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THE INHERITANCE OF VICTORY:

POSTCOLONIALISM AND ORIENTALISM IN INDIAN BOOKER PRIZE-WINNING NOVELS

Master's Thesis – Literary Studies (The Book Industry)

Mariss Gerrits (s1028894)

Abstract

The Booker Prize is among the most well-known and esteemed literary prizes in the world. For a long time, only English-language novels from the Commonwealth of Nations were eligible to win the Prize. Novels from periphery nations such as South Africa and India are less likely to win the Booker Prize than British novels, and numerous commentators have noted that periphery Commonwealth novels seem to need to adhere to certain expectations and preferences in order to have a chance to win the Booker Prize. Commonwealth Booker Prize winners tend to be novels which heavily focus on the lingering effects of colonialism in their subject countries, engage with Orientalist stereotypes about these same countries, and altogether avoid topics and concepts which may alienate or confuse a British reader—such is the standing hypothesis. This thesis aims to discover whether or not, and to what extent, this is true of Indian Booker Prize-winning novels in particular. Three novels were analysed for the purposes of this thesis: *The God of Small Things* (1997), *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), and *The White Tiger* (2008). All three novels turned out to be laden with postcolonial and Orientalist modes of storytelling, with veneration of Western culture and institutions and extensive portrayals of unsanitary Indian metropolises being among the most recurring narrative elements. However, *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss* do manage to shed the label of stereotypical Commonwealth Booker Prize winner to a certain extent through their use of non-English phraseology and heavy reliance on regional histories, both of which diminish the ease of reading for a British audience.

Keywords

Booker Prize, Man Booker Prize, Colonialism, Orientalism, New Orientalism

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Introduction

In an article celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Booker Prize, Gaby Wood, the chief executive of the Booker Prize Foundation, wrote, "[i]t's a huge responsibility to think of the prize as being global, but there's no denying that it is."[1] Indeed, the Booker Prize, while often thought of as a British literary prize, is an award of international renown and character.[2] Even in 1969, when the Booker Prize was first awarded, the prize accepted entrants from all member states of the Commonwealth of Nations, provided that the relevant novel had also been published in the United Kingdom. The aim of the Booker Prize was to lift up the best English-language novel published in any given year, and in this sense the Booker Prize became a great success: to this day, the winning novel is all but guaranteed to achieve cultural consecration and immense financial success.[3] Since 2013, the Booker Prize has been open to all English-language novels published in the United Kingdom, adding the United States and other English-speaking countries to the pool of candidate nations. Even so, the Booker Prize retains a very strong postcolonial character. The prize is still primarily identified as a British one, and any Booker Prize victory on the part of a Commonwealth or diasporic author is bound to result in coverage of the United Kingdom as a postcolonial cultural force.[4]

While the Booker Prize presents itself as a force for good in a postcolonial era, many commentators from without have criticised the Booker Prize for underdelivering on its promise of enabling a worldwide readership for authors of the Commonwealth, with some going as far

[1] Gaby Wood, "A Glimpse Behind the Scenes: The Booker at 50," *The Booker Prizes* (online), July 18, 2018, https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-library/features/a-glimpse-behind-the-scenes-the-booker-at-50.
[2] The Booker Prize has taken on a number of different names over the years as it changed hands between sponsors, including the Booker Prize for Fiction, the Man Booker Prize, and simply the Booker Prize. For the sake of simplicity, the prize will be referred as the "Booker Prize" for all its iterations in this thesis.
[3] Luke Strongman, "Introduction," in *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), ix.
[4] Lucy Christopher, "Shehan Karunatilaka Wins Booker Prize for Sri Lankan Political Satire, The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida," *The Conversation* (online), October 18, 2022, https://theconversation.com/shehan-karunatilaka-wins-booker-prize-for-sri-lankan-political-satire-the-seven-moons-of-maali-almeida-192722.

as claiming that the Booker Prize perpetuates colonialist power structures. Graham Huggan, author of *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001), posited that the Booker Prize's vision of postcolonialism was one which commodified the cultural disparity between the United Kingdom and its former colonies.[5] He went on to write that the view of the postcolonial world as artistically egalitarian "avoids confronting structural differences in conditions of literary production and consumption across the English-speaking world[,]" and that Commonwealth authors operate in a struggle between themselves as an oppositional, postcolonial force and assimilative, neo-colonial markets.[6] At the time of writing, Huggan saw the Booker Prize not as a utopian, unifying presence, but as a neo-colonial force which used the outsider status of Commonwealth writers as a marketable feature for the novels those authors wrote. Referencing Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, Huggan portrays the British book market that the Booker Prize operates within as one that is still an active battlefield as far as the colonial struggle is concerned. The Booker Prize, according to Huggan, is not so much a magnanimous sharer of cultural and financial capital as it is a gatekeeper, one which is free to grant or deny these riches to the cultural periphery.[7]

