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AT HOME IN INDIA:
GEOGRAPHIES OF HOME IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN
NOVELS

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DECLARATION

No material from this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

ABSTRACT
AT HOME IN INDIA: GEOGRAPHIES OF HOME IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN NOVELS

Alexandra Fiona Barley

This thesis explores the geographies of home in contemporary Indian literature in English through an in-depth reading of mainstream Indian novels by a number of prominent writers including Anita Desai, Amit Chaudhuri, Shobha Dé, Shama Futehally, Raj Kamal Jha, Pankaj Mishra, Jaishree Misra, and Rohinton Mistry. Concepts of home are explored including identity, self, nation, and how these are reflected in the narratives and genre of the novels. Chapter one introduces the thesis by outlining the thematic focus and reviewing the literature on home. Chapter two outlines the reading strategies used in the thesis: concepts of worldliness and affiliation, to examine the discourses of home in the novels. These provide the foundation for the subsequent exploration of home in the novels in chapters three, four and five, where each chapter considers 'home' at different scales: self, family, nation and diaspora. Chapter three examines the conflict of identity between the self and the nation in the novels showing the failure of the home. Chapter four considers the family and addresses how the Indian middle classes are adapting to changes in Indian society such as globalisation, and economic and cultural changes. These novels in this chapter demonstrate the ambivalence of the old middle class towards these changes expressed as feelings of fear and nostalgia. Chapter five explores how particular groups experience displacement and marginalisation in the nation on the grounds of caste, gender and religion. The focus of the novels in this chapter is on the 'State of Emergency' in the 1970s and the Hindu nationalism of the 1980s and 1990s rendering the changing political situation in India textually. Chapter six focuses on how the gendered discourses of daughter, wife and mother place limitations on the spatial mobilities of the female protagonists. Through attention to themes of courtship and marriage, the chapter also considers how these Indian novels destabilise the genre of domestic novels by portraying protagonists going against the grain of domestic discourses by not marrying, or by divorcing. Finally, the conclusion in Chapter Seven draws together these different threads of home by placing them in the wider South Asian context in literature and film, and ends with an examination of the film *Monsoon Wedding* showing how domestic themes are captured on screen.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER ONE

The world through the home

"The novel seeks to show us what it means to find one's world through the home" (Black, 2006, p 61)

Introduction: the novels and home

"While houses and families are not synonymous for each other, they both gesture towards domestic structures of feeling that seek to place individuals within literal or figurative forms of dwelling" (Black, 2006, p 46)

The thesis examines the representation of home in contemporary Indian novels. The nine novels analysed herein: *A Fine Balance*, *Ancient Promises*, *Fasting Feasting*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Freedom Song*, *Sultry Days*, *Tara Lane*, *The Blue Bedspread* and *The Romantics* have been chosen to fulfil specific criteria in terms of focus and thematic concerns. Novels allow for lives to be fleshed out and characters created to provide the narrative with its human interest. However, novels are more than just fictional self-contained worlds, and, using Said's concept of 'worldliness', I develop his position that texts both reflect and help to constitute the political realities of the society from which they emerge, to show how these postcolonial Indian novels have unpacked the home through an analysis of literary, historical, nationalist and political texts to provide explanation and context for my analysis of these Indian novels. These novels showcase a range of perspectives, both male and female, about the contemporary Indian home, from authors who are literary prize winners, to others who are less well-known outside of India. These novels have been chosen because they represent different aspects of home and domestic life and demonstrate the ways home is charged with different registers and resonances: representing both the

physical aspects such as the design, construction and use of domestic spaces –
and the symbolic aspects relating to the family and the nation.

The criteria for selecting these nine novels is primarily based on content.
These novels depict the fictional representation of home and share a common
focus on domestic themes and issues. The domestic settings of these novels
illustrate the material history of the Indian home and associated religious, social
and cultural practices, and show how these are adopted and reworked by the
protagonists. Similarly, in the depiction of domestic life, gender roles and social
relations in the household, these novels provide new perspectives on the
theoretical models of western and Indian domesticity. In chapters three, four,
five and six, I show how the novels represent the importance of home in the
construction of cultural and social discourses about class, caste, family and
identities. The novels contest particular discourses of home in terms of gender
roles, consolidating middle class and upper caste identities, and marital and
family relationships through narratives that focus on a range of perspectives from
the individual to the narratives of family, and the nation. In these novels, home
is what Black (2006, p 46) describes as a "doubled form of physical and social
architecture. Houses, flats, roofs and domestic artefacts shape the inner world of
the novel[s], while bonds of extended kinship provide metaphorical structures
within which characters develop over time".

The novels as a group portray a society in transition and cover a range of
historical and political junctures making connections between the spaces of the

novel and indicators of time such as Indian independence, the Emergency, Hindu nationalism, and economic liberalism. Also important in terms of content and focus is scale; some of the novels, particularly *Fire on the Mountain* and *The Blue Bedspread* are novels that concentrate on the inner worlds of their protagonists and their conflict and turmoil with national events as a backdrop. Others novels like *A Fine Balance*, *The Romantics*, *Freedom Song* provide a much broader outward-looking perspective, through the depiction of a range of protagonists and their interactions with family members, other Indians and foreigners and connecting these to political and national events like the Emergency and caste reservations. Thus novels such as these make the nation visible through the home and through the domestic lives and relationships of the characters and I discuss this more fully in the following chapters.

The structure of the chapter is in three parts; the first part examines how home is theorised as a material and symbolic space, and I focus on colonial and nationalist constructions of the home and domestic spaces in India. I also explore the physical space of the home, and outline some of the Indian and western architectural influences on the design and construction of domestic spaces. The second part of the chapter situates these Indian novels as part of postcolonial and Indian writing in English showing how postcolonial theory has unpacked the home in relation to the Indian authors and their multiple registers of home and location. This is important for understanding how these novels are mobilising and addressing home in different ways and at different registers at a variety of scales. The third, and last part of the chapter, discusses textual

approaches to worldliness in imperial texts, and I show how these novels are part of a domestic genre.

Conceptualising the Indian home: material and symbolic spaces

Much research on the Indian home is historical, chiefly focusing on the colonial period; contributions to this field have been made by geographers, historians and literary theorists, on English homes in India (Blunt, 1999, 2000; Kennedy, 1996; Kenny, 1995; Marangoly George, 1999); on Indian women's writings about the Indian home both in India and abroad (Burton, 2003; Grewal, 1996); about nineteenth century Bengali nationalists' constructions of the Indian home (Chakrabarty, 1992; Chatterjee, 1993; Chattopadhyay, 2002; Legg, 2003). Of the postcolonial period, research has focused on the establishment of an Anglo-Indian homeland within India (Blunt, 2002, 2003); on diasporic writings about home in India and abroad (Chau, 2002; Marangoly George, 1999, 2003; Nasta, 2002); about the loss and disruption of homes during and after Partition in India and Pakistan (Bahri, 1999; Butalia, 2000; Nandy, 1999); on specific domestic issues such as servants (Dickey, 2002; Qayum & Ray, 2003); on public culture (Appadurai & Breckenridge, 1995; Munshi, 1998, Yeoh, 2001); about women, home and contemporary Hindu nationalism (Chowdhry, 2000); regarding western influences on Indian architecture and design (Evenson, 1989); about the performative aspects of home (Dohmen, 2004) and the religious aspects influencing the design of Hindu homes (Moore, 1996; Säävälä, 2003);

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and gender issues, such as women's power and authority in the home (Dutta, 2002).

Throughout the rest of this section, I discuss Bengali/nationalist conceptions of the Indian home; the reason I privilege Bengal is because this is the location and focus of the pre-Independence nationalist movement in response to Calcutta as the capital of British Empire until 1911 when it moved to Delhi. These nationalist discourses defined India as a domestic space separating it into public and private spheres. This separation into public and private spheres is triply encoded by western, colonial and nationalist discourses. Although my focus is on British colonial constructs of home, they have a wider resonance to other colonial nations such as France, which also held territories in India. Research shows Bengali nationalist discourses on the home were about imposing order and control over the domestic environment; these focused on the Indian woman and expressed fears of women becoming too westernised, or that they would neglect domestic and religious duties. Thus this section of the chapter examines the particular notions of order, cleanliness and sanitation being imposed through the imagery of the home in nationalist and colonial discourses. Orientalist and colonialist discourses depicted the Indian home as an opaque space something that was inaccessible and unknowable (Grewal, 1996). Hence the female spaces of the Indian home: the sites of purdah and confinement such as the zenana are depicted as 'harem spaces' (Grewal, 1996). Such spaces were exoticised and sexualised depicted by the British as places of immorality, and of deviant sexual behaviour and the subordination of women (Chakrabarty, 1994:

Grewal, 1996). However, as I will show, the Bengali nationalists subverted this imagery by creating a moral and spiritual home symbolised by Indian women. Thus the opaque space of the 'harem' in colonial discourse was reinvented by the nationalist as: "home, a reconstituted Victorian space that was transparent in its clear manifestation of moral virtues as symbolised by Indian middle-class women (Grewal, 1996, p 25).

The creation of an urban Indian middle class during the colonial period brought about new ways of thinking about Indian domesticity; in particular how the private (domestic) sphere became the focus of modernisation driven by European social and scientific discourses about women and the home. British notions of domesticity and cleanliness influenced the writing of Bengali versions of household manuals and conduct books. In these tracts of Bengali domesticity, colonial concepts of cleanliness, daily household routines and obedience of servants and children were taken up by the Bengali middle class as a 'systematic emulation' of the British (Kaviraj, 1997). The hostility of the colonial authorities to this emulation unintentionally facilitated nationalist sentiment by encouraging the Bengali elite to articulate their distinctiveness from the British in relation to the public and private spheres (Kaviraj, 1997).

This increasing public scrutiny by the British and the Bengali nationalists of Indian domestic spaces had the effect of politicising the nineteenth century Indian home. In contemporary Bengali newspapers there were public debates about sati. child marriage and widow remarriage thus bringing the home into the

public sphere (Sarkar, 2001). The home became a site of contestation between the reformers and the nationalists. However, it was the growing Hindu revivalism that made the home the focus of nationalist re-imaginings. The weakening of the Bengali middle class economically and politically in the nineteenth century led to fears among nationalist leaders of potential loss of caste status and the loss of virtue in women, so the home became the focus through which the middle class could regain control. Thus the nationalist project was enacted through the home, and the home became a means of reconstructing the Bengali public sphere (Chakrabarty, 1994). The figure of the woman as a mother and as a goddess has, and is still used by Indian nationalists as a symbol of the nation. Tanika Sarkar's (2001) research into nationalist iconography identifies food and clothing, particularly *Khadi* cloth (Indian produced handloom or handspun cloth) as symbols of freedom. Additionally, the goddesses Kali and Durga were used to represent symbols of ideal womanhood for women to identify with: Kali as symbol of nationalist anger against the colonial occupation, and Durga the symbol of a dutiful housewife, a chaste woman and the *sati* (a widow burned on her husband's funeral pyre).

Western and Indian discourses influences have contributed to nationalist conceptions of Indian women's domesticity. Partha Chatterjee (1992, 1993) demonstrates how concepts of Indian domesticity are split into two spheres, the public and the private. He argues that this conceptual separation of spheres arose out of the nationalists' need to construct an Indian identity in opposition to colonial discourse. Thus the home became the site of this Indian national

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identity. In nationalist discourses the social spaces of day-to-day living were separated into the *ghar* and *bahir*, or the 'home' and the 'world'; these corresponded with the inner and outer domains (Chatterjee, 1993). The 'world' represented the external material domain of the coloniser/the west; the 'home' stood for the spiritual domain represented by the figure of the woman. The nationalists' reasoning behind this was that India has been subjugated by a superior European culture in the material domain of public life, but the Europeans were not able to colonise the spiritual culture of India and the nationalists wanted to protect and preserve Indian culture from western influences (*Ibid.*). However, both Chatterjee (*Ibid.*) and Dwyer (2000a) highlight an additional meaning which is the inside private space symbolises something that is pure and intrinsically Indian, and the outside public space is something that can be westernised and does not affect the core Indian identity of the private space. This is significant for understanding the response of Bengali nationalists towards colonisation and that it was important to resist colonisation, yet at the same time to retain what Nandy (1983, p 111) calls, an "inviolable core of Indianness" to keep the Indian identity uncontaminated from western influences.

The dichotomy of the public and private spheres of the home is the subject of much western feminist criticism. While some feminists accept there is a public/private split within society and consequently contest the precise boundaries of such a split, others such as Pateman (1987) contest the whole concept of public/private spheres. Pateman (1987) argues that such a split reinforces patriarchal power by assuming that men automatically have

dominance in the public and political sphere, and there is no reason for privileging the political over the domestic. In the case of colonial India, such a split appears in the equation of the public with the political, and this was reinforced spatially through the separation of women's quarters from the public rooms of the house, which were demarcated by the fact that these public rooms were often given western style furnishings, thus turning the Indian home into a hybrid space (Sarkar, 2001). Women, who were seen as containers of the Indian spirit were doubly excluded from this public space by their femaleness and their Indianness, and nationalist discourses allowed men could become superficially westernised in appearance but prevented women from doing the same. Although purdah – the veiling and seclusion of women in the home - is seen as a Muslim practice it was widely adopted and practiced by high-caste Hindus. The interior domestic spaces inhabited by Indian women can be depicted as womblike because of their internal enclosure within the house. Bharucha (1998) argues that the enclosure of women in courtyards – the *aritharpurs* and *zenanas* of domestic space – is compounded by masculine discourses through doctrinal and scriptural restrictions, which disempower women and makes them invisible in domestic spaces. South Asian women authors like Attia Hossain and Githa Hariharan use metaphors of flying and strong creatures dominating men in their writing to symbolically break free of masculine discourses (Bharucha, 1998). In chapters three and six I discuss how the novels *Fire on the Mountain, Fasting Feasting* and *Ancient Promises* portray women who destabilise gendered roles of women as daughters, wives and mothers in nationalist discourses.

Alongside these nationalist discourses were those of the Reformers, also in Bengal, who put forward alternative ideas for domestic reform. There are two types of changes advocated by the reformers; the first of these is the citizen-subject type which draws upon colonial concepts of bourgeois domesticity and companionate marriage, the second type connects the domestic to the Indian/Hindu concepts of religion (Chakrabarty, 1994; Kaviraj, 1997). The Reformers took up the mantle of the citizen-subject type of domesticity as based on a duty to civil society; the concept of a 'new woman' through the invocation of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi is used to bring about a concept of a 'new' Bengali domesticity and individuality based on Indian rather than western concepts of freedom (Chakrabarty, 1994). This represents not emulation, but an adaptation of British domestic practices (Kaviraj, 1997). Lakshmi symbolised a civilising type of nationalism for women based around domestic happiness through self improvement by education and the cultivation of virtues of grace, modesty and obedience (Chakrabarty, 1994). These qualities of the Lakshmi-Indian woman were important in differentiating her from the English memsahib who was stereotyped as self-indulgent and selfish (*Ibid.*). The other type of domesticity based around spiritual/religious aspects of domesticity and arose partly out of resistance to the erosion of Hindu religious practices amongst those Indians working for the colonial state. In the Bengali text *Kalikata kamalalaya*, its author Bhabanicharan argued that the Bengali middle class – the *bhadralok* – were not observing religious practices and ceremonies properly and instead they were keeping time with civil-political (colonial) society rather than the alternative daily rhythm of spiritual time (*Ibid.*).

The effect of these nationalist and reformist discourses on Indian women are visible through their novels, diaries, letters and other personal artefacts (Chakrabarty, 1994). These attempts to protect and preserve Indian culture is illustrated by a common trope in nineteenth century Bengali literature: the fear of westernisation, specifically the fear of the Bengali woman becoming westernised. This fear is represented as a parody of a Bengali woman imitating the colonial memsahib. Many novelists took up this theme ridiculing and reproaching a fictional Bengali woman for her dress and manners, fuelled partly by envy of her wealth and status as a member of the new social elite (Chatterjee, 1993). Behind this was the concern that westernised Bengali women would neglect the home and spiritual aspects; Chatterjee (1993) for example, cites an extract from the novel *Majã* by Amarendranath Datta, in this extract the daughter is asking her father for a new football and bicycle, a 'self-driving car', and for him to fix the electric light because she cannot see well by gaslight. To counteract these fears a 'new' patriarchal discourse encouraged the education of middle-class Bengali women, but these women were also expected to exhibit spiritual signs of femininity in dress, eating habits, social demeanour and religiosity (Chatterjee, 1993).

Writing in this way, Indian nationalist writers were able to appropriate the coloniser's trope of the gaze and in doing so were able to represent 'their' landscape, culture and people in their own terms and to take both narrative and political command (Boehmer, 1995). This was seen in terms of a self-recovery or cultural retrieval and was initiated by the colonised middle classes and this

countered colonial representations with indigenous representations. Psychoanalytical postcolonial approaches have focused on attempting to explain the complex relationship between colonised and coloniser as a form of doubleness or mimicry. According to Bhabha (1994, p 86), "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference almost the same, but not quite*". The production of mimicry can be understood in the following way: colonial discourse produced binary conceptions of identity such as black/white; but as Bhabha shows, it was impossible for these binary identities to remain fixed and stable because they were being constantly undermined by an ambivalence or hybridity within colonial discourse. This ambivalence is a mixture of attraction and compulsion that characterises the relationship between the coloniser and colonised and is manifested through mimicry (Ashcroft et al, 2000). It is through mimicry that colonial discourse was able to produce a 'recognisable Other' through figures of 'authorised otherness' such as Macaulay's Indian translators and Naipaul's mimic men whose voices are also silenced and marginalised (Bhabha, 1994). These figures are part of a doubling in which they can also emerge as 'inappropriate' colonial subjects when mimicry turns to a menacing mockery, as I have already mentioned the satire of the English memsahib in nineteenth century Bengali literature. This links back to the issue of affiliation between the texts colonial authors and modern Indian in English. The menace of mimicry comes through the colonised appropriating the colonisers' vocabulary and symbolism for their own usage. Mimicry was a way of reversing colonial stereotypes, for example, the Negritude movement took

black stereotypes and turned them around by giving them glamour and spirituality instead of the colonisers negativity (Boehmer, 1995).

One of the dangers of portraying the development of the Indian novel in English in this way is conflating it chronologically with the independence movement, anti-colonialism and nationalism, is to see it as nationalistic. Unlike Frederic Jameson (1986), my argument is not that all Indian novels are nationalist allegories. However, nationalist 'resistance' literature from newly independent countries was nationalistic and anti-colonial as a necessary means of asserting a new and independent identity. However, Jameson's conception of these literatures assumes that the nation is a monolithic entity and has a common narrative and meaning to all its citizens. The nation is a continuing trope in much of postcolonial literature because as Loomba (1998, p 207) explains: "[i]f so many so-called 'third world' writings return to this site [the nation], it is not at the expense of, but as an expression of, 'other' concerns - those of gender, ethnicity, race, religion, caste, language, tribe, class, region, imperialism and so on". Thus, we should not be surprised at the continuing importance of the nation and its contestation.

Bengali writers like Bankim Chandra and Rabindranath Tagore were part of the nationalist nostalgia for an imagined past; Tagore's novels and poems combined Bengali poetic forms with English romantic forms in a celebration of the rural environment of Bengal as a focus for Hindu authenticity and 'rooted' identity (Boehmer, 1995). The voices and writings of this new literary elite

could be found in Bengal's universities, societies, public meetings, and in newspapers, journals and books. Bamkim's work was used by the Indian nationalist movement, his novel *Anandanath* first published in 1882 inspired the Swadeshi resistance movement and the composition of *Bande Mataram* (Hail Mother) which later became the nationalist anthem (Boehmer. 1995). Nostalgia is also a feature of present day Hindu nationalism but has a political focus that attempts to reshape the nation through foundational myths that exclude specifically Muslims. The cultural wing of the *Bharati Janata* Party (BJP) the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) has constructed founding myths and invented a 'great tradition' of Hinduism to legitimise the Hindu nationalist movement an the aim of creating a Hindu *rashta* (nation) built around notions of a Hindu cultural territory (Hansen, 1999). This has led to many inhabitants of India who are not Hindu (or members of the closely aligned religions such as Jains Buddhists and Sikhs), namely the Muslims and Christians being subject to xenophobic nationalism (Hansen, 1999). The controversy in 1999 over whether the mosque in Ayodhya is indeed the site of Ram's birthplace is one such example of the use of religious imagery and meaning in the creation of national and religious identity. Thus, as this demonstrates, the use of national imagery can be both exclusionary and inclusive. The concepts of *homely* and *unhomely* are useful when applied to the nation in relation to sense of national belonging. A nation can be both a homely and unhomely place for particular groups of people.

The symbolic spaces of the home come together with the material in the physical spaces of the home. The incorporation of spiritual and cultural practices in the architectural design of dwellings is something that occurs in traditional Indian dwellings. Also important are the links between design and religious practices, particularly the notion of auspiciousness in relation to practices and rituals that govern everyday life from carrying out rituals such as *Puja*, to maintaining ritual purity and cleanliness. The notion of auspiciousness is about the temporal, not the material in the here and now. Thus it is common for the urban middle classes to conduct religious ceremonies to purify and bless their houses, as well as consumer goods such as cars, scooters and television sets to name just a few (Säävälä, 2003). Additionally there are rules governing the design of the house, the location and purpose of particular rooms. Auspiciousness is about controlling future outcomes and ensuring the social and economic success of the family. So for the 'new' middle class families in Hyderabad who are moving and transgressing class and caste boundaries, these rituals enable them to secure their higher position in society and demonstrate to others that they are of the same social status in society (*Ibid.*,).

Religion contributes not only to the performance of domestic practices in the home, but also to the design and layout of houses. In traditional Hindu houses it is necessary that the plan of the house corresponds to spiritual elements and that spatially, it should represent the body of a supine 'foundation man'. The foundation man is considered to be a fallen anti-god and his body is used as a template for the layout of traditional Hindu houses. For example, in the layout of

a typical Hindu house in Kerala, the position of the foundation man corresponds with the location of certain rooms: for example, the mouth is below the kitchen, the genitals underneath the favoured bedroom (Moore, 1989). However, there are two fundamental issues in the design of Hindu houses. The first issue is directional, and determines that the house must be orientated to each of the four directions: north, south, east and west. The houses have a four-sided structure centred around an atrium which has a lower floor level than the rest of the house, the doors and rooms must face in accordance with the prescribed directions. There are variations on this, some houses particularly in wealthy households have many atriums but there is always one true atrium, some houses have no atriums – these are known as west-side houses (Moore, 1989). However, it is not always possible to build or design such spiritually orientated housing, especially in urban areas where space is limited and the colonial occupation also influenced the design and layout of Hindu and Muslim homes in India to which I turn to now.

The British colonial occupation also influenced Indian housing design with contemporary Indian houses designed in a more secularised manner with strong western influences (both historical and modernist) being incorporated (King, 1995, 1997; Mehrotra, 1991). Srinivas (cited in King, 1995) has identified three aspects of Indian house design that have been affected; the first is a change in house plan, form and structure. The multi-storeyed courtyard type dwelling has been replaced by a detached outward facing courtyard-less one or two- storeyed bungalow. This suggests that the number, size and functions of the

interior rooms has also altered. Second, there has been a move from the city to the suburb in order to accommodate such low density dwellings. Third, the adoption of western domestic equipment such as cutlery, tableware, furniture, fridges, wash basins and bath tubs. Where there has been new building in residential districts the housing styles have become more westernised and suburban losing distinctive vernacular features such as courtyards, and the restriction of decoration to arches and filigree (Evenson, 1989).

Writing about the home: texts, themes and their authors

Texts such as these Indian novels demonstrate issues of colonialism, nationalism, gender, class, and caste through their biographical, social, economic, institutional and geographical 'worldliness' (Daniels and Ryecroft, 1993; Said, 1993) and hence, give literature a role as social commentator and driving force of social change (Berger, 1977). In this thesis, I show how home is a slippery concept – one that has multiple meanings and interpretations. I focus on specific texts of Indian novels in English to demonstrate this slipperiness and how it shifts between material matters such as the way home is lived, the design and function of the spaces of the home, the boundaries between public and private spaces, and scales such as the self, the family and the nation; or about symbolic matters such as social and cultural meanings attached to spaces, and about feelings and attitudes such as belonging, identity and nostalgia that is produced in relation to the home. Thus, I demonstrate the different meanings of

home, as represented in the novels, produce and also play with particular imaginative geographies of India at local, national and global scales.

Drawing on the work of Edward Said, I treat these Indian novels as cultural productions; objects that are part of the world of which they speak. In this part of the chapter, I will address how these novels are part of an affiliative network connecting texts to the author and society and culture. The novel came late to India, thus the form of the novel and the act of writing in English is contentious. However, this has not stopped the expanding genre of Indian writing in English. In fact there seem to be two broad strands developing: one is writings by Indians living in India, the other are writings by those authors resident abroad. Even this is too simplistic a definition, some writers' primary locations are in India, but within India these authors live in multiple geographical contexts where regional ethnic identities might be emphasised such as Keralan, Bengali, and Punjabi; or sometimes their national association to Indian is emphasised. Indian writers are also defined by labels created in the west such as 'postcolonial', 'global', and the 'global south'. So Indian writers are at once both 'globalised' and 'localised'. Similarly, novels reflect these multiple identities and locations of their authors in the narratives, for example, Arundhati Roy's (1997) *The God of Small Things* is set in Kerala but its focus is simultaneously both national and regional because it features characters from minority groups in the nation such as members of the 'untouchables' caste and the Keralan Christian community. Consequently, home is no longer in one place.

it becomes places of multiple locations rather than a dis-location from place (hooks, 1990).

Ways of theorising postcolonial literatures have taken into account these multiple locations of postcolonial authors by including factors such as ethnicity, class and nationality. Some postcolonial authors deal with how these issues have affected their countries, highlighting those who are displaced, dislocated and estranged by depicting themes of alienation, homelessness, violence and revenge. The home is more than just a physical structure, it also represents a space of stories and memories. The partition of India into India and Pakistan made many Muslims and Hindus homeless as if they were living in the 'wrong' country. Such people became refugees traumatised by the violence, the loss of their ancestral homes and their culture and identity; the effects of which are still being felt today (Nandy, 1999). Various novels and non-fictional accounts (Butalia, 2000; Nandy, 1999) have attempted to re-engage with the trauma and recover these lost stories; Bapsi Sidhwa's (1999) novel *Cracking India*[1] is one such novel, set before and after partition in what is now Pakistan. It is told through the eyes of Lenny, a Parsi girl, who because of her age, has only a partial perspective of events, and she only realises what is happening when her Hindu ayah disappears. The ayah is one of many Hindu and Muslim women who were raped, sexually abused, mutilated and killed as part of a 'gynocentered assault on the enemy', during the turmoil of Partition (Bahri, 1999). It is Lenny's mother and aunt who instigate an operation to rescue these raped Hindu and Muslim

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[1] Its UK title is *Ice Candy Man* (1988). It has also been turned into a film: *Earth* directed by Deepa Mehta (1998).

women from refugee camps, by hiding and returning them safely to their families. However, many of these women, including the ayah, were so ashamed and traumatised that they refused to return to their families. The raping of a women defiles the nation of which she is part; therefore, in war, women and their bodies become a 'metonymic totem of national, cultural, religo-communal being' (Bahri, 1999, p 222) through a masculine nationalism (Eisenstein, 2000).

In relation to contemporary literature, Homi Bhabha (1994) argues that much of contemporary literature reaches for the 'beyond' by putting the present into the realm of the 'post' by introducing ambivalences and ambiguities. Bhabha uses the work of Toni Morrison and Nadine Gordimer to illustrate using literary texts how estrangement and unhomeliness result from living in these cultural interstices – to describe the unhomely experience of post-colonial lives. Bhabha uses Morrison's *Beloved* and Gordimer's *My Son's Story*; both of these texts centre around houses which have been invaded by the outside world where unhomeliness has taken hold (Bhabha, 1994). In *Beloved*, the house is haunted by the ghost of the daughter who had been killed as an infant by her own mother. The ghost returns to avenge the injustices of slavery which forced the mother Sethe to commit the infanticide, and in the novel Sethe, reconstructs the narrative of the murder bringing to light what is unnamed and unmentioned (Bhabha, 1994). The return of her daughter Beloved through Sethe's reclaiming and renaming her, signifies the return of Sethe's life and the freedom from the past that haunts her. In presenting this reading of *Beloved* Bhabha calls for the political responsibility

of the critic in order for the: "to fully realise. and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present" (Bhabha, 1994, p 12). Haunting is a motif that emerges in some of these Indian novels, in particular, *The Blue Bedspead* and *Fire on the Mountain* which I discuss in chapter three.

For the colonised peoples to resist colonial discourses and achieve self-representation they had to articulate their autonomy in relation to colonialism; means of doing this was through the strategies of mimicry, anti-colonial nationalism and cultural revival. I have shown how Indian nationalists and Indian reformers used the Indian home to create a sense of rootedness. In order to discover these strategies, a deconstructive approach can be applied not only to the colonisers' texts but to those who are colonised. In literature, English as a global language acts as a kind of imperialism by a process that Spivak (1985, 1990) calls "worlding". This is the textual representation of the Third World or the non-west by western authors, Western imperial texts represent and portray the imperialist discourse by their othering, that is silencing and erasing, of non-western characters such as Bertha[2], Mr Rochester's Caribbean wife in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, from imperialist texts. Furthermore, in postcolonial works such as Mahasweta Devi's *Peterodactyl*, India is an independent nation and as such, the native informant becomes a citizen rather than a subject, yet still cannot speak because of neo-colonialism and the dominance of the postcolonial migrant which renders the native less visible (Spivak, 1999). Ways in which the

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[2] Jean Rhys gives voice to Bertha in her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).

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subaltern were able to speak include the practice of sati, which the colonial

authorities tried to outlaw to protect Indian women from their men, a colonial

civilising mission, whereas the practice of sati was seen as a way of rebelling

against colonialism and western influence, a form of "cultural heroism" (Spivak,

1999). The aim of the subaltern project was to give political voice to those

subalterns – the oppressed, non-elite who cannot speak, since western

intellectuals are unable to speak on their behalf.

With regard to diasporic writers, Schoene (1992) has suggested that the

British-Asian writer Hanif Kureishi's position within the metropolitan centre as a

British-born Asian not an immigrant places him in an 'ethno-English aesthetic.

This ethno-English aesthetic challenges conventional concepts of British

identities from the perspective of Britain's ethnic communities; Kureishi's novel

The Buddha of Suburbia suggests new ways of conceiving hybrid British

identities are through theatrical performances (literally and metaphorically) of

the protagonist. However, many postcolonial writers inhabit multiple locations

encompassing different cultural and geographical positions that shift over time

and space emphasising rootlessness, and thus challenging the essentialising

discourses of nation and nationalism. Some postcolonial theorists have

suggested that these multiple locations and affiliations of writers displays a

'cosmopolitan' aesthetic (Carter, 1997) or a 'transnational' aesthetic (Appiah,

1991) which articulates a sense of displacement rather than a localised discourse

(Carter, 1997, p 171). Carter argues that the Pakistani-American author Sara

Suleri illustrates this type of cosmopolitan aesthetic in her semi-autobiographical

novel *Meatless Days*, through her position as a diasporic author she destabilises western and 'third world' ideologies about ethnic and national identities and through writing about her own feelings of exile and displacement from home and nation. Similarly, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* represents this aesthetic through the intermixing of cultural tropes from western, Asian and other influences suggesting a lack of rootedness in a particular place or culture (Parnell, 1996). *Midnight's Children* destabilises nationalist discourses by parodying rather than revering the creation of an Independent India from the British Empire. Accordingly then, home is more than just the location where one is dwelling, for those who are exiles or diasporic, home represents a longing for something unobtainable. Thus, home becomes a concept that is fluid and slippery slipping at different levels and scales materially and symbolically.

Home is not always rooted or fixed in place; it can also be a circulating and moveable concept. This is particularly applicable to diasporic and exilic people whose experience of home may be a kind of 'rooted cosmopolitanism' where home is constantly being re-created as people move from place to place (Appiah, 1999). Srivastava (2005, p 379) focuses on the "recurring leitmotif of journeying, moving, going and coming in the texture of Indian life" which he says is ignored in many studies exploring discourses of home, belonging and mobility in India. Instead, attachment to native places and ancestral villages is privileged, ignoring narratives of travel and mobility within and outside India. Though historical and archival research of Indian women's domestic lives, has uncovered narratives of travel abroad to Europe and elsewhere (Burton, 2003;

Grewal, 1996). Other types of travel through involving a permanent move away through migration and diaspora to the west, has raised issues of identity and belonging to both family and nation, which is a subject that many postcolonial novels address. The type of floating home is illustrated by the way that diasporic or exiled people characterise home and homeland that they have left behind in nostalgic ways. For the postcolonial individual home is about the legacies of colonialism and slavery, and a continual searching for home and a place to belong (Marangoly George, 1999) and the writings of some of these authors reflect this homelessness and dislocation. Salman Rushdie in the title essay of his collection *Imaginary Homelands* begins by talking about being a diasporic Indian writer and the problems he, and other similarly diasporic authors, have of trying to recreate a sense of home in their writings, he says:

> "our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (Rushdie, 1991, p 10).

What Rushdie evokes here, is a sense of nostalgia for home and that his separation from home evokes feelings of loss that he resolves through the creation of imaginary homes. Rushdie goes on to say that because of his physical distance from home (that is India) his version of India as an imaginary home is only a partial representation amongst many other representations by both migrant and home writers. My analysis focuses on how different Indian novels represent different versions of home in India, which I demonstrate through the worldliness of these novels and their affiliative connections to other domestic novels from India and also from the west, particularly those by Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë, which I discuss in chapter two.

Indian migrant writers writing about India, like Rushdie for example, are considered by the west as having a privileged position, because it is assumed they are able to see India as an insider would while writing from the outside (Spivak, 1999; c.f. Carter, 2001[3]). The 'native informant' and their 'native voice', even if their geographical location is elsewhere, are considered to give a sense of authenticity to third world writing that non-native writers are assumed to lack (Spivak; 1990, 1997, 1999). Indian authors writing in English tend to depict a more cosmopolitan sense of India "showing a "specific way of inhabiting the transnational and transcultural currents of contemporary globalisation (Black, 2006, p 45). Because of the cosmopolitan focus in their novels, those Indian writers who write in English are considered to represent the nation because their work is read across India and also transnationally. Indian writing in English is also targeted at western readers, as well as Indian readers, who might have different expectations and demands of Indian literature. The novels of the first generation of successful Indian writers such as V.S. Naipaul, who wrote his first novels specifically for western rather than Indian audiences, had a colonial outlook, and consequently, his books are very different in style and themes to authors writing in vernacular languages, and to younger authors writing in English now (Mishra, 2000d). It is difficult for Indian writers to ignore the influence of the west as a potential market for their books, as the infrastructure for book publishing in India is western orientated (Mishra, 2000d). In terms of volume over time, regional language literature is greater in output than Indian

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[3] Carter puts forward the concept of a 'domestic geography' or local knowledge, which she argues that 'native' authors do bring a different way of engaging with the landscape of daily life in a particular place because they have the advantage of being a cultural insider rather than a transient visitor.

literature in English; but it is obscured by the publicity given to English language literature which is described as a 'giant edifice' that obscures and minimises the significance of Indian literature written in other languages (Ahmad, 1992; Orsini, 2002). However, it should be pointed out with regard to Indian readers, that English is also the language of the elite and the English language novels are primarily written by and for the urban middle classes. I show in later chapters how contemporary Indian novels in English are part of a consolidation of Indian middle class identity because they give their authors and readers cultural and symbolic capital and so act as markers of taste and class (Bourdieu, 1984; Dwyer, 2000a). Thapan's (2001) work on young middle class Indian women's identities finds that it is urban middle class, English speaking, educationally advantaged women who have the necessary cultural capital to take advantage of global flows of media and culture. There have been some studies of young middle class women's reading habits which show a preference for canonical English language novels as well as imported romantic fiction under the brand of Mills and Boon (Parameswaran, 1999, 2002; Puri, 1997). Shobha Dé's novels are an interesting counterpoint to this, written in English, they portray and incorporate elements from popular Indian culture such as Hindi cinemas and its magazines (Dwyer, 2000a).

