleri’s account spans a time of great political upheaval in Pakistan’s history. Her father was still active as a journalist when Bhutto was hanged by Zia’s military and dictatorial regime, a man he had appointed as the head of the army. Betrayal was in the air and Suleri could sense it in food:
And to some degree all of us were equally watchful for hidden trickeries in the scheme of nourishment, for the way in which things would always be missing or out of Pakistan’s erratic emotional market. Items of security — such as flour or butter or cigarettes or tea — were always vanishing (---) the milkman had accidently diluted our supply of milk with paraffin instead of water; and those were not pistachios, at all, in a tub of Hico’s green ice cream. Our days and our newspapers were equally full of disquieting tales about adulterated foods (---) we in Pakistan were bed mates with betrayal and learned how to take grim satisfaction from assessing the water table of our outrage. There were both lean times and meaty times. (MD, p. 28, 29)

Food seems to allegorize the mayhem of corruption and adulteration prevalent in the newly independent country. Even the poor quality of market food may reveal the abyss of demoralization and degeneration to which postcolonial societies usually sink. However, the disappointment with “items of security — such as flour or butter or cigarettes or tea” may point to the shocks caused by mutual as well as national breaches of trust.

The metonymy of Meatless Days reflects a starved life. For Suleri “hunger” is synonymous with love, when she demonstrates, “[her] father’s sudden hungering for God” (MD, p. 16) or “hungry for [Ifat’s] presence in our lives” (MD, p. 121). Her “hunger” for her comfort zone seems to become more voracious after losing Ifat, her confidante and best friend. Warren Belasco narrates an incident exemplifying how the “feelings and bonds of sisterly love” are usually connected to food.53 Similarly, Suleri’s yearning for her sister may have affected her like that of withdrawal from an addiction which is usually intense and deeply felt. This kind of painful hunger is also alluded to by John Steinbeck in The Pearl, “hunger for love when love is withdrawn".
Her dream (MD p. 44) may also signify that her soul hungers in exile and therefore, collects the “chunks” of her loved ones. Her state may be compared with Margaret Atwood’s Canadian hunger artist who “[is] hungry again; [she has] been eating in bits and pieces all day and [she has] been counting on something nourishing and substantial.” Suleri’s dream spills out of a strange kind of hunger for meat that is inseparable from mother and home. In her dream she tries to feed herself at least her “mother’s knuckle” an image which seems to reflect her eternal need for Mama. The “mother’s knuckle” in her mouth may also demonstrate her as feeding on emptiness and “bones” while attempting to flesh out identity for herself. Her hungry self may not be different from the protagonist in Margaret Atwood’s The Edible Woman who “had tried to reason with it, and accused it of having frivolous whims, had coaxed it and tempted it, but it was adamant; and if she used force it rebelled.” Suleri is also adamant in her core identity for which the food memories are an extended metaphor.

She seems skilled in translating her moods and feelings into food. Her anger and hatred for the woman; a foster daughter of her father after her mother’s death, finds expression in the metaphor of “boiled eggs” which she fed her father during his last days. The “boiled eggs” seem to suggest the shame and immorality of a female “usurper”. Interestingly, Suleri describes her relationship with Tom in terms of food which may suggest an intensity of their desire. She says “[they] watched the twist through which food became [their] staple metaphor, suggesting that something of the entire event [has] ---against [their] will---to do with hunger”. Again in sketching out Tom’s personality, she uses food imagery:

“You do not have the backbone of a shrimp,” I mourned, gazing up at the spread-sheet of that man mountain. “You have a head the size of a bowl of porridge and a brain the size of a pea.” This was
in a restaurant. I was surprised beyond measure when that big head bent back and wept, a quick summer shower of tears. By the time he left, all surfaces were absolutely dry (MD, p. 38).