While Huggan goes on to soften his criticism by clarifying that the Booker Prize is far from the most insidious neo-colonial force active in the literary and cultural fields, his points of criticism continue to ring true in the eyes of many. In a 2020 article that was highly critical of the Booker Prize, Paula Morris proposes that Commonwealth writers are not only limited in terms of who has a chance to win the Booker Prize, but also what kind of stories have a chance to be nominated to begin with. She writes by way of example, "[t]he sort of New Zealand novelists who speak to a New Zealand readership about New Zealand matters have long found

[5] Graham Huggan, ""Prizing" Otherness: A short history of the Booker," *Studies in the Novel* 29, no. 3 (1997): 417.
[6] Huggan, ""Prizing" Otherness: A short history of the Booker, 417, 427.
[7] Huggan, ""Prizing" Otherness: A short history of the Booker, 427.

themselves excluded in the wider anglophone market."[8] In Morris' eyes, there are only two types of Commonwealth novels that stand a chance at being nominated for the Booker Prize: ones that are largely disconnected from their native country, such as Lloyd Jones' *Mister Pip*, and those whose narratives are deeply linked with their native country's colonial history, such as Nadine Gordimer's *The Conversationalist*. Since the Booker Prize is primarily a vehicle for British publishers to boost their book sales, Morris argues, it stands to reason that novels which alienate British readers through total familiarity are less likely to be nominated for the Booker Prize.[9] Since a novel needs to have been published in the United Kingdom for it to be eligible for the Booker Prize, the perceived tastes of the British audience acts like a sort of filter through which Commonwealth novels with a deeply local character are not allowed to pass. Satyanarayan Tiwari and Ajay K. Chaubey came to a similar conclusion in their analysis of two Indian Booker Prize shortlist nominees. It seemed to them that Indian Booker Prize hopefuls in particular tended to be novels which reinforced existing stereotypes about India as a nation and consistently harkened back to India's colonial past.[10] The India they see in Booker Prize-winning novels is one which is "a particular and strange India, twice and thrice removed from reality."[11] There seems to exist, then, a perception of the Man Booker Prize as an award which is only given to Commonwealth authors if their novels exhibit those (post)colonial themes which British readers can connect to. Commonwealth novels need to fit within a certain mould to have a shot at the Booker Prize, and this has led to a significant lack of narrative diversity in the eyes of the aforementioned commentators.

[8] Paula Morris, "The "Leftovers of Empire": Commonwealth Writers and the Booker Prize," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56, no. 2 (2020): 268.
[9] Morris, "The "Leftovers of empire": Commonwealth Writers and the Booker Prize," 265-266.
[10] Satyanarayan Tiwari and Ajay K. Chaubey, "Politics of the Man Booker Prize(s): The Case of The White Tiger and Sea of Poppies," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 10, no. 3 (2018): 136.
[11] Tiwari and Chaubey, "Politics of the Man Booker Prize(s): The Case of the White Tiger and Sea of Poppies," 131.

How true is this perception? The academic literature on the topic of Commonwealth Booker Prize winners provides no more than a bird's eye view on the matter, which makes it difficult to draw any sweeping conclusions. In order to investigate if the Booker Prize really does suffer from a lack of narrative diversity among its Commonwealth winners as a result of their adherence to postcolonial and Orientalist modes of storytelling, it is time to zoom in, which is what this text aims to do. Since analysing every Commonwealth Booker Prize winner would make for far too broad of a scope for a thesis of this length, this research undertaking will instead focus solely on Booker Prize winning novels from a single country: India. The question at the heart of this thesis will be the following:

> In what ways is the potential for narrative diversity among Indian Booker Prize-winning novels undercut through their use of postcolonial and Orientalist modes of storytelling?