Indian novelists writing in English have been able to reach a much wider audience outside of India (particularly western readers) than they would writing the regional languages. English is still so pervasive in India after colonisation partly because it is the language of globalisation (Mishra, 2000d), and partly

because south and north Indian tensions give English a more neutral language status than Hindi. Some consider that Indian writers make a statement by choosing to write in English rather than in one of the indigenous languages because it is seen as a foreign language and a language of the elite rather than the language of the people (Deshpande, 1997). In comparison to Bengali, Urdu and Hindi, English is a relatively recent addition to India's languages and lacks a cultural history which is why writing in English is more controversial and is making a cultural, political and class statement from an urban English educated middle class (Deshpande, 1997). English is considered universally accessible and the translation of indigenous Indian writing into English makes such translated literature available to a global readership. For example, Tharu and Lalita (1995) in volume II of their *Women Writing in India* anthology, have selected 'forgotten' or marginalised (non-Brahmin and secular) women's writings for inclusion.

Although Indian writing in English has a relatively short history, there have been a number of important shifts in the use of language. Early twentieth century writing in English was heavily influenced by colonialism and lacked confidence and vitality of the indigenous language writing, it was "a sustained literal translation of the vernacular rather than islands of direct monstrous speech in a sea of authorial Standard English" (Spivak, 1996, p 128). Belonging to this age are a group of writers including R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Ruth Prawer Jhabwala, who are what Spivak (1996) calls a group of "reportorial realist writers" who used stilted language and wrote nostalgically about rural India. The

1980s brought about a revolution in Indian writing: novelists felt they were no longer shackled to the coloniser and the writings of this group were exemplified by Salman Rushdie, who used the postmodern language of the hyper-real with its play on English and western words, and cultural references in novels such as *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Thus in such novels, the English language is being used by postcolonial Indian migrant authors to reclaim their national space and ethnic identity (Spivak, 1996). Subverting the English language in this way, and making it part of a national identity through creating hybrid Indian-English words and grammar, undoes the authority of English as the dominant language (Spivak, 1993b). Translation into English may be one way of rectifying this discrepancy; as Spivak (1995, p xxiii) insists, regional language authors like Mahasweta Devi "must not be commodified as 'national cultural artefact[s]' only accessible to 'Indians'".

The hegemony of Indian literature in English has been maintained through Indian writers in English, who have acted as gatekeepers of Indian fiction for western readers. Two recent anthologies edited by Salman Rushdie (Rushdie & West, 1997) and Amit Chaudhuri (2001), both Indian writers in English, have focused predominantly on literature in English; Rushdie and West (1997) have stated controversially in their introduction to the collection: *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*, that they have only included writings in English because they consider these works are more significant than Indian literature in other (ethnic and regional) languages. Writing in English raises a number of issues around how this Indian literature in English is part of 'English'

literature, this is reflected in the debates over what to call the literatures from the former colonial countries, and various terms used in the theoretical literature include 'postcolonial literature', or 'world literature written in English', or 'commonwealth literature'; all of these namings have embedded in them particular ideologies about the literatures they encompass. Naming these literatures in this way serves to perpetuate the separation between western and non-western literatures by assuming that such literatures are different from each other and are separate from the western canon, rather than looking at the cross connections between such literatures (Ahmad, 1992). I attempt to address these debates by exploring elements of worldliness and affiliation between the texts drawing on the theoretical work of Edward Said; I discuss this more fully later in this chapter, and in greater depth in chapter two.

The writers with whom the present study is concerned are part of these debates about Indian literature in English, they write in English and are of Indian descent, some of whom are living in India and some of whom are bi-locational spending periods of time both in India and the west. Raj Kamal Jha, Shobha Dé, Shama Futehally and Pankaj Mishra have their homes in India in the cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi. The others: Anita Desai, Rohinton Mistry, Amit Chaudhuri and Jaishree Misra have all worked and lived in both India, as well as spending periods resident in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. I use the following novels of these authors to discuss specific representations of home and domestic life in contemporary India:

A Fine Balance by Rohinton Mistry (1996)

Ancient Promises by Jaishree Misra (2000)

Fasting Feasting by Anita Desai (1999)

Fire on the Mountain by Anita Desai (1977)

Freedom Song by Amit Chauduri (1998)

Sultry Days by Shobha Dé (1995)

Tara Lane by Shama Futehally (1993)

The Blue Bedspread by Raj Kamal Jha (1999)

The Romantics by Pankaj Mishra (1999)

These nine novels mobilise home in various ways and at different registers; one way of representing these different registers is to consider home as a series of scales. Thus if social relations are seen as having spatial form and content across space (Massey, 1994), then scale can be seen as an outcome of social processes (Marston, 2000). Sallie Marston (2000) shows how a discourse of American women as female citizens was able to negotiate the different scales of social life: the household; the municipal, State and federal governments, as well as going beyond the nation through practices of social reproduction and consumption. (Marston 2000). It is the worldliness of these Indian novels which makes these scales visible.

Scale is also useful in theorising about mobility and location in relation to the home. As Srivastava (2005, p 380) argues, one way of thinking about space in India is to consider the "acts of 'going somewhere' and those of being in between places", what he terms as "relations of dwelling". This contrasts to European notions of dwelling which suggest that to dwell, implies a sense of permanence, or an anchor, and to rest from

movement and travel (Seamon, 1985). A European example of building national identity in place is the *heimat* movement in Germany; this was an attempt to turn a rural land based identity into both a national (German) identity and a national (German) discourse (Hage, 1996; Morley and Robbins, 1995). This concept of *heimat* suggests a memory of origin of a past that is impossible to return to, but it can still act as a potent national imagery (Morley and Robbins, 1994). These Heideggerian concepts of dwelling and *heimat* are western orientated constructs and do not easily transfer to India. Srivastava (2005) puts forward the concept that dwelling in India is tied to an itinerary of travel and mobility rather than territory. This becomes important if home and identity are rooted in a particular place; one such discourse that mobilises identity in place is nationalism (Radcliffe, 1996). The reappropriation of the past, as a return to roots, is a concept taken up by the Indian nationalist movement and the attempts to create *Hindutva* in India. In the case of India, a similar trope in India is the rural ancestral village (Nandy, 2001; Srivastava, 2005), which is used in Indian national imagery as a symbol for a more pure, authentic and traditional India (Nag, 1991).

Visualising home as a series of scales enables an examination of both the material and symbolic conceptions of home spaces (Smith, 1993). Thus, to represent the novels at a series of scales, they might be grouped as follows:

Scale	Novel
Self	*The Blue Bedspread* *Fire on the Mountain*
Family	*Freedom Song* *Sultry Days* *Tara Lane*
Nation	*The Romantics* *A Fine Balance*
Diaspora	*Fasting Feasting* *Ancient Promises*

These are literary novels that play with the potentials of home in particular ways and bounce off various registers. Thus home becomes a metaphor for notions of the self family and nation, and these novels address these scales simultaneously. So although the registers and resonances of home are much more complicated than this table suggests, it also demonstrates how home slips up and down different scales. So for example, *A Fine Balance* addresses issues of the self through its focus on caste, religious and class differences between the protagonists, and at the same time addresses the scale of the nation through discourses of caste, class and religion, and the clash of the home and nation. It is these entanglements that adds to the charge to home in the text and these novels demonstrate these different relationships.

The home is traditionally perceived as stable and fixed. as Doreen Massey (1994, pp 166-167) observes:

"It is interesting to note how frequently the characterization of place as home comes from those who have left. and it would be fascinating to explore how

> often this characterization is framed around those – who perforce – stayed behind; and how often the former was male, setting out to discover and change the world, and the latter female, most particularly a mother, assigned to a role of personifying a place that did not change".

Massey's comments are interesting first, because she highlights the association of women with the home and second, the trope of masculine travel. Second, she brings out a common theme in postcolonial literature, which is the representation of home written from the perspective of a migrant. However, the focus of the thesis is not on the migrant/diasporic Indian community abroad, rather the thesis focuses on what it means to be at home in India and analyses the representations of home in India as it is lived in the contemporary period. Thus the thesis examines notions of homelessness, displacement, marginalisation and dislocation from within the nation.

Conclusion: reading and representing the home textually

In my discussion thus far, I have suggested ways in which the concept of home appears in Indian novels in a variety of guises, for example, through themes such as nationalism which emphasise the symbolic meaning of home; or through the style in the novel such as magic realism which may produce a sense of home that is rootless reflecting the author's multiple locations and identities. In this section of the chapter, I examine how these different guises of home can be represented theoretically. Literature has contributed qualitatively to geographical research by adding meaning, subjectivity, agency and imagination. Thus geographers have begun to question the role of representation and writing

practices first focusing on issues of specific interest to geographers such as landscape (Barnes & Duncan, 1992). Postcolonial theory has also influenced geographical methods of interpretation through the deconstructing of colonial texts and practices, and the concept of 'imaginative geographies'. In turn, geographic metaphors have provided postcolonial theory with methods and vocabulary to reconceptualise the binaries in colonial and imperial discourses such as space, place, margin, centre, location and borderlands (Bhabha, 1990. 1994; Said, 1994, 1995; Spivak, 1985, 1987, 1995. 1999). Drawing on postcolonial theory geographers are turning attention to other texts such as travel writing (Blunt, 1994; Duncan & Gregory, 1999; Gregory, 1994. 1995; Phillips. 1999a, 1999b, 2001a; Sharp, 1999, 2000), letters and diaries (Blunt, 1999). and novels (Barnett. 1996, 1999; McKittrick. 2000; Phillips, 1997; Sharp, 1994).

The imagery and symbolism of the Indian home which I have discussed so far is about the battle for representation of women, of India. Chapter Two discusses this in more detail by exploring postcolonial aspects of these novels. As mentioned earlier, the exotic female sexualised space of the Indian home as portrayed by British imperialists is part of an orientalised discourse about India. The discourse of Orientalism was a way for European nations to create a culture of the East (the Orient) produced by and for itself. The creation of institutions, academic disciplines and specialist vocabularies to explain. study and rule the Orient provided information not just about the Orient, but about European cultures themselves (Said, 1978). The Orient was Europe's 'Other'. it was an opposite, a contrasting idea, image and personality (Said, 1978). As early

travellers to Egypt like Nightingale and Flaubert show. Egypt was in the process of being set up as an object to be viewed, and a machinery of representation (Gregory, 1995). Travel writings and guide books were written to bring inform and give meaning to the sights/sites for tourists and travellers. William Lane's book entitled *Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians* represented the natives in such detail producing an effect of an 'ethnographic gallery' through description and drawings of things like their dress, clothing and mannerisms (Gregory, 1999). This 'scripting' of Egypt produced 'fabrications' of a space of constructed visibility through vantage points and viewing platforms of the sites/sights, these opened up a sanitised version of Egypt by providing a display of the exotic orient (Gregory, 1999). Being able to view Egypt in this way had the effect of making Egypt a transparent and legible space open to the colonial gaze (Gregory, 1999).

The Indian home appears indirectly and directly in British imperial literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in domestic novels by writers such as Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters and others. It is part of the culture of othering and of silencing the colonised woman. Western canonical literature by authors such as Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster have been shown to reinforce colonial discourses and ideology through the themes and characters in their novels. For example, the geographical mapping of the narrative of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* shows textual locations in Britain (Portsmouth, Northampton and London) as well as British plantation estates in Antigua; these non-European locations are significant because they are

illustrative of the importance of the Empire financially to Britain, and also how imperialism influences the creation of a geographically defined cultural identity (Said, 1995). Furthermore, the imaginary geography of the text not only mirrors, but contributes to the discourses of imperialism through its language of cultural superiority (Said, 1995).

However, although Spivak's and Bhabha's theories are helpful, it is Said's interpretative angle – the worldliness and affiliation of texts – that I make use in my analysis of these Indian novels. As I show in chapter two, Said's approach provides me with the tools with which to show the connections of these novels to a variety of texts from different times and geographical locations. Accordingly, in chapter two, I situate these Indian novels as part of a broader domestic genre and I explore how affiliative networks connect them to other texts. As Nancy Armstrong deomonstrates, domestic novels enable:

> "...very different individuals to sit down to dinner in entirely unfamiliar places without finding them particularly strange, to shuffle into classrooms with people whom they have never met and with whom they have little else in common, and to enjoy melodramas and sit-coms produced in regions or even countries other than theirs" (Armstrong, 1987, p 251).

Thus, home may be experienced vicariously through the imaginations of others in books, diaries and films which in turn helps to familiarise ourselves with other types of homes. These imaginations of home are a way of making sense of our own home in relation to other homes in order to determine what is home and not home. These imaginations of home also provide to readers or viewers a sense of what is culturally acceptable behaviour and what is not.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: chapter two outlines the reading strategies used in the thesis: concepts of worldliness and affiliation, to examine the discourses of home in the novels. These provide the foundation for the subsequent exploration of home in the novels. Chapter three examines the conflict of identity between the self and the nation in the novels *Fire on the Mountain* and *The Blue Bedspread* showing the failure of the home. Chapter four considers the family and addresses how the Indian middle classes are adapting to changes in Indian society such as globalisation, and economic and cultural changes. Three novels are used: *Freedom Song, Tara Lane*, and *Sultry Days* as a lens in which to view the attitudes of the 'old' middle class in Bombay and Delhi towards home, public culture and the new middle class. These novels demonstrate the ambivalence of the old middle class towards these changes expressed as feelings of fear and nostalgia. Chapter five uses the novels *A Fine Balance* and *The Romantics* to explore how particular groups experience displacement and marginalisation in the nation on the grounds of caste, gender and religion. The focus of these is on the 'State of Emergency' in the 1970s (*A Fine Balance*), and the Hindu nationalism of the 1980s and 1990s (*The Romantics*). Running almost chronologically, these two novels illustrate the changing political situation in India and render it textually, depicting the thuggery of the state during the Emergency through violence, slum clearances and forced sterilisations. *The Romantics* portrays the caste and religious conflicts affecting India and how these manifest among the students at university: it also illustrates the dislocation and aimlessness of young Brahmin men. Chapter six focuses on how the gendered discourses of daughter, wife and mother place

limitations on the spatial mobilities of the female protagonists in *Fasting Feasting* and *Ancient Promises*. Focusing on themes of courtship and marriage, the chapter also considers how these Indian novels destabilise the genre of domestic novels by portraying protagonists going against the grain of domestic discourses by not marrying (*Fasting Feasting*), or by marrying and subsequently divorcing (*Ancient Promises*). Finally, the conclusion in Chapter Seven draws together these different threads of home by placing them in the wider South Asian context with other textual medium like film and ends with an examination of the film *Monsoon Wedding* showing how domestic themes are captured on screen.

CHAPTER TWO

Reading texts: discourses, space, gender and mobility

This chapter outlines the theoretical position of the thesis which draws on the theories of Edward Said as a method of reading these Indian novels. I take as my starting point Said's concepts of affiliation and worldliness to understand how these Indian novels are situated in the world and how they are connected to other texts located in different times and spaces. Consequently, this chapter explains how I use these concepts of affiliation and worldliness as exemplars of reading techniques. In order to do this, I use Said's (1994) postcolonial reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* as a way of tracing connections from the nineteenth century imperial novel to the late twentieth century postcolonial novel in India through a number of affiliative genre, style and thematic concerns. To illustrate the worldliness of the novels, I examine the discourses in relation to the Indian home, and how particular notions of home are normalised in contemporary Indian society; second, I explore the spatial geographies present in these novels in relation to gender and mobility and women's placement at a series of scales. After exploring Said's reading, I then look at some the critiques of Said and ways in which his work can, and is, being extended by geographers and literary critics through for example, a closer reading of novels, by paying greater attention to gender, other types of discourses, and other genres and types of texts. The strategies of reading outlined in this chapter will inform my discussion of the novels in later chapters by addressing the following issues:

1. How do these Indian novels represent the complexities of the postcolonial present?

2. To what extent do discourses about gender and the Indian home circumscribe mobility in the novels?

3. In what ways are discourses about the home destabilised in these novels?

The latter two questions deal with the novels' themes, style and narratives, first, in terms of how to read and interpret the different discourses inherent in them; second, in terms of how these discourses are contested. These are dealt with in parts two and three of this chapter. The first of these questions is dealt at the beginning of this chapter, which considers how these novels are situated as part of colonial/postcolonial literary-domestic tradition, to which I turn to now.

The complexities of the postcolonial present

The first of these complexities is how these Indian novels mediate the tensions between the literary traditions of imperialism and postcolonialism. I argue that these novels are part of a postcolonial domestic genre that draws on the tradition of canonical English domestic novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by writers such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, Mary Shelley, Samuel Richardson and the Brontë sisters. The dominance of these canonical authors is being contested by postcolonial writing such as these Indian novels which suggest new ways of thinking about the domestic. The distinguishing features of these English domestic novels are a depiction of a closed community

focused around a narrow circle of family and close friends concerned with matters of courtship and marriage (Armstrong, 1987). I use the term 'domestic novels' to refer to novels where the primary focus is on the home and family relationships. In examining these Indian novels, I am interested in how contemporary Indian domestic novels represent and portray ideas of home and how these are affiliated to English domestic novels. The similarities of themes between certain Indian realist novels and English domestic novels is the subject of much debate, for example, most notably Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, but also the nine novels discussed in the thesis: *A Fine Balance, A Fire on the Mountain, Ancient Promises, Fasting Feasting, Freedom Song, Sultry Days, Tara Lane, The Blue Bedspread*, and *The Romantics*. The English domestic novelist who is invoked most often in relation to contemporary Indian novels is Jane Austen. Two possible explanations for her importance are, first, that she is part of an imperialist novelistic tradition that has permeated through imperialism and colonial education system in the former colonial parts of the world; and second, her themes and realism can be remade and reworked in different cultural contexts (Rajan, 2000). However, it is the ways in which Austen is reworked in the Indian context through novels that is the focus of this thesis; the prevalence of domestic themes is paralleled in Indian films of which there are two strands: Hindi cinema and diasporic cinema. Hindi cinema post-1990 has focused more on 'domestic dramas' through which the representation of a wealthy, upper caste, upper class, Hindu family with a patriarchal head of the household and women in the home, normalises this as a universal Indian family, excluding or relegating minorities such as Muslims and Christians to servant roles (Malhotra and Alagh,

2004). We can see Austen's influence in diasporic films such as *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), which loosely adapted from *Pride and Prejudice*, takes specific elements from the Indian context around issues of national identity, family values and consumption practices for contemporary Indian and diasporic audiences (Geraghty, 2006). The traditional values present in *Bride and Prejudice* provide stability during a period of social and economic change for Indian audiences and for diasporic audiences, reasserts the importance of Indian values. Austen's influence extends beyond India though, and is applied and adapted to suit western tastes in popular culture and addressing contemporary concerns: for example, consumption in the US film *Clueless*, or self-help books such as *Jane Austen's Guide to Dating* by Lauren Henderson, or simply a re-evaluation of the relevance of her themes such as *Flirting with Pride and Prejudice: Fresh Perspectives on the Original Chick-Lit Masterpiece* edited by Jennifer Cruise. Most importantly, though is how Austen can be interpreted from a postcolonial perspective and how this can be applied to reading Indian domestic novels.

In later chapters of the thesis, the similarities between Indian authors and imperial[1] authors like Jane Austen with regard to their themes and focus on domestic issues is discussed in greater detail. In this chapter, I consider how Said establishes Austen as an author supporting the hegemony of imperialism, and how other critics such as Susan Fraiman read Austen in a much more fluid way and see her as a destabilising influence on imperial hegemony. I use these

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[1] Said refers to Austen as an Imperial author, however, as I have shown, she also has a much wider sphere of influence.

alternative readings of Austen, to examine these Indian novels not just as texts expressing hegemonic upper class, upper caste, English-speaking discourses, but also how the novels destabilise discourses of home, gender and mobility. However, these themes are dealt with more fully in later chapters when I examine the Indian novels more fully. This chapter provides a discussion of the wider context of this subject in relation to postcolonial literature in general. There is growing interest in how novels by imperial writers such as Jane Austen are staged as postcolonial texts and how their themes and contents are reworked in modern postcolonial novels from India. In the *Postcolonial Jane Austen* Sunder Rajan explains that the presence of Austen in Indian literature is seen as odd because she appears outside her place of origin:

> "Austen as much as any other English book, both produces an 'ambivalence' in such a setting and undergoes mutation itself. Like the postcolonial theorist, the postcolonial novelist too exploits the rich ironies and complexities of the estrangement of English literature 'elsewhere'. The odd presence of Austen in Meerut, *Emma* in Lahore, or *Mansfield Park* in Miranda House has not gone unnoticed in recent postcolonial texts" (Sunder Rajan, 2000, p 14).

This point about the ambivalence of Austen's novels and postcolonial novels is significant in terms of how these are situated in the world and the topics and themes they address in the narrative. For example, the colonial legacy is visible and imported into Indian novels in the following ways: the novel is an English form, writing in English, and also writing about the home and domestic life. Furthermore, my focus on home is, as a theme, like the novels, about its ambivalence[2] and slipperiness. As Natarajan (2000) observes, the social novel of manners in the style of Austen is a western import to India because traditional

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[2] Homi Bhabha (1994) uses the term ambivalence in a Lacanian manner to refer to the way in which colonised people, who through mimicry attempt to overcome their characterisation of the Other, and are caught in an ambivalent, hybrid position between two cultures. Instead I prefer to use the term in a Saidian sense where cultures are overlapping and intertwining.

Indian stories (both oral and written) contain a much wider cast of characters and locations. Thus home in these Indian novels is influenced by imperialist, nationalist and postcolonial discourses; and home is slipping between different scales of the local, national and the global. Consequently, it is the intertextuality, or to use Said's term, the worldliness, of these novels that connects them back temporally and thematically to the English domestic novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It is because of these connections, that it is interesting to note that it is Austen, and not the Brontës, who appears in Indian literature. One reason is that Austen's novels put forward a lifestyle, or a paradigm of social relations that has an element of universality or identification for Indian readers. Austen's writing style: her ironic social realism compared with the passionate gothic romance of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* appeals in particular ways. As Natarajan points out, "Hindu proprieties lent themselves better to Austen's non-denominational, non-erotic ethic for women. In contrast to George Eliot's philosophical moralism or Charlotte Brontë's passionate individualism, Austen's restrained propriety translated well into the indigenous Indian context" (Natarajan, 2000, p 151). Thus novels not only portray, but shape what domestic life is. The identification with Austen's novels centres on ideologies and discourses about the role of women that spans spatial and temporal differences. Indian teachers have commented on the translatability of Austen to the Indian context, particularly, with regard to the moral conflicts, the arrangements of marriages, and strategies of passive rebellion available to Indian women and the female

university students who are reading Austen (Vanita, 1992). If female Indian university students read Austen because her novels contain elements, which are strange yet familiar, I use Austen and postcolonial critics' readings of Austen to inform my own reading of these Indian novels. Too young to be caught up in the wave of raj nostalgia affecting England in the early 1980s, and too old to be introduced through the school curriculum to the postcolonial writing of black and Asian authors, my first encounter with such novels was at university; this was not through the syllabus of my geography degree, but most likely through magazine and newspaper book reviews. For me though, it was not the hype surrounding the Booker prize winners, first Salman Rushdie and later Arundhati Roy, it was the style and subject matter of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Anita Desai which lent my reading a sense of familiarity and also the exotic through the foreign settings. Some such as Shivani argue that twentieth century Indian novels in English are another form of Orientalism written for western audiences, which simplify and flatten the Indian context, he says of these novels:

> [T]hese are soothing, comforting, non-disturbing novels; in effect they violate the integrity of the novel and bring to the western reader apparent news and reportage that is no more than recycled stereotypes about East and West familiar from popular culture. American conglomerate publishing interests seem to be finding a ready supply of Indian novels in English that enact the commodification of exoticised Orientalism in global capitalist exchange" (Shivani, 2006, p 2).

Influenced by postcolonial theory and Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, Shivani (2006) here is reigniting a longstanding debate within postcolonial theory and within the Indian literary establishment about writing in English. There is an Indian literary tradition in various regional languages – Urdu, Bengali and so on, and this has been privileged as being more authentic and representative than works written in English (Chandra, 2000). However, the

dominance of Indian writing in English in terms of potential global markets, the huge advances paid to writers, is that these regional language communities and writers are being destabilised and marginalised. The vast majority of Indian writers in English choose to write in English, despite their detractors, because they are part of a "post-Independence generation which thinks, speaks and writes primarily in English" (Mukerji, 1996). Furthermore, the readers are not just westerners, but also the Indian diasporic communities living in north America, the United Kingdom and Australasia. As a reflection of this diasporic readership, there are also a large number of diasporic writers also writing in English though their focuses and concerns are different to those of 'home' writers (Lau, 2005). The authors of the nine novels examined in later chapters are a mix of home and diasporic writers, though it is difficult to make a clear distinction as many of the have multiple locations. The focus of the thesis is on the multiple locations and scales in the novels, and of the novels, rather than the authors.

Instead of dismissing these novels, as Shivani does, by highlighting what he sees as stereotypical images of east and west, it is more productive to examine why these Indian novels share features in common with the west, as Said argues, we need to look at how novels illustrate the connections across cultures instead looking at them in isolation:

> "... if we take seriously our intellectual and interpretative vocation to make connections, to deal with as much as the evidence as possible, fully and actually, to read what is there and not there, above all, to see complementarity and interdependence instead of isolated, venerated, or formalized experience that excludes and forbids the hybridizing intrusions of human history" Said, 1993, p 115).

The English literary canon is an example of how literature is connected through a process of 'filiation' – thus the text becomes part of homogenous domain as is "connected serially, seamless and immediately with other texts" (Said, 1983, p 174). But it is Said's notion of affiliation that enables texts to be seen as part of a diverse domain with some texts more hegemonic than others. Thus to recreate an affiliative network of texts is "to make visible, to give materiality back to, the strands holding the text to society, author, and culture". Thus I use Said's concept of affiliation and extend it, to suggest that these Indian domestic novels are linked to a global network of authors and readers through shared colonial legacy of literary culture, but also to specific cosmopolitan upper caste, middle class, English-speaking elite in India. As Said succinctly puts it in relation to anti-colonial/nationalist literature, "to read Austen without also reading Fanon and Cabral - and so on and on - is to disaffiliate modern culture from its engagements and attachments" (Said, 1993, pp 70 - 71). Hence, rather than undercutting colonial English writing and authors like Austen, we need to pay attention to the tensions and the co-entanglements of colonialism and nationalism and the influence on postcolonial writers. However, postcolonial Indian writing, such as these nine novels, is much less concerned with nationalist allegory (see Jameson, 1986) and instead draws on thematic and stylistic elements from authors such as Austen and reworks them in an Indian cultural context.

Unlike Said in *Culture and Imperialism*, who examines imperial culture, my focus is on how Indian culture and society is represented in these Indian novels. The reason for using the novel as a cultural form is that it is:

"… an incorporative, quasi-encyclopaedic cultural form. Packed into it are both a highly regulated plot mechanism and an entire system of social reference that depends on the existing institutions of bourgeois society, their authority and power" (Said, 1994, p 84).

Said is referring to the western imperial novel, but the novel in India is too an art form of the middle class, more so than the Hindi cinema of Bombay (Dwyer, 2000a). Furthermore, novels are a different cultural form to films: they have different types of audiences and different ways of being consumed and read by these audiences. The Hindi cinema, or Bollywood as it is more widely known, is a form of popular culture aimed at the new middle class and lower class cinema-goers. As mentioned earlier, there is a shift in Hindi cinema towards more domestically focused plots centred on the home and family, however, it is diasporic films that have tended to focus more strongly on domestic themes. Though the popularity of Bollywood and regional language films is undiminished, there is in recent years a growing interest in art-house films and films by diasporic Indian film-makers that is aimed at more middle class audiences (Geraghty, 2006; Malhotra & Alagh, 2004). I discuss in chapter seven how some of these diasporic films deal with some of the themes of middle class domesticity such as *Monsoon Wedding*. However, it is through novels, that authors have greater flexibility in dealing with ambiguity and subtlety of themes. In the following two sections, I discuss how these novels can be read and the themes and style they are concerned with.

Reading these novels: discourses, gender and mobility

I take a thematic and narrative analysis rather than a chronological/ historical approach to reading and making connections between these nine novels. The intention is to look at connections between these groups of novels in terms of different themes of home. In addition, a narrative analysis requires an in depth understanding of the novels: a thorough reading and understanding of the structure and content of the novel. As Said explains his method of reading *Mansfield Park*:

> "Without reading it in full, we would fail to understand the strength of that structure and the way it was activated and maintained in literature. But in reading it carefully, we can sense how ideas about dependent races and territories were held both by foreign office executives, colonial bureaucrats, and military strategists and by intelligent novel-readers educating themselves in the fine points of moral evaluation, literary balance and stylistic finish" (Said, 1993, p 114).

The structure that Said is referring to is Raymond Williams' concept of 'the structure of attitude and reference' in how *Mansfield Park* as a novel is part of domestic imperial culture, and how it both reflects and reinforces these imperial ideologies and discourses through the home, to the readers of the novel. My own approach to these nine Indian novels has been an in-depth and comprehensive reading, focusing on the narrative, plot and thematic concerns. However, whereas Said's structure of attitude and reference is imperialism, and thus he reads Austen's novels as part of imperial culture, I read these Indian novels through a postcolonial structure, as part of a culture which is partly influenced by colonial discourse about Indian domesticity, and also as emerging from an Indian anti-colonial nationalist perspective that has provided other alternative discourses of domesticity. Furthermore, it is important to see these novels by late-twentieth

century Indian authors, as part of maturity of a postcolonial country and so, their concerns are less with putting forward an argument for particular cultural discourse, and more with critiquing and subverting these discourses through their narratives. Said (1993) claims there are differences between early imperialist novelists like Austen, and those towards the end of empire like Conrad lack confidence and instead express an anxiety about imperialism. Thus. Said reads Austen as being positive about imperialism, and he explores the ideology of imperialism as represented in *Mansfield Park*, and examines the spatial geographies of the novel and how this links to gender and mobility as supporting the discourses of imperialism rather than contesting them.

According to Said's reading, *Mansfield Park* is about the creation of 'a desired English order' which comes together at the end of the novel with the marriage of Fanny to Edmund Bertram. who then become the spiritual master and mistress of Mansfield Park, and Fanny's old position in the Bertram household continued by her sister Susan Price (Said, 1994). Sir Thomas' large scale movements in space from Mansfield to Antigua represent an imperialistic way of ordering the world through the subordination of the colony to the metropolis; in particular how the wealth of the Bertrams' is built on the profits of slave labour from their Caribbean plantations. Fanny's role is to order the domestic side of Mansfield; the 'imported' Fanny provides the 'moral qualities found wanting within'. The central point that Said makes is that Fanny supports Sir Thomas in his imperialism by providing the right sort of social order and moral priorities back home at Mansfield. The values represented by Fanny are

middle class values of domesticity and the separation of the social world into public and private spheres. Said's argument is that imperial authority is maintained by spatial location, so that when Sir Thomas leaves for the colonies, Mansfield Park no longer is a place of social and moral cohesion because there is no authority at 'home'. Thus Said is suggesting that geographical territory represents the ideology of imperialism yet it is also human agents and institutions that confer such qualities upon land and space (Chrisman, 1998).

By examining the spatial geographies, Said shows how metropolitan high culture is dependent on, and supported by, colonial possessions such as Sir Thomas Bertram's Antigua plantation. In *Mansfield Park*, Said suggests the characters of Sir Thomas and Fanny Price represent both masculine and feminine aspects of imperialism and that a unified imperial ideology encompasses both genders. According to Said (1994) *Mansfield Park* can be read as a novel of both domestic order and imperial order. Said's reading integrates these two types of order into the novel by giving the character of Fanny authority and mobility over the domestic space, and the character of Sir Thomas authority and mobility over imperial space. Said argues that because Fanny is affiliated to the Bertrams, she also shares their authority by being bestowed with Sir Thomas' patronage, authority and direction (Said, 1994). Thus rather than attributing Fanny's limited spatial mobility to her lack of authority, he positions her as complimenting the larger scale movements of Sir Thomas in the imperial space of his Caribbean plantations. So Said argues that the spatial movement of the relocation of Fanny from Portsmouth to Mansfield Park, her movement 'centres' Fanny within the

household of Mansfield Park (Said, 1994). In Said's reading of *Mansfield Park* he is not critical of the disparity between the mobilities of the male and female characters and particularly those of Fanny Price and Sir Thomas Bertram and how imperialism is a gendered ideology.

Other postcolonial critics suggest that imperialism is a gendered ideology; Gayatri Spivak's (1985) reading of *Jane Eyre* suggests that the ideology attached to Jane and the spaces in which she moves are both gendered. With regard to the gendering of space, Jane is shown as preferring to sit in the breakfast room rather than the conventional space of the drawing room with the rest of the family, this Spivak argues, demonstrates the ideology attached Jane as a woman, is reflected in the different ways she is treated by the male protagonists St. John Rivers and Rochester. If Jane were to marry Rivers, then she, like Bertha Mason (Rochester's Caribbean wife), would be marginalised because colonial men like Rivers and Rochester have a missionary civilising role. However, Spivak shows the imperial ideology changes when Jane eventually marries Rochester, so that on her marriage to Rochester Jane moves to the 'centre' (like Said's Fanny) thus delegitimising Bertha, and Rochester is released from his missionary (civilising) marital duties to Bertha (Spivak, 1985). Thus Jane's marriage shows how colonial women are constituted into society in which imperial expansion is more important than sexual reproduction: "domestic-society-through-sexual-reproduction cathected as companionate love" (Spivak, 1985). As Spivak puts it:

> "...nineteenth-century feminist individualism could conceive of a 'greater' project than access to the closed circle of the nuclear family. This is the project

of soul making beyond 'mere' sexual reproduction. Here the native "subject" is not almost an animal but rather the object of what might be termed the terrorism of the categorical imperative (Spivak, 1985, p 248).

So while Jane becomes a female individual subject, the non-European women - the Caribbean Bertha Mason becomes subordinated and othered by imperial ideology, and thus given no part in colonial society apart from a role as the Other. Spivak's reading shows it is important to unpack the effects of discourses on gender, class, race and mobility and how these affect the female protagonists and their placement at a series of scales.

What both Said and Spivak show, in their readings of Austen and Brontë respectively, is how home is closed and introverted. These two authors portray a specific type of home: the Country House. The Country Houses in both authors novels are masculine and territorialising spaces, and as Mathur (1998) observes, the Country House "...although a name for a specific form of housing in its basic sense, it actually aspires to entail an astonishing sense of mobility and outreach on the part of those who own one" (Mathur, 1998, p 72). So, Sir Thomas Bertram of Mansfield Park might say:

> "I am the centre in so far as I maintain the mobility; I am established in so far as I have connections; I am rooted in so far as I am branched out; I am firm because I have moved around; I am reliable to ensure romance, solid to carve you spaces, authoritative to secure your mobility; and (finally), I tend to the margins to reaffirm the centre (Mathur, 1998, p 72).

