

**Betrayal, Division, and the Ideology of Revolution in
Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and
Neel Mukherjee's *The Lives of Others***

*Maha Sallam**

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Neel Mukherjee's *Lives of Others* (2014) – henceforth to be referred to as *GST* and *LO* respectively – are award-winning novels that belong to the well-established and prestigious subgenre of the Indian Novel in English. *GST* is a winner of the Man Booker Prize and *LO* was shortlisted for the same prize. The two novels are political novels with genealogical affiliations to the All-India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA), described by Priya Joshi as the literary and intellectual movement that has dominated the Indian literary scene since its emergence in 1933 till the present, despite the formal disintegration of the movement in 1939. The narration of the Indian nation in AIPWA-inspired novels is characterised by a coupling of leftist politics and literature, as well as the deployment of social realism. The goals of AIPWA are summed up by Ahmad Ali, a major Indian novelist and a co-founder of the Movement who defines it as,

an intellectual revolt against the outmoded past ... against acquiescence to foreign rule, enslavement to practices and beliefs, both social and religious, based on ignorance, against the problems of poverty and exploitation, and complete inanity to progress and life. (qtd in Joshi 207)

The present paper offers a reading of the two novels, and aims to illustrate how the theme of betrayal and the image of a seemingly endless chain of binary divisions are foregrounded as the representative symbols par excellence of the modern nation-state of India. The paper also proposes that, in their construction of arguably comparable versions of the post-Independence Indian nation state, both *GST* and *LO* belong to the tradition of novels described by Neelam Srivastava as being engaged in a "critique of the state ... [which is] more about the failed possibilities of the Indian nation-state rather than a critique of nation formation per se" (32). The present study attempts to show that the time gap of almost a century between the AIPWA goals cited above and the writing of *GST* and *LO* has not resolved the conflict between stasis and progress that has featured

* Associate Professor of English Literature, Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University.

throughout the post-Independence years. And while the Indian nation has achieved major feats politically, socially, and economically, the problems depicted in the two novels are still highly relevant in today's India.

The joy and hope of independence of India (and Pakistan), announced at midnight of August 14th, 1947, was inevitably associated with the trauma of Partition in which millions have been displaced and unspeakable violence was perpetrated. Appropriating the English language and (especially in the case of *GST*) "ma[king it] nearly into an Indian language" -to use the phrase of Joshi describing Salman Rushdie's groundbreaking 1980 novel *Midnight's Children*- *GST* and *LO* engage with narratives of the nation, highlighting the betrayals and failures, and offering their visions for future resolution. History and the narration of nation have always been, not only a persistent thematic preoccupation but the very "raison d'etre"(6) of the Anglophone novel in India, according to Priyamvada Gopal, who argues that, "the conditions of its emergence – out of the colonial encounter, addressing itself to empire rather than a specific region – meant that the Anglophone novel returned repeatedly to a self-reflexive question: "What is India(n)?"(6). Gopal claims a special status of "prominence" and "contentiousness" for the Anglophone Indian novel both in the context of Anglophone postcolonial literature and in the context of novels written in indigenous Indian languages. Whereas writing in English language provides the novels (and their authors) with "both economic privilege and cultural capital"(2) reflected in a "global readership" and "canonical status" in some cases (1), the Anglophone postcolonial novel in general and Indian novel in particular is under pressure to prove its national credentials in the language of the colonizer. The argument of the present paper contends that both *GST* and *LO* have risen bravely to this mission and engaged with the question of "What is India(n)?"

The India represented by the two novels is a composite world that bears the heavy weight of history since times immemorial, reflected in its rural landscape and urban centres, as well as in its uncharted places such as the river in *GST* and the forest in *LO*. The Indians dwelling and interacting within the textual worlds of *GST* and *LO* are the peoples of the state of Kerala in *GST* and the peoples of Calcutta and the surrounding countryside of the states of West Bengal, Medinipur, Orissa and Bihar in *LO*. Far from being homogenous, the Keralese and the Bengalis of the novels are sharply divided by class/caste, gender, and, most importantly, by religion – a major identity marker that overshadows other cultural distinctions. Betrayal and division have marked the private lives of the novels' characters as much as the political public arena of the nation.

The temporal focus of both narratives is the late sixties and early seventies – a time of political turbulence after the death of Nehru, during the reign of Indira Gandhi and immediately preceding "The Emergency" of 1975-1977, imposed by

Indira Gandhi and seen by many as a powerful symbol of the betrayals of the post-Independence era. The idea of India represented by the two novels is informed by the abortion of the nationalistic dream embraced by the modern nation's founding fathers Nehru and Gandhi, towards the construction of a secular unified nation beyond the divisive claims of religion, caste, community, or region. Arguably, both *GST* and *LO* belong to that "endless stream of 'nationsroman' ... novels of the nation" which, according to, Joshi, was "inaugurated ... [by Salman Rushdie's] *Midnight's Children* ... [A stream whose imaginary constructions] seem more elegiac over than celebratory of the nation" (260). These novels, according to Joshi, "formulate or expose what Timothy Brennan has called a 'collective myth of the nation', ... not at its moment of birth when it was the glorious victor of a liberation struggle, but in its unglamorous middle age, riddled by ... maladies" (261).