In order to ascertain whether this perceived lack of narrative diversity is indeed present within the Indian crop of Booker Prize winners, this thesis will analyse three novels: *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) by Kiran Desai, and *The White Tiger* (2008) by Aravind Adiga. These three novels represent the sum total of Booker Prize winners which were originally published in India before arriving on the British market. While other Indian authors or authors of Indian descent have won the Booker Prize as well, their novels' original country of publication was not India. For example, the novel *In a Free State* was written by V.S. Naipaul, an author of Indian descent, but since it was originally published in the United Kingdom it falls outside of the scope of this thesis.[12] There are, of course, also

[12] Audrey Golden, "Man Booker Prize Winners from India," *Books Tell You Why* (online), July 29, 2017, https://blog.bookstellyouwhy.com/man-booker-prize-winners-from-india.

many novels written by Indian authors which have graced the shortlists and longlists of the Booker Prize over the years, but they, too, exceed the purview of this thesis. While the result of these excisions may be a corpus which is small in scope, it also allows for this research undertaking to be pointed and go into great depth on each of these novels. The above-mentioned research question will be answered by way of a close reading of the three relevant novels. Each novel will be given its own section, in which the presence of themes relevant to postcolonialism and the British perception of India will be ascertained and analysed. In doing so, this thesis aims to clarify how widespread the presence of colonial history is in these novels, and whether or not their most significant underlying themes are ones that a British reader might imprint onto India. Numerous prior literary analyses of the three relevant novels will be consulted and cited over the course of this thesis in order to ensure that any quintessentially postcolonial-Indian narrative element that is identified is grounded in a broader cultural perception of India, rather than relying solely on this thesis' author's perception of India.

The decision to select India and its authors, novels, and Booker Prize winners in particular as the subject for this thesis was made after some deliberation. In theory, any Commonwealth country—big or small, Booker Prize regular or routine absentee—could have been chosen as the source for this thesis' primary texts. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that the Booker Prize winners of any given Commonwealth country could have led to interesting (and perhaps disparate) research results in their own right. That said, the decision to focus on India and its Booker Prize winning novels was not made arbitrarily, as there are a number of factors at play that make India the foremost candidate for this thesis. For one, India is the largest country by population size in the Commonwealth by a huge margin.[13][14] In a fully egalitarian society, assuming also an equality of literary talent and output in every country,

[13] "U.S. Census Bureau Current Population," *United States Census Bureau* (online), accessed April 5, 2023, https://www.census.gov/popclock/print.php?component=counter.

India should dominate the list of Booker Prize winners or at least have a more significant presence on it. Since India is outperformed on this metric by much smaller countries such as South Africa and Canada, the following question arises: which barriers are in place to prevent India from having a better showing at the Booker Prize, and what are the characteristics of the occasional Indian novel that manages to penetrate these barriers? This is one of the questions that this thesis hopes to answer implicitly.

Secondly, while India does not have an especially strong presence among Booker Prize winners, it is the birthplace of one exceptionally noteworthy winner: Salman Rushdie. Rushdie won the Booker Prize for fiction in 1981 for his novel *Midnight's Children*, and this same novel was later crowned, twice over, the best novel to ever win the Booker Prize, receiving the Best of the Booker Prize in both 1993 and 2008.[15] One could imagine that a country which served as the birthplace for the single most consecrated author in the history of the Booker Prize would be given more leeway to provide novels which do not contribute to colonial narratives and stereotypes to the Booker Prize, but this remains to be seen.

Finally, the current state of the academic debate appears to provide a much stronger foundation for a research undertaking such as this one focussed on India than any other valid candidate nation. The aforementioned article by Tiwari and Chaubey on *The White Tiger* and *Sea of Poppies* hews quite closely to the topic of this thesis, and no equivalent article for the relevant novels of other Commonwealth nations appears to exist. Moreover, Luke Strongman's *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire*, which may well be the most in-depth text on the Booker Prize as a postcolonial entity, has an entire chapter dedicated to Indian literature—an honour granted to no other Commonwealth literary field. Even when taking the Booker Prize itself out of the equation, *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White*

[15] Lindesay Irvine, "Rushdie's Midnight Children Crowned Best of the Bookers," *The Guardian* (online), July 10, 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jul/10/news.bookerprize.