As this shows, it is men who do the moving, determining who is placed where and at what scale, and it is women who are moved. Thus Fanny, in Said's reading is moved to the centre by her marriage to Edmund and similarly in Spivak's, Jane's marriage to Rochester moves her to the centre. In the case of the Indian novels, marriage is also important regarding the mobility of the female

protagonists: marriage necessitates a movement from the natal home to the marital home, where their mobility is restricted and limited. Like the Country House man, Indian male protagonists have little restrictions placed on their mobility both within and outside the home. As I show later in chapters three and six, for the female protagonists mobility comes at a price, available only through widowhood or divorce; even those who remain unmarried lack freedom of mobility.

Accordingly, paying closer attention to the impact of imperialism as a gendered discourse, allows for different readings of *Mansfield Park*. Other critics have read the novel not in terms of how it reinforces imperial discourses and ideologies as Said does, but instead examine how it destabilises such discourses. Fraiman (1995) puts forward an alternative reading that suggests that *Mansfield Park* is not a novel that maintains the colonial project, but instead destabilises it. Whereas Said holds Mansfield Park up as the embodiment of a desired English order, Fraiman argues that Said needs to produce a more careful reading of the text that considers Austen's style and her use of irony. The extract the Fraiman uses to contest Said's concept of imperial order is this one:

> "At Mansfield [as opposed to Portsmouth], no sounds of contention, no raised voice, no abrupt bursts, no tread of violence was ever heard; … every body had their due importance; everybody's feelings were consulted. If tenderness could ever be supposed wanting, good sense and good breeding supplied its place; and as to the little irritations, sometimes introduced by aunt Norris, they were short, they were trifling, they were a drop in the ocean, compared with the ceaseless tumult of her present abode" (Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, cited in Fraiman, 1995, p 809).

The use of the phrase "If tenderness should be shown wanting..." is, Fraiman argues, revealing of Austen's own feeling about the order in Mansfield Park. In

Said's reading of *Mansfield Park*, when he compares Portsmouth to Mansfield,

he emphasises the desirability of Mansfield to Portsmouth in terms of

geographical space – represented by Fanny's experience of an enlarged sense of

being at home (Said, 1994). Fraiman reads the same passage in an ironic way, to

focus on the condescending treatment of Fanny, their 'poor' relation, by the

Bertram family in the novel. Thus she says that Austen's representation of

Portsmouth is a disorder of an obvious kind: dirty, chaotic, drunken; but

Mansfield Park is a hidden disorder of a 'profound and hypocritical kind' full of

adultery, intimidation, exploitation. Fraiman argues that Austen's use of irony in

this passage is her way of critiquing the 'moral blight' of Mansfield Park and by

association the colonial project. Thus Fraiman's reading is useful because she

suggests that discourses can be subverted in subtle and ironic ways; that novels

do not always reinforce dominant cultural discourses and ideologies. This

informs my reading of these Indian novels as ones that critique middle class

society in India. Furthermore, Fraiman's reading highlights a distinction

between country and city, showing the contrast between the urban and the rural,

a common trope in English literature (Williams, 1993). A similar trope emerges

in Indian literature and nationalist writings as the Indian village as a symbol of a

pure unsullied Indianness versus the colonial space of the city (Khilani, 1997; see

also Khair, 2001 for an alternative reading).

Fraiman's reading of *Mansfield Park* is one that she suggests can be read

as a critique of the patriarchal order of the gentry ruling classes (Fraiman, 1995).

The 'dead silence' of Sir Thomas Bertram in relation to slavery, can be

understood as a metaphor for class and gender wrong-doings amongst the gentry.

Therefore, *Mansfield Park* is not just a moral critique of slavery per se, but also

functions as a middle class critique of adultery and other forms of immoral

behaviour. Here Fraiman is referring to the importation of Fanny, and how,

when she rebels against the patriarchal order by refusing to marry Henry

Crawford, she is not 'centred' in the order of Mansfield Park as Said suggests;

rather she is marginalised; this is shown most strongly when on their marriage

Fanny and Edmund live on the boundaries in an adjacent parsonage and not in

Mansfield itself (Fraiman, 1995). Therefore, although imperialism as a discourse

dominated and subjugated those who were colonised, it also constructed

gendered differences in terms of mobility among the population of the

metropolis: men had freedom of movement across the empire whereas women

were located primarily in the domestic private sphere. So building upon this

critique of Said and the notion of gendered discourse, geographers have explored

this issue further not only in domestic novels but in the genres of adventure

fiction and non-fiction travel writing.

Travel Writing as texts of discourses of gender and mobility

Discourses impact on gender roles in specific ways, and affect for

example, the roles available to women both within and outside the family.

Inderpal Grewal's reading of *Jane Eyre* departs from Spivak's reading above

focusing not on individualism, but how the emergence of the nuclear family

contributes to the colonial project. Grewal's focus is on how the protagonist Jane

Eyre can be seen as representing the figure of the 'pioneering Englishwoman'. These pioneers were Englishwomen who participated in the colonial project in the colonies as travellers, missionaries, teachers and ethnographers; what was significant about these women was how they broke down bourgeois ideals of women as 'angels in the house' (Grewal, 1996). The narratives of these 'pioneering' women both in their travel writing and in fiction show their attempts to be the equal of middle and upper class English men as well as the superiors of the native colonised peoples (Grewal, 1996). Thus, their narratives also became part of the nationalist discourse of empire (Grewal, 1996). When Jane is asked to join Rivers in his missionary works, Rivers wants her to go with him as a 'helpmeet' – a wife, Grewal (1996) suggests that Rivers, like the colonial state, is trying to dominate Jane by making her become his wife. When Jane rejects Rivers' dominating imperial masculinity and instead endorses Rochester's 'damaged' and 'needy' masculinity by maintaining her equal status as his both wife and comrade (rather than as a helpmeet), Jane and Rochester represent a new type of domestic unit – the emergence of the nuclear family (Grewal, 1996).

When imperial women did travel abroad as 'travellers' they found they had to locate their femininity within a masculine, imperialist tradition of exploration, conquest and surveillance. Alison Blunt's (1994) analysis of Mary Kingsley's travels shows how Kingsley chose to emphasise certain facets of her personality in her writings; for example when she travels to West Cameroon, Kingsley's account of this part of the journey is very masculine such as the achievement of a long-standing goal which was to climb Mount Cameroon, or by

adopting the male profession of trader in order to fund her travels. However, she

also addresses more feminine concerns and preoccupations with her appearance

and dress, and in her emotional responses and sensitive portrayals of the beauty

of the West African landscape. However, Kingsley is both inside and outside

these discourses – an ambiguous position so she is able to take on different

personas and voices to negotiate different contexts and subject positions in

response to situations encountered in her travels, and prejudice she encountered

back in England from institutions like the Royal Geographic Society.

Furthermore, Blunt argues that Kingsley's use of many different voices

undermines her stable fixed identity as an authoritative author and a traveller, as

well as (masculine) colonial and imperial discourses.

Imperial adventure stories were also a site of contested gender identities

as Richard Phillips' (1997) examination of the construction and reconstruction of

colonial and imperial discourses in adventure stories written for British girls and

boys shows. In particular Phillips uses girls' adventure stories to illustrate the

ambivalence of imperial and colonial discourses by showing how girls' stories

focus on both feminine and masculine qualities of the protagonists. Before the

introduction of adventure stories written specially for girls, boys adventure

stories reinforced the binary distinctions of 'home' and 'away' which

corresponded to the female and the masculine spheres respectively (Phillips,

1997). Adventure stories written for girls enabled these traditional boundaries to

be transgressed in many ways. Phillips takes the example of the British writer

Bessie Marchant whose stories for girls were set in exotic sounding locations of

Uruguay, the Argentinean Pampas, the Philippines, and the colonial territories of Tasmania and Australia. Marchant's stories belong to a tradition of 'settlement adventures' focusing on the experience of emigration and settlement, although the stories contained the traditional adventure themes of buried treasure, rescues, riddles, escapes, crime good/bad guys and so on (Phillips, 1997). Phillips uses Marchant's *Daughters of Dominion* (first published in 1907) to illustrate the main themes of this type of transgressive adventure story. In *Dominion* the heroine Nell, gets caught up in all sorts of masculine adventures and scrapes, but she still retains her feminine domestic ways symbolised by her practical clothes and work ethic (Phillips, 1997). However, the circulation of colonial discourses was important to contributing to Marchant's books: Marchant herself was not a traveller, she never left England and material used in her books were from information gleaned from overseas correspondence and copies of the *Geographical Magazine*, as well as from libraries (Phillips, 1997). However, Marchant's work can be seen as part of a wider tradition of female travel writers like Mary Kingsley and Isabella Bird, who challenged notions of a woman's 'place' in imperial and colonial discourses. Marchant's heroines seen as 'trespassers' in the world of masculine adventure stories, imagination provided a way of transgressing British gender boundaries and possibly inspired girls and young women to emigrate and settle in the colonies like their fictional heroines (Phillips, 1997).

However, in the later stages of colonial dominance, the fragility of imperial discourse becomes more obvious. Blunt demonstrates this in her

analysis of diaries written by British women in Lucknow during the period of the Indian mutiny. These diaries are significant because although by the late nineteenth the authority of imperialism was beginning to waver, it is possible to identify a "crisis of imperial rule on a domestic scale" (Blunt, 2000, p 229). These diaries show not representations of, but self-representations of this crisis, for these women the crisis took the form of (albeit temporary) social disorder and loss of upper class women's status and social as well as racial hierarchy during the siege of Lucknow. The disruption of imperial homes during this crisis shows how important these homes were in legitimising imperial values (Blunt, 1999). All the conventional forms of legitimisation of imperial control in the domestic sphere through the use of Indian servants to carry out domestic tasks were redundant when the servants left and the British women had to carry out the domestic chores and tasks themselves (Blunt, 2000). There are varieties and differences in the practices of colonial power, it may weaken, as Blunt suggests, due to a temporary loss of authority and control during the Indian mutiny. It is precisely these ambivalences and fluctuating power of imperial discourses that Said overlooks.

According to Sethi (1997) Indian nationalism and the recovery of an authentic Indian tradition needs to be examined against Orientalism because indigenous identities were relational rather than oppositional. So if as Chatterjee (1986) suggests, Indian nationalism is seen as a discourse, the Indian nationalist movement can be seen as a kind of 'Orientalism in reverse' drawing on the circulatory aspects of Oriental/imperial discourse to create itself out of and in

response to these discourses. Thus the Hindu cultural and spiritual renaissance under the nationalist movement brought the private Indian sphere of the home and family under patriarchal control. Like Oriental and imperial discourses before, Hindu nationalism marginalised and oppressed Indian women in the home, it also excluded other non-Hindu religious and cultural groups from political representation. I discuss this more fully in the following chapters some of the ways in which Hindu nationalism and its construction of the Indian home connecting women and religious identity with the home and how these are contested in the novels.

Genre and themes in the novels

In the collection *The Postcolonial Jane Austen* edited by Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan and You-Me Park (2000) a number of contributors have considered how contemporary Indian authors are "recasting" (Mohapatra & Nayak, 2000) or "indigenizing" (Natarajan, 2000) Jane Austen's novels in an Indian context. A diverse range of Indian novels are considered to contain similarities to Austen novels in terms of style, themes and narrative, including *Jasmine* (1991) set in India and the United States by the diasporic author Bharati Mukerjee, the pan-Indian novel *A Suitable Boy* (1993) by another diasporic author Vikram Seth, and the Bengali novel *Swami* (1915) by Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. Seth's novel in particular is widely acknowledged as paying homage to Austen. Female authors such as Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala have all been

called India's Jane Austen by reviewers of their novels. However, the novels discussed in the thesis have not been the focus of critical attention regarding similarities to Austen but, as will be argued, they bear, a number of similarities to the realist genre of domestic novels, and Austen's novels in particular, in terms of the domestic themes they portray and their focus on marriage in particular, though there are differences concerning the themes in an Indian context and the form and structure of the novel.

Austen's novels speak to the postcolonial and post-independence circumstances of India, not just in terms of revealing the hidden colonial legacy present in her novels as Edward Said has suggested, but in similar struggles for middle class cultural hegemony and how this is being destabilised. Nancy Armstrong (1992) argues that domestic fiction like Austen's novels transmitted middle class cultural values that favoured the authority of middle class women over the previously dominant patriarchal ideology of the aristocratic ruling class; this rise of middle class authority occurred during a period of economic instability caused by the Napoleonic Wars. Drawing upon Armstrong, Mohapatra & Nayak (2000) argue that Seth, like Austen, is writing of (but not during) a period of instability and change in Indian history. In a reading of Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, Mohapatra & Nayak (2000) argue that in the novel he has written from the point of view of family relationships, a post-independence post-partition national history of the Indian middle classes and their battle for cultural and political hegemony. Thus as Fraiman's reading of *Mansfield Park* shows, we need to pay attention to the class context of the novels, which I argue, portray

a middle class specificity, and function as a critique of the discourses

surrounding that social group. The novels discussed in later chapters of the

thesis deal with some of the problems facing middle class Indians in the post

independence period such as the rise of the 'new' middle class, Hindu

nationalism, globalisation, changing social and cultural values that are provoking

a sense of instability.

However, although there are parallels between Austen and some Indian

domestic novels, there are differences not just in the Indian setting but in terms

of the cultural context and particularly religious and nationalist discourses.

Despite the number of obvious parallels to the Indian context, Austen's influence

on pre-independence Indian literature is limited. As I have discussed in the

Introduction in chapter one, the Indian home became a contested space in the

anti-colonial and nationalist conflict in the late nineteenth and twentieth

centuries. Thus as Natarajan explains:

> "One can see how the Indian novel exploring domesticity had a confusing
> mission – to pose a heroine on an Austenian secular level and yet retain the
> religiosity of that was the essence of the counter-colonial cultural resistance"
> (Natarajan, 2000, p 156).

One explanation is that Austen is considered too British and too representative of

colonial culture, and is absent because she is a "denationalizing" force

(Natarajan, 2000, p 154). For the independence movement the anti-colonial

cause became more important than a battle for middle class cultural hegemony.

Thus Indian nationalists constructed a discourse in which women and the home

represented a space that could be claimed as 'Indian' and a repository of the

spiritual self and of true identity, and men represented the domain of the material

world (Chatterjee, 1993). Yet this does not mean that Austen's novels did not serve as paradigms for Indian novels in terms of form, structure and thematic concerns.

This common ground between Austen's novels and postcolonial Indian novels is most visible with regard to a combination of style, plot and themes. In terms of style, Seth's *A Suitable Boy* is a good example of how Austen's realism influences contemporary Indian writing; in fact Seth has admitted modelling his realist style on Austen's. However, writing in a realist style also raises issues about colonial influences on Indian novels, of mimicry and appropriation of the colonisers. As Mohapatra & Nayak (2000) point out, the Austen-like similarities between certain English novels and particular Indian novels does bring to mind the colonial legacy and they way in which English literature has been exported to the colonies through the influence of the English education system. To say that Seth is reclaiming realism for Indian novelists would be overstating it: many Indian novelists were, and still are, writing realist domestic novels such as Anita Desai, Amit Chaudhuri, Shama Futehally. More likely realist novels by Indian authors have been overshadowed by the giant figure of Indian literature Salman Rushdie and his postmodern magic realism style exemplified in his novels *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie is credited with developing a style that is seen as more authentic and representative of the postcolonial condition and one that does not have colonial connotations of realism (Mohapatra & Nayak, 2000). However, as I show in my analysis of the novels later in the thesis, the concerns of these realist novels is about the

problems facing the middle class in adapting to changes in post-independence society and challenges to their social and cultural hegemony, rather than settling colonial scores.

In terms of similarities between Austen's novels and Indian domestic novels, the most significant is the focus on the home as the main location for events in the novel to take place. There is a limited span of spatial particularly for the women, and the small cast of characters are similar to the social worlds depicted in Austen's novels. Like Austen's novels, notions of propriety for women in terms of dress and social behaviour are important concerns in many Indian domestic novels (Natarajan, 2000). Similarly, a major concern in Indian novels is the arrangement of marriages for social and financial advancement and this is the focus of *A Suitable Boy*, and also the protagonists in *Fasting Feasting* and *Ancient Promises* as discussed later in chapter six. There may even be similarities in types of characters who appear in the novels: the witty daughter, the worried mother, the uneducated silly sisters and so on (Natarajan, 2000). In highlighting the similarities, the intention is not to suggest that Indian domestic novels reproduce an Austen plot exactly, as Mohapatra & Nayak put it, it is important to make a:

> "... crucial distinction between Austenian moments, authorizing this narrative mimesis, and the allusions to Austen. The latter constitute a mere handful, whereas the former permeate the whole narrative of *A Suitable Boy*...The point, therefore is to read the novel in terms of its Austenian moments that are also the narrative's defining moments" (Mohapatra & Nayak, 2000, pp 198-199).

Thus it is specific moments in the narrative that suggest an intertextuality, or to use Said's term, a worldliness between the novels, rather than direct parallels to particular novels of Austen. So, the focus of the following four chapters which

provides an in depth reading of the novels, will be on examining the discourses about home, gender and spatial mobility. and how these connect back to other domestic novels like Austen's.

Conclusion

I argue that these novels discussed in later chapters, destabilise both these Imperial and Bengali nationalist models of the Indian home in the following ways: first, by depicting home as a site of oppression, and to address this I explore women's gendered roles in the home and attitudes towards the State and political circumstances such as the Emergency and Hindu nationalism. Second, I consider ways in which home is exclusionary for different genders, religious. caste and ethnic groups; I also examine ways in which middle class cultural hegemony is challenged. Third, I look at how the novels provide a critique of the traditional joint family model and explore alternative homes, living alone, or not marrying. Fourth, I consider limits to mobility and how gender circumscribes spatial mobility, but I also explore one the features of these novels: their introspection and consider the reasons for this. Some have suggested that this inward gaze is a sign of political apathy; other critics of Indian literature have picked up on how novels by women authors lack specific political engagement with womens' movements but suggest that postcolonial literature does not have to be radical and resistive. Rosemary Marangoly George (1999) drawing on James Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* suggests that political acts take place within

the home through acts of invisible protest such as sulking. weeping, running away. The next chapter addresses George's point, by exploring how home becomes a site of conflict between self-identity and national discourses about the home. I consider how the novels: *Fire on the Mountain* by Anita Desai (1977), and *The Blue Bedspread* by Raj Kamal Jha (1999), depict the failure of the middle-class Indian homes to live up to nationalist ideals of what home should be and how it should be lived. The protagonists of these novels protest against their circumstances through withdrawal into places of sanctuary and retreat. The chapter examines how these nationalist discourses about the home and family endure and are reworked in these late twentieth century novels.

CHAPTER THREE

Home as sanctuary? Destabilising nationalist discourses of home

Introduction

This chapter explores the idea of home as a space of sanctuary and retreat from the problems of domestic life through the two contemporary Indian novels: *Fire on the Mountain* by Anita Desai (1977) and *The Blue Bedspread* by Raj Kamal Jha (1999). Taking the motif of sanctuary, I discuss how these novels reveal the hollowness of the home and how the narratives within, destabilise nationalist discourses of home, family, and gender roles. We can see the affiliation to domestic novels through the presence of themes marital and family life, moral conflicts, strategies for passive rebellion, as well as the portrayal of daily domestic life in the home. *Fire on the Mountain* and *The Blue Bedspread* incorporate these themes, but common features to both are the focus on the protagonists' innermost thoughts, represented by a narrative that is introspective and inward-looking. Accordingly, the novels attend to the conflicts faced by the protagonists in dealing with difficulties and problems in their domestic lives. The first section of the chapter outlines the background to the novels; the style and themes present in the novels, including those of sanctuary, retreat. and haunting; as well as their worldliness through the presence of nationalist discourses. The following three sections, focus on examining the narratives of the protagonists' emotional journeys revealing their stories of secrets and sadness that. unresolved. manifest as hauntings; and how these are settled by the end of

the novels. The first section, examines how the protagonists construct a sense of self/selves produced in opposition to nationalist discourses about women in the home and, the way in which family life is lived; the second section explores how these discourses of home are destabilised in the novels; and the third section considers how the sense of self is reconciled and reconstructed and the hauntings resolved. The conclusion discusses how the stories present in these novels reveal the private spaces of the home as flawed and imperfect, showing the home as failing in relation to the nationalist ideal of the home.

Nationalist discourses set up the ideal of the Indian home and family as a sacralised private space. Partha Chatterjee (1992, 1993) shows how the conceptual separation of public and private spheres arose out of nationalists' needs to construct an Indian identity in opposition to colonial discourse. In nationalist discourses the social spaces of day-to-day living were separated into the *ghar* and *bahir*, or the 'home' and the 'world' (Chatterjee, 1993). The 'world' represented the external material domain of the coloniser/the west; the 'home' stood for the spiritual domain represented by the figure of the woman. Nationalist literature portrayed the Indian woman as an idealised figure representing the nation through feminine attributes of subservience, domesticity, and as a bulwark against fears of westernisation. Thus establishing the home as the site of this Indian nationalist identity. However, *Fire on the Mountain* and *The Blue Bedspread* represent women who destabilise such discourses through subversive thought and deed, or through their absence from the narrative. This is important because novels such as these two, through the worldliness of the text,

can register a 'protest' against the limitations of women's lives within the home

suggesting alternative narratives and destabilising dominant discourses:

> "If the traditional domestic or social 'realism' colludes with actual social and
> historical 'reality' in retaining women within the private sphere of home and
> domesticity, then it would seem that a fantastic or utopian imagination must release
> then into diasporic freedom" (Rajan, 1993b, p 86).

In *Fire on the Mountain*, Desai creates in Nanda Kaul a widow. in search of her

own utopia, who deliberately chooses to relinquish her responsibilities towards

her family and domestic life and moves to Carignano, a remote hilltop house. to

escape from, and deter family and visitors. As I show. Nanda's actions can be

read as an attempt to show the difficulties for women to nurture a sense of self

and to move beyond the roles of women as mother and wife.

The worldliness of both these novels is significant to the narratives; both

novels were written during times of political instability in India: *Fire on the*

Mountain published in 1977 during the time of The Emergency, and *The Blue*

Bedspread published in 1999 during the rise of Hindu nationalist politics in the

1990s. Thus, in both novels it is possible to observe changes in both literary

sensibilities and means of destabilising domestic discourses in Indian novels over

the second half of the twentieth century. Hence, there is a notable shift from the

preoccupation with women's gender roles that Desai and other female Indian

writers focus on, to a concern with the darker side of family life and taboo

subjects such as incest and sexual abuse. An edgy, uncomfortable book, *The*

Blue Bedspread is not condemnatory of the incestuous relations between the

brother and sister presenting them as a source of comfort for the siblings. In

Jha's *The Blue Bedspread*, the anonymous narrator depicts his lower middle-

class family in Calcutta torn apart by the father's acts of domestic violence and familial incest between the father and the children. I use concepts of home in the novels to critique the idealised patriarchal Indian nationalist discourses that emerged during the nineteenth century and continue into the present. The moral conflict between their inner lives and socially constructed behaviours and gender roles converge in the novels causing the protagonists to confront the flawed nature of their home and family life in relation to the nationalist discourses about the home. Thus themes such as adultery and emotional neglect, and darker unmentionable subjects such as physical and sexual abuse become metaphors for the undermining not only of the family and kinship relations, but also between the home and the nation.

With the home being destabilised in this way, it is no longer a place of refuge and safety for the protagonists and so they create a place of sanctuary elsewhere: underneath the blue bedspread, or at Carigano, a hill-station home, to escape the problems of home and domestic life. Examining the relationships depicted in the novels shows family life to be disrupted through difficult and inappropriate relationships: *The Blue Bedspread*, and to a lesser extent, *Fire on the Mountain* portray children as victims of physical and sexual abuse. However, there are very few other contemporary Indian novels that deal with the taboo subject of sexual abuse within the family, one notable exception being *An Obedient Father* by Akhil Sharma (2000). In this novel, Gee (2001) suggests that the sexual abuse is a metaphor for unequal power relations, not just between men and women, child and parent, but also between the generations, and between

the rich and poor. Applying the metaphor to *The Blue Bedspread* and the sexual and physical abuse perpetrated by the father on his children. suggests unequal power relations between parent and child, particularly the dominance of the father. However, the sexual relationship between the brother and sister is less about power over each other, but more as a means of providing comfort and sanctuary to each other. In *Fire on the Mountain*, Nanda's great granddaughter Raka is subjected to physical violence from her father. Raka is depicted as a disturbed and withdrawn child, and Nanda's anxious to hold on to her independence and the sanctuary that Carignano provides, deliberately withholds nurturance and care for her granddaughter.

The family relationships in the novels take place within the home. and thus when homes like these, are difficult to live in, these are depicted negatively in relation to discourses of home. The physical structure of home in the novels and the protagonists' relationship towards their home is significant. After Independence, Nehru and Gandhi both offered two competing images of what Independent India should be like: the Gandhian one was of a rural idyll, a network of self-sufficient villages; the Nehruvian one was of a modern. secular, industrialised state (Damodaran and Unnithan-Kumar, 2000), and planned cities like Chandigarh. In a new nation, cities like Chandigarh, designed by Corbusier. were part of a new ideology that saw the home as a machine for living, divesting the home of its sacralised nationalist imagery. In post-Independent India. it was the Nehruvian vision which dominated politically, and economically. for much of the twentieth century; however, the village has been the object of nostalgia for

many Indians offering an idealised way of life. The novels destabilise this secular Nehruvian image of contemporary India in different ways; *Fire on the Mountain* is set not long after independence (but published in 1977) offers a picture of privileged rural life of elite Indians taking over from the British in the hill stations of northern India. Nanda's gaze in *Fire on the Mountain* is one that emphasises a pastoral view of the countryside surrounding the hill station, and carefully avoiding in her gaze the view of the industrial landscape of the nearby factory (Khair, 2001). Nanda's romanticised view of the countryside and her depiction of Carignano as her dream house, is similar to the Gandhian image of modern India. In contrast, *The Blue Bedspread* set in contemporary Calcutta depicts a modern urban city, but the narrator's gaze, like Desai's Nanda, it is still a middle class gaze avoiding, the urban squalor, congestion, industrialisation. However, unlike Nanda, the narrator-protagonist does not romanticise his home and domestic circumstances.

Both the protagonists experience constraints on their mobility but react to this in different ways. Nanda's experiences of her marital home are of a masculine controlling and public space, which she describes as his house not hers, so she resolves to have a home that is hers alone. Now a widow, Nanda has freedom: she chooses a bare, empty house in a remote location in which she creates as her private space and allows her to withdraw into herself. So, for Nanda, freedom of mobility does not mean an enlarged sense of space and greater spatial mobility, rather it allows for a turn inwards. The narrator-protagonist in *The Blue Bedspread* similarly withdraws deeper into domestic

space because the home is a space of fear and, it is the territory underneath the blue bedspreads of the brother and sister that provides them with places of sanctuary from their father. However, *The Blue Bedspread* is different from the conventional realism of *Fire on the Mountain*: later in the novel, the adult narrator-protagonist, experiences the home as a refuge from the menacing presence of the city of Calcutta trying to breach the inside/outside boundaries by invading the apartment. However, what is unusual in this novel, is that the protagonist experiences freedom through his imagination which constructs scenes of disembodiment with his eyes flying across the landscape of Calcutta. As I demonstrate in the next section, the novels' protagonists' sense of self is linked to their experiences of home: Nanda longs to be alone, free from the demands of others, but has a strong sense of her own identity; contrastingly, the narrator-protagonist constructs multiple selves and identities for himself.

Narrating the self and the nation

The focus on domestic life in the home and the arrangement of marriage is a theme that illustrates the affiliation of these Indian novels with domestic novels novels such as those by Brontë and Austen. At the beginning of *Fire on the Mountain* we meet Nanda Kaul as a widow living as the owner and inhabitant of Carignano, a house on a hill top above the fictional village of Kasauli in northern India. *Fire on the Mountain* is Nanda's personal story of her life as a wife and mother, then, as a widow, her arrival at Carignano and her conflict

between rejecting her instinct to mother Raka and remain true to her desire to become an independent woman. Nanda's narrative is one of a battle between the demands of the self and the rhetoric of the nation (Rege, 1996). For Nanda, Carignano – the home of her widowhood – represents the rejection of those houses of her childhood and marriage: houses full of family, servants, possessions and furnishings. More than that, it is the start of a new way of living for herself. Nanda's life represents the traditional trajectory of a young Indian woman: marriage and then motherhood. Through the gendered roles of wives and mothers the nationalist movement privileged the home as a sacralised domestic realm. However, some Indian women of Nanda's generation inspired by the Nationalist cause and heeding Gandhi's *Swadeshi* movement did postpone marriage or remain unmarried. The *Swadeshi* movement politicised the home, not only in bringing women, outside the home, but in giving women 'spatially limited agency' – that is they were allowed to self-regulate their spatial movements within and outside of the home rather than be confined to the home through purdah (Legg, 2003). The choices faced by women is a theme that appears in many novels including *The Home and the World* by Rabindranath Tagore (2004) and *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur (1998). In Kapur's novel, one of the characters, Virmati, admires the independent life that her unmarried female cousin, Shakuntala, is leading in Lahore. Virmati resents her role in her family where she is expected to take care of her many siblings, instead she wants to study and longs for a life outside the home like her cousin. However, despite their desire to remain independent, both girls are expected to have an arranged marriage soon. During a conversation between Virmati and her

cousin Shakuntala about their forthcoming arranged marriages; Shakuntala explains to Virmati why she has stayed away from the family home and is leading her own life in Lahore:

> 'These people [our family] don't really understand Viru [Virmati], how much satisfaction there can be in leading your own life, in being independent. Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are supposed to marry, and nothing else.' 'But everybody knows how they also go to jail with Gandhiji, don't they, Pehniji [Shakuntala]?' contradicted Virmati timidly. 'And conduct political meetings, demonstrate, join rallies. I wish you could see what all the women are doing in Lahore. But for my mother marriage is the only choice in life. I so wish I could help her feel better about me' (Kapur, 1998. p 17).

Here Shakuntala is saying that marrying or not marrying is a political choice. By not marrying she feels she is able to help support Gandhi and the nationalist cause by becoming involved in political meetings, rallies, and demonstrations against colonial rule. Shakuntala does not say that she is never going to marry, just that she has more options open to her than just marriage. Thus, through their worldliness, novels are able to intervene politically and suggest alternative narratives. As the conversation between Shakuntala and Virmati shows, the Swadeshi movement made it possible for women to go outside their homes to participate in civil disobedience through political demonstrations, rallies and other means of protest.

Whereas Shakuntala makes a choice to delay her marriage, Desai's Nanda finds that choice over what to do with her own life only becomes an option as a widow. There is of course the issue over whether Nanda and Shakuntala are actually exercising a choice, or whether their 'choices' represent contending ideologies about women and the home (Sunder Rajan, 1993b). Nanda finds that it is only her status as a widow that allows her to reject her role

as wife and mother and move to Carignano. However, she is only able to do this because of her family's liberal attitude towards women that allows her to have her own property and money and an independent lifestyle. But this is also enabled by her class position she does not have to work for a living (Wickramagamage, 1994). Also from her accounts of her life during the period when she was a wife and mother, it is clear that her husband was liberal in his attitudes towards his wife; they had a marriage of partnership – a companionate marriage in which he consulted his wife on various matters and decisions: one afternoon during an afternoon nap, she heard her husband say to someone: "Later, I'll have to consult my wife about it" (*Fire on the Mountain.* p 23). As mentioned back in chapter two, Spivak's (1985) reading of Jane Eyre shows how Jane's companionate marriage to Rochester represents a shift in imperial ideology which implicated wives in imperial discourses and colonial expansion. Similarly, Nanda is also complicit in nationalist domestic discourses of the dutiful wife within the home, when entertaining guests with her husband: "…Mr Kaul [her husband] had wanted her always in silk, at the head of the long rosewood table in the dining room, entertaining his guests" (*Fire on the Mountain*, p 18). However, Nanda shows she did not share this view: the marital home was his space and she adopted a strategy of passive rebellion biding her time until she had a home to call her own: "Mentally she stalked through the rooms of that house – his house, never hers…" (*Fire on the Mountain*, p 18). Thus she makes Carignano her space, a sanctuary away from domestic duties.

The house of Carignano is a house haunted by the ghosts of its colonial

residents; the town of Kasauli is a former hill station of the British Raj – a place

of leisure and relaxation for those escaping the heat of the plains. Its heyday was

during the second world war when its reputation even rivalled Simla, but this all

ended with the advent of Indian independence in 1947 and the British all left.

The next inhabitant of Carignano was Nanda Kaul, and Desai describes Kasauli

thus: "The little town went native" (*Fire on the Mountain*, p 10). In this sense

she obviously is living in a house that provides significant status and power as a

British colonial space, symbolised by Carignano's isolated position on a ridge

high above the town (Kenny, 1995). Nanda's self-imposed isolation mirrors that

of the colonial inhabitants before her, because unlike the other Indian inhabitants

of the hill station, Nanda is unsual in eschewing contact with people and having

no visitors for the summer season. The postman coming up to Carignano to

deliver a letter to Nanda, finds her isolation odd compared to other households in

the town and asks her cook, Ram Lal, if there are any visitors yet. The postman

finds the image of Nanda standing waiting for him at the gate strangely

foreboding:

> "Sighting her [Nanda], grey and only faintly stirring under the three pine trees
> that stood by the gate in their exaggerated attitudes as of men going up in flames
> with their arms outstretched, charred too, about the trunks, the postman felt
> something ominous hover in the heavy summer light..." (*Fire on the Mountain*,
> p 12).

The postman's uncanny image of Nanda, on what is a bright summer's day,

standing grey amongst the charred trees is portentous of the novel's final chapter

where Nanda's granddaughter, Raka, deliberately sets alight the forest

surrounding Carignano. The letter that the postman is bringing heralds the end of

Nanda's solitude and isolation by announcing the forthcoming arrival of her

great granddaughter Raka. This arrival of Raka is the pivotal point of the novel. and here we begin to understand Nanda's reasons for choosing Carignano and how she fights against the loss of her solitude. For Nanda to be domestic and maternal is to submit to traditional gender roles and nationalist discourses about the home.

In Carignano, Nanda finds a house that not only is her own house, that she shares with no-one else (except for when her granddaughter arrives later in the narrative). The isolated house becomes her refuge (Swain, 1996), or sanctuary. Carignano is not just a dwelling place it reflects her self, so much so, that her self almost merges into that of the house (*Ibid.*). At the same time, her merging into the house means that she is relinquishing not only her past, but repressing the house's colonial history which is not shared by her (*Ibid.*). Almost immediately into the novel, the second paragraph of the first chapter, Desai tells us that Carignano represents all that Nanda Kaul had spent her life preparing for. However, Desai does not describe the house spatially, or in terms of its decoration, instead she tells us what the house means to Nanda:

> "Everything she wanted was here, at Carignano, in Kasauli. Here, on the ridge of the mountain, in this quiet house. It was the place, and the time of life, that she had wanted and prepared for all her life – as she realised on her first day at Carignano, with a great cool flowering of relief – and at last she had it. She wanted no one and nothing else. Whatever else came, or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction. This she tried to convey to the plodding postman with a cold and piercing stare from the height of the ridge to his honest bull back" (*Fire on the Mountain*, p 3).

