

Indian Literature in English: An Introduction

Lecture 9: Globalising India: Terror and the Postcolonial Exotic

- 1) **Visions of Global Terrorism**
(Rushdie/Nagarkar)
- 2) **The Postcolonial Exotic?!**
(Roy/K. Desai)
- 3) **A Truly Globalized Fiction**
(Dasgupta)

1) Visions of Global Terrorism

- > Vikram Chandra, *Sacred Games* (2006)
- > Salman Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown* (2005)
- > Kiran Nagarkar, *God's Little Soldier* (2006)

Shalimar the Clown:

Maximilian Ophuls – Boonyi (Bhoomi) Kaul – Noman Sher Noman
India Ophuls

- Part 1: India [Los Angeles, 1991]
- Part 2: Boonyi [Pachigam, Kashmir]
- Part 3: Max [Strasbourg>Paris>London>US (>India)]
- Part 4: Shalimar the Clown [Kashmir>Pakistan>Afghanistan>US]
- Part 5: Kashmira [Los Angeles, 1991ff.]

“There was no India. There was only Kashmira, and Shalimar the Clown.”

That Rushdie now prefers the pursuit of a signature style to tragedy is itself a kind of tragedy. *Shalimar the Clown* is nearly that much needed thing: a tragic novel about the growth of a terrorist's mind in one of those rogue regions of the world [...] Instead, the novel is by turns satire, old-fashioned revenge romance and Hollywood action movie, and it seems to flaunt its determination to put as much padding as possible between readers and feelings [...] The deliberate campiness and flight from character into archetype, which were so prominent in Rushdie's turn away from politics to beauty and talent in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) and *Fury* (2001), have intensified, as has his pursuit of that elusive beast, the great global novel.

Marco Roth, "Give the People What They Want: Salman Rushdie's Many-Ringed Circus." *TLS* Sep 9 (2005): 19f.

Kiran Nagarkar (*1942 Bombay):

Saat Sakkam Trechalis (1974) [*Seven Sixes are Forty Three*]
Ravan & Eddie (1994/95)
Cuckold (1997)

***God's Little Soldier* (2006):**

Zia Khan	vs.	Amanat Khan
aka		
Lucens		
aka		
Tejas		

Zubeida Khaala
Antonia Booth-Langston

(1)

One of Zia's earliest memories was of a concert at their home, Firdaus. His aunt Zubeida pushed her chin out in the direction of the dais and said, 'Satan, that's where he is.' [...]

'Just look at them, men and women mingling shamelessly,' Zubeida Khaala muttered as she tried to pat Zia to sleep [...] 'Decent women don't throw off the pallor of their saris and expose their breasts. They should sit in the zenana. Or wear a burkha when they have company.' [...]

(11)

Zia could not get used to the alarm [...] How he loathed this job. He had gone out for a walk one morning around five because he couldn't sleep, and had been struck by the filth and litter on the road. He was convinced that all tourists should be banned from Cambridge. It was not their town and so they simply didn't care if they shat all over the place. The pair of sweepers on this beat must have gone for a cup of tea, for they had leaned their brooms against a hedge and left their carts nearby. Zia had finished cleaning up half the street when one of them came running towards him.

'What the hell do you think you are doing?'

'I would have thought that even a fool could tell that I was cleaning up the mess on the road.'

'It's my street. And that's my broom.' Then he added with surprising formality, 'If you don't have a work permit, you can't take a job here.'

'Sure I can,' Zia contradicted him, 'I'm doing it for free.'

The next morning Zia was at work before the others got there. He had bought himself his own heavy-duty broom. In time the rest of the crew shrugged their shoulders and smiled. There was no dearth of weirdoes in Cambridge. Every second fellow, tutor or don was a nutcase. Now there was one more.

[...]

Zia was a manic worker [...] Zia's attitude to the work was perverse: the more he abhorred his new-found métier, the more meticulous he became [...] This was the enemy, the original sin, the evil cornucopia of human waste on which the whole of mankind would choke and die.

[...]

There is only one purpose to life; only one ontological, epistemological, teleological end to and reason for creation: shit. What you eat, you shit. The more you consume, the more you shit. That is it, tortillas, shepherd's pie, doner kebabs or gyros as the Greeks call them, photographic films, computers, cars and car exhausts, woollens, synthetics, everything equals everything. There is not a grain of excess in the universe. All is accounted for. Yes, whoever sat up there in the sky was first, last, middle and sideways an accountant.