According to Srivastava, the Emergency marks the onset of two major political events: the breakdown of Nehruvian secular ideology adopted since Independence and later threatened by the extremist far-right Hindutva ideology, as well as "the reassessment of the meaning of Indian democracy and the achievements of the Indian state" (4) by Indian intellectuals. Highlighting the parallel development of Indian historiography and Indian Novels in English since the 1980s and 1990s, Srivastava points to the recent trends in Indian historiography, represented by the Subaltern Studies collective of historians whose original project was grounded in a Marxist perspective. The historian Ranajit Guha argues that,

It is the study of this historic failure of the nation to come to its own, a failure due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism and a bourgeois-democratic revolution of the classic nineteenth-century type ... it is the study of this failure which constitutes the central problematic of the historiography of colonial India. (43)

The two novels begin their action in medias res, with the Ayemenem House already in ruins in *GSM* and the Bose Street House on the downward trajectory that will lead to utter disaster in *LO*. The correspondence between this theme of failure and destruction and the state of Indian national politics in the mid-sixties is evident. The successive betrayals and divisions that mark both public and private spheres are the causative agents of destruction in both cases. Interestingly, the fissures and betrayals can be traced back to the origins of the nationalistic movement: for whereas both Nehru and Gandhi shared a vision of liberation from colonial rule, and emphasized the multicultural composite nature

of India, blaming the colonial encounter for disrupting the harmony of India's multiple communities that have coexisted peacefully for millennia, the attitude of these founding fathers towards the nature of government, the role of religion, and language is markedly divergent. The common ground shared by Nehruvian and Gandhian ideology stops at the margins of the anticolonial liberation struggle, as Srivastava argues through her revision of Nehru's *The Discovery of India* and Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* [*Self-Rule*]. Nehru advocated, and presumably tried to implement -in his capacity as Prime Minister- a European-based model of modernity, in which feudalism is an attribute of the middle ages that has to be eliminated, and industrialization, technology, and English education are to be embraced as the means to progress. Nehru preached secularism – not in the sense of anti-religion, but rather anti-sectarianism through the relegation of religion to the private domestic sphere rather than the public political one. Gandhi's nationalist vision on the other hand involved "a call to return to the roots of Indian civilization ... a utopian, collectivist and religious political vision ... a rejection of rationality and the scientific mode of knowledge ... and a return to village life" (30). This emphasis on village communities and rejection of urbanization was vehemently rejected by Nehru, as Srivastava claims, since "primitive backward roots are inevitably antithetical to the desired progress" (31). Gandhi's brand of nationalism is religious, in the sense of an all-inclusive "syncretic religion" that unites all Indians regardless of religious denomination. The spiritually-oriented brand of nationalism espoused by Gandhi, as well as his advocacy of the use of Hindustani language as official language in post-independence India, has an antithetical relation to Nehruvian ideology, with its secular orientation, and its bias towards English language. This antithesis marks the onset of divisive tendencies that will afflict Indian political life throughout the twentieth century, and that find expression in the multiple metaphors of fissures/fission in the texts of the novels under study. However, Srivastava plausibly points out that whereas Nehru's political vision got a chance to be implemented during his reign as India's first prime minister after independence from 1947 till his death in 1964, Gandhi's political vision depicted in *Hind Swaraj* "had never been considered or adopted by the ruling Congress [Party] as a concrete political strategy" (32).

Other political betrayals leading to further divisions – and echoing the biggest betrayal/division of all that led to the Partition of the Indian subcontinent into the "twin" nation states of India-Pakistan, then the subsequent division of Pakistan into Pakistan and Bangladesh – are the divisions among the ruling Congress Party and even among the opposition Communist Party. For example, the erosion of the unity of the Congress Party by the Hindu right, to whom Nehruvian secularism was nothing more than "Muslim minority appeasement"

(11), as Srivastava claims, constitutes a betrayal of the Nehruvian ideology of secularist nationalism. Moreover, "The strong rural basis of the Congress -both in terms of the wealth of some of its major landowning supporters and in terms of sheer voting numbers- has made it difficult for the Congress to effect a just redistribution of land or promote large-scale industrialization of the country" (Srivastava 8). Of special relevance to the plots of both novels under study is the historical division of Indian Communist Party into CPI (Communist Party of India) and CPI(M) – Communist Party of India (Marxist Division), then the subsequent division of the latter into a number of factions, including the Naxalites – the most militant faction of the CPI(M), who staged an armed insurrection in the 1960s in Naxalbari, a village in Bengal.

Both novels highlight the theme of "Revolution", and both use the upper case letter "R" to write the word; but whereas *LO* represents Revolution as the only means to challenge timeless oppression and current political corruption, *GST*, overshadowed as it is by the possibility of Revolution – still embraces and visualizes an ethos of love and acceptance of the self and the other as a way out of an impossible situation, albeit being a narrow, steep, risk-ridden way. In the small town of Ayemenem in which the events of *GST* unfold the Naxalites and their Revolution seem far away in tandem with the distance separating Kerala from Bengal. This feeling of distance prevails, despite the Workers' Marches in which factory workers, organized by corrupt self-serving Labour Unions, carry red flags and chant revolutionary slogans written in the novel's text in both the Malayalam language of Kerala and its simultaneous English translation: "*Inquilab Zindabad! Thozhilali Ekta Zindabad!* 'Long Live the Revolution!' they shouted. 'Workers of the World Unite!'" (66).