So, in describing Carignano as everything Nanda had ever wanted, Desai is presenting the house as the culmination and fulfilment of her wishes and dreams. It also implies that the other houses (her natal and marital homes) in which she

has lived, have not fulfilled her wants and desires. Thus novels allow for the expression of desires and dreams through the narrative: Carignano is the physical embodiment of Nanda's desires, what Gaston Bachelard (1991) calls an imaginary dream house as an expression of the soul. However, Nanda's Carignano is not a nostalgic recreation of a childhood home, rather it is a rejection of nostalgia, symbolic of a break with the past and her roles of daughter, wife, mother and grandmother; and as a widow, she now feels able to 'discharge her duties'.

In contrast to Nanda's spatial isolation and retreat, *The Blue Bedspread* is about loneliness and alienation in the city. So, whereas, Nanda is striving to achieve a sense of self, the protagonist in *The Blue Bedspread* displays multiple selves and identities constructed out of fragmented and disjointed childhood memories. We meet the narrator, a middle-aged man in his apartment in Calcutta. The novel is his story about his family, his childhood and about his relationship with the city of Calcutta. While Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* is a relatively straightforward novel in realist style, Jha's novel by contrast, is surreal and disjointed. *The Blue Bedspread* begins as a mystery for the reader to unravel the baby girl's relationship to the narrator and why she has arrived so suddenly in his flat this night. The novel is structured into a set of chapters forming stories that the narrator is writing during the night for baby girl. He is telling her the stories, we learn, so that she will have a sense of belonging, of her identity, when she is adopted. The stories adopt a postcolonial aesthetic and are not told in a linear narrative with beginnings, middles and endings; instead they subvert story-

telling conventions by being structured as loosely connected stream-of-consciousness recollections of the narrator's childhood. This aesthetic produces an atmosphere of disorder and instability within the narrator's home and domestic life. *The Blue Bedspread* has an atmosphere mixing fear, menace and oppression both within the home and outside in the city of Calcutta. My reading of *The Blue Bedspread* is that the narrator's stories within are destabilising nationalist conceptions of the home and family by portraying domestic life as negative and damaging experiences. There is the absence of key figures of family life, notably adult women except for a brief description of his mother wrapped-up with a shawl on a snowy morning, and then she disappears from the narrative without explanation.

The stories told in the *Blue Bedspread* represent a psychic geography of the narrator in that they portray the internal psychological world of the narrator in both the act of telling (and the writing). The narrator's flat in Calcutta becomes, to use Bhabha's terminology, a house of secrets and sadness (Bhabha, 1992). In this house lurks the unhomely through the narrator's repression of his memories, events and feelings. To illustrate this use the narrator's relationship with his parents and sister to show how he suppresses his memories of his father's acts of domestic violence towards his mother, his father's pederasty towards his children, and his incestuous relationship with his sister. Here the narrator's sense of self becomes more fractured than Desai's Nanda, identities in the stories constantly shift between a child and an adult and from location to location. The reader is aware that the narrator manipulates the stories, for

example: The narrator is lying on the grass observing through an open window, his parents in the house. The parents start to argue and the boy sees his father beat his mother. The narrator feels a need to finish the story by bringing it into the present: "I could end the story here, but that would leave it for ever trapped in the past, incomplete and purposeless" (*The Blue Bedspread*, p 53). He recreates the scene of that night observing his parents from the garden and re-writes history. This time he is married living in the same house with wife and children. Exactly the same scene is replayed: "he reads aloud to his wife; outside, their child lies on his stomach, in the garden staring at the window. They have an argument their voices rise..." (*The Blue Bedspread*, p 54). The reader is also aware that the boy lying on his stomach, is the narrator himself as a child; showing that the adult-narrator is now able to manipulate and alter stories at will. Thus suggesting that he is deliberately trying to repress the more uncomfortable aspects of his childhood to cope with the traumatic after effects by maintaining control. Here the narrator sense of control is demonstrated by the changing of the ending to a happier one:

> "And this time, Father gets up, puts the book on the table, his shadow on the wall, walks first to his wife, kisses her on the nose, she makes a face, smiles, and then he walks to the window, calls out to the child, pulling his little family into a world he has only now begun to explore" (*The Blue Bedspread*, p 54).

This story and the quotation above, demonstrates the shifting identities in the novel, at one moment he is the narrator, then at another moment he is the child, and at another he is the father. Thus, the reader is presented with the presence of an unreliable narrator who through the narrative presenting fiction within fiction with no way of knowing the 'truth' of either account.

This need to feel safe, is a recurring theme in the novel. There is a sense of the narrator's powerlessness and helplessness that he experienced as a child. In childhood his home becomes an ambivalent emotional space – a mixture of pain, and happiness and sadness: "And although my body still hurt, where father had put his entire weight on me that evening, I kept drowning in a stream, a river and then an ocean of happiness" (*The Blue Bedspread*, pp 61-62). Again. the narrator tells the reader that he is manipulating his memories, and shows the reader how he might control the events of that night, also possibly distancing himself from events:

> "I have embellished Father's heavy breathing, my muffled screams, with adjectives in my mind. I have made Father's trousers black at one time, blue at another; changed that rainy evening to a hot summer morning. Or when I have felt like it, I have made it pour that night so that sister and I, locked in embrace, can hear the drops drum against the window" (*The Blue Bedspread*, p 62).

This literary technique used by Jha demonstrates the slipperiness of memory and the ambivalence of home. The shifting identities of who the narrator is addressing in his stories are equally ambivalent. Sometimes he is addressing the reader, sometimes himself, other times his father, as the following quotation demonstrates:

> "I want to tell him what happened happened and it's been selfish of me to keep using him for failures of my own making. Or as a subject of my prose. I want him to help me understand why he failed as a father and how could so much hatred and pain have gracefully coexisted with so much love and joy..." (*The Blue Bedspread*, p 63).

Whilst this causes the reader some confusion, it is a technique that demonstrates the process of memory as moving constantly from one thought to another.

However *The Blue Bedspread* is not just a psycho-geography of memory, it is also about the relationship of the narrator to the city of Calcutta. In the following

section of this chapter, I will explore how Nanda's house Carignano, and the narrator's Calcutta apartment represent a collision with home and self.

Destabilising the discourses of home

Carignano is deliberately made by Nanda into a silent, empty house, one that supresses domestic and national discourses; for example she wills the postman not to stop to deliver a letter for her; she is also reluctant to have her great granddaughter Raka to stay. The geographical location of the house, on a ridge above the village, symbolises its separateness (a legacy of colonialism) from people in the village, her sense of superiority, and its precarious position set apart and out of step with daily life in the hill station. Desai talks about Carignano as being both the place and the time of her life, its remote location a deliberate choice; the avoidance of people and visitors, as though she is trying to repress memories of, and stop herself perfoming the wifely and motherly roles she is expected to carry out. Letters and a telephone line provide connections with the world beyond Carignano, however, much she would wish otherwise. Nanda resents her privacy being invaded by the arrival of the postman, Raka, and Ila Das; she also resents the shrill ringing of the telephone. By discharging her duties to her family, she is rejecting intimacy by not making the house cosy and welcoming, by repressing her 'housewifely impulse' (Wickramagamage, 1994).

What Desai does when describing Carignano, it is to emphasise its bareness and emptiness, at one with the 'starkness' of the landscape surrounding Kasauli and Carignano:

> "Occasionally an eagle swam through this clear unobstructed mass of light and air. That was all. And Carignano, her home on the ridge, had no more than that. Why should it? The sun shone on its white walls. Its windows were open – the ones facing north opened onto the blue waves of the Himalayas flowing out and up to the line of ice and snow sketched upon the sky, while those that faced south looked down the plunging cliff to the plain stretching out, flat and sere, to the blurred horizon" (*Fire on the Mountain*, p 4.).

Carignano is a house that is open to the elements, there is a blurring of the boundaries between the home and the surrounding landscape. Moreover, it is Carignano's bareness and emptiness that brought pleasure to Nanda Kaul: "What pleased and satisfied her so, here at Carignano, was its barrenness" (*Fire on the Mountain*, p 4), and "It seemed so exactly right as a house for her, it satisfied her heart completely" (*Fire on the Mountain*, p 5). Nanda's preference for a bare and empty house is one that also reflects her unhappy sense of self (Bachelard, 1991). Similar too is Raka's desired house, one that is even more sparse and barren than Carignano: a burnt and blackened shell of a house destroyed by fire on the hillside near Carignano. The motif of the haunted house reoccurs here through the emphasis on the emptiness of Carignano and the fire-ravaged house nearby. However, Carignano has the potential to be turned into a homely house for a brief period of time. One afternoon during a storm, Nanda and Raka have tea in the drawing room. Instead of describing Carignano as bare and empty, during the storm the house becomes almost cosy:

> "What rain! The house shook, the roof crackled, long raindrops slanted in. They [Nanda and Raka] rose, picked up the tea-tray and retreated to the drawing-room. It was dark here. A light was lit. The room took on an appearance of a shelter, warm, glowing. The downpour drummed on the taut tin roof, deafening. The coolness and the wetness of the air refreshed, exhilarated – it was iced wine dashed in the face" (*Fire on the Mountain*, pp 81-82).

Seemingly encouraged by the homely atmosphere, Nanda makes use of the time to tell Raka stories of her childhood. Thus the house becomes not only a place of shelter, but a place, no longer bare and empty, but filled with of memories and a sense of intimacy between Nanda and Raka through the domestic homely imagery of the warm and glowing drawing room.

However, even more important to Nanda, was not just the sparse and simple style of the house, but the fact that Carignano belonged to her, and her alone; it was not a place she had to share with others. Carignano represents the house of her dreams, yet at the same time, despite wanting the house for herself, she still expected that she would have a duty to care for others, and to maintain familial bonds and connections, and so did not expect to renounce them so quickly on her arrival at Carignano:

> "The care of others was a habit that Nanda Kaul had mislaid. It had been a religious calling she had believed in till she found it fake. It had been a vocation that one day went dull and drought-struck as though its life-spring had dried up It had happened on her first day alone at Carignano. After her husband's death, her sons and daughters had come to help her empty the Vice Chancellor's house, pack and crate their belongings and distribute them, then escort her to Kasauli... When they left, she paced the house proprietarily, feeling the feel of each stone in the paving with her bare feet" (*Fire on the Mountain*, pp 309-310.

Desai describes Nanda's roles of wife and mother using religious metaphors: a habit, a vocation, a calling. The depiction of Sita and other dutiful wives in Hindu religious imagery is another significant discourse in determining women's identities and gender roles. Nanda has followed what Wickramagamage (1994, p 27) refers to as 'the normative narrative of the "good" wife/mother', which Nanda dispenses with. Thus by doing this, she is rejecting the nationalist construction of home as a spiritual sacred space. This is significant in terms of

the timing and setting of the narrative: Nanda's rejection of her role in the home also coincides with the intensification of anti colonial nationalism and the achievement of Indian independence. However, Nanda's ownership of Carignano meant that she could be her self, she was no longer defined in relation to other people as a mother or wife. She was at long last, a home owner rather than a home maker, caring for others in her family. This can be seen in the difficulty she has in coming to terms with the stay of Raka. Thus, when Nanda has a reawakening of her maternal instinct, symbolised by domestic calling of the bird: "A cuckoo sang in the Chestnut tree down by the road, with its low, domestic call" (*Fire on the Mountain*, p 36); she responds by showing her feelings of resentment towards this culturally imposed mothering role by resisting and withholding from Raka gestures of motherliness. This is significant because, as Sudhir Kakar (1978) suggests, a Hindu woman's adult identity is marked by a sense of motherliness.

Towards the end of the novel, Nanda gets together with her friend Ila Das, to retell a bored Raka tales of their youth, constructing in their stories fantasy castles of childhood:

> "Raka wilted. She hung her arms between her knees and dropped her head on its thin stalk. It seemed the old ladies were going to play, all afternoon, that game of old age – that reconstructing, block by gilded block, of that castle of childhood, so ramshackle and precarious, and of stuffing it with that dolls' house furniture, those impossibly gilded red velvet sofas and painted bedsteads, that always smelt of dust and mice that she had never cared to play with" (*Fire on the Mountain*, pp 116-117).

Here the theme of a dream house reoccurs: Carignano represents Nanda's desire for an adult house, whereas with Ila Das she is recreating her childhood home, improving, embellishing it in order to impress Raka. A dream house is a mixture

of the dreamer's pride and reason, and it embodies what is considered desirable by other people (Bachelard, 1991). Therefore, Nanda creates an ever more elaborate childhood house filled with exotic treasures and a zoo, endless picnics and parties in order to entertain a child.

Like Nanda, the narrator of the *The Blue Bedspread* also has stories to tell a child about his home. The urban surroundings of narrator's home is in marked contrast to the rural hill station location of Nanda's Carignano. The apartment is located in central Calcutta on Main Circular Road, on the second floor. There is a veranda that looks down over tram wires, a street lamp, across the street there is an oil refining mill (still closed after a strike) where an old man looks after the owner's pigeons kept in a cage by the entrance to the mill. The narrator's home does not represent a culmination of dreams, instead it is a repository of memories. When telling his story to the baby girl, he explains to her, that the stories will be like the rooms in house waiting for the door to be opened. Fearful of what he will discover, he tells her:

> "We shall visit all these places, I shall hold your hand, open all the rooms that need to be opened, word by word, sentence by sentence. I will keep some rooms closed until we are more ready, open others just a chink so that you take a peek. And at times without opening a door at all, we shall imagine what lies inside" (*The Blue Bedspread*, p 6).

In the chapter of the novel called 'Blue Bedspread' the narrator tells us about the significance of the bedspread, that is was a bedspread he shared with his sister. During the day the bedspread was the location of childhood games and imagination, at night it became the sky lit up from underneath by the lamp:

> "...our eyes fixed along the surface, imagining we were looking at the sky. And that the discoloured patches were clouds. At night the bedside lamp made patterns of light on the bedspread "making our black sky shimmer with stars", spinning the

lamp shade made the stars "move in huge orbits across the bed" (*The Blue Bedspread*, p 55).

The narrator's home is so unhomely, that as children, he and his sister constructed an imaginary home, that was a safe space, a sanctuary, under the blue bedspread.

As well as private, secret spaces of sanctuary within the home, *The Blue Bedspread* is also about the narrator's relationship to the city of Calcutta. As when Nanda's self merges with her house, Carignano, the narrator's self in *The Blue Bedspread* also becomes entwined with the city of Calcutta. The narrative provides an unusual depiction of the city, using imagery and modes of representation that is different to western representations. For example, John Hutnyk's (1996) analysis of western tourists descriptions of Calcutta finds common adjectives and phrases used by westerners to describe Calcutta include: crowded, stinking, brutal, dark, a black hole, slums and its association with the Missionaries of Charity. As Geoffrey Moorhouse (1998, p 19) points out, in his book on the city, part history, part travelogue, "[T]he truth is that almost everything popularly associated with Calcutta is highly unpleasant and very nasty indeed". However, alternative depictions by Indian writers like Jha and others are providing more sympathetic and contemporary representations. Krishna Dutta (2003) highlights compassionate representations, for example she cites Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* which shows the magic of the city cloaked in blackness during a power-cut and then suddenly lit up as the power is restored, or the depiction of a refugee colony in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* where the landscape of rice-fields is replaced by shacks and shanty

towns. In the chapter entitled 'Garden Child', the story is based on an image, an image of a child lying in the garden on his stomach. The narrator's vision of this story begins in his flat, and the reader has to travel with him, as he moves out across Calcutta:

> "I close my eyes and concentrate; so hard they prise free from the sockets and I let them fly across the room. Dodging below the fan, in between the bookshelves, through the green window, past the red curtains, down onto the street. In and out of the traffic, inside a tram, around the passengers, some sitting some standing. Across the Esplanade, past the beauty salon on Park Street where two Chinese women in black jeans wait for customers; across the Maiden, carried by the breeze, through the trees cold and shivering. I concentrate harder; let the eyes glide over the Hooghly briskly skim its black surface, barely touching the buffaloes that wallow, their snouts above the water. Below the bridge, into the railway station, over the crowd, the vendors running with their trolleys, into the train that's pulling out of the platform" (*The Blue Bedspread*, pp 48-49).

I have quoted this lengthy description of the city in order to show how Jha writes about Calcutta. In this vision of the narrator we follow a pair of eyes, on a journey across the urban landscape of Calcutta from his home out into the city: across the street, on the tram, past the prostitutes, over the Hooghly river, into the station and onto the train. It suggests that the narrator is familiar with the geography of the city. However, the narrator is detached from the city, he is not participating in the urban life producing a cinematic type of vision.

In the first part of the novel, the narrator-protagonist presents a detached view of the city as if it were something 'out there', outside the boundaries of the home. Towards the final parts of the novel, the city is imbued by the author with agency and, so almost becomes a character in the novel rather than a backdrop to events. In its guise as character, the city interacts with the narrator-protagonist at first as a benign presence, and then later the city morphs into something more menacing and uncanny. The uncanny city as character is a trope that also

appears in Indian cinema. In his analysis of the Indian film *Parinder*, set in

Bombay, Rajani Mazumdar (2002) suggests that this film articulates Anthony

Vidler's concept of the 'architectural uncanny' by representing the "uncanny as

an older private form transforms itself into a public experience in the modern

metropolis" (Mazumdar, 2002, p 71). This articulation of the uncanny also

appears in *The Blue Bedspread* in the narrator's interaction with Calcutta, which

connects his private self to the public self of the city. This connection of the

private self with the city is illustrated in the following quotation; in this quotation

the city is still benign and is an 'avuncular' presence seeking listeners, like the

lonely narrator-protagonist, to hear its stories and admire its faded and decaying

grandeur (Ram, 1999, p 72):

> "This city likes lonely people, the city likes this man. There is no one to walk
> by his side, to wait for him at a street crossing, so the city moves in to help, it
> slows down the traffic, parts the crowds. There's no one to talk to him, so the
> city speaks through its banners, it hoardings. At night he has nothing to do, so
> the streets tell him their stories, street lights trap insects in their plexiglas covers,
> lull him to sleep. No wonder he is so grateful to his city and returns the favour
> whenever he gets the chance. For example, when buildings are more than a
> hundred years old, streaked with moss and rain, not worth a second look, tug at
> his sleeves, he stops in his tracks to watch and admire. Once, twice, even thrice.
> On days when the streets are deserted, trade unions have called a strike, he stays
> up extra hours, gives the city company, listens to its stories like a loyal child.
> Until one night his phone rings" (*The Blue Bedspread*, pp 74-75).

The image of the city as an avuncular presence is at odds with popular western

conceptions of Calcutta, like other authors of Calcutta: Ghosh and Chaudhuri,

Jha presents the city with compassion noting evocative details of the urban

landscape such as insects trapped in street lamps, dilapidated buildings, banners

and hoardings (Ram, 1999). This is also a masculine account of the city focusing

on public spaces outside the home, in contrast to the domestic spaces in Nanda's

hill station home of Carignano. The image of Calcutta presented by Jha gives the

city a human persona, and the city is shown as helping the narrator-protagonist

on his journeys through the city, by holding up the traffic for him. However, the city also demands attention from the narrator calling him to look at its buildings (suggesting the city has a sense of pride), and expecting loyalty from him (expressed by the narrator feeling obliged to stay up extra hours to keep the city company).

After the event of the telephone ringing in the quotation above, in order to explain the progression of the narrative, I briefly summarise what happens next: the significance of the telephone call is explained in the final stages of the novel: the telephone call is not just the police officer ringing to inform the narrator-protagonist of his sister's death, it is also signifies a changing relationship between the narrator and the city when he withdraws into his home to type out his stories. Annoyed at being thwarted, the city seeks revenge from its former friend:

> [the city keeps] … "watching him, irritated and angry. In just a few hours, the darkest of the night, the foundations of their friendship will crack, the pillars of his solitude, the walls, will begin to buckle, some will even give way. The night will go darker, the city, once spurned, will begin searching for another lonely man or woman in some other neighbourhood. And until then, until it finds a new friend, all alone, it will keep coming back to haunt the man, filling him with fears and dreads he has so far never imagined. Like, how will he cross the street tomorrow morning" (*The Blue Bedspread*, pp 75-76).

The narrator seems fearful of the city breaching the boundaries of the home. After the narrator's withdrawal into his home, like Nanda in *Fire on the Mountain*, the city is portrayed in a more menacing way, and it becomes a watching, waiting and revengeful character. During the night when the narrator checks on the baby, the city is shown to be outside the window. The city becomes a haunting presence, like a ghost invading middle class Victorian homes

(Marcus, 1999). As Mazumdar (2002, p 71) points out " [I]n the uncanny city of the imagination, memory, childhood, nostalgia. claustrophobia and primitivism co-exist to produce a distinct form of spatial anxiety". This is in contrast to Carignano in *Fire on the Mountain*, where the bareness and barrenness of the house and landscape are at one with each other, there is no boundary symbolising private space.

Conclusion: Reconciling home with the self

In the last chapter of *Fire on the Mountain*, the extent of Nanda's re-imagining of her childhood home becomes clear. What Nanda had told Raka were lies, lies about her exotic and bohemian childhood, lies about her marriage:

> "She had lied to Raka about everything. Her father had never been to Tibet – he had brought the little Buddha from a travelling pedlar. They had not had bears and leopards in their home, nothing but overfed dogs and bad-tempered parrots. Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen – he had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress, whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved, all his life loved. And her children – the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice – she lived here because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing. All those graces and glories with which she had tried to captivate Raka were only a fabrication: they helped her to sleep at night, they were tranquillizers, pills" (*Fire on the Mountain*, p 145).

By facing up to the reality of her married life by releasing her memories, Nanda ends her repression of the past. In doing so, she has to recognise her own feelings of betrayal about her husband's affair, and her collusion in keeping silent. Nanda's home represents the failure of her home to live up to the nationalist ideal – a husband who does not love her, and alienated and distanced from her children. Nanda's home as a space of betrayal, failure and her

subservience to her husband, is also paralleled by the experiences of many women who found that the recreation of the Indian home by male Bengali nationalists made home a site of betrayal, resubjection and silencing for many Indian women (Legg, 2003). Thus, Carignano is not Nanda's home of choice as was suggested in earlier parts of the novel, rather it was another form of nationalist discourse or ideology that she was brought under and silenced (Rajan. 1993b).

The final chapter of *The Blue Bedspread* is called 'Eight Words'. Here in the Calcuttan equivalent of the Speaker's Corner in London's Hyde Park, the narrator decides to reveal his secret to the awaiting crowd. Here is an act of speech used in a similar manner by Toni Morrison for the ending of *Beloved*. Bhabha (1992) suggests that Sethe's public speaking – the claiming and renaming of Beloved – the continual repetition of her name is a way of ending the haunting uncanniness of the home. The narrator in *The Blue Bedspread* in front of a crowd of people, the people who have haunted his memories. He has only one sentence to say: "I... am... the... father ...of ...my ...sister's ...child" (*The Blue Bedspread*, pp 226-227). This sentence of eight words is enunciated slowly, emphasising the precise meaning of each word. In saying this sentence, he is admitting to the ghosts who haunt him (represented by the familiar faces in the crowd) that he is not the baby's uncle but her father. This admission signals the end of his repression: "He doesn't have to lie any more, twist facts to flesh out his fiction" (*The Blue Bedspread*, p 227). Thus by revealing the flawed

nature of his family life, the narrator-protagonist is, like Nanda, also speaking out against the failure of the nationalist ideal of the home.

Both these novels thus address the failed home and how the protagonists find sanctuary from this; themes of dissatisfaction, adultery, emotional neglect, and abusive relationships highlight some of the difficulties and problems that are hidden by conventional discourses about the home and relationships within the family and the nation in general. It is through the destabilisation of nationalist discourses that the novels exhibit their worldliness. Some of the issues raised here about the relationship between home and nation are taken up again in chapter five in the context of The Emergency and Hindu nationalism. The next chapter discusses the middle class family and examines issues facing the 'old' and the 'new' groups of India's middle classes and the challenges they face in dealing with the complexities in a newly globalising India.

CHAPTER FOUR

From old to new: family and home in a globalising society

Introduction: narratives of transition and change

The social, cultural and political changes resulting from the liberalisation of the Indian economy since the 1990s is a subject that has resonance in many contemporary Indian novels. The middle classes among whom there is a feeling of transition from an 'old' traditional society to a 'new' globalised society (Das, 2002; Kumar, 2000) are charting these changes. This chapter examines how Indian novels have narrated this social transition through the representation of the lived experience of home in *Tara Lane* by Shama Futehally (1993), *Freedom Song* by Amit Chaudhuri (1998), and *Sultry Days* by Shobha Dé (1994). The worldliness of these three novels is present in the narratives of change that are taking place within urban middle class homes, and I focus on how these novels represent ways in which these changes are transforming concepts of family and class hegemony. The focus on the family and the home is an affiliative feature between these Indian novels and English domestic novels; and, in the case of India, the family is important in providing, and transmitting, a sense of shared class, politics and nationalist discourses. I explore the significance of these values and consider how these are contested by the 'new' middle class in terms of public culture, lifestyle and employment. In relation to the family, I examine how the representation of the traditional extended family in the novels symbolises stability.

To orientate the reader, I briefly describe the plots of the novels and some of the key issues about home that each raises with regard to social, cultural and economic changes taking place in society as a result of globalisation. Juxtaposing these novels illustrates how the Indian middle classes are responding in different ways to the transition to a more globalised society. *Tara Lane* centres the domestic concerns of the Mushtaqs, and it is Tara the protagonist, who narrates the story of her middle class family living in Bombay. The novel, published in 1993, is however, ambiguous regarding the timespan of the narrative, which begins with Tara's childhood and ends with her as a young wife and mother, but clues in the narrative, particularly the references to the 'Licence Raj' era during Tara's marriage, suggest it is set somewhere between the period from the 1950s to the 1980s. The novel depicts the decline and eventual destruction of the family business and the loss of the extended family's houses, moving from a privileged cocooned life in the family's private compound to ordinary apartments in a municipal block. I show in this chapter, that this loss of house and the decline of the family business, in this novel, is a metaphor for the decline of 'old' middle class values in modern India and a period of transition and change socially, culturally and economically. *Tara Lane* stresses class as a more significant marker of the Mushtaqs' identity, than for example religion, and it is the family business that confers their class and status. Tara's childhood is presented as a period of stability and continuity, but it is Tara's marriage and the entry of her husband Rizwan into the narrative that signals changes afoot; it is Rizwan who contributes to the eventual bankruptcy through his illegal bribing of the workers resulting in the closure of the company. Adapting to this change is

difficult for the Mustaqs, and in terms of articulating that change, the narrative becomes incoherent and eventually non-existent, it is left to the reader to image what happens next when they leave the family compound in Tara Lane. The novel ends looking not to the future, but back to Tara's childhood, taking the reader full circle into a nostalgic reminiscence of her former home.

In a similar vein, *Freedom Song* is about the life of three generations of an extended family. Set in Calcutta in the 1990s, the novel chronicles the lives of Bhola and his sister Khuku and their respective families, portraying the banalities of daily life: eating, sleeping, and going to work. In the novel, Bhola's family lives in a house in Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar Road with his wife and three children. Khuku lives with her husband Shib nearby, and her friend Mimi is staying with them. Running through the novel, is a strong sense of stability and continuity of domestic life that anchors home against external changes taking place in Calcutta as well as India in general. These changes include communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims, globalisation and economic liberalisation, diasporic scattering of family members living worldwide. I argue that *Freedom Song* represents a more subtle shift in the changing middle class values showing gradual transition and change in the structure and decoration of the houses and the arrival and departure of family members, unlike the abrupt ending in *Tara Lane* signified by the loss of the Mushtaqs' house and factory.

Sultry Days strikes a very different note in terms of the style, while still continuing the theme of transition, focuses on the lifestyles of the younger

members of the 'old' middle classes and those of 'new' middle classes which differ from the lifestyles of the 'old' middle classes depicted in *Freedom Song* and *Tara Lane* who are involved in family businesses, politics or working in the nationalised industries. *Sultry Days* set in Bombay of the 1990s, is an example of a 'new' middle class novel, its themes are lighter, focusing showing the lifestyles of young wealthy Indians working in new industries such as advertising, journalism and film, where the emphasis is on office gossip, careers and shopping instead of centring on the family. The novel features Nisha a young graduate, and native of Bombay, and her relationship with boyfriend called Deb but popularly known within their group of friends as 'God'. I argue that this novel represents not the 'new' middle class, but the 'old' middle class trying to adapt to changes in society. The novel shows how Nisha, from a solidly 'old' middle class background – a father who is a manager in a multinational company, her mother a housewife and 'company' wife – becomes immersed in the public culture of Bombay: parties, film premieres, poetry readings, and so on. The family has all the accoutrements of the lifestyle of typical middle class Bombayites: a house in the exclusive area of Malabar Hills, her mother wears Chiffon saris, and they have an ambassador car, and a driver. The 'yuppie' lifestyle that Nisha adopts is new to her and she has difficulty fitting in. The novel ends with her boyfriend 'God's' death when he is shot by gangsters.

To examine these issues of change and transition in the novels, the first part of the chapter focuses on the representation of the Indian family in the novels, and then, exploring the worldliness of this subject discusses how the

Indian family has been theorised and the various discourses associated with it. The second part of the chapter considers the middle class status of the families in the three novels, relating these to ways in which the contemporary middle classes have been theorised, and how particular subgroups such as the 'old' and the 'new' groups within the middle classes are emerging in Indian society. Expanding on this, I explore ways in which the 'old' and 'new' middle classes are produced and maintained in Indian society, and through an analysis of these novels, argue that the representation of family background as cultural capital serves to produce a sense of longevity and legitimacy for the 'old' middle classes. In addition, I examine the difficulty of these novels in suggesting, and imagining beyond the present, and representing changes facing the middle classes society. These changes are particularly visible through the representation of public sphere in *Freedom Song* and *Tara Lane* which features the employment of the mainly male protagonists, and the female protagonists are shown in the private sphere of the home carrying out domestic duties and supervising the servants; only *Sultry Days* depicts the protagonist, a young middle class woman, working. The different locations of the novels in Calcutta (*Freedom Song*) and Bombay (*Tara Lane* and *Sultry Days*) demonstrates the political and economic discourses associated with different types of employment such as the traditional middle class white collar occupations in nationalised, protected industries, or in family businesses, compared with newer globally orientated industries such as advertising and computing. Using Chaudhuri's (2003) concept of 'cities of the mind', I argue that the protagonists' type of employment shows differences in the culture and the mentality of the middle classes of both cities that explains the

different types of transition and change represented in the novels. Moving from public culture to private spaces, the next part of the chapter explores the representation of home in the novels, examining how the middle class gaze of women is turned inwards focusing on the family and domestic life. Finally, the chapter examines the new public culture of the middle classes in 1990s Bombay in *Sultry Days* which focuses less on family life and more on work and friendship connections between the protagonists.

Intertwined communities: the family, the nation and the realist novel

The family (both as nuclear and extended family units) is an important means through which middle class Indian novels reproduce ideologies and identities of the middle classes. The central theme that links the three novels discussed in this chapter is that of the family, and relationships with and between family members. In terms of the worldliness and affiliation of these novels, the theme of family is common to many Indian English novels both realist and postmodern (Mohapatra & Nayak, 2000). The significance of the family is such that Viney Kirpal asserts that the family is like one of the characters in Indian novels, and it is the family that provides a sense of community and belonging in Indian novels that is lacking in other types of English fiction such as Anglo-American novels:

> "The family which has been central to Indian English novels…is aggressively foregrounded in the Indian English postmodern novel. Work after work, it appears almost like a character…*Midnight's Children, The Great Indian Novel, The Shadow Lines, Rich Like Us, A Suitable Boy, Such a Long Journey, The Binding Vine*, and a host of other novels. By contrast, the characters in the

Euro-American postmodern novels such as *Catch-22, Possession, Under the Net*, appear to be so alone. No mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, wives, husbands, sons, daughters, cousins, aunts and uncles; only lovers who keep coming in and out of their lives. They inhabit a lonely society and the malaise of alienation spills into the novels" (Viney Kirpal, cited in Mohapatra & Nayak, 2000, p 195).

In the light of Kirpal's comments above, studying how families are portrayed in novels provides a sense of the emotional tenor of family and domestic life. Also through the interactions of the characters the novels depict the fluidity and ambivalence of family life in relation to various concepts and discourses about the home and family. The focus here is on exploring the representation of the family in an urban setting. These changes from an extended to a nuclear family set-up are particularly visible through the representation of home in the novels. For example, all three of the novels depict urban dwelling of the old middle classes from the large family houses of *Freedom Song* in Calcutta; similarly, in the Bombay location of *Sultry Days* Nisha, the young female protagonist, resides in her 'old' middle class family, while living a new middle class lifestyle. In *Sultry Days* the characters are shown enjoying a lifestyle of leisure pursuits and the purchasing of consumer goods. The novels also depict changes in employment and the shift from state nationalised industry to the multinational service sector. *Tara Lane* shows domestic life in a family compound, but the loss of home means the end of dwelling in the family compound and a shift to smaller-sized family accommodation in a municipal apartment block.

Himsnsu Mohapatra and Jatindra Nayak attempt to address Kirpal's observation that the family has been 'aggressively forgrounded' in Indian English realist novels by suggesting that the family is significant because it is a

trope with a nation-forming role, or function (Mohapatra & Nayak, 2000). In support of their thesis, they use Vikram Seth's realist novel *A Suitable Boy* to suggest that the themes of the novel construct a particular ideology of the middle class Indian family during the period of British rule and in the aftermath of Indian Independence. Comparing Seth's use of realism to the realism used by the British nineteenth century author Jane Austen, they argue that Seth writes of Indian middle class families deploying Austenian style narrative and themes (Mohapatra & Nayak, 2000). However, they maintain that the most important factor Austen and Seth have in common is a shared political project, that of portraying the development of a new bourgeois society; Austen does this by writing about how the landed gentry interlock with a new bourgeois society in nineteenth century England, and similarly, Seth's novel represents middle class Indians' protests against colonial rule and the consolidation of middle class power and political control after Indian Independence (Mohapatra & Nayak, 2000). In the chapter, I argue that this is what *Tara Lane*, *Freedom Song* and *Sultry Days* do in modern postcolonial India and assert the values of the 'old' middle classes which are being threatened by the rise of the new middle classes.