Tiger seem to have been especially fertile ground for postcolonial literary analysis. Alex Tickell, Suresh Nandi, Oana Sabo, and numerous others have previously examined one or more of these novels to expound on the ways in which they do or do not function as postcolonial narratives. From a purely practical standpoint, India appears to be the best choice for this research undertaking since prior research into its Booker Prize winners is so plentiful. There is no other country with so many giants whose shoulders one can stand on.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The literary industry of India, like that of any independent nation, is fully autonomous, and yet the way the fruits of its production are perceived is affected by the lingering presence of colonial control. What would the appropriate framework for such a research undertaking be? Normally, any academic project that sets out to examine the perceptions of a South-Asian country like India from the perspective of the Western world is likely to find itself resting on the borderline between three major academic fields of study: prize studies, postcolonialism and Orientalism. While this thesis will be no different, additional attention will need to be paid to the particular dynamics between centre and periphery that are at play when discussing Commonwealth winners of a literary prize, which the canonical texts on Orientalism do not fully account for.

The term "Orientalism" has been used for centuries to denote the anthropological study of the Orient, but within the field of cultural studies it has more recently come to refer to the widespread practice among Western artists and academics of patronising and exaggeratedly othering Eastern countries and cultures in their writing. The most notable text on this topic is Edward W. Said's seminal 1987 book *Orientalism*. In this book, Said lays bare the fact that many contemporary depictions of the East writ large are deeply mired in prejudices that lingered from the colonial era. Said also notes that Orientalism is incredibly pervasive and more revealing of the Western world that produces it than the Eastern world it is meant to describe.[16] With Orientalism being so endemic to Western writing on the East for such a long period of time, it has achieved what Said calls "discursive consistency", meaning that it has developed a

[16] Edward W. Said, "Introduction," in *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 12.

material and institutional history through which it can advocate for its own validity, making it a difficult viewpoint to break away from.[17]

Said would later publish a second book which built on the foundation that *Orientalism* established, that book being *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). The chapter "Resistance and Opposition" is particularly noteworthy for the purposes of this thesis, since it deals with the methods (former) colonies use to push back against the way they are discussed within hegemonic circles. He notes that the "tragedy of resistance", of responding to Orientalism, is that it must engage with the false narratives created by Orientalism before it can concern itself with creating a more truthful image of one's own culture.[18] "Resistance" here meaning responses from those voices who are still experiencing (post)colonial oppression. Opposition, on the other hand, are those responses which come from areas which are not influenced by the dominance of colonial force, choosing instead to present a fully discreet ideology which does not present itself as a response to hegemonic power.[19] When translated into cultural terms, the distinction between resistance and opposition would be the distinction between postcolonial literature and literature which fully disabuses itself from the spectre of colonialism. *Orientalism* predominantly examined the phenomenon of Orientalism from a sociopolitical perspective, but other authors have stepped in to explore the topic through the lens of cultural studies. A notable example is the Geoffrey P. Nash-edited book *Orientalism and Literature* (2020), which consists of critical examinations of Orientalism in literature going all the way back to the Bible. A chapter by Valerie Kennedy serves as a direct response to Said and aims to weave Said's later work on resistance writing from within the Orient into the theory of Orientalism. Kennedy crucially notes, citing Philip Darby, that resistance writing is not created equal, and that all

[17] Edward W. Said, "Modern Anglo-French Orientalism in Fullest Flower," in *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 273.
[18] Edward W. Said, "Resistance and Opposition," in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1993), 210.
[19] Said, "Resistance and Opposition," 240.

writing which responds to Orientalism, however critical, runs the risk of converging with imperial narratives.[20]

Within the field of postcolonialism, it is almost impossible to talk about the Booker Prize without discussing Luke Strongman's 2002 book *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire*. In this book, Strongman examines the Booker Prize from numerous angles, postcolonialism and Orientalism being two among them, to confer to what extent and in what way the chosen winners of the prize "reflect and portray the state of culture after empire."[21] Strongman identifies the proliferation of multiple "Englishes" which are used in literature and other forms of cultural expression in the Commonwealth. These Englishes, while technically existing and proliferating in a postcolonial world, still owe plenty to the prior relationship of coloniser and colonised between the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth.[22] Many Booker Prize winners, Strongman notes, participate in a highly specific framework of post-imperial culture, wherein the resistance and response to the influence of the United Kingdom on the Commonwealth plays a key role in the narratives of the novels.[23]