And who clears the detritus in the universe? It is the sweepers of the world who must continually clean up the shit of human kind and canine kind and one other kind that is the nemesis, the diabolical and true Satan for Zia Khan. The other kind so beloved of nature lovers like Wordsworth, Kalidasa, Shelley, Keats and a hundred others who should have been forced to be sweepers before they were allowed to write a word about the joys of creation, the other kind, or rather the most unkind: the trees on this damned planet, earth.

It was during his first autumn that Zia realized why the American term for it was far more appropriate. Was there ever a more apt name for a season, or the human condition, than the fall? There is nothing, absolutely nothing, in the chronicles of mankind's suffering as great, as fallen, as symbolic and symptomatic, as overwhelming as fall, with or without the definite article.

[...]

Autumn had indeed exacted a terrible price from Zia. It seemed to him that Allah, too, had taken a fall. Zia didn't bother to pray these days. Allah had ceased to matter to him any more.

[...]

Dump the job? How could he? As long as he had it, he had every reason to catch up on sleep all day and not go to supervisions or lectures where he would have to study that most barren of subjects, pure maths.

(59)

'Do you remember what you has written about traitors when you were one of us?'

Tejas said, 'How could I forget?' but it was as though he was not listening any more. He was intrigued by the phrase 'to take care of someone'. How often had he heard it said that God takes care of his own. He himself had sworn to 'take care of Amanat' when his brother had threatened to reveal his arms-trade activities to the media. James had told Nawaaz, 'We take care of our customers, come what may.' And when Shakta Muni had picked him up from the police lockup he had assured him, 'We take care of our own ... one way or the other.' Now Nawaaz Irfan, his devoted disciple, would take care of him.

It was odd, but the last thing he recalled was something Amanat's Kabir had said towards the end of his book: 'There's only one God and Her name is Life. She is the only one worthy of worship. All else is irrelevant.'

(60)

[Letter from Amanat to Zia after Zia has vanished]

Come home, Zia [...] Let's put up our feet and talk about old times. About Abbajaan, Zubeida Khaala and Aunt Antonia. And yes, of dear Ammijaan too.

Love,
Amanat

2) The Postcolonial Exotic?!

- > Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (1997)
- > Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006)

Can one discuss *The God of Small Things* without addressing the Roy phenomenon that, as Graham Huggan tells us, paradigmatically exemplifies how the production and dissemination of Indian writing in English colludes with the construction and marketing of 'Indo-chic'?

(Wiemann 2008, 274)

'Indo-chic', and Roy's contribution to it, are not simply to be seen as naïve Western constructs; they are products of the globalisation of Western-capitalist consumer culture, in which 'India' functions not just as a polyvalent cultural sign but as a highly mobile cultural good.

(Huggan 2001, 67)

The hype and the promotion has attained such discursive power and penetration that any independent evaluation of the book calls for special levels of clarity and candour.

(Paranjape 2000, 119)

The God of Small Things:

(1) Paradise Pickles & Preserves

May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun.

[...]

But by early June the south-west monsoon breaks and there are three months of wind and water [...] Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom. Brick walls turn mossgreen. Pepper vines snake up electric poles. Wild creepers burst through laterite banks and spill across the flooded roads. Boats ply in the bazaars. And small fish appear in the puddles that fill the PWD potholes on the highways.

It was raining when Rahel came back to Ayemenem [...]

The Inheritance of Loss:

(1)

All day, the colors had been those of dusk, mist moving like a water creature across the great flanks of mountains possessed of ocean shadows and depths. Briefly visible above the vapor, Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light, a plume of snow blown high by the winds at its summit.

Sai, sitting on the veranda, was reading an article about giant squid in an old *National Geographic*. Every now and then she looked up at Kanchenjunga, observed its wizard phosphorescence with a shiver. The judge sat at the far corner with his chessboard, playing against himself [...]