On the other hand, the Calcutta of *LO*, the hometown of the factory-owning Ghosh family, cannot continue to ignore the impending threat of the ongoing Revolution any longer, given the geographical proximity of the village of Naxalbari just north of the borders of the state of West Bengal as highlighted by the map prefacing the text; and more relevantly, given that one of their own sons, Supratik Ghosh, who studies political science at the University of Calcutta, has already left home to join the Naxalite-inspired revolutionaries in the countryside. Moreover, the crowds of beggars that fill up the streets of Calcutta arriving at the house doors of middle-class families begging for food, having been displaced from their villages by the recurrent famines that ravish the Indian countryside are a constant reminder of failed post-Independence policies and politicians' unkept promises, and a powerful sign of the inevitability of Revolution according to Mukherjee's text. Describing the despair of Calcutta's homeless poor, Supratik writes:

Lying on their gamccha, a jute sac, a piece of tarpaulin or plastic or whatever scrap of cloth they can spare after wrapping their bodies, is a row of sleeping men curled up like fetuses ... Their vests are full of holes, they wear dirty threadbare lungis that ride up while they are asleep, exposing their shame to the world, the soles of their feet are so cracked, they look like parched land in a particularly bad drought ... They are not beggars, and they are certainly not the worst-off in our country – they have the clothes on their backs and the physical ability to work at least for now ... But, in a few years most of them will contract a disease and die like animals. Do you know what happens to their dead? ... They are slipped into the Hooghly in the dead of the night. There the corpses rot and bleach and bloat, wash-up ashore, get half-eaten by dogs and foxes, rot on land for a while, then get pulled back into the water during high tide. (32-33)

Significantly, as one of the multiple images of division in the world of *LO*, Supratik's worldview considers such scenes of extreme suffering, as the scene of Calcutta's homeless quoted above, within a wider image of division between the haves and the have-nots. The above quote describes "The world beyond the walls of the Great Eastern Hotel ... Only ten feet separate [these homeless] from the world of extreme wealth. *Inside-outside: the world forever and always divides into these two categories* [my emphasis]" (32). Influenced by Marxist ideology despite his bourgeois family origins, Supratik is a meticulous observer of these daily signs of a societal fissure that destabilizes the very foundations on which India is constructed.

Corruption is a major causative agent of the suffering of masses in both novels: An episode in *GST* illustrates the corrupt profiteering stance of Party politicians who denounce one of their leaders, accusing him of "providing relief to the people and thereby blunting the People's Consciousness and diverting them from the Revolution" (68). The novel scathingly critiques such insensitive disregard of the fact that relief was desperately needed during the 1960s when "Kerala was reeling in the aftermath of famine and a failed monsoon. People were dying. Hunger had to be very high up on any government list of priorities" (68). The link between corruption and Revolution is underlined on the same page where we read the description of Naxalites as revolutionaries who have "organized peasants into fighting cadres, seized land, expelled the owners and established People's Courts to try Class Enemies ... spread across the country and struck terror in every bourgeois heart" (68). Similarly, *LO* abounds with multiple instances of collusion between members of Parliament, police officers, and wealthy businessmen, in a concerto of betrayal directed mainly against landless peasants and factory workers in both novels, as well as the "scheduled

tribes" displaced from their metal-ore-rich land in an act of genocide in *LO*, and the "Untouchables" of *GST*.

It is noteworthy that the middle class, with its pivotal in-between position in modern nation-states, is the main narrative focus in both novels, and is ambivalently represented as betrayer and betrayed. The Syrian Orthodox Christian Jon Ipe family of Kerala in *GST* and the Hindu Ghosh family of Calcutta in *LO* are representative of a large section of middle-class Indians. Gopal's claim that in Anglophone Indian novels, "the domestic and the familial ... intersect with, transform, and are transformed by the grand narratives of nation and national history" (8) is vindicated by the plot of the two novels under study, and foregrounded, among other things, by the juxta positioning of a Ghosh family tree diagram and a map of West Bengal, India in 1967 in *LO*. Significantly, the declining fortunes of both families is related to the implementation of new technology to private enterprise in a country not fully prepared for modern Western technology – an endeavor that stresses the families' finances embroiling them in the labyrinthine maze of corrupt official bureaucracy and multiple-interest bank loans on the one hand and the pressures of exaggerated workers' demands incited by corrupt labour unions on the other. Ironically, the pickling and preserving nature of the grand-sounding business venture "Paradise Pickles and Preserves" of the Jon Ipes indicates the conflict between tradition and modernity in postcolonial contexts; The Paper Manufacture and Print Press and the Bengali Publishing House of the Ghoshes on the other hand evoke different, albeit equally conflicting, connotations.