Strongman examines Booker Prize winners from within the United Kingdom and from the greater Commonwealth, and of particular interest for the purposes of this thesis are the sections on "Novels of the Raj" (Booker Prize winners which explore the relationship between India and the United Kingdom post-Indian independence) and "Postmodernism and History" (the postmodern, fragmented postcolonial Commonwealth that Booker Prize winners often portray). In the former, Strongman reveals that the portrayal of India in Booker Prize-winning novels is often deeply amorphous, neglecting to portray the fact that India is a highly

[20] Valerie Kennedy, "Edward Said and Resistance in Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures," in *Orientalism and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey P. Nash (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 224.
[21] Luke Strongman, "Introduction," in *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (New York, NY; Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2002), ix.
[22] Strongman, "Introduction," xix-xx.
[23] Strongman, "Introduction," xxi.

multicultural and multitudinous nation fraught with internal divisions.[24] This chapter also details a habit within postcolonial Commonwealth literature to express great nostalgia for the Raj while also deemphasising the sheer crushing presence of the British governing body in India.[25] In "Postcolonial Pessimisms", Strongman makes note of the way Booker Prize winners tend to portray former colonies as chaotic remnants, nations which cannot return to their precolonial status quo but are also not capable of fully adapting to the British way of life.[26] In these novels, metanarrative "truths" are no longer seen as desirable, and history becomes a pastiche of reduced relevance to whatever story is told.[27] While his research does not directly address the three novels at the heart of this thesis—all three of them were published after Strongman had already begun working on his book—Strongman reveals a surprising number of common elements among Booker Prize winners which discuss the former British empire and the Commonwealth.

These texts provide a strong theoretical background for this thesis, but since they are primarily concerned with writing on the Orient (and India in particular) from Western authors, additional writing still needs to be incorporated in order to make this information applicable to Booker Prize winners from India. There is, after all, a world of difference between external and internal portrayals of India, as is true of any country. Particularly noteworthy on this front is a 2008 article by Ronit Frenkel, which posits that a sense of "post-colonial pathos" is a nigh mandatory feature for a Commonwealth novel to have if it wants to have a chance at winning the Booker Prize.[28] Where Strongman observed that much of Indian literature in the post-colonial era is

[24] Strongman, "The Crystal Palace: Novels of the Raj," in *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (New York, NY; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 3.
[25] Strongman, "The Crystal Palace: Novels of the Raj," 24-25.
[26] Strongman, "Postmodernism and History," in *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (New York, NY; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 104-105.
[27] Strongman, "Postmodernism and History," 140.
[28] Ronit Frenkel, "The politics of loss: Post-colonial pathos and the current Booker Prize-nominated texts from India and South Africa," *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in South Africa* 13, no. 2 (2008): 79.

preoccupied with the theme of developing independence, Frenkel notes that Commonwealth literature which gains the attention of the Booker Prize needs to count the politics of loss, the newfound absence of the British empire, among its themes.[29] Daniel Allington adds to this that, since the Booker Prize is an instrument od cultural "soft power" that flows from the United Kingdom, it is the interests of British readers that ultimately need to be catered to.[30] This is especially true for Commonwealth authors who wish to reach an international audience, as Satyanarayan Tiwari and Ajay K. Chaubey note, since non-British authors who write about their own country in a way which resonates with British readers appear to be far more likely to gain attention in the United Kingdom than those who choose to write from a culturally anonymous perspective.[31]

The mechanisms at play here have been described by some commentators as "New Orientalism": a shift in power by which Orientalism continues to be the dominant mode of discussion, but the narrative control is being handed back to those whose cultures are being discussed. M. S. Veena and P. V. Ramanathan approach present-day Indian writing from this angle, noting that Indian authors experience immense pressure to portray the "real Orient" in their writing, or to subvert Orientalism altogether.[32] Some authors have taken a more critical stance on this reclamation of Orientalism, however. In the book *Re-Orientalism and Indian Writing in English*, Lisa Lau and Om Prakash Dwivendi instead put forth the term "Re-Orientalism". Re-Orientalism theory posits that, while Indian and other Eastern authors have seized significant control over the overall cultural representation of India, they are still liable to put forth skewed and stereotypical portrayals of Indian culture and society, on top of still