To the background of food and restaurants, she seems to be watching the drama of her own life acted out by someone else. The food metaphors serve as a screen for her to hide behind and distance herself from the painful sight of Tom’s leaving. To her surprise, she finds herself hosting a man with “a head the size of a bowl of porridge and a brain the size of a pea” in a way similar to that of “putting out a saucer of milk and goodwill for the hedgehogs in the garden and then discreetly vanishing before they froze into prickles of shyness and self-dismay” (MD, p. 37). Earlier, when he has turned out as vital as food for her, she has to question him with, “what is it, after all, between food and the body?” I asked one day in an exasperation of pain, and never got an answer in reply” (MD, p. 37). The food-sex-love nexus seems to refer to a relationship that could not last. Consumed by desires, she describes it in terms of “hunger”, as it was a short-lived association, but otherwise “hunger” is positive for her as it helps her attain self-acclamation. But expressions like “exasperation of pain” and “mourned” reveal that she tries to cover her heartache with food imagery. This description of how food serves her in many ways is also described by Fisher:

It seems to me that our three basic needs, for food and security and love, are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others. So it happens that when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it ---- and warmth and richness and fine reality of hunger satisfied ----and it is all one.57
It puzzles her, that food remains central despite hunger for other intimacies, even with Tom. Again, the relationship seems to develop through eating as she remembers that “Tom and Tillat [try] to behave like friends; they [cook] together in a way [she likes]”. Food evokes emotional immediacy as well as the embarrassment of getting to know each other. Their affair seems to have started and to have ended around the table, as Tom seems to be especially fond of food. She “rapidly learned that the one intimacy [they] had to eschew above all others was the act of making meals and eating them alone--- it was revelatory for [her], who had never before watched someone for whom a dining table was so markedly more of a loaded domestic space than was a bed, but [she] was not totally averse to this new logic” (MD, p. 37). As an Eastern woman, it may have been a consolation that she proves to be a good host “[devising] oblique methods of introducing food into [her] house (for him), free-floating and aimless items that could find their way into anyone’s mouth with such studied carelessness that they could do no damage to the integrity of a flea” (MD, p. 37). Perhaps more than Tom, it is Suleri who tries to nourish her love through food and remains more hospitable and generous with a good supply of food as long as Tom is in “her house”.

The metaphor “meatless” seems to become multi-dimensional as her “meatless days” may also reveal a kind of emotional sterility after losing Tom. Being “meatless” may also refer to physical weakness as meat is an instant source of iron. 58 Meat is, no doubt, associated with male identity (male = meat) 59 and if this is the case, Suleri seems to have lived in cloistered, “meatless days” with the shadow of loss surrounding her. After Tom has left, she says, “I lived alone but in expectancy, which robbed me of the necessary solace that surely must accrue for those who truly live alone (---) And so I waited to conduct the ceremonies of welcome, sitting up a little straighter with the thought that, if not Tom, then tomorrow Mustafa or Dale or
Jamie (her friends) or Tillat (her sister) would come to visit” (MD, p. 82). She ends her chapter, “Goodbye to the Greatness of Tom” while seeing herself “walking alone [in Paris], amid the sprinkling of sharp Western rain (MD, p. 89).

Immigrants appear to draw comfort from reinventing and reconstructing an identity by carrying across memories of home-cooked food. Suleri seems to base her argument about food by saying, “expatriates are adamant, entirely passionate about such matters as the eating habits of the motherland” (MD, p. 22). The memoir is titled *Meatless Days* just as the title of her second chapter. Even the first chapter focuses on the role of “meat” in her past life. She allows culinary narrativization to take over long sections of her writing like: “dusky iftar”; “dates”; “grilled liver”; “tang of pepper”; “orange juice”; “spinach leaves”; “fried in the chick-pea batter; tenderness of fresh fruit; touching to the palate”; “cocktail hour that provided a fine excuse for company and affability”; “meatless day breakfast”; “goat’s head and feet cooked with spices”; “rich and ungula sauce”; “the things that people eat”. Suleri seems to be a liberal woman of the 1970s, a time when socialism was in the air and tradition was being swapped for modernity in elite circles of Pakistan. However, later on, her homelessness might have created a craving for the culture of *iftars, eids, Pakistani food, gol guppas, the local tea, the late night chats and all the festivities* of food around seasons and occasions. She seems to miss special days and occasions which appear to have left a deep imprint on her mind.