The rise and fall of the Ghosh family business reflects the material conditions of Cultural production in Bengal in the decades before and after Independence. Significantly, the perennial failure of the Ghosh Publishing House, specializing in offering opportunities to emergent writers of novels and poems in Bengali language during the late 1960s and early 1970s of *LO*, is a reversal of the nationalist cultural revival of the early decades of the century. Reviewing the abundant body of writing about Calcutta seen through English/European gaze since medieval times, Kate Teltscher argues: "From the 1860s ... the increase in political activity coincided with the growth of Calcutta into a major commercial and industrial city ... As the city's economy grew, so did the colonial bureaucracy, staffed by Western-educated elite among the Bengali middle class, the *bhadralok*" (199). "It was the *bhadralok* that was largely responsible for the spread of nationalist ideas and activity in the city" (199), adds Teltscher, "This was the class which Kipling satirized in the figure of the babu who 'drops inflammatory hints / in his prints' in the poem 'A tale of Two Cities', and who makes interminable speeches in the Bengali Legislative Council in the narrative 'The City of Dreadful Night' (1888)" (200).

However, far from being depicted as politically active, the "bhadralok" of the late 1960s and early 1970s India depicted in *GST* and *LO* suffer from a state of political inertia resulting from the repeated frustrations and disappointments that unfortunately often follow the high hopes and exaggerated expectations of liberation struggles. In *GST*, Pappachi, the head of the Ipe family, had his prestigious title of "Imperial Entomologist" downgraded to "Joint Director" (48-9) after Independence, and his lifelong work of discovery of a new species of butterfly – known to his family as "Pappachi's Moth" was plagiarized by a colleague through corrupt nepotism. Thus, this scientist who had received a Vienna scholarship under the rule of Empire, retires with his family to the countryside after Independence, spending most of his time in his dark library with shelves of boxes of butterflies pinned into paralysis for eternity. Pappachi becomes a wife-beater, using a brass vase to beat Mammachi's head night after night, causing severe scars that remained till her death. Chacko, their Rhodes scholar son with a degree in Classical Literature, transforms from an intelligent young man with a beautiful English wife and daughter and with progressive Marxist views that make him such an enlightened "Modalali"/owner or manager of the family business, into a lazy overweight gourmand who spends his time "Reading Aloud" in his bedroom and making balsa airplanes that never take off the ground. It is a mark of the pathos and lost potential of this sensitive intelligent young man that, despite all private and public frustrations, his caring tenderness allows him to act as father surrogate to the twins of his divorced sister Ammu who is herself another victim of betrayal. Having married a Bengali Hindu young man – a love marriage that ends in divorce due to the tragic downfall of the husband (another bourgeois victim of political betrayal) into alcohol addiction, Ammu inadvertently dooms her twin son and daughter (Esthe and Rahel) to ignominious hybridity. Unaccepted by their maternal Christian Keralese family or paternal Hindu Bengali one, the twins nevertheless have a happy childhood, thanks to their Uncle Chacko, their Mother Ammu, and a third character who is arguably the tragic hero of the novel – Velutha (the very dark-skinned man whose name means "white" in Malayalam). Ammu, who has received an English language education at missionary schools, has a lifelong ambition to make an independent living and support her children by establishing her own private school – an ambition that remains unfulfilled due to her untimely death at the age of thirty-one, sick, ostracized, and all alone in a hotel room. Tragically, it is Ammu's short love affair with Velutha that has been so cruelly punished by a society where despite all claims of progress, age-old caste-system prejudices are as deeply entrenched as ever.

Velutha is represented both physically and emotionally as a demi-god: a handsome young man with black skin, dazzling white teeth, tall muscular body,

high intelligence, compassion, and humility; he has received advanced vocational training under a German master which, coupled to his great natural artistic skills, makes him an engineer cum carpenter cum artist cum electrician. Chacko admits that Velutha "practically runs the [Jon Ipe] factory" (279). An all-inclusive capacity for love, compassion, and sharing is the core of Velutha's nature: he is the bread-winner and care-taker of his small family consisting of a blind father, a sick mother, and a paralytic brother; he is a guide, companion, and playmate to the twins, as much of a father figure to them as their uncle Chacko is, teaching them how to swim and row a boat, sharing games and stories with them, and endlessly caring for them. Nevertheless, Velutha belongs by birth to the "low" caste of the "Untouchables", which is not just a metaphoric marker of marginalized inferiority, but a literal stigma that precludes getting in touch with the body of anyone belonging to a higher caste. Velutha is betrayed by the impenetrable persistence of age-old caste prejudice that relegates the lower caste members or "Untouchables" to an eternally inferior position, by the self-serving political manipulations of Comrade Pillai, and by the establishment represented by the police who murderously kill Velutha in a scene of unspeakable violence enacted in front of the seven-year-old twins Esthe and Rahel:

Touchable Policemen ... [were acting as] history's henchmen. Sent to square the books and collect the dues from those who broke its laws. Impelled by feelings ... of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear ... Man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify ... If they hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature – had been severed long ago ... They stepped away from him. Craftsmen assessing their work ... Their Work, abandoned by God and History, by Marx, by Man, by Woman and (in the hours to come) by Children, lay folded on the floor ... His skull was fractured in three places... his face pulpy, undefined.... (308 – 310)

It should be emphasized that Velutha's life was sacrificed at the altar of social prejudice for daring to love the "Touchable" Ammu, and at the altar of politics for daring to resist the establishment and to act sincerely for the welfare of the working class as one of the exceptionally rare card-holders of the Communist Party to uphold the values of general welfare rather than private interest.