[29] Ronit Frenkel, "The politics of loss: Post-colonial pathos and the current Booker Prize-nominated texts from India and South Africa," 87.
[30] Daniel Addington, "Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and the Troubled Symbolic Production of a Man Booker Prize Winner," in *Indian Writing in the English and Global Literary Market*, ed. Om Prakah Dwivedi and Lisa Lau (New York, NY: Palgrave McMillan, 2014), 124.
[31] Satyanarayan Tiwari and Ajay K. Chaubey, "Politics of the Man Booker Prize(s): The Case of The White Tiger and Sea of Poppies," *Rupkatha Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 10, no. 3 (2018): 131-132.
[32] M. S. Veena and P. V. Ramanathan, "New Orientalism in Literature: A Critical Overview," *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* 4 (2013): 3.

being beholden to Western audiences.[33] Ultimately, Dwivendi writes, much of Indian writing, like all writing, is still written with the end goal of being commodified, and this is best done by appealing to Western publishing houses and audiences.[34] For this reason, Booker Prize winners from Commonwealth nations do not necessarily represent the best literature from those nations, but rather the best of the literature from those nations that British publishers came into contact with and found appealing enough to publish.

Ultimately, there are two knowledge bases which need to be synthesised for this thesis. On one hand, there is Orientalism, which posits that Western scholars and authors have historically put an extremely skewed view of the East to page. On the other hand, there is New Orientalism/Re-Orientalism theory, which reveals that Commonwealth writers have been able to reclaim the cultural narratives of their countries, but that in doing so they have adopted, in part or in full, many of the preconceptions that plague Orientalism. Seated between these two forces is the British literary field, which appears to be particularly interested in stories from Commonwealth writers that conform, or at least play into, Orientalist presuppositions that British readers have about Commonwealth nations. For these reasons, it seems entirely too plausible that the Man Booker Prize is inclined to reward those authors whose novels display Re-Orientalist tendencies. The question still remains if this is indeed true for India and its three Booker Prize-winning novels.

In order to effectively answer the research question that was set forth for this thesis, each of the three Indian Booker Prize-winning novels will be analysed separately and in great detail. The intent of this analysis is to reveal to what extent these novels adhere to the apparent reading

[33] Lisa Lau, "Introducing Re-Orientalism Theory and Discourse in Indian Writing in English," in *Re-Orientalism and Indian Writing in English* (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2014), 2.
[34] Om Prakash Dwivendi, "Indian Writing in English: Commodification and Re-Orientalism," in *Re-Orientalism and Indian Writing in English* (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2014), 116-117.

preferences of the British reading public. As the introduction and the rest of this chapter have laid out, postcolonialism and Orientalism will be the primary lenses through which *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger* will be analysed. In the case of postcolonialism, this thesis will evaluate the primary texts to dissect the ways in which the lasting effects of Western colonialism continue to play a role in the lives of the novels' characters and the worlds they inhabit. Through the use of Orientalist theory, this thesis aims to break down the breadth of stereotypical and othering imagery, descriptions, and character archetypes that are used in these novels. Additionally, the primary texts will be inspected in search of other elements which may serve to significantly ameliorate the reading experience of British readers who might otherwise find themselves lost and confused in reading a foreign novel. These elements may take the form of explanations of cultural phenomena that would seem self-explanatory to Indian readers, for example. To ensure that the analysis in this thesis remains balanced and paints a full picture, any elements present within the novel that may inhibit the ease of reading of a non-Indian reader, such as the use of untranslated Hindi phrases or scarcely contextualised historical details, will be covered as well.

Chapter 1: *The God of Small Things* – Othering the Self

While it may not have been the first Booker Prize winner written by an Indian author—that honour goes to Sir V. S. Naipaul's 1971 novel *In a Free State*—Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* was the first Booker Prize-winning novel that was initially published in India by an author who was, at the time of publication, a resident of the Republic of India.[35] The novel was published by IndiaInk in India, in association with HarperCollins, in 1997. HarperCollins would go on to publish *The God of Small Things* in the United Kingdom that same year.

Presented in a nonlinear fashion, *The God of Small Things* tells the story of Rahel Yakko and her fraternal twin brother Esthappen. They are born and raised in the Kottayam district of India by a dysfunctional family consisting of their anglophile academic uncle, Chacko; their strict but caring mother, Ammu; and their Americanised, television-obsessed great aunt, "Baby" Kochamma. One half of the novel is set in 1969, when the twins were only seven years of age. Their cousin Sophie and Chacko's ex-wife Margaret come to visit India from the United Kingdom after the death of Margaret's second husband, and the family's car is caught in a wave of communist protestors as they are crossing a bridge. Rahel believes she sees family acquaintance Velutha among the protestors. Velutha, being a member of the "Untouchable" caste, the lowest stratum of the Indian caste system, is only allowed to interact with Rahel and the Yakko family in limited ways: he does grunt work at the family's pickles and preserves factory and is not allowed to directly touch any member of the higher castes, nor look them in the eyes or enter their homes. Despite these societally enforced boundaries, Ammu and Velutha end up embroiled in an affair. When Velutha's father, fearing for his own life and freedom, reveals this affair to the Yakko family, Ammu is locked up in her bedroom by her mother,