"It's nothing more than a class war": representing changes in the composition of the middle classes

The issues facing the Indian middle classes in the last decade of the twentieth century are very different to those in the past. Economic changes,

notably the shift from a protected nationalised to a liberalised global-orientated economy has had a number of effects on the composition of the urban middle classes. Firstly, social mobility has meant that the size of the middle class has increased giving rise to a more diverse membership. Thus in recognition of the changing composition of this group, it is more appropriate to talk of the middle classes in the plural rather than the singular to take into account this multifarious grouping. The middle classes no longer consist primarily of professionals working in public-sector occupations, instead the group has enlarged to include entrepreneurs, small business owners, and professionals working in the private sectors. Given the expansion of the middle classes, it is unsurprising that a number of commentators suggest that there are differences within the middle classes. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Rachel Dwyer's (2000a) study of the middle classes of the city Bombay identifies three sub groups that make up Bombay's middle classes. She categorises them as the 'old' middle class, the 'new' middle class, and the petit bourgeois. Although Dwyer's study is based on Bombay, her categorisations have wider application to other cities in India, such as Delhi and Calcutta. The petit bourgeoisie of Bombay that Dwyer identifies, will not be discussed in this chapter as they aspire to middle class status, rather than have actually obtained such status[1] (Dwyer, 2000a); rather the chapter focuses on the old and new middle classes. The sub group of the new middle class is a 'fragment' or a 'faction', which does not map easily onto the generic middle class category (Toor, 2000). The so called old middle class was formed in the nineteenth century from the English-educated Indians and its members have dominated the post-independence period socially, economically and

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[1] For a discussion of home in relation to India's aspiring middle class, see Säävälä (2003).

politically. The dominance of the old middle class is now being challenged by the more recent emergence of a sub group. which we might refer to as the new middle class. The new middle class is a group whose wealth and status is based on the acquisition and creation of money by businessmen and entrepreneurs who have benefited from India's economic growth and liberalisation in the 1990s. As I show in the following discussion, a number of commentators posit these differences within the middle classes between the 'old' and 'new' as more complex than just a conflict tradition and modernity because the new middle classes are some cases more traditional in behaviour than the old middle classes.

The three novels in this chapter are written by and for members of the educated, English speaking, metropolitan-living 'old' middle class. Therefore, like their authors and readers, the protagonists of these novels articulate issues that concern the old and established middle classes, and demonstrate the limitations of this discourse in terms of narrating change and transition. The old middle classes form part of the national bourgeoisie in cities such as Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta; they are in professional occupations in the civil service, education, medicine and journalism, and have large amounts of cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications (Dwyer, 2000a). A distinctive feature of the old middle classes is their bourgeois mentality, which emphasises democratic, secularist and nationalist (in a Nehruvian sense, rather than Hindu nationalist) values (Dwyer, 2000a). Language is another important marker of the old middle classes who are fluent in English and may also use another language for reading and speaking (Dwyer, 2000a). For example. in the novel *Tara Lane*,

which is discussed in more detail later in this chapter, the protagonist Tara and her husband Rizwan use English to speak in public to other members of the family, or to servants; but speak to each other in Hindi as a sign of intimacy between themselves. Similarly, in *Freedom Song*, the two sisters Khuku and Mimi converse in the 'familiar' East Bengali dialect. Nevertheless, the old middle class culture is changing gradually and having to incorporate elements of the new middle class culture, as I show later in the chapter with my analysis of *Sultry Days*.

Indian commentators echo Dwyer's observations about the separation of the middle classes into old and new groups. The economist and novelist Gurcharan Das also observes that rising standards of living have contributed to the growth of the middle classes and, like Dwyer, he also identifies the emergence of a new type of middle class values and attitudes:

> "Thus we start off the twenty-first century with a dynamic and rapidly growing middle class which is pushing the politicians to liberalise and globalise. Its primary preoccupation is with a rising standard of living, with social mobility and it is enthusiastically embracing consumerist values and lifestyles. Many in the new middle class also embrace ethnicity and religious revival, a few even fundamentalism" (Das, 2002, p 287).

Das attributes these changing attitudes and values to the new middle class. He uses the term 'new' middle class in dual sense: first that such a category is a recent phenomenon and, second that the consumerist, right-wing, fundamentalist values are new and distinct from long-standing liberal values of the old middle class.

The emphasis placed by the new middle class on the acquisition of money and wealth, makes Das, a self-defined member of the old middle class, feel nostalgic for the sense of social responsibility and spiritual values held by the old middle class, he says:

> "We may regret the eclipse of the old bourgeoisie, especially because it possessed the unique characteristic of being a class based on free entry, education and capability. We may feel equally uneasy that a new class based on money alone – without social responsibility, let alone spiritual values is replacing it" (Das, 2002, p 281).

Here, Das is arguing that social mobility into the middle class was possible because it was a 'class based on free entry, education and capability'. However, in making this statement he ignores the privileged position of his group. Das assumes that money is the significant criterion for membership of the new middle class; it may be the case that members of the new middle class have been able to make vast amounts of money relatively quickly, and may even be wealthier than some members of the old middle class. Nevertheless, the possession of social capital in the forms of caste, family background, social and political connections are as important as wealth in achieving membership of the old middle class both in the past and the present day.

Others such as Parvan Varma, suggest that differences are more entrenched and that there is an internal battle for social status within the middle classes: on one side is the old middle class and its obsession with status attained through educational achievement and. on the other. is the new middle class vaunting their status through the purchasing of consumer goods and services (Varma, 1998). However, the extent of this entrenchment between these two middle class groups may be exaggerated, for such a position assumes that the old

middle class is static and unable to adapt to a changing way of life. However, the concern over maintaining social status is a theme common to many South Asian novels; for example, Kamila Shamsie's novel *Salt and Saffron* portrays the fears of the old middle classes at a time of social and cultural change, this time set in Pakistan. In Shamsie's novel Aliya Darde-e-Dills has fallen in love with a lower class man much to the disapproval of her family. In a conversation with her cousin Sameer she theorises about why her family should be so disapproving, she concludes that it is because of snobbery based on a fear of losing their social status. Aliya says:

> "'Lets get back to my theory. I think our family's attitude towards the nouveau riche is another symptom of fear. We're uncomfortable around them because they remind us that class is fluid; the Mushtaq parents may be considered nouveau riche, but their kids are being sent to finishing school to acquire polish and within a generation they'll marry into respectable but no-longer-rich families, and they'll start turning up their own noses at the nouveau riche. This reminds us that status is not permanent; as the Mushtaqs rise, someone else will fall, and that someone might be us'" (Shamsie, 2001, p 184).

This issue about awareness of the changes taking place is dealt with subsequently in a discussion of how Indian novels represent the way in which some of the members of the old middle class adapt and deal with the transition to a globalised society. The cultural capital held by the old middle classes provides a buffer against external changes, the next part of the chapter discusses the effects of change on the homes of the old middle classes.

Family history and cultural capital: maintaining the old middle class home

In *Tara Lane*, Futehally constructs a novel of old middle class family life in Bombay. Thus the novel is not a 'rags to riches' story depicting the social mobility of the new middle class group. Instead she represents a family who initially appears to be secure in their middle class status and lifestyle, though later in the novel this security is under threat and the family face losing their homes and business. Futehally begins the novel by describing Tara's privileged childhood through which these middle class values are transmitted in practices and ways of living. This can be seen in Tara's description of her domestic landscape, thus:

> "[You went up] stone steps edged with ferns, and a teak door opened to the drawing-room. A cool stone floor reflected its blues and browns; the french windows reflected the garden ..." (*Tara Lane*, p 9).

The reader is told little about the decoration or furnishing of her home, but Tara's use of terms such as drawing room and French windows are colonial terms, and suggest European influences on house design, and the naming and use of rooms. Tara does not appear to regard her home as unusual or out of the ordinary, particularly when the reader is told of her grandmother's house, a much larger and much grander residence, described as: "an enormous mansion at the other end of the lane, beyond the factory... It looked like a cardboard cut-out of a castle in a story-book" (*Ibid.*, p 13). The importance of the grandmother as the matriarchal head of the family is symbolised by the grander size and design of the house; not involved in the day-to-day running of the factory, she lives slightly further away than Tara or her parents, distance also connoting higher status. Thus, the design of house, size and the way it is used denotes the class and status

of the inhabitants. For those outside the family, neighbours, friends, and factory workers, both houses symbolise wealth and the cultural and class hegemony of the family.

As I show back in chapter two, Said (1994) and Spivak (1985) in their analyses of *Mansfield Park* and *Jane Eyre* respectively, show the importance of domestic spaces like the drawing room, in symbolising authority and gendered mobility. Thus, a location like the drawing room forms an arena for the performance of the domestic, and in the case of *Tara Lane*, the domestic is performed as nostalgia for times past. The family stands out of time, almost an anachronism, still feeling part of the 'Anglicized elite' (Bhabha, 1994) of the colonial period. Tara's grandfather established the family business back in the nineteenth century with the assistance of British contacts and bank loans, now dead, his wife maintains a shrine in his honour where his portrait is draped in marigold garlands: "We knew that my grandfather had been a great man, and that he had started the Factory" (*Ibid.*, p 15). Tara's grandmother also keeps photograph albums and yellowed newspaper cuttings about her husband and the business, as well as certificates presented to him by once eminent people such as the Governor of Bombay and institutions such as the Rotary Club. These are more than just family mementos, they are documents demonstrating the man's status and authority that his wife tries to maintain. For Tara living in post-Independent India, these artefacts no longer engender the same feelings of respect that they once did, and she pokes fun at her grandmother behind her back for keeping them. Furthermore, the sense of tradition and continuity in the

family is sustained through the traditional roles of the men and women in the family who occupy public and private spaces: the sons (Tara's father and uncle) maintain the family business, serving as directors of the company, and the women (Tara's grandmother and mother, and Tara herself) take pride in their homemaking. As the earlier quotation from Das shows, the old middle class does feel a nostalgia for older and, what appear to be, more established values. The Mushtaqs are, as an anglicised elite, allied with the colonialists, and caught between this culture and the postcolonial nationalism (Leblanc, 2002).

In *Freedom Song* family life is also portrayed as stable and continuous. In the novel we are introduced to the daily life of two branches of an extended family living in Calcutta. The first of those families, consisting of Bhola, his wife Puti, their two sons Bhaskar and Manik, and their daughter Priya, all live in a house in Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar Road. The house is depicted as solid and steady despite the superficial changes to its décor and the addition of kitchen appliances introduced by its inhabitants:

> "This house had been a wedding gift from Bhola's father-in-law, part of a dowry. Since then it had gone through changes, for the worse and then for the better, but its red stone floors and stairs and its bottle-green windows with slats and the small prayer room upstairs had remained the same. The kitchen had been painted; new shelves had been fitted; and the earthen oven...had been put in the shed at the back of the house where the coal and the wood used to be kept" (*Freedom Song*, pp 37-38).

The house thus represents a symbol for the fixity and stability of this family, and is also symbolic of the traditions of the old middle class. The basic structure of the house had remained the same: the red stone floors, the bottle-green coloured windows, and the location of the *puja* room. The changes to the fabric of the house have been made as the family fortunes have grown, so the kitchen has

been painted and new shelving has been added. Also presumably central heating has been installed as the stores of coal and wood are no longer needed and the redundant earthen oven probably replaced by a newer electric model. Even when new additions join the family, such as Bhaskar's new wife, the house provides a sense of history and continuation; when the newly married couple take over the rooms on the second floor of the house for their marital home and these rooms contain photographs of relatives watching over the newly married couple which provide a sense of connection to the past: "...upstairs where their new life began, beneath the photographs of late and ever present grandparents" (*Ibid.*, p 184).

In the second house, inhabited by Khuku, Bhola's sister, and her husband Shib, there is also a sense of the continuity of family life in the daily routine of the household as the following quotation shows:

> "They [Khuku and her visiting friend Mimi] woke, slept, talked. They eked out the days with inconsequential chatter. Rumours of atrocities in other cities came and went around them. Meanwhile, Nando [one of the servants] went to market and came back..." (*Ibid.*, p 99).

Here, continuity manifests as a regular routine within the household: the women pass the time by sleeping, talking and gossiping in the house. Shib, the only male in the household apart from the servants like Nando, works outside the home as a factory manager for a nationalised industry. D'Souza (2001) is particularly critical of Chaudhuri regarding his portrayal of male and female characters in his novels, arguing that he portrays traditional family life "based on patriarchal conceptions where women are reduced to the limited agency of wives and mothers within their homes" (*Ibid.*, p 83). In the case of *Freedom Song*, Khuku is a housewife a role that might be

expected of the older pre-Independence generation of middle class women;

Mimi is a schoolteacher. In this quotation, I posit that Chaudhuri is

attempting to show the precariousness of the household, teetering on the

brink of change around them. The reference to 'atrocities in other cities' is

made by the author's narrative voice and is dropped in almost as an

incidental event. The atrocities here refer to the demolition in 1992 of the

Babri Masjid at Ayodhya, which the Hindu nationalists claim is the sacred

site of Ram's birthplace, and also to the communal riots and violence that

followed across India, notably the *Shiv Sena* riots that took place in Bombay

in 1992 and 1993[2]. The focus here on domestic matters rather than external

events like politics and violence reflects the interiority of the women's lives,

and the continuation of the smooth-running of the household (such as the

servant Nando going out to do the daily shopping) is more significant in the

domestic sphere than external political change. This also marks the

separation between the public and private spheres, with home providing

shelter and refuge for the family. However, this is not to say that *Freedom*

Song presents a world that is stuck in the past, rather the novel appears to be

taking a long term view and that change when it occurs is short-lived. As

Chaudhuri tells us, changes will occur, but so slightly, that the rest of the

world would appear unchanged:

> "Much would change in the next few months in subtle ways, but much would
> seem to remain unchanged. And the change was probably only a phase, a
> development as short-lived as anything else; while what seemed to be in a
> condition of stasis might actually be shimmering with uncertainty and on the
> brink of extinction" (*Freedom Song*, p 107).

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[2] There is a vast literature on the history and growth of Hindu nationalism, for general discussion and analyses on the riots see for example, Hansen (1999), Jaffrelot (1996), and the collection of essays in Ranchod-Nilsson & Tétreault (2000).

Thus, it is home that provides a sense of stability in the midst of change, even if it is home itself that is changing and this can be seen in changes taking place within the family.

The Indian joint family has become a trope representing traditional Indian values (Uberoi, 1993). Within this trope there are two conflicting images of the Indian joint family, the more positive image is that the joint family represents an ideal; this image also has elements of 'nostalgia for times past' (Uberoi, 1993), and the novels *Tara Lane* and *Freedom Song* provide examples of this imagery. A more negative image depicts the joint family as an evil institution, the source of Indian backwardness, economic stagnation, and the cause of psychological dependence of its members (Uberoi, 1993). These two conflicting images of the Indian joint family are examples of two extremes. The prevalence of nuclear family units might be seen as a solution to some of the problems with the joint family unit, or as a result of social and economic changes particularly in urban areas, where through matters of choice or circumstance, it is not possible to live as a large extended family unit. This is portrayed in *Sultry Days* where Nisha's childhood home is in the process of change: her parents are separating after her father's affair was discovered and the atmosphere at home is tense. Accordingly, Nisha finds her home cheerless and empty of a homely feeling:

> "...things on the home-front were dull. Mummy was practically incommunicado while Papa stayed out as much as he could. I'd walk in and walk out at will - something I didn't enjoy doing. I missed the old cross-examination, I longed for suspicion; I even craved punishment at least I would then be sure that someone still cared. It was a lot like living in an impersonal hostel. But even hostels had wardens. At my house there was no one" (*Sultry Days*, p 185).

Here we see in Nisha's comments, the emergence of what Mohapatra and Nayak (2000) identify as the family as a character in Indian novels, manifesting as a sense of community and belonging to relatives living in the home. However, in this quotation Nisha is lamenting the opposite – the lack of community and belonging – wanting someone to be concerned and care for her and not receiving that. Nisha's comments also demonstrate a less individualistic approach to life; she prefers to live at home with her parents rather than live alone in an apartment as friends do. Nationalist discourses situated the family as a domain of privacy: a site of order, rule, discipline, love and affection (Dwyer, 2000a); and *Sultry Days* shows how these discourses are being translated in new ways into the nuclear family unit. Nisha's lifestyle in *Sultry Days* depicts separate spheres of home, work, and leisure time spent with God attending parties or plays and poetry evenings.

Cities of the mind: middle class employment in Bombay and Calcutta

So far, I have been describing the old middle classes as a homogenous group; however, there are differences between members of the old middle classes, which I will now explore through these novels as exemplars. I consider the differences in the public cultures and discourses associated with different types of employment and occupations in Bombay (*Tara Lane* and *Sultry Days*) and Calcutta (*Freedom Song*). Chaudhuri (2003) argues that Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta have their own unique cultures, what he calls "cities of the mind". His

argument is that out of each city's culture and history different types of middle classes have emerged; comparing Bombay and Calcutta to New Delhi; Chaudhuri contends in the case of New Delhi, that the city as the seat of government reflects the ideology of its middle classes who emphasise careers in politics and the civil service. The middle classes of New Delhi consists of "a group of people who had designated themselves as the new ruling class, as being the best equipped to rule in terms of their intellectual and social background and their secular credentials" (*Ibid.*, p. 62). Chaudhuri notes that in New Delhi there is a 'cult of success' – that is an emphasis on middle class achievement, a culture which he says does not exist in the same way in Bombay and Calcutta. In contrast to New Delhi, there is a cult of failure prevalent among the middle classes of Bombay and Calcutta: an oedipal impulse among the children of the middle classes to destroy the successes of themselves or their parents. This cult of failure is something that is, or has been, deliberately cultivated by middle class males of Chaudhuri's generation. Chaudhuri, now middle aged, recounts how as a young man living with his parents in Bombay he grew his hair long and started playing the guitar as his form of rebellion against his father's corporate success and to destroy "what your father had built up around you and in you...so all my impulses were non-academic and non-corporate...there must be a space for opting out, for irresponsibility" (*Ibid.*, p 63). This option for irresponsibility is not possible now, Chaudhuri argues, because the old middle class and its secular values are under 'siege' from the right-wing Hindu nationalists.

Turning to the portrayal of the public culture in *Freedom Song*, the focus is on the lives of the male protagonists outside the home. Khuku's husband Shib, is a semi-retired manager of a state-owned sweets manufacturer called Little's, a former colonial company. Shib is very much of the 'old' middle class, a professional, and a manager of a state owned company.

> "While these people rested at home, Khuku's husband sat in an office on the outskirts of the city. It was an old company once, reputable and British owned ... The company had changed hands several times, until now it was owned by the state government, and, after having made losses for many years it was named a 'sick unit' ... but ever since the Communist Party came to power ... the whole thing became a relaxed, ungrudging family affair" (*Freedom Song*, p 20).

Here the cult of failure that Chaudhuri (2004) mentions above manifests itself through a lack of competitiveness and inefficiency amongst the employees, who are described as: "eager tea drinking employees" (*Freedom Song*, p 22). This could be interpreted as a criticism of the failure of successive Congress governments' to develop a successful economic policy for state-run industries. In the novel, we learn that Shib is one of a long line of 'caretakers' at the company, and that the government is happy to keep paying his wages, rather than to subsidise the company. These state industries are depicted as hopelessly inefficient and unprofitable and seem to exist as an extension of the home with opportunities for socialising and drinking endless cups of tea. The portrayal of the workplace in this way brings to mind, the parallels with the peculiarly Bengali institution of the *adda*. The *adda* is a site where company and conversation takes place usually between men, but women form their own groups, though there may be the occasional mixing of men and women, like these employees in Shib's factory. Although an *adda* is seen as intellectual

gathering, it has its origins in the gatherings for informal discussions in the villages of rural Bengal (Chakrabarty, 2000).

This relaxed attitude towards employment, where company and conversation take priority is also adopted by Shib's nephew Bhaskar. Bhaskar despite his privileged position in society is portrayed as not being interested in material success and is a fervent communist party supporter:

> "They [the boys in his group] had all grown up on the border that separated middle-classness from a fathomless border where a street of middle-class houses ran out to the railway lines and the makeshift huts beyond... all their lives they had barely managed to slip off from their haven of school-books and exams... Only Bhaskar, perhaps, among them could be said to have come from a family that was properly middle-class" (*Freedom Song*, pp 50-51).

Bhaskar spends his time delivering party newspapers, attending meetings with fellow supporters. The aimlessness of Brahmin young men facing uncertainty and lack of prospects in employment is a topic I discuss in more depth in chapter five. However, Bhaskar is not aimless, but his family is concerned that, in their opinion, he is not doing anything productive with his life and that being a communist party supporter does not help his marriage prospects since it is not considered an appropriate or respectable interest for a middle class boy. In a conversation with Khuku his mother explains how she wants him to marry, and her pet name for him as a child on account of his dark colouring was 'black beauty', thus she says to Khuku: "Black Beauty' won't help him when his [prospective] father-in-law finds he sells *Ganashakti* [the Communist Party's newspaper]" (*Freedom Song*, p 25). Thus both lifestyle and occupation are important for denoting middle class status, and that Chaudhuri's 'cult of failure' is something that young middle class men may indulge themselves in, but these men eventually have to adopt the cultural norms of their class.

Failure is also a theme in *Tara Lane*, though in this novel it represents something deeper than a temporary lifestyle choice, it represents the collapse of the illusion of national unity portrayed by Nehru and shows how the Mushtaqs have benefited from their privileged position in society:

> "As the novel proceeds and the daughter [Tara] moves out of the cosseted world of the extended family into the city of Bombay, the paternalistic view of society which represents her father's factory as a treasure house which provides both for the family and the workers is revealed as a deception operating in the interests of the middle classes" (Mee, 2003, p 323).

However, the Mushtaqs life of privilege is threatened. Like the other novels in the chapter, *Tara Lane's* narrative presents a battle between tradition and modernity from within the 'old' middle class; in the case of *Tara Lane* this comes to head in the form of a crisis within the family business, which forces the closure of the business and the loss of the family home. As Dimri (2004) points out, the crisis is the result of ideological differences between family members as well as external economic difficulties. Bombay, the location for *Tara Lane*, has a very different economic image to Calcutta: one of private companies and entrepreneurial thinking. The source of employment for Tara's father and uncle is the family business, and later they are joined by Tara's husband Rizwan. Rizwan becomes embroiled in a labour dispute and is accused of bribing factory employees. Halfway through the novel, the factory goes into liquidation as the family do not have money to continue production at the factory, and are unable to raise loans while allegations against Rizwan's strike payments are being investigated by the authorities, and the family are faced with the possibility of losing both the factory and the family houses. Tara tries to justify Rizwan's misconduct to herself by remembering the other important men who have told lies to her, first her father, then Nehru, and then Rizwan:

> "Rizwan had – he had offered misinformation. Well – so did all businessmen, I told myself unhappily, so did all government officers, so did all policemen. all railway-clerks-all-ticket-inspectors-all-tax-officers; it was said on one occasion that Pandit Nehru had himself omitted the truth; my father too had once confessed that he…" (*Tara Lane*, p 125).

Here Tara's moral and ethical middle class values are called into question and that they are unrealistic, even Rizwan her husband tells her that all she: "…wants [is] to sit there smelling beautiful and have the money floating down from the sky" (*Ibid.*, p 124). Once the company has gone bankrupt, Tara now has to consider getting a teaching job. She considers going into teaching and she revisits a former teacher to ask if there are any jobs available. The teacher apologies to Tara for not being able to help, telling her that the department gets so many applications, that Tara's only hope is if her family has 'influence' with the board. This is ironic when contrasted with her virtuous attitude towards Rizwan's bribery of the factory employees, when it is bribery that would help her to obtain a teaching job in the college.

The Bombay of *Sultry Days* is radically different to that in *Tara Lane*, the former focuses on the public culture of the city, while the latter focuses on the private culture of the home and the external world of the city is shut out. In the novel, Nisha is symbolising the modern Indian woman: single, educated, financially independent with a fashionable and popular career in the relatively new industry of advertising. However, this veneer of independence slips away when she tells the reader, she is passing the time until something better comes along, like marriage:

> I took up a job with a mediocre ad agency straight after college. Just because I'd graduated with English honours and didn't really want to study any further. I had decided to go out and get myself a job, any job. And as everybody knows, when there's nothing better going, join advertising. If your bullshit sells -

> there's nothing like it. If not, you can still get by. Not shine as a supernova. but crawl along, jumping from one agency to the next, till you join the huge firmament of senior mediocrities like yourself. By then, you at least have the ad jargon mastered and several cute tricks under your belt. (*Sultry Days*, p 13).

Nisha's comments about her easy entry into her advertising career show that she is benefiting from the social and cultural capital of her university education and middle class background. Whereas Das (2002) condemns the loss of 'old' middle class cultural capital, Nisha is using it to trade into newer. less well-established industries like advertising. Although Nisha uses a scornful and self-depreciating tone when talking about her own job, her boyfriend 'God' is equally condescending about her father's professional employment in a traditional 'old' middle class managerial job:

> "God was contemptuous about almost everything. But my parents, particularly my father, came in for special treatment. 'What is he, *yaar*? Just a stooge of his white masters. What has he done for himself, *yaar*? Fuck all. Screwed the country, that's all. Selling substandard rubbish. Things are going to change, baby, just watch out. Tell your old man, they're coming for him. I'd like to see him then. What will you do when that happens, Nisha? When the party's over, *sub kuch khatam, yaar*. You'll have to travel in buses and trains like the rest of us'" (*Ibid.*, p 22).

Together they are both destabilising middle class economic and social capital, yet at the same time, they have both benefited from these. 'God' condemns Nisha's father for being a colonial stooge for using his position to further his career advancement. However, both extracts demonstrate the persistence of the Indian middle class over time and the ability to take advantage of the career opportunities available to them. This is not something that is available to all who want these opportunities; as I show in chapter five in *A Fine Balance* and *The Romantics*, young men in particular, face difficulties gaining employment because of factors like caste, class and religion. Thus when 'God' makes threatening comments, implying that Nisha's father needs to 'watch out'. for

what or whom is not made clear, but that it would result in people like them becoming 'like the rest of us' travelling on public transport rather than in their private car. These comments suggest that there is jealously and resentment smouldering among those who have not benefited from the unequal economic successes of globalisation in Indian society, and that Nisha and her parents comfortable position may not be secure.

Unseeing eyes: the inward gaze of the old middle class

One of the affiliative features of domestic novels is the focus on events that take place in the domestic sphere; it is through the domestic that the novels' worldliness becomes apparent. The characters in *Freedom Song* exhibit an introversion, an inward-looking gaze towards the private spaces of the home. So, this inward-looking gaze demonstrates the worldliness of this novel whose 'old middle class characters' social and domestic lives focus around events taking place in private spaces rather than the new middle class orientated urban public culture of Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta (Dwyer, 2000a). An example of this introversion is when Kukhu and her friend Mini go out in the car for a visit to the nursing home. On this trip, their focus is entirely on themselves: the conversation that tales places between them and their inner thoughts. They appear oblivious to the view out of the car window:

> "Here, at the entrance to the lane, was a sprawling rubbish-heap of an
> unimaginable colour – but the two women in the car wouldn't notice it. Mini
> was wearing a white tangail sari with a slender green border, and a dark
> cardigan; bent forward slightly, she was a mixture of light and dark this
> afternoon. Many times Khuku had persuaded her to wear brighter colours, but

she had always refused;… Through traffic jams, bursts of exhaust fumes, a mad chorus of car horns, they'd come, passing the 'boulevard' in Gariahat, with its tinsel and Christmas caps hanging from the stalls, and its portraits of Ramakrishna and imitation Rembrandts, empty exercise books and jars of spices and generators; then the roundabout at Gol Park. Through all this they'd come. The nursing home rose before them like a mirage" (*Freedom Song*, p 69).

I have quoted Chaudhuri's description of this journey in full because to show

how he depicts Khuku's and Mini's selective vision of the world outside the car;

the car serves as an extension of the home, and throughout the journey represents

the private spaces of the home. When they arrive at their destination of the

nursing home, Chaudhuri describes it as a mirage, as though the two women

have been passing through a desert rather than through a busy city. Chaudhuri's

description in the narrative of the sights the two women pass through also

emphasises a sense of exoticism and distance: as they leave their home and drive

into the line of traffic, they unseeingly pass a rubbish heap of 'unimaginable

colour', which is then contrasted with a description of Mini's clothing which by

contrast is dull white and green, Khuku encourages her to wear brighter colours,

yet somehow does not see the rubbish. Then there is the noise and the hustle and

bustle of the roads and streets that they pass through on their journey.

In *Tara Lane* the home is also depicted as a bubble, within but separate

from the outside world surrounding it. Tara is aware that the factory provides

her family with wealth and status, however she finds it difficult to reconcile her

pride in the source of her family's wealth and the reality of it as a dirty, smelly

and noisy factory, with its disagreeable, striking workers. Tara constantly tries to

distance herself from the factory. Even as a child she is aware that the location of

the family home close to the factory means that there was no way of disguising

this, unlike the front lawns of her friends' houses. Instead of being disguised, the source of their wealth is visible to all, not hidden behind a veneer of respectability. Thus, like in *Freedom Song* the trope of distance emerges again, this time through the view of the factory rather than the street scene. *Tara Lane* is unusual in this respect, in that it does provide a glimpse of the 'dirty' side of industry. Many Indian English novels if they do depict any industry tend to show the commercial, domestic or artisanal mode of production, a legacy of the romantic/colonial depiction of India (Khair, 2001). In the following extract Tara explains why she disliked the factory:

> "I hated the factory; its incessant clanging, its heaps of rusty iron lying in the scrapyard; the incomprehensible machinery it produced; its untidy canteen in the front. The only pleasant part of the factory was my father's air-conditioned office right on top. There, once you entered, the door closed gently on heat and smells and noise, and, rising as it were from the wall-to-wall carpet, substituted instead an audible civilised hush" (*Tara Lane*, p 25).

She focuses on the factory's noise and messiness, and saying that the only pleasant part is her father's office, where the peace and quiet represents a civilised haven. Thus, her father's office represents a familial space, a home and a refuge within the factory. Though Tara is aware that the family's wealth is built on the work of the factory, she is at the same time distancing and differentiating herself from the people who work at the factory. Her middle class values and educational qualifications means that she has no need to do such work herself as she is financially supported by her family and husband.

The factory becomes an ever present issue for Tara. Even when she is making arrangements for her marital home, the issue of the factory still intrudes into happiness. It is arranged that her husband-to-be Rizwan will come to work at the factory alongside her father. Tara will also continue living close to her

natal home and will take what was the company guest house as her marital home. Although, she expresses delight at making the arrangements, she is concerned about the factory intruding into her view from the house:

> "Such joyful tasks awaited me! There was for instance the question of getting a house ready. We [Tara and her husband] were to move into the factory guest-house...And immediately my mother and I were delightfully worried about the guest house. The hedge around it would have to be raised to shut out the view of the factory yard..." (*Ibid.*, p 71).

The factory is necessary but unwanted presence that she tries to block out and disguise its view by growing a tall hedge.

Despite Tara's attempts to present her home as a middle class space, the family's homes and work spaces cannot be exclusively middle class spaces because these spaces are also frequented by servants and other employees. With regard to the domestic spaces of their home, the Mushtaqs have servants who are largely invisible in terms of numbers and names. As befits their middle class status, the Mushtaq family treat their servants in a benevolent and paternalistic way. Those who work in the household, particularly favoured servants, are given gifts of money or clothing such as cast-off saris. According to Emma Tarlo (1995) receiving items such as clothing is not without obligation for both the giver and the receiver for it reinforces the receivers' inferior and subordinate status as well as making them dependent on, and indebted to, the giver. For those employed in the factory, a Sports Day is held annually at which games and races take place, prizes are awarded to the winners, and speeches are made by members of the Mushtaq family. Thus, it is class rather than caste divisions that are paramount within the compound: the space of the compound is divided into servants' housing, and the family's houses, with the factory and its employees in

another part. This way of compound living with servants living in is gradually dying out in India homes. These issues facing Tara resonates with Qayum and Ray's (2003) study of the relationships between middle and upper class Indian women and their servants, which identifies a shift from servants living-in to servants living-out. The growth in apartment living has also made it more difficult to have live-in servants due of lack of space. Instead servants live out and provide their own accommodation, and are paid a wage in accordance with their hours worked and type of work carried out, usually they will assist with specific domestic tasks. This living-out mode of employment is in contrast to the almost feudal style of relationship between the servants who have live-in accommodation in a compound, as depicted in *Tara Lane*, which allows servants to treated as part of the family, as well as giving the employer greater control; though the servants will always the family's inferiors, and in return have obligations to members of the family (*Ibid.*). Thus, signifying that Tara's family's attitudes towards their servants signifies that they are old-fashioned and out of step with the times.

Two of the servants who feature prominently in Tara's memories are her Ayah and Samuel the two people who had the most to do with Tara as a child. The class divide across the compound is noticeable with regard to the servants' housing, particularly as the servants' housing surrounding Tara's house is described as more simple and basic. In contrast to the way Tara's home is described as being entered through a series of doors, the interior and function of the servant houses is visible from some distance away: "Behind the chickoo

leaves was the Kholi in which Samuel and Ayah lived. You could see the edge of a string bed, the beautifully shaped crack in the floor, the battered aluminium bowl" (*Tara Lane*, p 9). Contrasting the relatively public spaces of the servants' home with that of Tara's family;s privacy, in particular the ability to shut off rooms and to close off space is associated with power. The servants' lack of power is shown by not only the sparseness of the house and possessions, but the visibility of this to Tara's (and other family members') gaze. In Tara's description she romanticises their poverty: the crack in the floor is beautifully shaped, rather than its existence being due to inability to afford to fix it. The string bed slept in by the servants is in contrast to Tara's description of their divan bed, used as a place to tell bedtime stories, full of cushions and white fabric. In these and other differences, Futehally sets up the contrast between wealth and power, and between riches and poverty and basic possessions. Interestingly, there is a paradox between the privacy and the public visibility of the Mushtaqs who are visible to their servants, and yet the family's lack of privacy through sharing their home with servants is not alluded to in the novel. *Tara Lane* represents a traditional old middle class lifestyle, that alters when the family is forced to leave their houses in the compound for an apartment in a municipal block. The lifestyles of the old middle class are now incorporating some elements of the public culture of the new middle class.

Trying out the new: representing public culture in Bombay

This public culture includes employment in multinational companies, and western style leisure activities (Dwyer, 2000a). However, the cultural values of the new middle class are more socially conservative than those of the old middle class. For example, they are more likely to be Hindu nationalist supporters; the younger members tend to live with their parents; have arranged marriages, and are strictly observant of caste rules (*Ibid.*). The new middle classes have a number of distinct characteristics. Unlike the old, the new middle classes derive their wealth from business, property development and the media. Marathi, Hindi and Gujarati are the main languages spoken in Bombay, and the new middle class of Bombay are likely to be fluent in Hindi, and may read and speak in English. Consequently it has now become fashionable among the new middle classes to converse in a polygot mixture of Hindi and English popularly known as 'Hinglish', examples of this form of speech appear in many of Shobha Dé's novels, notably *Sultry Days*. In contrast to the private, home-based culture of the old, the new middle classes are creating their own public culture. Wealth and religious conservatism do not seem to be incompatible concepts for the new middle classes particularly those who are Hindus. Chaudhuri comments on the emergence of "a version of Hinduism…as a rich man's, a trader's religion" (Chaudhuri, 2004, p 18), which encourages the embracing of wealth and material success through the worship of deities like Lakshmi and Ganesh. Traditionally Lakshmi in her form as the goddess of wealth is worshipped by members of the trading castes; however, it may be that many traders are joining the ranks of the

new middle classes, or that the worship of this goddess has appeal across the social spectrum (Flood, 1996).