It was Dadi who seemed to be particularly fond of food and meal times. At the dining table, “the more she demurred, the more she expected her plate to be piled with an amplitude her own politeness would never al low. The ritual happened three times a day” (MD, p. 3). Suleri vividly remembers how she was more interested in sumptuous *sehri* meals than in keeping fasts. She is nostalgic about Ramadan.
when “the [Sehri] food itself [was] designed to keep the penitent sustained from
dawn till dusk, was insistent in its richness and intensity, with bread dripping clarified
butter, and curried brains, and cumin eggs, and a peculiarly potent vermicelli, soaked
overnight in sugar and fatted milk. And if [she] liked the getting up at dawn, then
Dadi completely adored the eating of it all. [Suleri thinks Dadi] fasted only because
she so enjoyed the sehri meal and that mammoth infusion of food at such an
extraordinary hour” (MD, p. 30). Dadi loved food so much that her grandchildren
could never understand whether it was “food” or “God” that “constituted her most
profound delight” (IL, p. 3). It was possibly food that gave strength to her frail body
as well as to her faith while her progeny were struck by postcolonial secular doubts.
She was “invigorated by an outcast’s strength, was sitting alone in the dining room,
chanting an appeal: ‘God give me tea, God give me tea’” (IL, p.8). However, “Dadi, as
an outcast, maintains her strength and resilience in loneliness, by not resorting to
anyone. Instead she has got God to appeal to for tea.” The old lady fancies tea,
even at midnight, to refuel her moral strength. The incident also highlights how Dadi
“the most imperious soul” (MD, p. 111) used food as a “voice”. One may wonder
why Dadi needed food as a “voice” when she was so strong-headed and
unrelenting in her ways. She who “at the foot of the table was always incognito, and
----- rather enjoyed her status as persona non grata, which she played to the hilt” might have needed food for a sense of self-worth. It was a sort of “identity spree”,
since she relished her food and allowed it to “move her to intensities” (IL, p. 3). Her
obstinacy about rituals was so extensive that it seems she would never have
forsaken them. The animal sacrifice on Eid, the distribution of meat among
neighbours, the instant cooking and then eating the half-cooked meat without
further delay are the customs that she observes with a religious fervour. Suleri leads
the reader to see how Dadi caused general unease, when everyone else in the
household has fallen for western manners; a fact well demonstrated at mealtimes. Her sceptical grandchildren seem eager to embrace modernity, and tend to see her conservative self as pre-historic. It is their dining table which becomes a postcolonial battlefield, where modern and traditional forces clash among three generations, particularly on special feast days:

The goat (---) winked and glistened on our plates as we sat eating him on Eid. Dadi ate, that is: Papa had taken his mortification to some distant corner of the house; Ifat refused to chew on hemp; Tillat and Irfan gulped their baby sobs over such a slaughter.

“Honestly,” said Mamma, “honestly.” For Dadi had successfully cut through tissues of festivity just as the butcher slit the goat, but there was something else that she was eating with that meat. I saw it in her concentration; I know that she was making God talk to her as to Abraham and was showing him what she could do---for him---to sons. God didn’t dare, and she ate on alone (MD, p. 5).

Dadi nonetheless, is the symbol of food traditions and eating together. As it is said that food “isn’t just its taste (---) It’s who you eat it with, and where. It’s in the Bible. Better a dinner of herbs where love is”. Suleri pays homage to the time when she could enjoy meals with her family. Memories of family dinners are important to her and seem to help her retain self-respect. One obvious reason for Suleri’s relishing of food memories is the special aura of Lahore city where she once lived. Lahore is famous for its rich food and its people are known for their indulgence in a variety of delicacies and food festivities. Suleri seems to be a true “Lahorite” with a special nostalgia for the mango season; “When it rained in the afternoons, children were allowed to eat their mangoes in the garden, stripped naked and dancing about, first getting sticky with mango juice and then getting slippery with rain” (IL, p. 38).
In retrospect, she may be ambivalent about her home and its location but not about the food that marks out her identity. It is noteworthy that home can be turned into “a discourse of convenience”, but not the favourite cuisine. In the cultivating gloom of New Haven and its “dark interior” (MD, p.182) remembering traditional food and mealtimes may be an opportunity to see the “cascading motion of dye in water” and sense one’s familiar self in smells and tastes (MD, p. 186). This is certainly the zone where Suleri seems to be on much securer ground than either the judge, Biswas, Sai, Lola or Noni; despite the fact that she had left home long ago. She fully celebrates food as part of her identity.

Notes

1 Suleri, Boys Will Be Boys, p. 86.

2 Roland Barthes, “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption”, Food and Culture: A Reader, p. 21.

3 Ibid., p. 26


5 Ibid. p. 12.

6 Ibid.

7 Warren Belasco relates; “making cafecito [strong Cuban coffee with milk] in her dorm room returns another student to her Miami roots: ‘Cuban coffee provides the vehicle that allows the Cuban exile community to gather to sip the brew and discuss the anger, the mourning and painful yearning for a country in chains. It was through a simple cafecito with my dad and grandfather every Saturday and Sunday morning at the omnipresent coffee stand, hearing stories of Cuba that help shape my identity as a Cuban’” (27).