The God of Small Things:

- set in provincial village in Kerala, Southern India
- tragedy of family life centred around the twins Rahel and Estha
- 1969 vs. 1993
- **1969:**
 - Rahel and Estha live with their divorced mother (Ammu), their grandmother Baba Kochamma and Uncle Chacko
 - Uncle Chacko's English ex-wife (Margaret Kochamma) visits with her daughter, Sophie Mol
 - Ammu has an affair with the dalit Velutha
 - The tree children try to get away, Sophie Mol dies
 - Collective murder of Velutha
- **1993:**
 - Incestuous reunion of Rahel and Estha

(1)

[...]

Still, to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem is only one way of looking at it.

Equally, it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendancy, before Vasco da Gama arrived, before the Zamorin conquest of Calicut. Before three purple-robed Syrian Bishops murdered by the Portuguese were found floating in the sea [...] It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag.

That it really began in the days when Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how.

And how much.

However, for practical purposes, in a hopelessly practical world...

(...)

Order – History – Society

vs.

Transgression – Moment – Nature

The Inheritance of Loss:

- **main plot:**
Kalimpong (Chu Oyu), Feb. to August 1986 (the present)
Sai, the Judge, the Cook
Uncle Potty and Father Booty
Lola and Noni
Gyan
Nepalese rebels (Gorkhas)
- **flashbacks:**
The Judge's Life (the past/colonialism)
(Piphit>Cambridge>Uttar Pradesh>Kalimpong)
Sai's life
Biju's life in the USA (three years: the recent past/diaspora, postcolonialism,
globalisation)

3) A Truly Globalized Fiction

Rana Dasgupta (*1971 Canterbury)

- studied in Cambridge
- lived in France, Malaysia and the US
- since 2001 in Delhi ('Acknowledgements: The city of Delhi. The fecund ground where this book unexpectedly took root.')
- new type of ex-NRI

Tokyo Cancelled (2005):

- a cycle of 13 tales, shared among 13 passengers stranded on an airport in the 'Middle of Nowhere' for one night setting of frame: the airport as a 'non-place' of transit which is transformed into an 'anthropological place' by means of narrative
- settings of tales:
 - 1) 'one of those small, carefree lands that used to be so common but which now, alas, are hardly to be found'
 - 2) London; 3) Delhi/Bombay; 4) Frankfurt/Turkey (Ankara vs. Anatolia); 5) New York City; 6) Lagos; 7) Detroit; 8) Tokyo; 9) Odessa/Istanbul/Marseille; 10) France (Neuilly > Paris); 11) Poland (Bytom/Upper Silesia > Kattowice > Warsaw); 12) Hunan Province/China > Shenzhen (Hong Kong);
 - 13) Buenos Aires
- 'global village sketch'

ARRIVALS

There was chaos.

Will someone please explain why we are here? What are we going to eat? Who has thought of that? – Who is in charge here? Let me speak to him!

A 747 had disgorged its passengers into the middle of a vacant, snow-brushed tarmac expanse, left them to trudge across it through the cold and the floodlit glare to a terminus whose neon name was only illuminated in patches and anyway was in a language most of them could not read; had abandoned them, in short, in the Middle of Nowhere, in a place that was Free of Duty but also, much more importantly, devoid of any obvious egress, like a back corridor between two worlds, two somewheres, where people only alighted when something was seriously kaput with the normal eschatological machinery.

[...]

(One man watched in fascination as, in the distance, an astounding, prehistoric kind of thing, a land mollusc, a half-evolved arthropod, all claws and wing cases, limped slowly from one side of the wall to the other. An insect, surely, but from here it looked the size of a rat. No one else seemed to notice.)

[...]

DEPARTURES

[...]

(Walking back from the bathroom, shaking hands dry, someone saw – it was an astonishing thing – some kind of antediluvian creature lying dead in a pile of sweepings in a corner. What was it? – some undiscovered land cousin of the lobster, the crayfish, a long armoured body, segmented, bristling with hairs and antennae, must be as long as my forearm! now useless and pale and covered with dust and chocolate wrappers and cigarette ends. It's when you see things like that, strange things like that, you know you're not at home.)

[...]

Passports were checked again and a machine sucked up each boarding pass, flashed a name for an instant, and spat back a diminutive stump. They filed through a tunnel, the sounds of the outside reaching them for the first time. Actually, it was good to fly in the morning, the day felt so full of new things and the air was so fresh. The whole ridiculous fiasco – it really hadn't been so bad. A good story to tell, after all.

They shuffled forward; the engines were roaring outside and men were loading their bags from a little truck [...]

Good morning.

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