Dwyer (2000a) suggests that conflict is arising over defining modern India, between the high middle class elite culture and the mass culture of the middle classes. In the light of this, it is useful to contrast what could be called the 'old' middle class lifestyle as presented in *Freedom Song* and *Tara Lane*, with that of the 'new' middle classes in *Sultry Days*. For example, the chapter has already mentioned the interiority of family life and its cocoon-like portrayal in *Tara Lane*; similarly in *Freedom Song* the household is shown as constant and slow to change. Thus, interpreting *Sultry Days*, I suggest that although there are differences between then 'old' and the 'new' middle classes, these distinctions are more fluid than rigid. *Sultry Days* contains a number of 'new' middle class elements: Nisha is young, female, and university educated. Rather than waiting at home for a suitable arranged marriage (see chapter six for a different take on this subject in the novels *Ancient Promises* and *Fasting Feasting*), she is fully integrated into the public and work cultures of Bombay. In *Sultry Days* most of the events occur outside the home and it is not so tightly bounded by family as in *Freedom Song*, so Nisha is able to meet friends and have boyfriends, and is not being encouraged by her parents into an arranged marriage. This newly globalised society presents a number of challenges to India's middle classes, there are not just differences within the middle classes, but different attitudes and values are prevalent between the generations. Thus, the old middle class is represented by an unchanging material culture, whereas the new middle class has

a material culture that changes according to fashion. I now want to suggest some of the different ways new middle class material culture has changed: first through empirical examples and then through some examples from *Sultry Days*. The journalist Amrit Dhillon writes about India's middle classes, and in an interview with a young male professional about rising standards of living and disposable income, the professional says of his lifestyle: "I spend on two restaurant meals what my mother used to spend running the house for a month" (Dhillon, 2004, p 5). This comment highlights the extent of the pace of change in terms of salaries, and the availability of opportunities through which to purchase goods and services not for necessities but for luxuries. This suggests that new ways of measuring wealth are developing among the middle classes. So alongside traditional forms of wealth such gold, jewellery and property, there might also be added newer forms of wealth related to modes of consumption, and include activities like luxury holidays within India, foreign holidays, items such as imported clothing and cars, or restaurant meals as in the case of Dhillon's interviewee (Shurmer-Smith, 2000). The work culture that Nisha is part of, is a separate sphere from the home. Nisha's work in the advertising industry in *Sultry Days* is by comparison to Little's sweet factory in *Freedom Song*, more ruthless, fast-paced, efficient and profitable, with more younger staff and more female staff, so the advertising agency, and other similar places, becomes an important domain for the young and upwardly mobile generation (Dwyer, 2000a).

In *Sultry Days*, Dé pours scorn on the upper middle class values of the older generation, and also scorns the yuppies and media types with their easy lives and easy virtue (Anita Roy, 2000). The characters in *Sultry Days* are portrayed as living the 'yuppie lifestyle', and it is in this lifestyle that elements of globalisation become visible. In the following quotation Nisha and 'God' are shopping in a Bombay department store, and Nisha describes why 'God' chooses to purchase particular brands of goods:

> "As we walked past the shoe shop and headed for the umbrella counter in the huge department store. 'Lets pick up one of those automatic Japanese jobs, *yaar*,' God said. 'The *desi* [Indian] ones are useless.' God had expensive tastes in most things. He'd spend hours looking for a perfect pair of loafers. 'If the aren't hand-stitched, they aren't worth wearing, *yaar*,' he'd comment" (*Sultry Days*, p 18).

Thus 'God', representing 'old' middle class culture chooses to buy a Japanese umbrella because he perceives it as more long-lasting and hardwearing than the Indian equivalent; and he only wears handmade shoes, again probably made outside of India. The availability of goods such as these is due to globalisation, and 'God' is demonstrating to Nisha his refined, luxurious taste and that he is a 'man of the world'. Footwear as a symbol of globalisation also appears in Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, in which the character Gibreel Farishta sings, what Nico Israel (2004) describes as, a "patriotic ditty" which recognises India's global connections but still maintains a local, Indian identity: "O. my shoes are Japanese / These trousers are English, if you please / On my head, red Russian hat - / My heart's Indian for all that". Like Farishta, Nisha and 'God' are caught in the ambivalence between the local and global elements of their lifestyle.

This ambivalence manifests as feelings of uncertainty among the 'old' middle class about this lifestyle which has created new rules governing choice of clothing, the food to be eaten, the exercise to be taken, and the 'right' charitable causes to support. As Nisha says in the quotation below, she is uncertain about what to wear when she goes on a "yuppie-style" date:

> "What was one supposed to wear? I didn't have the right clothes. I didn't wear designer jeans or Reebok shoes. I didn't go to aerobics classes. I wasn't getting ahead professionally and didn't care much whether I did or didn't. I used public transport and jostled my way through sweaty crowds. I wasn't living on my own and had no plans to. I hadn't been to a wine and cheese party in my life and couldn't tell a Camembert from a Brie. I didn't own very much, not even an exercycle. And I continued to prefer home-cooked, calorie-laden food to salads and fruit juices. OK, I was sufficiently 'into nature' in that I enjoyed picnics to the lakes around Bombay, but I didn't have a pet cause to call my own. I didn't care sufficiently for Bombay's street-children or slum-dwellers. I wasn't paying towards the upkeep of a panda or a Puerto Rican orphan. My face was clean-scrubbed and make-up free only because I was far too clumsy to apply eyeliner or lipstick. The watch on my wrist was an HMT, not a Swatch, and my underwear was Indian (*Sultry Days*, pp 111-112).

This contrasts to more traditional concerns about women's clothing facing the protagonists *Ancient Promises* and *Fasting Feasting* (which I discuss in chapter six) about what to wear when meeting the families of prospective husbands for which there are already culturally-determined dress codes which dictate the type of clothing, make-up and jewellery worn. Nisha's uncertainty is partly to do with her 'old' middle class background; dating is a relatively new phenomenon, given that cultural norms dictated that young women had to be closely chaperoned by relatives when meeting boys. Furthermore, such meetings would only be possible in the context of finding a future marriage partner. Nisha appears free of these constraints on her social activities and unconcerned about the implications, if any, on her future marriage prospects. All three of the novels examined in this chapter have depicted varying degrees of transition and changes facing the 'old' middle classes.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored themes of change and transition in these three novels in relation to the family, the middle classes, and economic changes affecting employment and lifestyle. I have shown through an examination of the worldliness of these novels, and through affiliation to other domestic novels in terms of style and themes, how the family and the home are important in symbolising middle class values during times of instability and change. Taken together, the form and the textual response of the novels portray the ambivalence of the 'old' middle class who appear to view themselves as staid and serious, and yet are critical of the 'new' middle class who are viewed as upstart nouveau riche. Chaudhuri in *Freedom Song* and Futehally in *Tara Lane* depict the 'old' middle class lifestyle in a nostalgic timewarp. Dé in *Sultry Days* shows more of the new middle class lifestyle than the other two novels, but is also critical of this lifestyle; the death of 'God' when he is shot by gangsters at the end of the novel, represents the intrusion of 'gangster culture' into the narrative and is implying that capitalism is an imperfect ideology and way of living. These novels represent one distinct take on the 'old' middle class and raise issues about how certain sections of Indian society are coping with this transition from old to new.

The theme of family is retuned to in chapter six, which considers Indian novels as postcolonial domestic novels, in this chapter I analyse discourses of marriage and how these discourses affect the spatial mobility of the protagonists in *Fasting Feasting* and *Ancient Promises*. The next chapter, chapter five, builds

on what is a recurring motif in this current chapter: Hindu nationalism, and the

link between the middle class and the nation, in order to examine how particular

groups on account of gender, caste and religion are excluded from the nation.

CHAPTER FIVE

Destabilising the nation: narratives of displacement and dislocation

Introduction: Writing the nation politically

This chapter explores home at the scale of the nation and looks at how national narratives exclude particular groups, or individuals from representation. The two novels examined in this chapter address this lack of representation by forming alternative narratives that challenge dominant political and social discourses. Taking the themes of displacement and marginality, I show how the worldliness of *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry (1996) and *The Romantics* by Pankaj Mishra (1999) can be read back to political events and moments in India, in this case, The Emergency in the 1970s and the right-wing Hindu nationalism of the 1980s and 1990s. Worldliness is also demonstrated through the multiple scales of home in the novels which enables authors to speak about the domestic. The novels provide a critical commentary on events by destabilising discourses of caste, gender and religion through the representation of marginal and displaced protagonists alienated by hegemonic narratives. What is emblematic of the protagonists' marginality and displacement is their homelessness both materially and symbolically, thus, I explore issues of belonging and being at home. Through these novels the different registers of home are visible, first, there is home in relation to the self and the sense of homelessness; second, there is home in relation to the intervention of the nation in the domestic through slum clearances in *A Fine Balance*, and other attempts by private landlords and

landowners to impose particular Statist versions of home, such as the attempts by Hindu nationalists to create a Hindu homeland or *Hindutva* in *The Romantics*. The opening part of the chapter outlines some of the discourses of displacement and marginality in the novels which provides the context for the following two sections which deal, first, with the homelessness of the protagonists of *A Fine Balance* and concept of inappropriate homes in relation to national discourses; second, with a more existential sense of homelessness in *The Romantics* showing alienation and a sense of not being at home in India, rather than the homelessness or rootlessness of diasporic writings (Dutt, 2001; Gane, 2002; George, 1996, 1999, 2003; Nasta, 2002).

To provide context for the subsequent discussion of the novels I briefly outline the plots. Set in Bombay during the upheavals and uncertainties of the Emergency, *A Fine Balance* chronicles the lives of four strangers: Dina Dalal, a young middle class Parsi widow, Maneck also a Parsi, a student from a hill station in north India, and Uncle and Nephew Ishvar and Om Darji, both tailors who have fled the caste violence in the villages to migrate to Bombay. All four are thrown together by chance; Ishvar and Om are members of the Chamaar caste who broke away from their caste restrictions and became tailors, move to the city in search of work. Maneck's reasons for moving to the city are to acquire a college diploma; unhappy with his university accommodation, he ends up lodging with Dina who is an old school friend of his mother. Dina anxious to assert her independence from her brother, continues to living in the apartment she shared with her deceased husband. Needing money, she takes in Maneck and

sets about establishing a business sewing dresses for an export company. She advertises for tailors and Ishvar and Om arrive at her apartment in search of work. At first the tailors live separately in the slum colony, and later they sleep on Dina's verandah, subsequently sharing living space and meals with Dina and Maneck despite differences of caste, class and religion. However, tragedy strikes, and each of the four have to leave their new found home.

The Romantics is about Samar a young Brahmin, who has arrived in Benares from Allahabad and taken a room where he intends to continue his solitary bookish life attending Benares Hindu University while preparing for the civil service exam. The novel depicts periods from Samar's time at Benares Hindu University and the atmosphere of unrest and violence fuelled by caste politics and Hindu nationalism. He reads books by non-Indian authors Edmund Wilson, Ivan Turgenev and Gustav Flaubert revelling in the fictional worlds so different to his own. In Benares he meets an elderly Englishwoman Miss West, who shares the room next to him. She introduces him to other European and American expatriates including Mark, Debbie, and Sarah who meet for parties and socialising, it is at one such event that he meets a French couple Anand and Catherine, with whom he falls in love with. Full of unrequited love for Catherine, Samar jumps at the chance to join her on a trip to Mussoorie, but is rejected by her. Anxious to leave Benares he pays a visit to his father in Pondicherry and then goes to Dharamshala to teach in a school, where he ends up staying for seven years, before returning to visit his former acquaintances in Benares.

Displacement and marginality in the nation

These two novels destabilise the association of home as a private feminine space concerned with domestic and family life, by bringing the home into the public space of national politics. *A Fine Balance* is a political novel in that it is heavily critical of a period of Indian history known as the 'Emergency' where censorship was imposed, civil liberties were suspended, and social engineering directed at the poor. The central narrative of *A Fine Balance* is set over eleven years from 1975 to 1984, but the main focus of the novel is the period of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's State of Emergency from 1975 to 1977, the location is in an unnamed city, but is probably Bombay. By showing how the protagonists in *A Fine Balance* are victimised and oppressed by The Emergency and its suspension of democratic rights and judicial procedures the novel criticises the Nehruvian idealism that has dominated Indian politics since Independence, where Nehru promised "to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell" (cited in Mee, 2003, p 323); and as one reviewer has noted, *A Fine Balance* is an 'intensely angry book' intended as a polemic against the Congress Party (Mantel, 2000). As such then, *A Fine Balance* is part of what Emma Tarlo (2003) calls a set of 'post-Emergency counter narratives' that includes the recovery of official documents, and attempts to recover the voices of the 'victims' of the Emergency – the poor, the slum dwellers – through interviews as well in literary texts such as these.

A Fine Balance also attempts to relate the events happening to its characters in the novel in response to real life incidents. However, as Laura Moss (2000, p 159) points out, "The primary function of the 'ordinary' characters in *A Fine Balance* is not to be synecdochic of the 'Indian citizen' in the Emergency but rather to represent possible examples of what might happen in such a state". Thus for the victims of the Emergency, the nation is made unhomely, Mistry does this deliberately through the novel by constructing a set of fictional characters who are marginal figures in society because of the caste, gender or social positions they occupy (Moss, 2000). Mistry's motley grouping of Dina a middle-aged Parsi woman, Maneck a Parsi student from a village in northern India, and Ishvar and Om – two low caste Muslim tailors from a rural village in the Plains – in Dina's apartment in Bombay is unlikely in reality. Khair suggests that such a combination would be impossible because such a group would lack a 'common language', not only because of their class and caste differences, but also in terms of culture and language spoken (Khair, 2001). However, my concern is not so much about the realism of such a grouping, but what Mistry is trying to say about the Emergency through the juxtaposition of these people. By bringing these people together, he is able to show different experiences of the Emergency and by constructing connections between these disparate protagonists: Dina, the employer and landlady; Maneck, the student and her lodger; and Ishvar and Om, Dina's employees and eventual lodgers; and in doing so, to create a sense of 'real' feelings rather than providing the perspective of a detached observer.

Following on from the Emergency in *A Fine Balance*, *The Romantics* picks up the political story of India in the 1980s and 1990s. The Emergency ended Mrs Gandhi's reign of power in 1977 and strong opposition to her in the 1977 elections resulted in the election of the first non-Congress government since Independence: the *Janata* Coalition made up of an alliance of parties comprising of right wing, Hindu nationalists, and farmers' parties (Khilani, 1997). Mrs Gandhi was re-elected in 1980, but was assassinated in 1984; her (unintended) political legacy was to change the political landscape which, since Independence, had been dominated by the nationalist elite through the Congress party (Khilani, 1997). The Congress party was replaced by single issue parties focused on issues of caste politics and regionalism, one example is the *Bharatiya Janata* Party (BJP) and its rise to power on the Hindu nationalist agenda (Khilani, 1997). The novel focuses on Samar, and is set primarily in three locations in provincial north India: Benares (Varanasi), Allahabad and Dharamshala. These locations are significant places, first, because of their religious and holy associations; second because these are liminal sacred spaces symbolising death and displacement: Benares is a city of death where Hindus go to die and be cremated, and Dharamshala is the spiritual home for Tibetan exiles and the residence of the Dalai Lama, their spiritual leader. These cities represent Samar's displacement and homelessness through his moving from one to the other unable to find refuge and feel at home.

Like *A Fine Balance*, *The Romantics* is also a political novel, and the author is making a statement about the political climate of the 1990s and the

aggressive Hindutva stance of the BJP. Margery Sabin says that Mishra: "urges closer imaginative attention to the small tragedies of individuals and communities, as they are caught in long-standing historical struggles and dislocated by the loss of traditional forms of solace and security" (Sabin, 2002, p 200). Samar is not someone whom at first glance it would appear is particularly marginal: a young man, a high caste Brahmin, well educated, and with albeit declining family wealth. However, Mishra uses *The Romantics* to demonstrate the continuities of India's colonial past with its postcolonial present through the character of Samar who becomes a dislocated figure caught in an intellectual bookish world at odds with the violence of inter-caste politics between the students at Allahabad University (Sabin, 2000). The character of Samar represents the fractured postcolonial figure, split between traditional Brahmin values, and the colonial values part of the class of Macaulay's Indian 'interpreters' symbolised by his reading and learning of English and European classics.

Inappropriate homes

In this section, I examine the depiction of homelessness in *A Fine Balance*, arguing that homelessness is a symptom of the protagonists' real and perceived marginality through national and nationalist discourses that make the protagonists homeless literally and figuratively. As Marangoly George contends:

> "If the home stands for not just one's representation of oneself but for what others see of one, then it is doubly important to pay attention to the status of

> those without homes either because of economic circumstance or political
> disenfranchisement... [and] those homes or selves that are not recognized as
> such because they are deemed inadequate or inappropriate" (Marangoly George,
> 1999, p 24)

The worldliness of these novels is revealed through the disenfranchisement of the

protagonists from the nation through discourses of caste, gender and religion. In

A Fine Balance the four protagonists are persistently made homeless; thus unlike

many domestic novels it shows the impossibility of creating a home and

domestic life. However, for a brief moment in the novel homeliness and

domesticity emerge when the four protagonists are living together in Dina's

apartment. Some time later Dina wants to tell her friend Zenobia how successful

the household was, and that she feels that for once that she was part of a 'family'

that loved and respected her, but felt that her friend would mock her:

> "...Maneck and Om had become inseparable, and [how[Ishvar regarded both
> boys like his own sons? That the four of them cooked together and ate together,
> shared the cleaning and the washing and shopping and laughing and worrying?
> That they cared about her, and gave her more respect than she had received from
> her own relatives? That she had, during these last two months, known what was
> a family? It was impossible to explain. Zenobia [her friend] would say she was
> being silly and imagining fancy things, turning a financial necessity into
> something sentimental. Or she would accuse the tailors of manipulating her
> through fawning and flattery" (A *Fine Balance*, pp 550-551).

Unlike the plots of conventional domestic novels which focus on family and filial

relationships, the protagonists come together through other forms of ties:

friendship obligations, employer/employee relations, out of necessity because

they have nowhere else to turn. At first the protagonists remain in two distinct

groups living and eating separately: Dina and her lodger Maneck, the middle

class Parsis, live and cook separately from Ishvar and Om, the Muslim tailors.

Gradually however, the differences, particularly those of caste between the two

groups, are erased when Dina no longer insists on the use of separate crockery

for Ishvar and Om.

The four settle into a happy comfortable existence confident that they are safe from outside interference. In the following quotation, a sense of a happy, homely feeling emerges in the shared activities of the protagonists: Dina sewing, Om massaging Ishvar's feet, and the shared experiences of the quartet. However, it is the continual threat to the home that is the underlying narrative:

> "After dinner Dina resumed work on the quilt. Except for a two-square foot gap at one end, it had grown to the size she wanted, seven by six. Om sat on the floor, massaging his uncle's feet. Watching them Maneck wondered what it would be like to massage [his] Daddy's feet. 'That counterpane looks good, for sure,' said Om. 'Should be complete by the time we return.' 'Could be, if I add more pieces from odd jobs,' she said. 'But repetition is tedious. I'll wait till there is new material.' They took opposite ends of the quilt and spread it out. The neat stitches crisscrossed like symmetrical columns of ants. 'How beautiful,' said Ishvar. 'Oh anyone can make a quilt,' she said modestly. 'It's just scraps, from the clothes you've sewn.' 'Yes, but the talent is joining the pieces, the way you have.' 'Look,' Om pointed out, 'look at that - the poplin from our first job.' 'You remember,' said Dina pleased. 'And how fast you finished those first dresses. I thought I had found two geniuses.' 'Hungry stomachs were driving our fingers,' chuckled Ishvar. ...Ishvar leaned over to indicate a cambric square. 'See this? Our house was destroyed by the government the day we started on this cloth. Makes me feel sad whenever I look at it'... " (*A Fine Balance*, p 490).

The making of the quilt – a domestic item – is symbolic of the protagonists' attempts at home-making. Dina takes on an aura of motherliness carrying out the domestic task of sewing a quilt. This quotation shows how Dina's apartment becomes a private domestic space recreating the homes that have been lost or taken away from the protagonists. The worldliness of the novel emerges in Ishvar's comment about how their former home in a slum colony was destroyed by government ordered slum clearances. Marangoly George's (1999) argument about the appropriateness of home is particularly apt here, because the slum clearances were part of the Emergency's beautification programme to rid the city of the unsightly dwellings of the poor. Thus Ishvar and Om are able to find a home with Dina because her middle class status provides protection and refuge.

However, even this home is only a brief respite from the pervasive theme of destruction which runs through the novel. so much so, that Hilary Mantel (2000, p 193) likens Mistry to an out of control bus driver set on mowing down his characters. She says of the novel:

> "Here [in the novel]] they [the protagonists] have no choice or no hope. They loiter forever on street corners, hoping to catch the bus but knowing it is likely that when it comes it will mow them down; the driver's name is Mistry, and within his six hundred pages he will crush them all".

Mantel has picked up on the inevitability in *A Fine Balance* of the destruction of the protagonists' home and lives. Rather than depicting the lived home as secure and steady, Mistry is destabilising the nation by showing the instability of home during the Emergency showing that the Nehruvian "universalist paradigm cannot hold" during the political disruption of the Emergency (Moss, 2002, p 163). To demonstrate this, I will discuss how Mistry depicts this worldliness through a discussion of how caste, class, religious and nationalist discourses contribute to the protagonists' homelessness.

Ishvar and Om's low caste and poverty means they experience specific discrimination in the Emergency crackdown when they have to access government services for food and housing. Furthermore, as immigrants to the city, lacking contacts and family support, means that they appear to be disproportionately affected by the politics of the Emergency. They first experience this when they apply for a ration card, but are told they can only have one if they agree to undergo the *nussbandhi* procedure (a vasectomy), one of many new laws brought in under the Emergency powers that declare they have to have a sterilisation certificate and inducements such as with the promise of a

transistor radio are used to persuade people to undergo the procedure. Both Ishvar and Om refuse to have the procedure, Om because he is young and unmarried and would like the option to become a father. Ishvar because he has already had the procedure (but could not provide the certificate as proof): '"All we wanted was a ration card, Mr Facilitator. And the fellow wanted our manhood in exchange!' ..." (A *Fine Balance*, p 178).

Like many immigrants to the city, Ishvar and Om find the only accommodation available to them is in one of the slum colonies. Though the slum colonies are being cleared, a readily available supply of people is useful for propaganda purposes; Ishvar, Om and their fellow slum dwellers, are invited to attend a meeting at which Prime Minister will be speaking. They are bribed into attending with offers of money, refreshments and free transport to the site. At the meeting, the crowd of slum dwellers are uninterested in the Prime Minister's speech and pass the time by chatting and playing card games. In a passage in the novel, Mistry supplies a description of the scenes at the meeting to emphasise the gulf between the 'spin' of the government officials directed at journalists, and the behaviour of the slum dwellers around them treating the meeting not as a political event but, as a day out, during which oppression masquerades as democracy:

> '".. and take note all you journalists who will write tomorrow's newspapers. Especially the foreign journalists. For grave mischief has been done by irresponsible scribbling. Lots of lies have been spread about this Emergency which has been declared for the people's benefit. Observe: where the Prime Minister goes, thousands gather from miles around, to see her and hear her. Surely this is the mark of a truly great leader.' Rajaram took out a coin and began playing Heads or Tails with Om. Around them people were making new friends, chatting, discussing the monsoon. Children invented games and drew pictures in the dust. Some slept. The minders and volunteers patrolled the

enclosures, keeping an eye on things. They did not care so long as people amused themselves discreetly. The only prohibited activity was standing up or leaving the enclosure" (A *Fine Balance*, pp 263-264).

It later became clear that this meeting was a cover so that the slum could be demolished while all the inhabitants were attending the meeting. Om and Ishvar arrive back at their slum colony house to discover that the colony has been destroyed by government inspectors. As one shocked slum dweller says: '"But how can they destroy our homes, just like that?' 'They said it's a new Emergency law. If shacks are illegal, they can remove them. The new law says the city must be made beautiful" (*A Fine Balance*, p 295). The inhabitants of the colony are allowed in to rescue their belongings and then are left to find another place to stay.

That the fragility and precariousness of Ishvar and Om's slum colony home is due to their marginal position in society is clear. To illustrate this, I discuss how Mistry illustrates the predicament of the two men. The now homeless Ishvar and Om spend the night wandering the streets looking for somewhere to stay. The hotels are too expensive so they pay a night watchman to sleep in a shop doorway. Sleeping rough makes Ishvar and Om's arms sore and stiff, and their disturbed sleep is affecting their sewing work. Dina is unsympathetic to the tailors' plight and refuses to let them stay in her apartment, though she does agree that they can leave their trunk in her house at night. One night the police visit the street where Ishvar and Om are sleeping in the shop doorway. Not until it is too late that Ishvar and Om realise that these policemen are not the 'proper' police who worked in conjunction with the beggarmaster, and these were the 'beautification' police. Ishvar and Om are rounded up with

other homeless people and taken on a truck to an irrigation project site where they are made to work on a construction site. Eventually Ishvar and Om escape and go back to the city.

It is only after Ishvar and Om's abrupt disappearance that Dina becomes aware of the difficulties that Ishvar and Om had to cope with in the city. When the escaped men arrive back in the city, she offers them a place to sleep on her verandah, partly out of a selfish desire to continue her business and pay the rent. The verandah is a liminal space between the boundaries of the home and the outside world, and Ishvar and Om are gradually moving in closer to Dina's home. In offering the verandah, she feels like a magician, that she could change their circumstances for the better. However, she does not offer them the space on the verandah as if they were her equals, but in an indirect manner that recognises the social and caste differences between them and her and Maneck:

> "For a moment Dina felt like a magician. She could make everything become shining and golden, depending on her words - the utterance was all... She took the opening; the pieces fell into place. 'Well, no need to rush. Have your dinner, then come back. Maneck and I will also finish eating by then.'" (A *Fine Balance*, p 402).

As I demonstrated earlier, the entry of Ishvar and Om into Dina's apartment results in the creation of a home. Here, temporarily, the marginal figures of Ishvar and Om become less marginal, and move from being figures of the 'other' on the outside to inside the nation. However, this home too, comes under threat from the State. An unexpected visit from the rent collector brings notice that Dina is to vacate the apartment within a month because they have evidence she is using the premises illegally for business activities. At the sound of the doorbell the tailors stopped sewing as they were in the flat when the inspection occurs.

This time she decides, rather than hiding them, she decides to take advantage of their presence as a household and she constructs an imaginary family group to convince the rent collector that she is not running a business, but rather they are making clothes only for her: "This man,' she said pointing to Ishvar, 'he is my husband. The two boys are our Sons. And the dresses are all mine. Part of my new 1975 wardrobe. Go, tell your landlord he has no case" (A *Fine Balance*, p 414). Thus, Dina this time, deliberately constructs herself as a mother and wife and the men as her husband and sons, as though grouping together as a family would hold off the destructive forces of the State. However, after receiving the rent-collector's report, the landlord ignores Dina's pleas that she was not running a business and sends round two *goondas* (thugs) with orders that Dina has to vacate the flat in forty eight hours. Unable to find anywhere to go, Dina stays and the goondas return to set about wrecking the apartment. The once homely atmosphere in the apartment evaporates as is destroyed; Maneck likens the now unhomely feeling to a kind of 'fungus on unrefrigerated food':

> "Did life treat everything so wantonly, ripping the good things to pieces while letting bad things fester and grow like fungus on unrefrigerated food? Vasantrao Valmik, the proofreader would say it was all part of living, that the secret of survival was to balance hope and despair, to embrace change. But embrace misery and destruction? No. If there were a large enough refrigerator, life would be able to preserve the happy times in this flat, keep them from ever spoiling... But it was an unrefrigerated world. And everything ended badly" (A *Fine Balance*, pp 440-441).

Here, Maneck uses the metaphor of refrigeration to illustrate his feelings about the destruction of their home; rather than symbolising the coldness and remoteness of the State, the refrigerator would preserve society and stop it being destroyed by the regime of the Emergency. The novel concludes the marginalisation of the protagonists: Dina unhappily moving back to her brother's

house, the tailors becoming beggars and finally, the suicide of Maneck. The loss of home thus symbolises their powerlessness in society.

Marginality through narratives of nostalgia

Like *A Fine Balance, The Romantics* also deals with the issue of caste and religious politics, but this time from the perspective of a young man in the Brahmin caste. In chapter four, caste is much less of a concern for the protagonists, however, in *The Romantics* caste politics is a stronger issue for Samar. The worldliness of the novel reflects the significance of caste in Indian politics during the 1980s and 1990s, but particularly since the implementation of the recommendations of the Mandel Commission in 1992, which in response to pressure from scheduled and lower caste groups, extended the quotas for university entry and higher level civil service posts. The effect was to threaten the Brahmin monopoly on government jobs, thus contributing to caste tensions and competition between Brahmins and lower caste groups at India's universities. It is these worldly issues that *The Romantics* depicts through Samar's period at Benares Hindu University. Samar is positioned as a marginal figure by Mishra, because although a Brahmin and not really marginalised; he is depicted as marginalised because he exists, like the old middle classes in chapter four, out of step with time. This is represented by his disinterest in contemporary politics, preferring instead the worlds of western nineteenth century novels; thus

showing the secularism of the old middle classes and the colonial influences on them as 'native elites'.

The Romantics depicts Benares Hindu and Allahabad universities as in crisis period, both in terms of student unrest due to caste politics, and also the decaying fabric of the buildings. Samar is so used to the appearance of decay and ruin of the university that he hardly notices the architecturally distinct Indo-Saracenic style of the buildings in Allahabad because the crumbling buildings were a sight too familiar to ask questions about. As Samar himself says, "This wasn't complacency, or lack of curiosity. I saw what I saw, but there was nothing to compare it with. Decay and ruin was very much part of one's environment that one took no notice of them" (*The Romantics*, p 76). This is, he comments, in the narrative a far cry from the idealism and hope that led to the founding of Benares Hindu University by the Gandhian Indian nationalists and Europeans such as Annie Besant and George Bernard Shaw:

> "In this the university resembled the one in Allahabad I had gone to for my undergraduate degree. The break with the past, whenever it had occurred, had been clean; the early years of idealism belonged to an unremembered time. You could get the details out of books. As for the present; you had to figure it out for yourself. You had to know where you stood, and you had to be careful" (*The Romantics*, p 78).

Here Samar suggests that the current state of universities represents a break with the colonial past, symbolised by a loss of idealism; such idealism is now something that is as remote as his Brahmin past, and the details forgotten (Sabin, 2002). Turning to the present day and the political context of the 1990s, Samar finds there is no precedent from which to learn from, and that he has to figure out

the details for himself, unlike his father and grandfather, he cannot rely on old certainties.

These uncertainties are expressed by Samar's secularism and avoidance of caste politics which make him innocent and unworldly compared to those around him. Not having a strong religious influence also means that there is a possibility he may get caught in the 'wrong' things, in this case student politics and demonstrations. When Samar is caught up in a student demonstration that turns nasty (a student throws a hand grenade that kills a policeman) he runs away from the scene before the police arrive to Rajesh's hostel, inside he tells Rajesh what has happened, and Rajesh tells him: "I had told you this would happen. Why didn't you listen? You shouldn't involve yourself with such people. You are a Brahmin, you are here to study, and that's what you should do" (*The Romantics*, p 85). When Samar blames politics for a recent student demonstration, Rajesh tells him that the cause was not political, but a lack of things to do and opportunities, and Samar's response is:

> "But instead of expressing any of these doubts and hunches, I said, 'There were Communist students in the crowd; also, Hindu nationalists.' He was unexpectedly quick in his response. 'No, these were just students. You can't call them Communists or Hindu nationalists or Congresswallahs.' He paused. 'Never make that mistake, never. 'These were just students with nothing to do, nowhere to go, with no future, no prospects, nothing, nothing at all" (*The Romantics*, p 86).

Rajesh's comments about the student demonstrators lack of future and prospects is a reflection of high unemployment facing young men and graduates. For example, in their research on low and middle class educated young men of the Chamar caste in north Indian villages, Jeffrey et al (2005a, 2005b) have found that these men have been acting out their jobless frustrations through drinking

and criminal activities ranging from vandalism and assault to murder. The Mandal reforms have made the situation more competitive, and at the time of writing in April 2006, this issue has resurged again with the government announcing a further increase in low caste quotas at universities that have been heavily contested by Brahmin groups.

Samar becomes aware of student politics when he is offered assistance by fellow Brahmins, like Rajesh who act as 'protectors' or 'backers' to support Brahmin students in their studies. Samar was introduced to Rajesh by Vijay an acquaintance from Allahabad University; Vijay was a 'contractor' a term used by student politicians and troublemakers, Samar met Vijay when he offered to obtain a health certificate for him:

> "I turned into one of the Brahmin students under his protective umbrella. 'Studious Brahmins like myself, he would say, pronouncing the English words with relish, needed 'backers' if they were to go on studying without fear of disturbance from low-caste 'lumpens' and 'antisocial elements" (*The Romantics*, p 23).

Backers are not only confined to Brahmins, Dalit students also have backers. Samar says that he has no interest in such 'backers' nor in the student violence. When Samar transferred to Benares Hindu University, Vijay passed on the name of Rajesh who would be Samar's backer at Benares. Samar says that he had little intention of looking up Rajesh because he felt uncomfortable about Vijay: "I had no sympathy for sectarian, caste- or religion- based politics; I wanted to keep as far away as possible from the constant skulduggery and intrigue that went on among different political factions, and that frequently resulted in violence" (*The Romantics*, p 23). Even though he is not actively involved in such things, by not explicitly condoning these activities he is supporting them by default, for

example in his unwilling friendship with Rajesh. At the same time he feels safe in Rajesh's protection and patronage.

Mishra shows through the worldliness of novel how the political landscape of India has changed, and does this by showing how Samar is out of step with the times through his ignorance about the current political situation and how it will affect him: "The Brahmin bit didn't make sense. It smacked of melodrama; it harked back to an India that had long ceased to exist, the India of classical times, where learning and the arts were the exclusive province of Brahmins" (*The Romantics*, p 86). Whereas Rajesh is telling him to take advantage of his caste position by continuing to study, that all hope is not yet lost in the scramble for civil service jobs, unlike students from other castes who were constrained by lack of family money and power and influence; facing the prospect underemployment in low paid jobs (Jeffrey et al, 2005a, 2005b).

For Samar, the university campus becomes not a place of learning, but a space of fear; he feels threatened by the random acts of violence from students — does not make caste or political distinctions, he's aware of previous violent outbreaks/ incidents. Furthermore, he is isolated by not knowing other students and the university is an unknown place apart from the library and Rajesh's room in the hostel. Then Samar recounts an incident he experienced at Benares. Coming out of the library one evening he saw some young boys playing a posturing with a pistol. Samar says it was the first time that he had experienced real fear and a sense of vulnerability:

> "... now the campus had different associations for me. As I returned home at dusk it appeared an ominous place; the possibility of violence appeared to lurk amid every group of students I encountered. I didn't know anyone at the university and was conscious more than ever of my vulnerability" (*The Romantics*, p 23).

Similar affiliative themes also emerge in *A Fine Balance*, when Maneck, a Parsi student in Bombay, is staying in student accommodation at university; he feels similarly alienated by student politics. Maneck experiences the effect of the Emergency on campus, and although he manages to avoid most of the student politics, partly out of a lack of interest or indifference, he fears the violence from students allied with two student political groups: Students for Democracy and Students Against Fascism (both in spite of their names, pro-Emergency groups) :

> "On campus, a new group, Students for Democracy, which had surfaced soon after the declaration of the Emergency, was now in the ascendant. Its sister organization, Students Against Fascism, maintained the integrity of both groups by silencing those who spoke against them or criticized the Emergency. Threats and assaults were so commonplace they might have been part of the university curriculum. The police were now a permanent presence, helping to maintain the new and sinister brand of law and order" (A *Fine Balance*, p 246).

To avoid them Maneck barricades himself into his room at the hostel, but one night he has to leave his room to use the toilet because of illness, and is sexually assaulted by a group of students. He decides he can remain in the hostel no longer and his parents make arrangements for him to lodge with Dina who was his mother's schoolfriend because the university is such a dangerous, unsafe place.