9 Suleri, Boys Will Be Boys, p. 3.

11 Belasco, “Identity: Are we what we eat”, p. 34.


13 Belasco, p. 28.

14 He “[picks] up the package, [flees] to the deck, and [throws] it overboard. [Doesn’t] his mother think of the inappropriateness of her gesture? Undignified love, Indian love, stinking love, unaesthetic love------- the masters of the ocean could have what she [has] so bravely packed getting upon that predawn mush” (IL, p. 38).

15 “Fed he was, to surfeit. Each day, he was given a tumbler of fresh milk sequined with golden fat. His mother held the tumbler to his lips, lowering it only when empty, so he reemerged like a whale from the sea, heaving for breath. Stomach full of cream, mind full of study” (IL, p. 58).

16 “After a spate of nights lying awake listening to the borborygms of his half-empty stomach, thinking tearfully of his family in Piphit who thought him as worthy of a hot dinner as the queen of England, Jemubhai worked up the courage to ask for a proper evening meal” (IL, p. 39).


19 “8:00: the cook saved his reputation, cooked a chicken, brought it forth, proclaimed it ‘roast bastard’, just as in the Englishman’s favorite joke book of natives using incorrect English. But sometimes, eating that roast bastard, the judge felt the joke might also be on him, and he called for another rum, took a big gulp, and kept eating feeling as if he were eating himself, since he, too, was (was he?) part of the fun” (IL, p. 63).


23 V. S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* (London: Picador, 2003), p. 141. All further references will be abbreviated to MB and will be parenthetically incorporated within the text.

25 Spivak says: “but one must nevertheless insist that the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous” (26). The description of Spivak’s subaltern seems to take all into its fold. The postcolonized subject does not have the resources to stand up for himself and this commonality is shared by all subalterns despite their heterogeneous backgrounds.


27 Dr Asha Choubey, “Food as metaphor in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Interpreter of Maladies”, The Literature and Culture of the Indian Subcontinent (South Asia) in the Postcolonial Web: Received from http://www.Postcolonialweb.org/india/literature/lahiri/choubey1.html accessed on 26-6-2014.

28 “Mr Biswas bought a tin of salmon and two loaves of bread. The bread looked and smelled stale. He knew that in his present state bread would only bring on nausea, but it gave him some satisfaction that he was breaking one of the Tulsi taboos by eating shop bread, a habit they considered reckless, negroid and unclean. The salmon repelled him; he thought it tasted of tin; he felt compelled to eat to the end. And as he ate, his distress increased. Secret eating never did him any good” (MB, p. 144).

29 Belasco, “Identity: Are We What We Eat?” p. 32, 33.


31 Ibid.

32 Said has committed himself to a close study of how the self-image of the colonial subject is reflected by western representations; “The European is a close reasoner; his statements of fact are devoid of any ambiguity; he is a natural logician, albeit he may not have studied logic; he is by nature skeptical and requires proof before he can accept the truth of any proposition; his trained intelligence works like a piece of mechanism. The mind of the Oriental, on the other hand, like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in symmetry. His reasoning is the most slipshod description. Although the ancient Arabs acquired in a somewhat higher degree the science of dialectics, their descendants are singularly deficient in the logical faculty. They are often incapable of drawing the most obvious conclusions from any simple premises of which they may admit the truth. Endeavor to elicit a plain statement of facts from any ordinary Egyptian. His explanation will generally be lengthy, and wanting in lucidity. He will probably contradict himself half-a-dozen times before he has finished his story. He will often break down under the mildest process of cross-examination. Orientals or Arabs are thereafter shown to be gullible, “devoid of energy and initiative,” much given to “fulsome flattery,” intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; Oriental cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately, that roads and pavements are made for walking);
Orientals are inveterate liars, they are “lethargic and suspicious,” and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race” (See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 38). I think that this image of weakness has been internalized by the subject and lives on in the colonial collective memory.


34 “It did matter, buying tinned ham roll in a rice and dal country; it did matter to live in a big house and sit beside a heater in the evening, even one that sparked and shocked; it did matter to fly to London and return with chocolates filled with kirsch; it did matter that others could not” (IL, p. 242).