The Hollywood musical drama *Sound of Music* (1965) is arguably deployed within the world of *GST* as a focal narrative event as well as a reiteration model of the theme of betrayal and of the politics of language. The twins are taken to

watch the movie three times, for the dual purpose of entertainment and pedagogy, as they are made to memorize the words of the songs as English language drills. Significantly, the movie employs English to tell the story of the Von Trapp Austrian family living under Nazi occupation – a linguistic choice justified by the power politics of the outcome of the Second World War and of the overwhelming influence of the Hollywood cinema industry. Like the novel, the movie's plot highlights private and public betrayal, and deploys non-linguistic indicators of identity such as landscape, character names, and historical references that subvert the overt linguistic choice. The multiplicity of major *GST* plot turning points that accompany the third and last trip to the movie theatre and that carry heavy betrayal connotations – Esthe's sexual assault by the "OrangeDrink LemonDrink Man", the Workers' March arranged by the Communist Party, and the arrival of the children's English cousin for the Christmas vacations – underline the thematic-linguistic connection between novel and movie. However, one major difference between the two art works persists: whereas the story of Austria-Germany is seen through American eyes, the novel uses its appropriated English-Malayalam to narrate the nation through Indian eyes.

Similarly, the world of *LO* teems with individuals and groups suffering from the after-effects of betrayal by government practices on the one hand, and by societal backward traditions on the other. Feeling betrayed by the government's economic policies, and disappointed by his sons' failure, the senile head of the Ghosh family has become a bedridden paralytic, a broken man. The Ghosh sons are afflicted by a variety of maladies that have been dormant for years only to be acutely precipitated by the impending financial ruin of the family at the beginning of the novel. These problems range from drunkenness and drug addiction, to habitual debauchery at the slum brothels of Calcutta, to wasted literary talent and aborted attempts at revitalizing the publishing industry of Bengali literature as a symptom of nostalgia to its heyday during the nationalistic struggle of the 1930s.

Betrayals and discriminations affect women characters in the world of both novels for reasons that are more related to gender rather than class, caste, wealth, or education: for example, honouring marriage sanctity is a code that applies to the Ghosh family wives in *LO* but not necessarily to the husbands – two of whom are depicted as regular visitors of Calcutta's brothels; *GST*'s Baby Kochamma who has a diploma in ornamental gardening from Rochester's college in the USA, and *LO*'s Chaya who has a master's degree in English Literature are deemed unsuitable for marriage due to religious causes in the former case and skin colour in the latter. To be unmarried is a stigma justifying being relegated by family and society to a permanent position of inferiority regardless of

education, wealth, or status, an oppression that finds outlet in feelings of low self-esteem which later metamorphose into petty jealousy, bitterness and resentment directed against everyone, and specifically against other women. Strong and intelligent women who seek to be independent, like Ammu in *GST* may be tolerated up to a certain extent, but eventually they are made to pay a harsh penalty for daring to challenge social norms and attempting to practice equal rights as their male counterparts. Widowed daughters-in-law like Purba in *LO* lead a sort of living death, treated by their in-laws as less than servants, not sharing family meals, and living in penury despite the relative wealth of their in-laws. Interestingly, such pernicious customs – that remind one of the "sati" practice in which widows were burnt alive with their husband's corpses – are a major consciousness-raising factor in the case of Supratik Ghosh, the protagonist of *LO*. His adoption of Marxist ideology and his joining the Revolution are as much a function of the tragic circumstances of Purba and her children at home as of wider socio-economic inequities.

On the other hand, Rahel in *GST* and Sabita Kumari in *LO* are vital examples of woman power that may yet be triumphant in a patriarchal society against all odds. Rahel has always been stronger than her twin brother Esthe or Esthappen; as children she has always taken the lead in play, doing homework, or interacting with adults. Significantly, she is the main narrator of the novel as she returns to the Ayemenem home after years of separation during which everyone has either died or emigrated, to find a traumatized silent Esthe. The novel can plausibly be seen as the attempt of 31-year-old Rahel – an age described recurrently as "Not old. Not young. But a viable die-able age" (3), which coincides with the age at which Ammu dies – to come to grips with the past, with its happy moments and its major traumas that could not be comprehended fully during childhood. The novel's end, as will be discussed later, leaves room for speculation regarding Rahel's (and her twin Esthe's) potential role in shaping the future of their country.

It is noteworthy that *LO*'s most powerful woman – Sabita Kumari – doesn't appear in the novel's text proper, but rather in the Second (and final) Epilogue set in September 2012, i.e. more than forty years after the death of Supratik. Significantly, Sabita is the inheritor of Supratik's legacy, and the new torch-bearer of the Revolution, having chosen the Revolution rather than the meek acceptance of the only fate that awaited her tribal people: "outside their land – daily wage-labourer in the city, maidservant in someone's home, prostitute" (502). Sabita is the daughter of dispossessed and displaced parents who have tried against overwhelming odds, to retain their belief in the official narrative of progress, struggling to offer their children an education that may guarantee them a chance for a better life. However, the betrayals catch up with them, and Revolution is Sabita's only means of revenge and survival:

When the little of her life had been reduced to nothing, the Party had held and rocked her in its iron cradle, told her that the nothing of her life could become a path, a straight, narrow, but tough one, at the end of which was a destination worth reaching. She has repeated the same words ... to her comrades who are silently marching with her now to their business of the night. She has picked them with great thought and care. Underlying her choice had been one immutable principle: they must be people who are nothing too, whose lives are nothing, who have nothing. No recourse to any form of redress or justice. Revenge was their last roar. And what was justice but revenge tricked out in a gentleman's clothes, speaking English? (501)