Like Maneck, Samar also lives away from the university, referring to the domain of the university and student politics as a separate world; instead he prefers the company of Miss West to that of Rajesh: "The world she represented held me more than the university, whose recurring tensions I found too familiar"

(*The Romantics*, p 33). When Samar goes to a party held by the American and

European expatriates, during the course of the conversation, Samar's mind

wanders to Rajesh and the possibility of imminent student violence and he feels a

gap, or as he calls it, a chasm between his student life and being in a house full of

foreigners:

> "...I remarked to myself at the same time about the great chasm between where
> I was - sitting here in Mark's house, an expatriate corner of Benares, among
> foreigners who fascinated me endlessly and the life lived at the university,
> whose problems from this remote distance appeared uninteresting and petty"
> (*The Romantics*, pp 57-58).

However, as well as feeling marginalised among the students in the university,

Samar is a marginal Indian figure within the group of expatriate Europeans and

Americans living in Benares that he has become friendly with. In particular,

Diana West an elderly English lady and Catherine a young French woman are

important influences on him. Samar's response demonstrates his doubled vision,

he is looking at India and himself, but he is also aware that he is being seen

through them looking at India.

These women destabilise Samar's conceptions of India and he does not

like what he sees through the eyes of foreign tourists. Samar tries to correct what

he feels are European misconceptions about India. He feels pressure on himself

to perform well and challenge their negative images by impressing them with his

learning and knowledge of European literature. He says, that in an attempt to:

> "... correct their notions of India, I became false to myself and others. I turned
> into a performer, one eye and one ear open for Catherine. I became eager to
> flaunt my book- learning, and I dropped names right and left: Nietzsche, Mann,
> Proust, James, Kierkegaard, Pascal. I was keen to demonstrate that I had read
> them all and, what's more, remembered everything I had read" (*The Romantics*,
> p 91).

Here he is trying to show that he is their 'equal', but at the same time is desperation and anxiety to impress means that he is not. Samar is thus forced into being a European image of India, mimicking the Europeans. When invoking Edward Wilson an authority on Flaubert to bolster an argument about Flaubert, a French woman demolishes his fragile tenuous position, by claiming to have not heard of Wilson. Similarly, in a discussion about the novel *Brideshead Revisited* Samar has to admit that he does not know the novel, thus revealing the limitations of his knowledge. Years later, when his thoughts go back to the evening of Miss West's party and the other Europeans and American's present, he became aware not only of feelings of loneliness, but also ignorance and his marginalisation in Indian society. He says of the party:

> "So little did I know of any of the people present at the party that in the brief time that I had seen them they became even more mysterious to me. I was tormented by my ignorance. I wanted to know more; I wanted to know everything about them. The knowledge was one way of dealing with the troubled, if largely undefined, sense I had after the party, a sense of awareness of how little it was accessible to me, how someone like me - someone with no money or clear prospects - was placed at its remotest fringes" (*The Romantics*, p 65).

This quotation shows that his position in society was precarious, and that his upper caste status as a Brahmin was not enough to bring him into society as much as he wished. Furthermore, when he goes with Catherine to Mussoorie he is treated derogatorily by the Maharaja's servant who addressed him in the "gruff Hindi" he used when speaking to menial staff. So when Samar is with the Europeans, he is relegated to a subservient position by one of his own countrymen, he becomes, to use Bhabha's phrase, a mimic man, not at home in his own country. He is alienated as a Brahmin and cast adrift because he is not part of the Hindu nationalists' reinvention of India as *Hindutva*. Similarly, he is

alienated from the group of foreigners and from learning because he wants reassurance that he is part of their world. So, for Samar, home stops being a possibility, he is not at home in India, or at home with the group of foreigners.

It is Samar's friendship with this group that causes unsettled feelings about his life in general. *The Romantics* focuses on the individuality of Samar's experiences, and how he is so inward-looking that he does not acknowledge the wider implications of his experience. Instead he finds parallels with his friendless, lonely state, disaffected and disenchanted with the nation with the characters in Flaubert's novel of nineteenth century Paris:

> "And, amazingly I found this account of a provincial's tryst with metropolitan glamour and disillusion full of subtle satisfactions. There were things in it I was particularly receptive to at this time. The protagonist Frederic Moreau, seemed to mirror my own self-image with his large, passionate, but imprecise longings, his indecisiveness, his aimlessness, his self-contempt. Also the book— through its long, detailed descriptions, spread over many years, of love affairs that go nowhere, of artistic and literary ambitions that dwindle and then fade altogether, of lives that have to reconcile themselves to a slow, steady shrinking of horizons - held out a philosophical vision I couldn't fail to recognize. Something of Hindu fatalism seemed to come off its pages, a sense of life as drift and futility and illusion, and to see it dramatized so compellingly through a wide range of human experience was to have, even at twenty, with so little experience of anything, a chilling intimation of life ahead (*The Romantics*, p 155).

Thus he feels *Sentimental Education* gives voice to his imprecise longings, his indecisiveness, his aimlessness and his self-contempt, and most importantly recognises its relevance to the spiritual aspects of Indian society, namely, the sense of Hindu fatalism. Looking back on his time in Benares, Samar finds that it was his short-lived love affair with Catherine that showed him there was life beyond books; a rich and fulfilling life:

> "There was no doubt in my mind that something of great significance had occurred in my life, and I was filled with a sense of wonder at how the vague longing and expectations of childhood and adolescence had crystallized into a clear, sharp feeling for someone who was a stranger to me in many ways, a

foreigner I wouldn't have ever known had I not gone to Benares. I had a growing conviction that I had all along been marked in some mysterious way, that after the dull, pointless years of drift, the long years of childhood and adolescence, the time during which I felt completely homeless and unprotected and lost, I had been predestined for the moment when I met Catherine - the encounter in which some of the richness of life and the world were revealed to me" (*The Romantics*, p 193).

He says that it marked an end to the 'pointless years of drift', the feeling of 'homelessness, unprotection and loss'. The appearance of *Sentimental Education* in *The Romantics* represents its worldliness through its network of affilative texts representing homelessness, marginality and displacement. Also, these two extracts demonstrate that it is not just the novel *The Romantics*, that is being affiliative, the character of Samar is responding affiliatively to Moreau, feeling that he too is indecisive, aimless, and full of self-contempt like his fictional hero.

Conclusion

Juxtaposing *A Fine Balance* and *The Romantics* has provided viewpoints on two controversial political periods in post-Independence India: the Emergency, and the emergence of the BJP into the political mainstream. The worldliness of these novels is demonstrated through the changing political circumstances of India and how certain groups in society are marginalised by class, caste and political discourses. Together the novels show the shift from Nehruvian secularism to the popularism of Indira Gandhi through to the right-wing politics of Hindu nationalism by way of the home. Both authors destabilise these political discourses Mistry is condemnatory of the Emergency showing its arbitrariness and unfairness by using fiction to break down caste barriers with the

depiction of the two Parsi characters Maneck and Dina, and the low-caste tailors Ishvar and Om setting up home together. Mishra on the other hand, shows how the political changes are long and drawn out, and he is critical of the politics of Hindu nationalism using the figures of homeless young men like Samar to represent political instability for a specific group (the Brahmin caste) in the nation. Thus these novels portray a fragmented nation where collective concerns are replaced by needs of the individual. However, both novels demonstrate the contrasting issues of home showing how homes can be threatened by the nation as in *A Fine Balance*, or, that the nation provokes a sense of alienation and of not being at home.

The following chapter shifts the focus back to domestic spaces and examines how domestic themes are being reinscribed in postcolonial Indian novels. Expanding on some of the themes affecting middle class families in chapter four, this chapter will explore the themes of love and marriage within families and how women's spatial mobility is limited to the home by domestic and national discourses and how the novels destabilise these.

CHAPTER SIX

Leaving and returning home: gender, domestic space and mobility

Introduction: domestic matters of family and marriage

This chapter examines the novels *Fasting Feasting* by Anita Desai (1999) and *Ancient Promises* by Jaishree Misra (2000) and shows how they destabilise discourses about the Indian home and women's spatial mobility in India. The first part of this chapter examines how affiliative discourses of love and marriage in Austen's novels are reinscribed in these Indian novels; and how Indian novels and films through the symbolism of the arranged marriage depict normative narratives of the family and the privileging of heterosexual love. The second part of the chapter examines discourses of the ideal wife through mythological texts of duty and sacrifice, and I show how the two novels destabilise these. The final part of the chapter examines the discourses prevalent in *Fasting Feasting* that restrict the protagonist Uma's mobility and also involves a critique of Chandra Chatterjee's (2001) reading of *Fasting Feasting* that interprets Uma and her position as an 'unfettered vacuum' so that she is bound to home. This also raises some further issues of mobility in *Ancient Promises*, including the tensions between the local and more hybrid and diasporic identities and how this results in showing disapproval of mobility. Additionally, this considers how Janu, the main protagonist of *Ancient Promises*, faces as a married woman restrictions on her mobility within the Maraar home, by destabilising discourses of the ideal wife that enables herself to travel and to transgress those limits to mobility: this

represents a rejection of patriarchal authority, and the diasporic spaces of abroad become spaces of liberation and freedom.

Discourses of love and marriage

Fasting Feasting and *Ancient Promises* both reinscribe Austenian themes in an Indian context, and use marriage to destabilise the Austenian plot and narrative. The affiliation to Austen in these novels is through the theme of marriage: both these novels feature young women protagonists: Uma in *Fasting Feasting* and Janu in *Ancient Promises*, who are preparing to marry and the novels depict their lived experience of home before and after marriage. Like Austen's domestic novels, these Indian novels show the processes leading up to marriage: the matters of arranging a marriage; thus, as in *Fasting Feasting* and *Ancient Promises*, the formation of alliances between families is an important consideration regarding the possibility of upwards social mobility. In both novels, the protagonists' families make use of family connections to find a suitable match and arrange meetings with potential spouses and their families. Other possible avenues include placing advertisements in the matrimonial sections of regional and national newspapers, using internet marriage sites, or employing a marriage broker to search on their behalf. Whereas in Austen's novels the heroine's marriage is often the culmination of the narrative, these Indian novels show what happens after engagement and marriage and portray the lived experience of marriage.

The discourses of marriage in India, particularly among Hindus, are split

between western and Hindu notions of love. Novels like these, and also films,

are important in portraying representations of love and marriage to Indian and

South Asian audiences in general, as well as the Indian diaspora. Western

discourses tend to privilege romantic love, but Indians also have access to Hindu

discourses of love based on Hindu myths that construct images of the ideal

dutiful wife in mythological figures such as Sita, Savitri and Draupadi (Dwyer,

2000a; Kakar, 1978) which appear in many literary and film texts. However, it is

the celebration and glorification of 'romantic' heterosexual love in Bollywood

Hindi films that are particularly expressive in terms of normative hetereosexual

discourses of love and marriage in India (Dwyer, 2000a; Kishwar, 1999). The

diasporic film *Fire* by the director Deepa Mehta (1996) is one exception to this

narrative, depicting a lesbian relationship between two sisters-in-law, which I

discuss later in the chapter in relation to discourses about the ideal wife in

relation to heterosexual discourses. Rachel Dwyer, in a discussion of the popular

Hindi film *Kabhi Kabhie* by the director Yash Chopra, suggests that in many

Hindi films romantic love is frequently idealised and set apart from real life:

> "Although Yash Chopra's films depict romantic love they always uphold the
> sanctity of the family... The plots of his romances concentrate almost
> exclusively on emotions; there are no social themes other than those which
> affect love and the family. ... it is circumstances and emotions which dislocate
> people's lives... His characters rarely face any social problems other than those
> precipitated by relationships... The family is a source of strength, not conflict,
> and society sets only loose controls on the characters' behaviour" (Dwyer,
> 2000a, p 150).

Thus, Chopra focuses on the collective will, in terms of the family, rather than

the individual's wants and desires. Similarly, in another film popular among the

Indian diaspora *Dilwale dukhania le jayenge* (*DDLJ*) (1995) directed by Aditya

Chapra (1995), this is seen most clearly in the love-torn characters of Simran and

Raj whose families disapprove of their relationships. Simran's mother

sympathises with their plight, and encourages them to elope, saying their love is

more important than duty to the family:

> "I won't let what happened to me happen to my daughter. She will not just be a
> daughter or a daughter-in-law. You need not sacrifice you love. She will be
> happy with you. Take her away. I'll take care of the rest" (*DDLJ* dialogue,
> cited in Uberoi, 1998: 325)

But as Uberoi (1998) points out, it is the mother and daughter who are being

sentimental and socially subversive by trying to bring about the marriage; Raj

however, decides to win Simran's father's approval first, thereby aligning

himself with patriarchal authority. *DDLJ* and *Pardes* (1997) are both films

popular with diasporic audiences, and these, she argues, resonates with non-

resident Indians (NRIs), because of the films' representation of family values,

particularly those associated with courtship and marriage. Thus, in diasporic

films, the patriarchal, heterosexual discourses of marriage are important in

providing an Indian context, content and identity.

As I have shown in chapter two, domestic themes such as marriage and

family represent the consolidation of middle class identity in novels. Similarly,

diasporic films such as *DDLJ* and *Pardes*, and English language ones such as

Monsoon Wedding (Nair, 2001), *Bend it like Beckham* (Chadha, 2002) and *Bride

and Prejudice* (Chadha, 2004) are what Desai (2004) collectively terms 'wedding

films' mark the return of the bourgeoisie (both as subject and audience) to Indian

cinema. These wedding films, are she argues, symbolic of the Indian diaspora's

nostalgia for their imagined homeland enabling them to construct a sense of

identity, community and belonging through the films. However, these films are not just aimed at the diaspora, they are crossover films aimed also at Indian and western audiences demonstrated by the affiliative references to Indian mythology or to western novels. However the affiliation between films and other texts such as novels is obvious in films such as *Bride and Prejudice* which is heavily based on Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*; Set in the Punjabi town of Amritsar, it features an Indian family anxious to marry off their four daughters to wealthy husbands. The Austen allusions are emphasised by the characters names: Darcy as the hero, Lalita as Elizabeth Bennett, Balraj as Bingley, and so on. Though the differences between Darcy and Lalita are not just class and wealth, there are ethnic differences between the American cosmopolitan Darcy and the provincial Indian Lalita. However, these wedding films privilege a heteronormative narrative that resolves any differences and culminates successfully in marriage.

Much of the following discussion in this section about the representations of marriage in the two novels will centre around *Fasting Feasting* because this novel deals in more detail with marriage preparations. In both *Fasting Feasting* and *Ancient Promises* both protagonists are following their parents' tradition by having an arranged marriage, but both are unwilling participants. Uma (*Fasting Feasting*) because of her immaturity approaches the idea of marriage with fear and trepidation, and Janu (*Ancient Promises*) is reluctant because she has a boyfriend unknown to her parents; and because he is going abroad to study, she gives in to her parents requests to marry someone they consider more appropriate. Matchmaking by senior members of the family is still common

practice despite social and economic changes in Indian society bringing about greater independence for women outside of the family in terms of education and careers (Uberoi, 1993).

Love and romance are related to notions of courtship and marriage, but as I will show, marriage has further significances in an Indian context, it is about the joining together of two families; marriages are arranged, families have to be of similar social background and of the same caste. So, Janu, in response to her mother's attempts to comfort her, points out:

> "'[Mother to Janu] Our family have all been gathered here, from everywhere. No be happy and look ahead to a new life, moley. All girls have to get married someday. You're a lucky girl. The Maraars are an old and gracious family, half the families in Kerala would have died for an alliance like this...' [Janu responds] Marriages in Kerala were never just marriages, they were 'alliances'. Alliances between just whom were the bit that wasn't always easy to work out. The parents? Families? Whole clans, reaching back many ghostly generations?...". (Ancient Promises, pp 65-66).

Traditionally the husband and wife would live as a member of a joint extended family, which may have several generations living in one household. Now, in urban areas, a nuclear family of parents and children is becoming the norm. Marriage is also a financial transaction through the giving and receiving of dowry; in middle class families this would involve traditionally the bride's family giving jewellery, clothing including saris for the bride and for her in-laws, money; and more recently, modern consumer items such a white goods, motorbikes and cars. The hauntings of past ghosts recalls similar themes in *Fire on the Mountain* and *The Blue Bedspread* in chapter three.

In *Fasting Feasting* the marriage arrangements begin with relatives being notifed of Uma's availability: Papa writes a letter to their relatives stating that Uma is of marriageable age and that they did not want her to continue her studies beyond class eight. Female relatives then responded with suggestions and photos of potential young men that are shown to Uma. Uma's parents make the final choice, but, as Anita Desai points out in the narrative voice of the novel. the showing of the photographs to Uma of prospective suitors is "a sign of the family's progressiveness" (*Fasting Feasting,* p 74). In addition to this type of traditional arranged marriage, is a second type, called an 'arranged love marriage' which is commonly depicted in Bollywood films. This second type is where a choice has already been made between the two protagonists and is later endorsed by the parents and treated as a traditional arranged marriage (Uberoi, 1998). For Uma and her sister the most important qualities are the physical attractiveness of the candidates, whereas for the parents it is more to do with family status; for example the groom's family's expectations of dowry and the bride's family's capacity to give, but also factors that the couple should have in common like language, religion, education, and caste (Sharma, 1993). If a bride marries within her community, factors like these, may to some extent, be taken for granted in terms of compatibility between couples, as Janu's comments about family alliances demonstrates, but migration to urban centres means that brides may marry grooms from different towns and cities to their own. In urban areas there is also a tendency for brides to 'marry up' to a groom of a higher social status, particularly if the match-making focuses on wealth rather than traditional factors like caste (*Ibid.,* 1993).

The process of arranging Uma's marriage follows a traditional pattern. Meetings are arranged with a potential groom's family to ensure compatibility and that the couple like each other. Uma is depicted in the novel as being ill-prepared for the meeting with the other family, she does not have a new sari but is wearing a borrowed sari and jewellery that does not fit or suit her. The significance of the borrowed clothing and jewellery is that it suggests Uma is not well-prepared for marriage. The wearing of a sari traditionally denotes that the wearer is an adult woman, and that Uma, despite her age, is still child-like and immature is shown by her wearing an ill-fitting sari. Uma's wearing of a sari at this meeting is a means of demonstrating to the family that she would make an ideal bride and wife for their son, because she holds traditional cultural and womanly values which the sari connotes. However, some Indian feminists view the sari negatively as an "allegorical body wrap that confines Indian women to traditional cultural and gender roles" (Gairola, 2002). So, Uma's inability to wear her sari is auguring of her later refusal to conform to her expected gender roles as dutiful daughter. Furthermore, the sari represents tradition, and some middle class women are reviving the sari wearing as a fashion or political statement (Banerjee and Miller, 2004). Though as Nag (1991) points out, many India women wear the sari when at home, preferring western dress, salwaar kameez, or even ready-made saris for work because these are easier to wear; Banerjee and Miller (2004) explain, women have to 'learn' to wear a sari as they would have to learn to drive a car, learning how to fold and pleat the material and how to move and walk while wearing it. Thus, by consigning sari wearing to the home, the item becomes significant in terms of when, where and how often it is

worn given that cultural discourses construct the home as a private space symbolic of tradition, spirituality and women as wives and mothers, the sari too is overlaid with the same symbolism.

Uma's sari wearing at this match-making meeting is also about appraisal by the man's family. Kishwar (1999) criticises this display of marriage partners arguing that it is humiliating for those concerned. It is at this point in the novel where the reader realises that Uma is not the most attractive potential bride both in terms looks and other desirable homely attributes. Uma was rejected by the first family because the son had preferred Aruna (Uma's sister). This causes tension within Uma's family because tradition dictates that the eldest daughter should marry first: "Even if Mama was indignant in refusing, she was impressed too, and – Uma saw – respectful of this display of her younger daughter's power of attraction" (*Fasting Feasting*, p 79). Unlike Uma, Aruna seemed to know instinctively how to dress and flirt. Families were already "making enquiries about Aruna", but first Uma had to be married off: "That was the only decent, the only respectable line of behaviour" (*Ibid.*, p 80).

It is at this point in the novel where the narrative of the successful arrangement of marriage begins to break down. At what would be the third and final attempt to arrange her marriage, Uma's parents treat her in such a way that she becomes less of a 'daughter' and more like an object that needs to be disposed of: "Mama worked hard at trying to dispose of Uma, sent her photograph around to everyone who advertised in the matrimonial columns of

the Sunday papers..." (*Ibid.,* p 86). There is, as the previous quotation shows an increasing sense of desperation in arranging Uma's marriage, apparent in sending her photo to every advertiser. Her parents organised photographs to be taken of Uma by a professional photographer and touched up. Finally, they find a family who is interested in Uma. To ensure the marriage will take place Uma is not taken to meet the groom before the wedding, because the previous meeting "had proved so unpropitious" (*Ibid.,* p 87) and hasty arrangements to organise the wedding and to meet the groom's family demands for dowry. A dowry is seen by some grooms' families as an easy way to make money, or to finance some capital expenditure. In the case of Uma, the difficulties in marrying her off with a generous dowry could be seen as representing a kind of 'gratitude payment' as a way of getting rid of a daughter (Kishwar, 1999). In the case of 'love marriages' without a dowry and/or parental opposition to the marriage, if the marriage goes wrong, for example the wife is beaten, or she has no money, there is nothing her family can do to help. However, a marriage with a dowry and family 'support', both in financial and emotional terms, helps by providing a means of mediation or a 'communication channel' between husband and wife (*Ibid.,* 1999).

Uma's marriage ceremony takes place and she leaves with her husband and his family for her conjugal home. However, once there she discovers that her marriage is illegal because her husband already has a wife and has married Uma for the extra money that would come to his family from her dowry. Her parents discover what has happened and bring her back home and make hurried

arrangements for a divorce. Now the novel begins to portray some of the more

negative discourses of love and marriage. One of the neighbours says to Uma's

parents "Be grateful that Uma was not married into a family that could have

burnt her to death in order to procure another dowry!" (*Fasting Feasting*, p 83).

Uma's failed marriage illustrates how failure to investigate the background of a

groom properly means that brides are at risk of being beaten or murdered. This

is becoming more common as people marry beyond their kinship groups using

matrimonial advertisements or professional marriage brokers (Kishwar, 1999, p

205). However, Uma escaped relatively lightly in comparison to her cousin

Anamika who was in a bad marriage – she was beaten up by her husband and

mother-in-law and treated as a servant. Uma and Aruna discuss Anamika's fate

with their mother; Uma wants Anamika to come back home regardless of how

shameful it would be for her family:

> "Uma said, 'I hope they will send her back. Then she will be home with Lila
> Aunty again, and happy.' 'You are so silly, Uma,' Mama snapped... 'How can
> she be happy if she is sent home? What will people say? What will they
> think?'... 'Don't talk like that,' Mama scolded them. 'I don't want to hear all
> these modern ideas. Is that what you learnt from the convent?'... So then
> Mama glared at Aruna. 'All this convent education – what good does it do?
> Better to marry you off than let you go to *that* place [the convent]'" (*Fasting
> Feasting*, p 71).

Their mother admonishes her daughters for placing happiness above duty to the

family. Many years later they receive a telegram telling them that Anamika is

dead; she is supposed to have killed herself by pouring kerosene over her nylon

sari and setting it alight. Rather than investigate the cause of Anamika's death to

find out if it really was an accident, Anamika's family attributed her death to

destiny. Uma however believed otherwise: "What Anamika's family said was

that it was fate, God had willed it and it was Anamika's destiny. What Uma said was nothing" (*Ibid.*, p 151). Her silence, expressing her disagreement.

Uma's passage into adulthood represents one of the problems in patriarchal culture over what to do with unmarried women. An unmarried daughter is considered shameful for her parents and family, and is treated as a burden and an outcast, as Desai says in the narrative voice of the novel:

> "Having cost her parents two dowries, without a marriage to show in return, Uma was considered ill-fated by all and no more attempts were made to marry her off. Uma knew...that she had not had their [Mama and Mira-masi] experiences, that hers was another: that of an outcast from the world of marriage, the world which all the murmuring and whispering and muttering implied, was all that mattered" ((*Ibid.*, p 96).

As this quotation suggests the 'world of marriage' is of social and cultural importance for Indian women because it provides women, as daughters, with the final pieces of their identity: these are that she is to be a wife to her husband and a daughter-in-law to his parents, and most importantly a mother to her sons and daughters (Kakar, 1978). Thus Indian women's identity is defined in terms of her relationship to members of her family; patriarchal and nationalist discourses construct a mono-identity for women as mothers in the domestic spaces and the 'inner' or spiritual sphere in middle class families (Chatterjee, 1993; Irigaray, 1991). There are ways for married women to challenge this construction of a mono-identity; these include women taking control of their fertility through the means of contraception and abortion to hold off or limit pregnancy. Women can also construct multiple identities for themselves through their participation in the public/outer sphere through employment and education (Irigaray, 1991). These are strategies attempted by Janu in *Ancient Promises* but met with opposition

from her husband's family who wanted her to behave in a manner they considered appropriate for a daughter-in-law.

Both *Fasting Feasting* and *Ancient Promises* show that Uma and Janu have complex roles and identities, including those of daughter, sister, wife and mother, friend, and lover. Spatially these identities are limited to the domestic sphere, and neither protagonist has employment outside the home to construct an identity in the public sphere. The protagonists show that some of their 'domestic' identities are more empowering than others. For example, Janu in *Ancient Promises* chooses to stop using contraception in order to become a mother; the element of choice is important because Janu becoming "a mother 'by choice'" represents an attempt to modify and use patriarchal social relations to her own advantage because becoming a mother would improve her status within the family (Irigaray, 1991). In *Fasting Feasting* Uma's unmarried state is shown to be a source of embarrassment to her parents and thus, can be read as challenge to patriarchal discourses because Uma-as-daughter is failing to follow her expected trajectory from daughter to wife and mother. After the disastrous attempts to arrange her marriage, Uma has opportunity to work outside the home, but her parents use her unmarried state as a means to keep her confined to the home.

The ideal wife?: duty and sacrifice

Love and marriage tends to be portrayed in a positive light in Hindi films. Diasporic films such as *Fire* (Mehta, 1996) attempt to challenge these normative narratives by destabilising discourses of home, marriage and wives. As I showed in chapter three, Nanda in *Fire on the Mountain* destabilises nationalistic discourses of women's gender roles by showing her hidden desires to rid herself of her domestic duties and family responsibilities. The film *Fire* draws on the myth of Sita from the epic Ramayana; Agni is the ever-present purifying god of the household who is witness to the chastity of women and decides their fates by fire. Sita the wife of Rama is kidnapped, when she returns she has to prove her chastity by undergoing *agni-pareeksha* (test by fire), she does so, emerging unhurt thus proving herself a dutiful wife[1]. The Sita myth appears continually throughout *Fire* showing on the television playing in the background, it is the subject of play attended by the protagonists, and so on. The two sisters in law have a close relationship, and initially they fulfil their obligations as devoted wives taking part in the *Karwa Chauth* fasting to ensure their husbands' longevity. Gradually however, they subvert this, as one scene in the film shows, when Sita says to Radha: "Isn't it amazing, you're so bound by customs and rituals. Somebody just has to press my button marked tradition and I start responding like a trained monkey. Do I shock you?" [question directed at Radha]. Radha replies: "Yes". After the women consummate their relationship, and are discovered, they agree to leave their husbands; before they prepare to

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[1] see Mani (1989); Kishwar, 1999; Rajan, 1993a; Spivak (1988) for a discussion of discourses of sati (widow burning) in which the Sita myth appears.

leave Radha is caught in a kitchen fire that causes her sari to catch alight. Thus *Fire* reworks the Sita myth when Radha emerges unscathed, so Agni endorses Radha and Sita's relationship rejecting their relationships with their husbands. The two women are shown to be in an honest, spiritual and loving relationship in contrast to their heterosexual marriages which are depicted as dishonest, spiritually bankrupt and institutionalised. As Kapur (2000) suggests through the use of the Sita myth, *Fire* highlights the tensions between culture and sexuality, in which cultural discourses construct the home and sexuality as pure spaces. Hence, *Fire* highlights the binary of tradition and modernity through tropes of the material and spiritual in which the good Indian woman is visible through the constructs of home, spirituality and domesticity (Desai, 2004).

However, certain representations of marriage in *Fasting Feasting* and *Ancient Promises* which present a more critical attitude towards marriage. To demonstrate this, I first want to consider the discourses about marriage that exist within Uma's family; below is a quotation about how the relationship between Uma's parents altered after the birth of a long awaited son, and how brought about a sense of the correct order having been achieved in the family, so that Uma's mother now becomes equal in status to Papa as his helpmeet or consort:

> "More than ever now, she was Papa's helpmeet, his consort. He had not only made her his wife, he had made her the mother of his son. What honour, what status. Mama's chin lifted a little into the air, she looked around to make sure everyone saw and noticed. She might have been wearing a medal... She had matched Papa's achievement, you could say, and they were now more equal than ever. Was *this* love? Uma wondered disgustedly, was *this* romance? Then she sighed, knowing such concepts had never occurred to Mama: she did not read, and she did not go to the cinema. When her friends or neighbours gossiped about a 'love marriage' they had heard of, she lifted her upper lip a little bit to convey her scorn. Love marriage indeed, *she* knew better" (*Fasting Feasting*, p 31).

There are a number of issues raised by this passage. The first is that becoming the mother of his son has made Uma's mother more equal to the status of her husband by being both his helpmeet and consort. The use of the word consort hints at a regal allusion suggesting that Mama's status becomes comparable to that of a queen or a goddess and perhaps also more separate and distanced from her unmarried daughters (Kakar, 1978). The concept of a helpmeet here demonstrates an affiliative theme, notably to Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in which Spivak (1985) suggests that Jane moves to the centre of imperial discourses on her marriage to Rochester, thus becoming equal in status to him. Mama also moves to the centre of family. The birth of a male child is more desirable because it is seen as completing the family because males are needed for the performance of religious rituals such as the funeral rites of the parents; daughters are viewed more negatively as an expense because of their need for dowry. Furthermore, the birth of a boy confers increased status on both the mother and the father. Moreover, out in the 'public' sphere Mama's achievement is visible and has to be acknowledged by people outside of the home.

Furthermore, Uma's question 'was this love?' in the quotation raises the notion that the marriage is some kind of 'contract' between her parents and that love (in terms of Uma's meaning of romantic love) is not part of that contract. This is in contrast to her daughter and her friends and neighbours who are questioning, through exposure to alternative discourses about love available through books, films, and the gossip and the behaviour of people around them. By giving birth to a son, Mama has fulfilled her role as a wife helpmeet/consort

because this is an arranged marriage rather than a love marriage, the outcome and the 'success' might be measured in different ways. Thus, while it could be said that Mama is accepting the 'traditional' Indian discourse about women achieving their identities as both wives and mothers, as Kamala Viswesaran has pointed out, by the end of the nineteenth century nationalist texts refer to women as mothers rather than as wives: "… when the debate on the women's question 'disappears' at the end of the nineteenth century, so too does the metaphor of woman as 'wife' (cited in Shetty, 1995, p 55). The nationalist association of women as mothers, not as wives, was also a means of 'containing' women in the domestic sphere (Shetty, 1995).

Janu, like the wealthy Maraars she will be joining on her marriage, is from a well-established Keralan family. However, Janu has spent her childhood living in Delhi only visiting Kerala during holidays with her parents. Her unfamiliarity with her homeland causes her to experience tensions between these two cultures one northern and metropolitan, the other southern and provincial. Thus she feels dislocated emotionally and spatially from both places and cultures and has not been initiated into the cultural and social roles that are expected of her in Kerala. She says, my parents "had already dug for themselves strong deep foundations in the age-old traditions of their ancestral soil [Kerala] and suffered no mixed-up priorities. Unlike me" (*Ancient Promises*, p 26). Therefore, after marriage Janu resents the constraints placed on freedom to choose to live her life as she sees fit by expectations of her wifely and daughterly roles. Hence her

depiction of her marital home, the Maraar house, as a space of patriarchy and oppression:

> "What had happened to Kerala's proud old matrilineal Nair tradition? When women ruled their homesteads with spirit and verve and got rid of the men who did not live up to their standards merely by leaving their slippers and umbrella outside the closed front door. These were the stories I had been told as a child about my heritage, but everyone always laughed as though those traditions were well rid of. The Nair Act did well to abolish all that rubbish, they said, it's taught our men to take responsibility to their children seriously. Best to join the rest of the country and become *patriarchal* instead, it seems to work for everyone else" (*Ibid.*, p 215).

Despite her ancestry Janu is an outsider, both as a bride, because she comes from another family; and also, because she is considered too 'Delhi' or 'metropolitan' in her behaviour and not Keralan enough, and as Shashi Tharoor (1997, p 75) comments in a similar vein, he like Janu, feels a sense of dislocation from Kerala, his ancestral homeland, because it is more his family's home than his:

> "...Kerala becomes a remote place, an ancestral homeland long since abandoned, associated with family but not friends, a repository of other people's memories. Our visits to what our parents continue to refer to as 'home' are increasingly the self-distancing trips of tourists. 'Home' is, after all, where our parents are, not where their parents used to be".

Rather than Janu being successfully assimilated into the Maraar family, her presence in the house provokes disorder because she does not fit in. Janu's marriage to the Keralan Maraars represents to her family that she could successfully be uprooted and replanted in Kerala. The success of her marriage is measured in the numbers of houses, cars and jewellery the family has and not in terms of her personal happiness. Janu's marriage also represents a reaffirmation of her family's Keralan identity: "These were all the people who were so keen to believe that I was happily married into an excellent family. As far as they could see, I'd done better than all my cousins, if things were measured in terms of houses and jewellery and Ambassador cars" (*Ancient Promises*, p 178). In the light

of subsequent events in the novel such as her divorce, the Maraar home becomes an ambivalent location for Janu: on the one hand, it can represent repressive patriarchal authority and on, the other hand, she has been able to use it to articulate both her identity as an individual (as a wife, daughter-in-law, and mother) and as a woman (Ponzanesi, 2000). By questioning these discourses in this way, Janu is subverting the role of the 'ideal' wife, and by later leaving the home, is rejecting patriarchal national discourses (*Ibid.*, 2000).

Janu is upset to learn that she was not the family's first choice for a daughter-in-law and she was chosen on the basis of Suresh's checklist of attributes of an ideal wife: that she should be pretty, young, and speak English. Discovering this information, Janu thus describes herself as "a perfect knick-knack for the mantelpiece of Suresh's life" (*Ancient Promises,* p 96). These superficial wifely qualities desired by her husband are precisely the qualities that the Maraar women torment her for: that is not being able to cook, not being able to speak Malayalam elegantly, for forgetting not to mind her Ps and Qs (manners), for being brought up in Delhi, and for having an aunt who had an affair. These examples represent what Friedman (1998) calls the foreign in the familiar; even doing her washing is a minefield of social conventions, when Janu hangs her blouse on the washing line, she suddenly realises that it is hung differently to the other Maraar women – a "sign of an intruder in their midst", (*Ancient Promises,* p 109). Other signs of difference include touch, for example she notices that the Maraars women regularly comb and oil each other's hair, but she is deliberately excluded from this female intimacy.