35 “Colonialism minus a civilizational mission is no colonialism at all. It handicaps the colonizer much more than it handicaps the colonized” (Nandy, “The Psychology of Colonialism”, p. 11). In the domain of food, it is possible that the civilizing mission has started to take its toll.


39 Hughes, p. 275.

40 Penny Van Esterik, “Feeding Their Faith: Recipe Knowledge among Thai Buddhist Women”, *Food and Gender: Identity and Power*, p. 84.


42 “Yet just as the playing of a “golden oldie” song may spark vastly different recollections of teenage life, so too many consumers experience and recall a Big Mac and fries in very specialized ways” (Belasco, “Identity: Are We What We Eat”, p. 31).

43 Ibid., p. 34.

44 “in societies that do not want to listen to women, food gives them a ‘say.’ Recipes, kitchen talk, memoirs, and community cookbooks all offer satisfying ways to communicate their experiences, preferences, observations, and desires” (Hauk-Lawson 1992, Abarca 2001, Finn 2004), (Belasco, “The Drama of Food: Divided Identities”, p. 44). However, Suleri’s voice seems to be that of assertion and not that of repression.

45 Hughes, p. 273.

46 “A literary form of commensality, shared food memories overcome distance and reinforce relationships—perhaps one reason for the popularity of food memoirs” (Belasco, “Identity: Are We What We Eat?”, p. 28).

47 Sara Suleri, *Meatless Days* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 34. All further references will be abbreviated to MD and will be cited in the text.


49 Ray, “Gastroethnicity”, p. 79.
50 Belasco, “Why Study Food”, p. 11.

51 Boys Will Be Boys, p. 86.


53 “More bittersweet is the wistful association of the smell of cooked cabbage with a stern boarding school to which one writer and her sisters had been confined when their mother became gravely ill. And yet, she also finds that these memories ‘are not disturbing. What is so remarkable is the clarity of these old events [and the way they bring] to mind old promises, feelings and bonds of sisterly love’” (p. 28).

See Belasco, “Identity: Are we what we eat”.


55 Ibid. p. 67.

56 Boys Will Be Boys, p. 6.


58 “Even today, persistent under-consumption of meat may exacerbate some chronic ‘female’ conditions such as anaemia if a diet is not ‘balanced’ in other ways (George 1994)”; (Belasco, “The Drama of Food: Divided Identities”, p. 51).

59 Ibid.


61 Boys Will Be Boys, p. 92.

CONCLUSION: Let not your minds be stolen

“To ask me to renounce what formed me, what I’ve loved so much, what has been my law, is to ask me to die”.1

My study offers no easy solution to the problems of identity and self-representation and like much of the postcolonial discourse aims at the “playing out of the problem as the solution”2. However, it may help in understanding the importance of a worthy self-image and how much it depends on tradition and history, though Ashis Nandy seriously doubts any such assumptions. Today, his revelation that “the West has not merely produced modern colonialism, it informs most interpretations of colonialism. It colours even this interpretation of interpretation”3, is more valid than ever.

Exploring the question of identity seems to be a liberating pursuit in its own right. For S. Hall, “identification is a never ending process of construction.”4 This “ability to think comparatively and across differences can be enabling”5 and uplifting. Self-critique is the way towards self-knowledge. The solution probably lies in, “seeking to change the way we read our world”6 and thus, to attain a better reflection of ourselves. In the postcolonial moment, the subject has to redefine himself through the travails and ordeals that are on the way to attaining self-knowledge. Identity rests on self-dignity. We are at a point in time where we feel greater responsibility towards self-realization. It is high time to enter the process of self-realization and break the deadlock of self-depreciation and self-abduction. Today, the subject questions his identity more frantically than ever, as he sees himself undermined in a world where there is no comfort for him either as a native or as a migrant. He suffers dual colonization as illustrated by Anita Desai; “in your world I am subjected and constrained, but over my world You have dominion.”7 As
survivors and sufferers of historical loss, we might heed such lessons from history in order to be saved from further cultural dislocation. We have to re-build the image that would enable a worthwhile reflection.