The final lines of *LO*'s last Epilogue shows us Sabita, leading a guerilla-war squad of a "new kind of children ... children of the trees" (500), marching through the forest in the middle of the night on their way to carry out the dangerous mission of implanting explosives on the railway using a technique inherited from Supratik and his comrades. Although Supratik himself had already died forty years ago, "his gift to his future comrades survived ... he lived on in his bequest" (504) – the innovative technique of implantation of explosives on railway tracks which he invented. Thus "Revolution" is still alive. *LO* highlights the tragic vicious circle in which these acts of violence are perpetrated by the dispossessed against the "lives of others" who are, by all standards, similarly dispossessed. The faulty logic embraced by Supratik's comrades/"children of the trees" is the result of despair of ever getting a fair chance to right their grievances against an all-powerful corrupt system that resembles the evil ogres of fairy tales. Through its vivid portrayal of the excruciating scenes of famine, institutionalized torture and rape suffered by these dispossessed at the hands of a seemingly invincible, corrupt, octopus-like regime infiltrating all vestiges of life, Supratik and his ideology are elevated to Saviour-like status. The novel's text confronts its readers with a challenging moral question: on the one hand, acts of terrorism against civilians cannot be condoned; on the other, the state of affairs prevalent in most so-called Third-World democracies where a suffering majority is persecuted and dispossessed by a corrupt ruling elite has to be remedied if the world is to be spared an apocalypse.

The midnight Partition that resulted in the birth of the nation-states of India and Pakistan is reflected in the two novels in a compound manner that reflects the inherent duplicity of the meaning of "division" as a concept. In addition to the biological meaning in which cellular division of living organisms whether humans, animals, or plants, is the only way towards growth and multiplication, towards survival of any given species in the generative sense, division also

connotes a traumatic separation that can be associated with tremendous suffering such as the violence that accompanied the birth of India and Pakistan. On the second page of *GST*, the image of in-utero division of the embryonic cells is evoked as we read that the twins Esthe and his sister Rahel – the protagonists/narrators of *GST*,

were two-egg twins ... Born from separate but simultaneously fertilized eggs. ... They never did look much like each other. The confusion lay on a deeper, more secret place.

In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun ... Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities.

Now ... years later, Rahel ... thinks of Estha and Rahel as *Them* ... Their lives have a size and a shape now ... Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared. (2-3)

"Borders" and "Boundaries" in the above quotation from *GST* are echoed by the "Boundary Commission's decision" mentioned in *LO* with reference to the boundaries drawn between the emergent nations of India and Pakistan. Significantly, the fortunes of the Ghosh family of *LO* are entangled with the decision of this political Commission, a "decision [which] ... came as a shock: the Ghoshes were to lose the mills at Charna and Meherpur to the new country, East Pakistan" (238). All the members of the Ghosh family gather to listen "to Nehru's speech on the radiogram at midnight of the 14th August, with the set turned up loud, all of them stoked up, for once in the patriotic blaze sweeping the country" (239). Extracts from Nehru's historical announcement are quoted in italics, highlighting the optimism of the moment, greatly at odds with the future disillusionment depicted by the novel: "*At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake ... A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step from the old to the new ... The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements...*" (239). Nehru's choice of English language to deliver this historical announcement to the Indian nation is subtly underlined by the frustration of grandmother Charubala, who cries out, "Oh, I can't bear this prattling in English any longer! Why isn't anyone speaking in Bengali?"(239).

The paradox inherent in the basic fact of life in which "multiplication" of cells occurs through subsequent "divisions" -two acts which have an antithetical relationship in the discipline of Mathematics- may shed light on the obsession of *LO* as a text (in which several chapters are dedicated to a detailed discussion

of mathematical concepts), and of Swarnendu (Sona) -the child prodigy and mathematical genius of the Ghosh family- with Theory of numbers, especially prime numbers that cannot be divided. Sona has been leading a life of deprivation with his mother and his sister in the basement of the Ghosh family house, with strict lines of demarcation that divide their world from the Ghosh world above. Their only sin is that they are a widow and her children, and according to tradition, they cannot be treated on an equal footing with other family members. Sona's mathematical genius and the help of Supratik and two of his teachers get him a scholarship in the USA. The novel's text proper tells us no more about the fate of the silent Sona, till we read in the novel's First Epilogue an American magazine article dated in 1986 giving the news that the now thirty-year-old Sona aka "Professor Swarnendo Ghosh, a Professor of Pure Mathematics in Stanford University ... [has won] the Fields Medal, widely regarded as the 'Nobel Prize for Mathematics'" (496) which makes him the youngest mathematician ever to get the prestigious award. Citing landmarks of his biography, the magazine, having failed to get an interview with the notoriously reclusive professor, cites the opinions of his colleagues and graduate students, to the effect that he is widely respected by all, that he is "hugely inspiring ... [with] a focused, brilliant, obsessed mind" (498), and that as is the case with "most mathematicians ... [he is a] creatur[e] somewhat dissociated from the real world ... the abstract matters to [him] much more than the concrete" (498). However, one is tempted to consider Professor Swarnendu's obsession as a rare amalgam of the abstraction of number theory and the concreteness of its historic applications in his homeland, India.