Like Uma, Janu experiences similar attempts to confine her to the home through restricting visits to her parents, and limiting her studies to correspondence courses. When Janu decides to file for a divorce from Suresh, her lawyer tries to persuade her to stay married. When she meets the lawyer's wife, Janu imagines what she (who in appearance and manner behaves as the ideal Keralan wife) is thinking of her – a Delhi girl upsetting their Keralan ways:

> "…all those *Delhi* girls with their *Delhi* ideas of divorce, corrupting our Kerala ways. Unable to adjust, huh? Send them all to me for a crash course on how to be model wives. I will teach them how to worship the ground their husband walks on, how to keep immaculate houses, how to cook Chinese Chilli Chicken and how not to have jumped-up ideas of jobs and careers. I will show them how to bring up model children who will look cute in their pavada-blouses and recite a-b-c *backwards* to look even cuter. I will show them that mothers-in-law are easily kept in their places by a few whispered ones in the husband's ear. The trouble with these girls is that they think they are above it all. Arrogance, that's what I call it!" (*Ancient Promises*, p 250).

In this imaginary monologue of Janu's, the lawyer's wife uses irony to criticise the Keralan ideal of wife and mother. The 'crash course' in being a Keralan wife would involve treating their husband as god-like, to stay at home as a housewife taking care of the house, cooking Chinese chilli chicken and bringing up model children. As Thapan (2001) suggests Indian women are like an 'ambivalent slate' at once both part of the traditional and modern world and Janu is caught between the two different aspects: Kerala as representing tradition and Delhi as representing modernity, and both represent different discourses about what makes a 'good' wife.

The conflict between clothing and identity is a recurring theme throughout the novel. Wearing certain combinations of clothes gives Janu a veneer of a Maraar identity. Clothes are important for projecting a particular image to other people and conforming to social etiquette (Ghosh, 2001).

However, dressing in this way has the effect of undermining Janu's sense of self because she looks and dresses like a typical Maraar woman instead of dressing in a manner that represents her own self-identity. The clothes Janu wears are symbolic of different parts of her life. When she is packing her clothes ready for her trip to England, Janu comments on the different clothing she has worn and how this is symbolic of the different lifestyles she has experienced: in the Maraars home she wears a sari and has long hair; in the Delhi of her childhood she wore western style clothes influenced by fashion trends– blouses, dresses, maxi-skirts, flared trousers, and salwaar kameez. These clothes give the appearance of belonging to a particular social group. In the extracts below Janu explains how she negotiates the tension between her family identity as a Keralan and her need to fit in with the Punjabi pupils in her Delhi school:

> "Had I really grown to hate the land that I had made my home? I had spent some of my happiest times there; even as a baby I had known of belonging somewhere amidst the peace of its backwaters, my grandmother had helped to uplift [teach] a whole generation of children in her village... and yet, Kerala had failed to take me, one of its loyal daughters, to her bosom. Despite all the futile attempts at sari-wearing and Malayalam-speaking, I had failed so abysmally to fit in. Was it because my parents had moved away to Delhi? Because I had not being born in my grandmother's house as tradition dictated, because I'd gone to an elitist Irish convent school and because the friends I'd grown up with were Punjabi businessmen's children who spoke a sort of 'Hinglish', leaving my Malayalam laughably accented? There was always something too *Delhi* about me and Kerala had not liked that much. Just like the childhood holiday friend who had described sneeringly as 'too fashiony' reducing me to bitter tears behind Ammumma's hydrangers. The odd thing was that Delhi had never taken me completely to her bosom either, possessing as I always did that faint Kerala edge. In my name and the way my parents spoke and the idlis I carried in my school lunch-box instead of parathas and pickle or even salami sandwiches. Halfway-children, we could have founded a world-wide club of people belonging nowhere and everywhere, confused all the time by ourselves..."
> (*Ancient Promises*, p 169).

Here Janu feels that she has been loyal to her Keralan identity and Kerala has abandoned her by not taking her to its 'bosom'. She wonders whether her middle class English-speaking upbringing in Delhi is responsible for this schism.

However, even in Delhi she felt different because of her name, the food she ate and the way her parents speak. This confusion over her identity makes her feel that she belongs to a 'world-wide' club of people belonging nowhere and everywhere. So, instead of privileging her hybrid cosmopolitan identity she finds it a liability. The aspects of her identity that made her 'different' to her Punjabi classmates disrupt the concept of a national identity through the use of stereotypes of south Indians as 'Southy'. In the extract below, Janu describes how she made it her duty to fight these stereotypes by becoming as north Indian as possible:

> "Cushioned from the cruelties of Partition by the good fortune of their geography, the South Indian was decidedly more mild-mannered and orthodox by comparison. The North, in turn had its own stereotypical notion of the 'Southy' in school I had been asked accusingly why I was not small, black and wiry-haired, with brain cells that overflowed. And whether my family had a strange predilection for eating their rice and sambar in large, messy balls that they threw into the air and caught in their mouths, sambar dripping off their elbows all the time. It was an image I considered my sacred duty to fight bitterly through my school years, usually the only 'Madrasi' in class facing a full battalion of 'Punjabis'. More gallingly, because I talked and dressed and behaved like everyone else did, I was often complemented on how like a North Indian I was" (*Ibid.*, p 177).

This extract demonstrates how Janu is showing, that for her, home is not a fixed location; Brah (1991) describes the concept of 'home' as a simultaneously floating and rooted signifier. In this case, home becomes harder to pin down when the categories that fix identity such as race, ethnicity, regional and national identities are disrupted through mobility and travel. For some social groups it may be important for creating a sense of ethnic, racial, or regional identity to be born in a particular place to ensure that a strong identity is maintained and preserved through a particular location of home; as Janu's family do, by maintaining ties and connections with Kerala. Others, in contrast, take pleasure in their multi-locational homes and identities; Ifekwunigwe's (1998) description

of her own multi-locational identity the result of multi-racial parents and an itinerant upbringing across three continents demonstrates that home can be transnational. For other diasporic postcolonials this multi-locational identity is a source of rootlessness and creates a continual search for home (Marangoly George, 1999).

Bound to home: limitations on female mobility

As discussed previously, Uma's possibility of spatial mobility has become more limited now that attempts to arrange her marriage were so unsuccessful. This part of the chapter will consider the lived experience of home for Uma in *Fasting Feasting* and examine the means by which her spatial mobility is limited, and my interpretation will be contrasted with Chandra Chatterjee's reading of *Fasting Feasting*. In her reading Chatterjee (2001) uses Anita Desai's metaphor of an 'unfettered vacuum', a phrase from *Fasting Feasting*, to read the novel's representation of Uma as a woman unencumbered by the social and cultural discourse that affect the other women in her family: her mother, sister and cousin. Chatterjee explains why she is using the metaphor of an 'unfettered vacuum' to explore the postcolonial condition in India:

> "The terms 'unfettered' and 'vacuum' inscribe a paradox against the background of history and society involved with anti-colonial struggles and their aftermath. The lack of a binding factor is combined with a concept of space which has been emptied or exhausted. It is a space where walls between east and west, home and not home and tradition and modernity do not exist" (Chatterjee, 2001, p 124).

Drawing upon Fanon, she then goes on to state that the space of the 'unfettered vacuum is a liberatory space from which new forms of nationalist resistance emerge and reverse dominant narratives, where "geographic and social boundaries do no longer necessarily limit physical mobility... or define religious identity" (*Ibid.*, p 124). Therefore, from this, Chatterjee is suggesting that the space of home for Uma is a positive space, one where she is free of the social and religious discourses about women's roles in society. The consequences for Uma's freedom from such discourses, is that "she is forever bound to 'home'" (*Ibid.*, p 130). However, I argue that Chatterjee's interpretation fails to problematise the concept of home. The only mention she makes of Uma's home-life is in the following sentence: "The present tense beginnings of all the thirteen chapters of the first part of *Fasting Feasting* marks the definite space of 'home', where Uma is seen having supper on her tray, waiting for her parents, or serving them as she has been for the last twenty years" (*Ibid.*, p 129). For Uma is waging a constant battle against her parents for freedom. Even accompanying Mira-masi (her aunt) on one of her pilgrimage trips is viewed by her parents with suspicion and disapproval. Domestic sites are often points on an itinerary of travel (Clifford, 1997; Srivastava, 2005). At the outset of one trip Mira-masi is unwell and Uma is allowed to accompany her on her pilgrimage.

> "... the unfamiliarity of the situation itself which would never have come up in the world presided over by MamaPapa. She reminded herself of its uniqueness, its adventurousness, trying to repel the onset of travel sickness to which she was prone and which engulfed her now" (*Fasting Feasting*, p 55).

It is during this pilgrimage that Uma realises how unhappy she is at home and how the experience of travel and journeying reveals to the self feelings of unhomely that would otherwise be hidden (Spearey, 2000). Her first realisation

of her feelings is shown when lying awake one night, she realises that she has

achieved a sense of silence and peacefulness, rather than the impersonal,

unaffectionate treatment she receives from her parents at home:

> "At night she lay quietly on her mat, listening to the ashram dogs bark...
> Gradually the barks sank into it [the night] and drowned. Then it was silent.
> That was what Uma felt her own life to have been – full of barks, howls,
> messages, and now – silence" (*Fasting Feasting*, p 61).

This feeling as if she is being barked at suggests that she is treated impersonally

and without consideration to her feelings. However, here are many parts in the

narrative where Uma does assert her independence, for example, at one stage

Uma refuses to carry out a request of her parents and walks away:

> "Uma thumps her hands down on the table in front of the red swing... She
> gives her nose a hard rub with the palm of her hand for extra emphasis. 'Not
> today,' she tells Papa loudly. 'Can't do it today.' She walks off to her room and
> shuts the door behind her. She knows that when she shuts the door MamaPapa
> immediately become suspicious. But she defies them to come and open it. She
> stands waiting for them to shout, or knock. Minutes pass and she can picture
> their faces, their expressions, twitching with annoyance, with curiosity, then
> settling into stiff disapproval" (*Ibid.*, p 134).

Thus home is not quite the space of liberation and freedom for Uma that

Chatterjee suggests, but Uma is able to challenge her parents' dominance, albeit

in a limited and relatively restrained manner.

Chatterjee's explanation of the 'unfettered vacuum' concept is not just

that the home becomes a space of liberation, but that Uma herself is free of the

social and religious discourses and concerns that affect her married sister and

cousin. Chattejee (2001, p 129) argues that: "Desai's portrayal of the death of

the beautiful Anamika, possibly burnt by her in-laws, and sister Aruna's life-long

obsession with metropolitan sheen, shows Uma's independence; these at least,

were conditions that did not fetter her". I would not say that Uma is unfettered

by religion and culture as implied by Chatterjee, rather Uma is affected in different ways. My reading is that Uma is bound to home because she preserves a nostalgic image of the home as a space that is unaffected by modernity. Similarly, as Sharon Marcus (1999, p 139) notes, in nineteenth century Paris there was a growing tendency for "interiorization [to be seen as] a nostalgic alternative to an alienating modernity" in response to an expanding public realm. In chapter four, I showed how middle class families in *Tara Lane* and *Freedom Song* also used nostalgia and an inward gaze making them seem anachronistic and out of step with the times. It is evident from the exchanges between Uma's parents that her mother does not approve of Uma and her sister going to the convent school and it is her father – a lawyer and the product of a colonial education who wants the girls to be educated in this way. Therefore, as part of the middle class intelligentsia it is likely that he has been influenced by nationalist discourses about education for women and the importance of maintaining a strong inner sphere of Indian identity (Chatterjee, 1993). Uma's mother by contrast was educated at home with her siblings by a tutor; she disapproves of her daughters' western education which she believes educates them in the wrong things when they should be learning domestic skills like cooking to help in attaining a good marriage.

This struggle between Uma and her mother over school and home mirrors the debates surrounding nineteenth century Bengali domesticity and the westernisation of Bengali women. The education of women was seen as a threat to the institutions of home and family. Chatterjee shows through his reading of

nationalist texts how Bengali nationalists constructed the concept of a middle class 'new woman' that emphasised the importance of these women in nurturing and protecting the spiritual qualities of national culture in the home (*Ibid.,* 1993). This 'new woman' was based on the Hindu goddess Lakshmi where women achieved domestic happiness through self improvement by education and the cultivation of virtues of grace, modesty and obedience (Chakrabarty, 1994). Uma is initiated by her mother into cultural and domestic knowledge so that mothers and other female relatives act as 'continuators' of the women's world by passing on this information and skills (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 1999). Uma's failure at school is used as an excuse by her mother to take her away from school and bring her back into the domestic sphere and under her control:

> "So now Mama was able to say, 'You know you failed your exams again. You're not being moved up. What's the use of going back to school? Stay at home and look after your baby brother.' Then seeing Uma's hands shake as she tried to continue with the folding the nappies, she seemed to feel a little pity. 'What is the use of going back to school if you keep failing Uma?' she asked in a reasonable tone. 'You will be happier at home. You won't need to do any lessons. You are a big girl now. We are trying to arrange a marriage for you. Not now,' she added seeing the panic on Uma's face. 'But soon. Till then you can help me look after Arun. And learn to run the house'" (*Fasting Feasting,* p 22).

However, Uma destabilises this narrative by being just as clumsy and uncoordinated with domestic matters as she was with academic matters.

Furthermore, Uma is bound to home because she is the foil to her brother Arun's transnational mobility. So whereas Uma's spatial mobility decreases, Arun's thus expands when he leaves India to study abroad in the United States. Said (1994) notices what is a similar affiliative trope of mobility in *Mansfield Park*: with Sir Thomas Bertram representing the expansive mobility of masculine imperial spaces, and Fanny Price representing authority over domestic spaces.

Like Fanny's, Uma's limited spatial mobility represents a repressed diaspora whereas her brother's mobility is encouraged. *Fasting Feasting* presents a typical trope of masculine mobility within geographical space represented by her brother in America, her cousin Rama who moves in and out of the novel with little restriction (Bhatt, 2002) and her father, who not only has spatial freedom of movement but can move between the registers of tradition and modernity to suit circumstances, like the arrival of a middle-aged unmarried female doctor:

> "... in fact, Papa was quite capable of putting on a progressive, Westernised front when called upon to do so – in public, in society, not within his family of course – and now he showed his liberal, educated ways by rising to his feet when Dr Dutt dismounted from her bicycle..." (*Fasting Feasting*, p 141).

Uma's lack of spatial mobility represents her lowly status as an unmarried woman, even her mother and married sister have more freedom for spatial movement outside the home than she does. Thus freedom of movement for the other protagonists, male and female, represent's their control and authority over the spaces in which they move, the authority and control which Uma lacks.

Janu chooses to reject the role of a Keralan wife by divorcing her husband, but rather than taking responsibility for her act, she attributes the cause of events to fate. The theme of destiny is a recurrent theme throughout *Ancient Promises*. She describes her longing to be with Arjun as the work of Kadalamma the goddess of the oceans and something that she is unable to escape from:

> "But today I'd fallen prey to the treacherous call of the high seas, to the howling, beseeching wails of a greedy Kadalamma, the Goddess of the oceans. I would never be free of that desire again. Today, nothing else mattered, not reputation, not a mother's love and not the honour of ancient illustrious families ... I knew there would be a price to pay ... perhaps tomorrow, when I'd have to board that return train to Kerala. Or, next month, when facing the tear-ravaged face of my mother. Perhaps it would happen on some dark wet night, when I would be surrounded by mad women weeping blood as they bashed tails into a

tree with their heads. Or maybe even in another life ..." (*Ancient Promises*, p 196).

When Janu leaves India for England she feels that she could never lose her bond with the motherland because there are still debts to be paid and ancient promises to be redeemed:

> "I took off from Cochin airport, and said goodbye to the land of my ancestors from above. Palm trees waved their farewell fronds and the sea glinted a goodbye smile. I knew there could no longer be anger at such a sorrowfully departing daughter. The motherland knew, like every birth mother does, that however far a child travels, it only takes a few notes of a half-forgotten lullaby, or the whiff of some sea-laden air to bring back the love. Bonds that are forged even before the first breath is taken cannot be broken with the passage of a few thousand miles, especially when ancient promises wait unredeemed" (*Ibid.*, p 263).

In the quotation below, Janu reflects on why her marriage to Suresh failed. It could not be because of the arranged marriage system, because going by the experiences of her friends and family many such marriages are good marriages, and that 'love' marriages like those in England can also fail. With regard to her own marriage failure, she blames it on a 'ghostly' deal between her and Suresh in the ancient past:

> "How much of that was my fault? Some of it? All of it? Ma had likened to say, *when you get married you only get half a man, the other half you have to make.* Had I simply not had the skills, and the guile to do that? Or had I simply not cared enough? It wasn't the arranged-marriage system that's for sure. I'd seen enough arranged marriages metamorphose into good marriages to know that. And I'd seen men and women in England, with their freedom to choose their own life-partners, make almighty messes of their marriages. It had to be something deeper and bigger than any of us, something that trickled much further back than any of us could ever remember. What ghostly deal had Suresh and I cut in our ancient pasts that had brought us together so inexorably, to inflict pain and confusion on each other in this one?" (*Ibid.,* p 299).

By choosing to attribute the failure of marriage she avoids taking responsibility for transgressing the boundaries of home.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that *Fasting Feasting* and *Ancient Promises*, through their worldliness and affiliative themes of marriage and family, are part of a genre of domestic novels. The theme of marriage – a common subject of domestic novels – has been used to explore issues relating to the representations of home and women's spatial mobility and the worldliness of these novels through their social and cultural discourses about unmarried and married women enable the authors to speak about the domestic through the home. In my reading of *Fasting Feasting*, I have argued that Uma represents an unspoilt home, protected and shielded from modernity, and that this is the reason for suppressing her spatial mobility and keeping her bound to the home. In *Ancient Promises*, I have examined how representations of the Maraar home as a space of patriarchal authority and that as a married woman, Janu's mobility is restricted beyond the home. It is only by challenging the discourses that construct Janu as an ideal wife, by committing adultery that she is able to break free of the limitations on her spatial mobility, and her freedom is represented by moving abroad.

In chapter seven, I conclude the thesis by examining how these domestic themes emerge in other South Asian novels and films. In particular, I focus on examining the film *Monsoon Wedding* (Nair, 2001) as an example of how cinema represents themes of home, family, marriage and mobility.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion: representations of the Indian home

In the preceding pages I have analysed, through the concepts of worldliness and affiliation in other domestic novels, the representations of home in nine contemporary Indian novels. This chapter draws together the themes and issues discussed in the preceding chapters. My analysis of these Indian novels has done three things: first, it has considered the material aspects of home such as the tensions between public and private notions of space and privacy; second, it has examined the representations of home in these novels; third, it has analysed the ways in which home in India has been theorised. The home, the nation, the public/private are some of the elements of the geographies of home I have described in the preceding chapters. These geographies produce a spatial imagery of the home that has emerged out of ideas, discourses, identities, histories and imaginations. Thus, the concept of home in this thesis is slippery and multidimensional spanning the material, the symbolic and the psychological meanings of home. These Indian novels have contributed to the representations and interpretations of home by providing "intimacy and texture to the discourse of spatiality" (Blair, 1998, p 551).

This thesis has focused on contemporary novels, but at the same time has tried to point out the connections between what Derek Gregory calls the colonial past and the colonial present. As Carol Leon (2003, p 16) observes, being at home "... refers to the intersections between past and present, colonial and

postcolonial, local and global that constitutes today's temporal and spatial configurations". Such a conceptualisation enables the destabilisation of colonial and national discourses by making home a space that represents our own identity and our sense of place in the world by:

> "... the transformation of home 'space' into alien space and vice versa. There are at least two dimensions of this 'home' space: first, the physical space of origin or a place with which we identify, and second, the intellectual (and psychological or spiritual) space out of which we speak and in whose language we order, understand and articulate the world" (Leblanc, 2002, p 240).

However, what is relevant here is this transformation of space into home and non-home that is important for national and colonial discourses about the Indian home. Chatterjee's (1993) elucidation of the Indian nationalist movement in the nineteenth century, illustrates this by showing how the Bengali 'home' is constructed as a spiritual, feminine and intrinsically Indian space, and the 'world' (that is the non-home) as a masculine, material and hybrid space. As chapters three, four, five and six have argued, these novels destabilise this neat dichotomy by showing the negative and restrictive connotations associated with home particularly with regard to women's roles and subjectivities in domestic spaces.

Home is also a major research area in geography, the social sciences more generally, and in literary and cultural studies. My work adds to the fields of geography, literary studies and cultural studies by interrogating home in a literary context exploring both the material and symbolic meanings of home. It also contributes to research on the lived experience of home and it contributes more broadly to a growing field of study around the meanings of home and how to conceptualise it (Blunt & Varley, 2004; Després, 1991; Marangoly George,

1998, 1999; Rubenstein, 2001), while exploring the slipperiness of home through various scales. Thus I have shown the limits and the boundaries of home through the depiction of home as dwelling; as a sanctuary/refuge highlighting the material aspects of the public/private dichotomy; demonstrating the links between home, self and psyche; and how house and home depict and subvert the image of the ideal home/house.

Specifically, this thesis adds to the textual and cultural turns in human geography that have paid attention to textual sources including travel writings, diaries, letters, and in particular the growing field of geography and literature. It has responded to geographers' calls for a more sympathetic geographical approach to literature that does not mine the text for descriptions of places or landscape as if the texts are a straightforward factual or representative depiction of reality (Brosseau, 1994, 1995; Sharp, 2000); instead it demonstrates the worldliness of the novels as embedded in the realities of Indian society. The thesis extends the application of postcolonial theory to geography and literature as a means of reading the novels by using postcolonial theory as a methodology for interpretation and by a close reading of the text paying attention to the overall narrative and structure, while simultaneously reading against the grain of the text for underlying discourses and silences.

In the thesis I have not attempted to pin down the meaning of home and provide a definition of home, rather my intention has been to problematise the representations of home, and to demonstrate the slipperiness of the concept of

home through the use of four scales: self, family, nation and diaspora. On one level these four scales denote the ways in which the novels have been grouped together, in chapters three and four have as subject matter novels that depict home from the perspective of self and family. In chapter three, the primary focus of the novels *Fire on the Mountain* and *The Blue Bedspread* is on a single protagonist and their internal psychological world, where the situation and the plot is exclusive to that particular character and it is not shared with others around them. Through focusing on the protagonists' inner thoughts and feelings, these novels demonstrate the destabilisation of nationalist discourses and the failure of the home. In chapter four, the individualism shifts to interactions and relationships between characters in daily life. In chapters five and six the self and family are still important, and extend the scale of the novels to the nation and the diaspora to illustrate the changing focus of the novel, where the individual or family group becomes symbolic of bigger collective concerns. Thus, chapter five shows how *A Fine Balance* and *The Romantics* articulate a sense of displacement and marginalisation in society on account of religion, gender, caste and class. Chapter six considers ways in which women's spatial mobility is limited by domestic discourses and how freedom of mobility is only possible through transgressing these boundaries of home, whether this is in an emotional sense, or by spatial movement. However, as I have tried to demonstrate, these categories of scale are not discrete and immoveable but, that home is fluid and shifting across the scales; for example, in chapter three, I have shown how self is linked to nation by destabilising the depiction of 'ideal' homes by nationalist discourses.

It is the focus on domestic matters that connects the disparate themes of the nine novels. However, part of my aims has been to consider if there are any significant themes of home emerging out of the novels. From a small sample such as this it is hard to make generalisations, particularly when at the time of selection there was a conscious attempt to choose a range of novels to highlight different aspects of home. As James Der Derian (1998, p 38) succinctly puts it:

> "Generalizations are drawn from some flimsy particulars. All true, perhaps – but irrelevant. Georges Sorrel says it best in *Reflections on Violence*: 'It is the myth in its entirety which alone is important: its parts are only of interest in so far as they bring out the main idea'".

The ideas of home that the novels incorporate are a mixture of the material, the spatial and the emotional aspects of home. Thus home encompasses:

> "cultural norms and individual fantasies…home brings together memory and longing, the ideational, the affective and the physical, the spatial and the temporal, the local and the global, the positively evaluated and the negatively" (Rapport and Dawson, 1998, p 8).

Taken as a whole, these novels demonstrate an ambivalent attitude towards home, they depict home as a problematic and difficult location. This manifests in themes such as dissatisfaction and unhappiness about home in *Fire on the Mountain*, *Fasting Feasting* and *Ancient Promises*, or from where one is displaced forcibly from home as in *A Fine Balance* and *Tara Lane*. Also important are the ways in which these novels depict the rhythms of daily life and the interactions between the protagonists, and here, home becomes a place of contentment and of nostalgia.

What is important about these novels, however, is the wider significance of their themes beyond the purely domestic. For example, in chapter three, home is not just a personal battle or a crisis for the characters: it is symbolic of the

fractured relationship between self and nation and a sense of homelessness. As

Ashis Nandy (2001, p 25) observes. homelessness and the psychology of

homelessness are new subject areas for Indian literature and cinema:

> "The Indian city has re-emerged in public consciousness not as a new home
> from within the boundaries of which one has the privilege of surveying the ruins
> of one's other abandoned homes. It has re-emerged as the location of
> homelessness forever trying to reconcile non-communitarian individualism and
> associated forms of freedom with communitarian responsibilities. freely or
> involuntarily born. Apparently, the city of the mind does not fear homelessness;
> it even celebrates homelessness. However, that merely camouflages the fear of
> homelessness, which can be cured only by a home outside home. Literature and
> serious cinema handle these issues as an inner conflict that defines a crisis of
> personal identity. Popular cinema sees it as a playful oscillation between the
> private and the public, the familial and the neighbourly, the rustic and the urban.
> The mother who is not a real mother but is more than one, the friend who
> becomes a brother and dies to prove the point, the self-destructive street urchin
> in love with a millionaire's daughter – in popular cinema, these are not merely
> anxiety-binding technologies of the self. They supply a cartography of a home
> away from home in a culture where homelessness, despair and the psychology
> of the outsider are all relatively new states of mind".

Hence, when home is depicted in all its unhomeliness it destabilises national

discourses that privilege the home as an ideal through gender roles and the

family. In chapter four the focus is not just on the family, but how these sets of

families represent a specific group in the nation: the old middle class, and how

these novels represent the tensions between the old bourgeois and the nouveau

riche newcomers. The novels in chapter five *A Fine Balance* and *The Romantics*

provide a political commentary on the nation beginning with the 'State of

Emergency' in the 1970s and 1980s through to the rise in Hindu nationalism and

the BJP in the 1980s and 1990s and discuss who is excluded and marginalised by

these political discourses. Chapter six shows how narratives of diaspora are

highlighting women's repressed mobilities within the home.

Although the Indian home has been the subject of much research and debate, most of the attention has been on examining nationalist constructions the Indian home in the nineteenth century focus mainly on Bengal and specifically its historical context (Burton, 2003; Chakrabarty, 1994; Chatterjee, 1992, 1993; Grewal, 1996); the colonial home in India has also received attention particularly the construction of imperial homes in India as discourses of empire (Blunt, 1999, 2000); so too has the establishment of the Anglo-Indian homeland of *McCluskieganj* (Blunt, 2002, 2003). However, there is a need for more research on home in contemporary India and this thesis adds to these gaps. Marangoly George (1999) addresses elements of this in her examination of elite Indian women's writing, where she focuses more on the positionality of the authors as elite women, and on diasporic writing. Feminist theories have politicised the home and the relationship between nationalism and home (Kaplan, 1994; Marangoly George, 1998). In India the right-wing BJP has explicitly applied Hindu nationalist discourses to women and the home (Eisenstein, 2000). Economic and social changes, as well as caste discrimination in favour of the lower castes, have left many middle class upper caste Indians feeling redundant in contemporary society (Tharoor, 1997). The idea of the domestic portrayed in these novels is primarily a middle class, upper caste one (shared by the authors and readers), and as chapters four and five show, these middle class feel under threat from the rise of the new middle classes, and also from lower caste groups for whom a quota of government jobs and university places are reserved for, which restricts the amount of places available to upper caste students. Although caste is not synonymous with class, it is the middle classes who are most vocal

about the restrictions, as the demonstrations and protests in April 2006 demonstrate. An imagined home in the novels may be able to incorporate the changes in Indian society and so help people make sense of the changes brought by globalisation, or provide a place of sanctuary or refuge from them from such threats.

Furthermore, this thesis has examined ways in which contemporary Indian novels share affiliative themes with domestic novels from other countries. The domestic genre was once seen as the preserve of female British novelists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such as Austen, the Brontë sisters, and Gaskell; however, there has been a revival of the domestic novel not only in India, but also in the United Kingdom and the United States (Jacobson. 2004). In fact as I write this, there is a recent newspaper article that highlights the continuing focus of women writers on domestic themes as a subject for novels (Laville, 2005). There is an increasing proliferation of Indian novels in English dealing with themes of home by both male and female writers, for example: Brinda Charry (2002) *The Hottest Day of the Year*, Jaishree Misra's *Accidents like love and marriage* (2002) and *Afterwards* (2004), Manil Suri (2002) *The Death of Vishnu*, Uttara Chauhan (2003) *A Model House*, Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2003) and *Home* (2006), David Davidar (2002) *The House of Blue Mangoes*, Rohinton Mistry (2003) *Family Matters*, Samina Ali (2004) *Madras on Rainy Days*, Manorama Mathai (2004) *Whispering Generations*, *Mistress* by Anita Nair (2005), *The Space Between Us* by Thrity Umrigar (2006). Home and domestic matters continue to be significant themes in contemporary

Indian literature in English. The prominence of home in contemporary novels and the links made between domestic and cultural narratives by a new wave of Indian novelists writing in the late twentieth century that this subject matter is dealt with by both male and female authors is significant especially as domestic themes were considered the preserve of female writers. Home has become conflated with the domestic in a new genre of novels that appear to be emerging in recent years that combine stories, fictional and autobiographical, with recipes. For example, *The Anger of Aubergines* by Bulbul Sharma (1998), *Monsoon Diary: A Memoir with recipes* by Shoba Narayan (2003).

There are other further avenues of research that perhaps need exploring with regard to home and domestic matters. The focus of this thesis has been on Indian novels in English and has provided an in-depth reading of specific novels. However for reasons of space and time, I have not been able to extend the scope of the thesis to include other, more recent Indian novels in English, as well as regional Indian novels, and novels in translation. Novels from other countries in South East Asia such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka, both formerly part of India, would provide a comparative perspective to this analysis of Indian novels. Carol Leon (2003, p 16) discusses one of Michael Ondaatje's recent novels: *Running in the Family*; part travelogue, part personal memoir, she argues that this novel depicts the multi-layered representation of his home and homeland of Sri Lanka:

> "*Running in the Family* is a vivid manifestation of the notion of 'being at home' in the world. Within the space of the narrative, through myth and rumour, frail memories and historical documentation, Ondaatje creates spaces for himself which are layered with past meanings and associations yet are provisional and mobile at the same time".

The provisional and mobile nature of the meanings of Ondaatje's home. show once again the multidimensional and slippery nature of home. In other parts of South Asia, in this case Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, Ann Brooks (2003) shows how issues about home are played out in the context of political debates surrounding religion and concepts of Asian Values and the Asian family in these three countries:

> "Islamization, consumption and the new affluence, postmodern Confucianist ethos and 'internalized Orientalism', and regional variations in the path to modernity have all had considerable impact on the question of Asian Values and the Asian Family" (Brooks, 2003, p 103).

Debates about home and family are also enacted on screen. Film is another significant cultural medium that this thesis has not considered, which is worth investigating. Recent research has focused on the psychology of the Indian cinema (Nandy, 1998, 2001); on major themes and tropes in popular Bollywood films (Dwyer, 2000a, 2002); and the diasporic Indian films (Mitra, 1999; Uberoi, 1998). To add the conclusions drawn from the novels already examined in this thesis, I want to end with a discussion of the major themes in a recent diasporic Indian film *Monsoon Wedding* that complements these.

Monsoon Wedding directed by the India-born Mira Nair (2001) and written by Sabrina Dhawan. is set in contemporary Delhi and it is about a wedding in the Punjabi Verma family. The parents of the bride Lalit (father) and Pimmi (mother) are in the midst of making frantic last minute preparations for their daughter Aditi's wedding, a traditional arranged marriage which is being held in the grounds of their home in the suburbs of Delhi. The wedding is taking

place during the monsoon season, hence the title of the film. The title alludes to the circumstances of the characters where tensions reach boiling point, the arrival of the monsoon rains are often preceded by an oppressive sense of heat and humidity, and in this film this is mirrored by the characters whose tempers fray, and their repressed hopes, anxieties and secrets are waiting to emerge. When the rains finally arrive on the day of the wedding they represent the washing away of problems where secrets are revealed, tensions fall, and love blossoms not only between the bride and groom, but also between the cousins Ayesha and Rahul, and between the servants Dubey and Alice, and is reignited between the bride's parents Lalit and Pimmi.

The film begins with Lalit in the garden propping up the marigold gate which has fallen. This is symbolic for subsequent events in the film when the seemingly happy and joyful surface events mask an undercurrent of unhappiness within the characters. The Verma family appears wealthy and secure, but the father is deeply in debt to a cousin who has loaned him the money to pay for his daughter's wedding. The bride Aditi is also ambivalent about her forthcoming marriage to Hemat, a non-resident Indian living in Houston, Texas; before her wedding she has a final fling with her former lover, but fears being found out and having the wedding ruined. Moreover, Aditi's cousin Ria is bitter and unhappy, she is holding a dark secret: that she was sexually abused as a child by a male relative who is also attending the wedding. This secret is revealing of a rupture within the fabric of the family requiring it to be dealt with or ignored (Desai, 2004).

This film is pertinent to the themes raised in the novels because it focuses on the home and domestic themes of marriage and family. Weddings function in Indian diasporic cinema as signs of community and ethnic belonging (Desai, 2004); hence the emphasis on a wealthy middle class family in Delhi with relatives and guests flying in from all over the world. Furthermore, the film depicts a society in transition from the old to the new, a theme discussed in chapter four. In the film the theme of change is evident visually and audibly in terms of clothing, furnishings, and speech, and particularly when the characters use their mobile phones and pagers, and the bleeping and ringing of these machines interrupts the narrative. The film also depicts the tensions between traditional Indian rituals and culture and the more westernised/globalised aspects of that culture. So the marriage is a traditionally arranged one and the bride has not met the groom before (apart from a secret meeting to confess her affair), and the bride is not chaste and virginal. The arranged marriage in the film represents a site of tradition and stability, a buffer against external changes (Desai, 2004). There are the traditional wedding rituals such as the *Chunni Chadana* where the bride is dressed, blessed, as well as the *Mehendi* where the bride's hands and feet are painted with henna dye. It is also a global wedding, family and friends come from all over India and the world, including the United States and Australia, to attend the nuptials. This bringing together of family to the wedding "functions as a way to suture the deterritorialized nation together" (Desai, 2004, p 228). Like the novels, *Monsoon Wedding* destabilises the notion of a stable traditional home. Aditi - the seemingly innocent and virginal bride - is having a fling with her former lover, before the wedding. Full of guilt about her betrayal Aditi

confesses to Hemat before the wedding about her affair, he agrees to forgive her and allow the marriage to go ahead. During the celebrations, her cousin Ria reveals to the wedding party the identity of her abuser who is then thrown out of the house by Lalit and the rupture to the family breached. Thus discourses are transgressed and broken, everything unravels and yet the wedding goes on.

Thus the novels examined in this thesis and the popular film *Monsoon Wedding* capture this Indian society in the process of transition. Being at home in India at this time of transition is about paradoxically being part of traditions of home and family and simultaneously breaking them. Chaudhuri (1998, p 107) says it best in *Freedom Song*: "much would change…but much would seem to remain unchanged".

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