The postcolonial writer breathing in an air of ambivalence, discomfiture and unease is in search of liberation from “desires, repressions, investments and projections” (Said, Orientalism, 1978) of the Other. Elleke Boehmer agrees with Caryl Phillips in stating that, “to ‘find ways to begin again and go on’ is today’s imperative.” Nandy probably, means the same when he says “these differences have become clues to survival”. These differences are “not negative but positive in [their] effect. [These present] the difference through which an identity (created or recovered) can be expressed.” However, “difference on equal terms” is to be acknowledged, “within which multi-cultural theories, both within and between societies, may continue to be fruitfully explored.” Peter Childs reflects that “the extreme multicultural diversity and drive towards personal individuation seem only to lead to new tonalities and the accelerating erosion of difference.” For me, this “erosion of difference” pronounces the loss of the very essentials, and is detrimental to attaining peace with one’s self. There is no denying the fact that the Orient is an intrinsic part of the Occidental and vice versa. Identity may be taken as agency in this self-other binary relationship and not as a regressive force.

The ex-colonized need the confidence of identity to evolve out of the void of self-negation and loss. Colonial lack can be converted into a source of strength. However, I believe there are more internal factors than external ones which outlive and reinforce colonialist impositions. Biswas or the judge or any of the colonial subject has to remove the idealized West from his/her system and start seeing beyond the duplicity and deception of namesakes. He/She has to resist the
temptation of “mimicry”. To bolster his/her self-esteem, he or she stands in need of the spiritual strength of Arbidinuo who “after all [did] find a protection against failures of intimacy and nurture, against meaningless silence and emptiness, and against the innermost separations and disjunctions the West had induced in him.”

The protagonists need to integrate instinctive messages. Eventually, Biswas finds that “his attitude to Hanuman House [has] changed. The House [is] a world, more real than The Chase and less exposed. Everything beyond its gates [is] foreign and unimportant and [can] be ignored. He needed such a sanctuary. And in time the House [becomes] to him what Tara’s had been when he was a boy” (A House for Mr Biswas, p. 195). Nearly all the characters in this study end up in a state of self-criticism and with a strange sense of reproach. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that our struggle for individual space is what really matters. Free thinking which may liberate us is wanting. Identity needs consciousness and realization, so that when colonial layers are peeled away, we may find “a hidden, impenetrable gem, the sapphire” deep down within us. On the way to achieve self-definition is to acknowledge ‘the sapphire’; “I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal----My --- consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It is. It is its own follower”.

One has to be his own follower to find his centre of meaning. He has to become himself. The self needs to be defined against overwhelming western personas.

My work drawing upon the textualized narratives challenges perceptions of colonial identity and demands integration of the Other by responding to the positive forces within us so as to embrace who we are. Greater generosity of heart and better understanding of the Other are required to rise above a chequered past. We need a world community rather than the mere slogan of a global world. The distance towards the Other or in other words towards the self has to be covered without a
“white mask” or “Mr”, by likes of the judge or Biswas; but also with much greater responsibility on the part of the oppressor. This hope is voiced by Said that “Nativism is not the only alternative. There is the possibility of a more generous and pluralistic vision of the World.”

To acknowledge and respect the Other is to find one’s own self.

This thesis provides some insight into the social and political state of affairs that are intrinsic to our postcolonial situation. To discuss these issues in detail confuses disciplines and divisions between fact and fiction; between the discursive practices of Post-Colonialism and the state of postcoloniality. A resonance of resistance may be noticeably tracked down in postcolonial writing as the said texts have a strong historical, social and political background which can be of interest to researchers in other disciplines for wider implications of the postcolonial condition. My perspective and limitations do not apply to other researches, nor should these restrict the possibilities of reading the texts from alternative angles. I may not have been able to capture a complete picture of the mind of the colonial subject and his identity battles. Moreover, I may have been guilty of leaving a number of loose ends which will have to be tied up by future researchers. My work is restricted to the trials and tribulations involved in realization and reconstruction of identity. However, it may point in many other directions for research with the background of a multicultural and global world where homelessness, dislocation and displacement are witnessed on a mass scale. I have explored the texts to examine the complexities of self-identification and colonial behaviour but these may be studied from numerous other perspectives. My study on Desai indicates issues relating to globalization and neo-colonization, while Naipaul’s narration may be examined solely from the standpoint of Diaspora Studies. Sara Suleri’s memoir may be investigated for its rich “uncolonized” idiom and imagery and non-linear narrative, as
well as for the topics of exile, patriarchy and feminism. My allegorical references to Lewis Carroll’s classics may be helpful for students who are studying *Through the Looking Glass* and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* to unleash philosophical, psychoanalytical and linguistic interpretations.