Lines of division may be portents of impending disaster and downfall, such as the vertical faultline extending all over the façade of the Bose Street house of the Ghoshes, seen through the eyes of Supratik on his return home after an absence of two years spent among the peasants organizing Revolution: "this house which is asymmetrical ... along the vertical plane. If one were to draw a longitudinal line dividing the building into two halves, they would not correspond to each other; the balconies would be to the left, the two windows of one of the front-facing rooms ... would be to the right" (391). The imminent ruin of the two family homes in both novels reflects the threats facing the stability of the nation as a whole. On the other hand, division may herald the spawning of a new generation of the Ipe and the Ghosh families whose lives parallel the rise and fall of national history.

These may rightly be called "Midnight's Children" following the title of Salman Rushdie's novel that is arguably the Ur-text of contemporary Indian novels in English. The genealogical ties between *GST* and *LO* on the one hand and *Midnight's Children* on the other are supported by the argument of the critic

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan discussing the Anglophone Indian novel and claiming the epigrammatic utterance "to write fiction in India today is to write in the shadow of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" (Joshi 232). Saleem Sinai, the Muslim protagonist of Rushdie's novel, has a disturbed life trajectory that parallels the political turbulences of *Midnight's Kashmir* as well as the unstable lives of Chacko, Ammu, and Velutha in *GST*, and of Supratik and his brother Suranjan in *LO* – all of whom are "midnight's children" born in the 1940s, on the other. Moreover, there is an intriguing correspondence between "Rushdie's enigmatic ending in *Midnight's Children* of a 'broken creature spilling pieces of itself into the street' (Rushdie 552) "which reflects," according to Joshi, "communal unrest and increasing separatist violence" (261), and the endings of both *GST* and *LO*. The younger generation in the two novels are born in the 1960s (Rahel and Esthe in *GST*) or in the late 1950s (Sona and his sister in *LO*); thus their birth dates coincide with the turbulent time preceding the Emergency; they can be named the Emergency Children, having suffered its trauma at an early age, and the endings of the two novels are intertwined with the fates of the two generations and the fate of the nation.

GST has a chronological end coinciding with the narrative present of narration, and a textual end coinciding with the novel's last pages relating a scene that has taken place years ago. Given that both scenes are variations of the novel's most reiterated expression concerning the problematic nature of "Love Laws ... the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much." (33), the endings of *GST* can be read as an attempt at reconciliation and healing of Rushdie's "broken creature" metamorphosed into a plethora of "broken creature(s)" including Esthe, Rahel, Ammu, Velutha, and all the other broken creatures whether humans or nations. In addition, because of the transgressive nature of the two love scenes, with the chronological end breaking the incest taboo and the textual end breaking the caste taboo, the possibility of Revolution cannot be eliminated. Rebellion is implicit within the love paradigm offered by the novel.

The chronological ending of *GST* involves an enigmatic love scene between the twins Esthe and Rahel in their childhood home in Ayemenem, now in ruins and empty of its people except for an elderly bitter maiden great-aunt, and her equally old and bitter maiden servant. One night in Esthe's dark bedroom, Rahel tries to coax him into responding to her speech, as he had stopped speaking for years. What happened between the twins, and what the future holds for them, has to remain an unsolved mystery:

There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that (in [grandmother] Mammachi's book) would separate Sex

from Love. Or Needs from Feelings ... But what was there to say/Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons ... Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief. Only that once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much. (328)

The reference here to "Love Laws" suggests that national and private problems may be solved by a rewriting of these laws dictating interpersonal and inter-communal relations, leaving room for speculation about future possibilities for the victory of love and/or Revolution against retrograde tradition and self-serving corruption.

The final pages of *GST* take the readers back in time more than twenty years to another love scene amidst the ruins, between the two star-crossed lovers Ammu and Velutha. The impossibility of any sort of union between them under a fossilized societal caste system changes their nightly meetings at the "History House" – that novelistic chronotope that used to be the house of an Englishman and his Indian lover in Imperial times, then a neglected ruin during the twins' childhood and during the Ammu-Velutha love story, changing once more into a modernized hotel catering for Western tourists at the narrative present of the novel – is inherently a revolutionary act as challenging to the status quo as Velutha's political activism. Recognizing this impossibility, the two lovers "stuck to the Small Things. The Big Things ever lurked inside. They knew there was *nowhere* for them to go. They had *nothing*. No future" (My emphasis 338). Among the "Small Things" they laughed at during their fourteen nights of love at the History House were "ant-bites on each other's bottoms ... clumsy caterpillars ... overturned beetles that couldn't right themselves ... [and] a minute spider who lived in a crack in the wall of the black verandah of the History House and camouflaged himself by covering his body with bits of rubbish" (338). Clinging to the safety of Small Things in a world where Big Things are too overwhelming to bear contemplation, the lovers identified with the spider, giving him a name – "*Chappu Thamburan* ... Lord Rubbish" (339). However, Chappu Thamburan turned out to be luckier than Velutha: "He outlived Velutha. He fathered future generations. He died of natural causes" (339). The final words of the novel are "*Naaley*. Tomorrow" (340) – the parting promises the lovers exchange every night during their short-lived love affair. One is tempted to read these final words as an allegorical reference to a national future where the have-nots or have-nothings survive like the spider and affect a change through a composite notion that may be termed "revolutionary love".

LO -a voluminous novel of more than five hundred pages- offers two consecutive and complementary endings; the final two chapters of the novel's text proper set in the year 1970 relate the double tragedy of the murder of Supratik after his being tortured by the police, and the related suicide of Madanda, the elderly Ghosh family servant who has been like a father to all the Ghosh children, especially Supratik. In addition, there are two Epilogues referring to the self-exile of Professor Swarnendo Ghosh and Sabita Kumari's midnight squad discussed above; these move the narrative years ahead to 1986 and 2012 respectively. These endings require a contrapuntal reading with the novel's equally violent Prologue, as together they frame the narrative, highlighting the inevitability of a comprehensive Revolution involving different classes. The police murder of Supratik after an extended incarceration during which graphic details of police-conducted torture sessions are depicted, leaving him broken physically and psychologically in a manner that echoes Rushdie's "broken creature", and the suicide of Madanda constitute a fitting accompaniment to the shock of the novel's Prologue. The first line reads: "A third of the way through the half-mile walk from the landlord's house to his hut, Nitai Das's feet begin to sway. Or maybe it is the head-spin again" (1). It is May 1966, and "the sun is an unforgiving fire; it burns his blood dry. It also burns away any lingering grain of hope that the monsoons will arrive in time to end this third year of drought" (1). The division between the haves and the have-nots is evoked as we read that Nitai has gone begging to no avail "all morning outside the landlord's house for one cup of rice. His three children haven't eaten for five days" (1). In the next two pages Nitai transforms the now-useless farming tools – the sickle and the insecticide – into lethal weapons, killing his wife, his three children, and then himself.

Contrapuntally, the final lines of the novel describe the heavily charged moment of time between the implantation of the explosives by Kumari and her squad and the imminent arrival of the train: "In three hours, well before dawn breaks, the Ajmer-Kolkata Express, carrying approximately 1,500 people, is going to hurtle down these tracks" (505). The high number of deaths and casualties involved in this explosion is presumably meant to cause a massive impact on the government that will shake the ground beneath the status quo and lead one step further on the road to change. True Revolutions exact a heavy price that has to be paid by everyone: middle-class educated idealist young men such as Supratik – avid reader of the romantic nationalistic poetry of Bengal's poet laureate Rabindranath Tagore's, as well as of communist utopian ideology of Marx, Mao Tse Tung, and Charu Mazumdar – play an active role as a field hand as well as guide and mentor. In addition to a leadership that works hand-in-hand with the grassroots such as Supratik, Mukherjee's vision of Revolution is an all-

inclusive one embracing peasants, workers, tribal people, and urban slum-dwellers.

Finally, the present study argues that, in their representations of versions of national narratives that highlight betrayals, divisions, and the inevitability of Revolution, *GST* and *LO* are two outstanding examples of excellence within a tradition that appropriates English language and overwork it to make it bear the burden of Indian experience. The complex interaction of politics and literature in the texts of both novels can be traced back to the influence of AIPWA, as well as to the Subaltern Studies of Indian historiographers, and to the stream of "nationsroman" initiated by Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The fates of two families in both novels are closely intertwined with documented national events, yet ultimately, it is the aesthetic value of the two novels that subsume their historical political content and guarantee the novels an outstanding place in Indian Literature.

Works Cited

- Ali, Ahmad. "The Progressive Writers' Movement in its Historical Perspective." *Journal of South Asian Literature*, vol. 13, fall/summer 1977/78, pp. 91-98.
- Brennan, Timothy. "The National Longing for Form." *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi Bhabha, Routledge, 1990, pp. 44-71.
- Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand. *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*. edited by Anthony J. Parel, Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Gopal, Priumvada. *Oxford Studies in Postcolonial Literature: The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narration*, Oxford UP, 2009. ProQuestebruary. Web. 12 February 2017.
- Guha, Ranajit. "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India." *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Oxford UP, 1988, pp. 37-43.
- Joshi, Priya. *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India*. Columbia UP, 2005. ProQuest ebruary. Web. 7 February 2017.
- Kipling, Rudyard. *The City of Dreadful Night and Other Places*. A.H. Wheeler, 1891.
- Lehman, Ernest, Rober Wise, Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein, Howard Lindsay, and Russel Crouse. *Rodgers and Hammerstein's the Sound of Music*. Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 1965.
- Mukherjee, Neel. *The Lives of Others*. Vintage, 2015.
- Nehru, Jawaherlal. 1946. *The Discovery of India*. Meridian Books, 1956.

- Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder. "The Feminist Plot and the Nationalist Allegory: Home and World in Two Indian Women's Novels in English." *Modern Fiction Studies*. Vol. 39, no 1, Spring 1993, pp. 71-92.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. 1997. Fourth Estate, 2009.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. Picador, 1981.
- Srivastava, Neelam. *Secularism in the Postcolonial Indian Novel: National and Cosmopolitan Narratives in English*. Routledge, 2008. Taylor and Francis ebooks. Web. 5 February, 2017.
- Telltscher, Kate. "India/Calcutta: City of Palaces and Dreadful Night." *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. 8th ed., edited by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, Cambridge UP, 2013.