The study uncovers what it is like living as a subaltern in a postcolonial world and explores the connections of social and historical landscapes with the domestic ones. Psychoanalysis has helped me in exploring the psychological contours of colonialism and postcolonial search for identity. The psychoanalytic approach appears to illuminate and clarify my arguments especially in reference to male identity, language inadequacy and psychosomatic conditions. I have drawn only on a general discourse of the subject as it is constructed by Fanon, Lacan and Cathy Caruth without attempting to transform the discourse into a psychoanalytic study. Though psychoanalysis as a discipline is helpful in accessing the complexities of the postcolonial subjectivity and in assimilating paradoxical truths; a pure psychological approach would have divorced my argument from its literary grounding and may have undermined the cross-referential richness and illustrative quality of my critique. In the same way, I have dealt with psychosomatics and the theories of language only to the extent that was required by my argument while remaining wary of turning my study into a clinical or linguistic discourse. However, they do contribute to the modern debate about identity and belonging and its stark manifestations in culture, language, gendered behaviour, and the whole attitude towards life; highlighting crucial similarities between the characters and the issues they are faced within the subject texts.

My work may not only add to the existing store of postcolonial comparative criticism but may also help in re-adjusting our lens for a better and broader view of
the issues that are more relevant today than ever. The nature of identity crises in
today’s world is becoming complex and offers even greater scope for writing and
critique. No doubt, this discipline has great potential, especially for researchers who
are baffled by questions of history and self-representation; and the relationship
between colonial schema and behavioural patterns in their creative and literary
manifestations. There is a pressing need for global resetting of perspectives and
better understanding of the postcolonial discourse regarding reconstruction of
identity and self-representation. The postcolonial discourse should have both a
destructive (satiric) and a reconstructive (optimistic) role, leading to alternative ways
of building self-esteem and identity in a cross-cultural and cosmopolitan world. The
identity that is foremost is that of humanity. So, greater courage is required from the
ex-colonized to see through these colonial illusions and face the present. My work
may bring wisdom and confidence to shun the baggage of colonial behaviourism that
we have been carrying all along and move on.

This attempt may prove helpful to students of my own discipline, especially
for those researching in Postcolonial Studies and Contemporary English Literature.
Moreover, this research is part of a process of self-reflection and self-examination. I
have noticed a tremendous change in myself after trudging through my project and
realizing what vacuum of identity I possess, especially during my time spent in
London. I struggled for some kind of reconnection with my roots by speaking my
mother tongue and cooking ethnic foods as soon as I stepped into my private space.
I found myself constantly waiting for news from home. It seemed as if I myself was
frantically in search of my own familiar world and experienced a bitter sense of loss,
despite residing in a metropolitan city. I became more than hungry for migrant
writing and started to appreciate the currency of the discourse in a world that seems
to retain polarities vehemently despite the claims of neo-liberalism. I am becoming
increasingly conscious of the colonization which we bear as spectators and outsiders to mainstream progress and advancement, whether we live on the peripheries or at the centre. At the same time, I understand that there are narratives that are never voiced, yet are very powerful; while also an unmistakable part of the very reality of a postcolonial world. I must acknowledge that my work has evolved out of a desire:

As soon as I desire I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I do battle for the creation of a human world ---- that is, of a world of reciprocal recognition (Fanon, 1986).

I hope my research will make the question “Who am I?” reverberate with a greater force. This very question heralds the beginning of a new era. Although, Salman Rushdie is not very optimistic about this approach as “at one time [he] tried to save him (the subject) from his (colonial) fate, but it was no go”.17 The subject may give it some thought this time.

Notes


2Spivak says, “in the broadest possible sense, most critical theory in my part of the academic establishment (Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, the last Barthes) sees the text as that area of the discourse of the human sciences---in the United States called the humanities---in which the problem of the discourse of the human sciences is made available. Whereas in other kinds of discourses there is a move toward the final truth of a situation, literature, even within this argument, displays the truth of a human situation is the itinerary of not being able to find it. In the general discourse of the humanities, there is a sort of search for solutions, whereas in literary discourse there is playing out of the problem as the solution” (54, 55).

3 Nandy, “Preface”, p. xii.
8 Nandy, “Preface”, p. xiv.
12 Nandy tells a historical story of an Indian, Arbidinuo, who was at last able to denounce the Anglicism his father had enforced upon him. He came back to India from England and became the upholder of a new kind of Indian-ness in which he was able to embrace his true self. (Ashis Nandy, “The Uncolonized Mind”, p. 96).
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