[35] *In a Free State* was first published by André Deutsch (now an imprint of Welbeck Publishing Group) in the United Kingdom. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* was similarly published in the United Kingdom by Jonathan Cape (now an imprint of Penguin Random House). Both V. S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie were residents of the United Kingdom when their respective Booker Prize winners were initially published.

Mammachi, and Baby Kochamma. Ammu blames the twins for her lot in life, leading to them running away from home along with Sophie. Sophie tragically dies as the trio is crossing the river on the way to Velutha's house. During the ensuing police investigation, Velutha is accused of killing Sophie and is assaulted the point of near death by a group of police officers. Ammu attempts to set the record straight after Sophie's funeral, but Baby Kochamma guilts the twins into testifying against Velutha, leading to his implied imprisonment. Soon afterwards, Chacko forces Ammu to leave the family home and pressures her into sending Esthappen to live with his father in New Delhi. The other half of the novel is set in 1993, when Rahel returns to India after living in the United States for many years. After numerous failed relationships and dead-end jobs in America, Rahel returns to her family home to find it in utter disarray. Baby Kochamma has grown thin and weary, and Esthappen either refuses to speak with Rahel or has developed muteness. The twins engage in an incestuous sexual encounter towards the end of the novel. The two disparate timelines of *The God of Small Things* are interspersed with short asides about the romantic and personal histories of the twins' various extended family members and detailed recollections of the history of the village Ayemenem and its surrounding areas.

While *The God of Small Things* was well-received by American newspapers—*Time* magazine, for example, called it a "bold debut" while listing it as one of the best novels of 1997—the British press was divided on Roy's debut title.[36] In his lukewarm review of the novel, Michael Gora of the *London Review of Books* argued it was "rather mechanical", filled with "[w]hite noise" passages, and too heavily indebted to Salman Rushdie's writing style.[37] Conversely, in a much more positive review, Christina Patterson of *The Observer* called the novel a

[36] "Books: The Best Books of 1997," *Time* online, December 29, 1997, https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,987619,00.html.
[37] Michael Gora, "Living in the Aftermath," *London Review of Books* online, June 19, 1997, https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v19/n12/michael-gorra/living-in-the-aftermath.

masterpiece.[38] Division over the novel would go on to reach a fever pitch as it became the favourite to win the 1997 Booker Prize, which it would go on to do. Stephen Moss, the literary editor for *The Guardian*, opined that *The God of Small Things* was "lush" and "overwritten", seeing it as the poster child for Booker Prize juries' preference for overwritten, high-brow literature.[39] Carmen Callil, publisher and 1997 Booker Prize jury member, called the novel "execrable" and was not in favour of its consecration.[40] In its native India, *The God of Small Things* also came under fire at this point in time, but this homefield criticism was mostly disconnected from discussions about literary merit. Roy was summoned before a magistrate in central Kerala to answer charges of obscenity raised against her novel—she vehemently denied these charges.[41] The novel continues to be divisive to this day. Many recent revaluations of *The God of Small Things*—especially those written in light of Roy's second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*—have been quite positive. Anindita Adhikari of the *South Asia Journal* called it a "modern-day classic" and a "timelessly beautiful masterpiece in her 2022 review, for example.[42] Even more recent scholarship, which tends to be critical of the novel as a product of postcolonialism, regularly acknowledges the literary merit of the novel. For the purposes of this thesis, however, it is this critique of *The God of Small Things* as a cultural representation of India that is of the utmost importance. As this chapter will show, *The God of Small Things* is heavily preoccupied with the subject of India as a postcolonial/Commonwealth nation, while

[38] Christina Patterson, "The Week in Reviews: Books: The Inviolable Law of Love," *The Observer*, June 22, 1997, Sunday. https://advance-lexis-com.ru.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SNF-1VS0-007C-23BS-00000-00&context=1516831.
[39] Peter Toohey, "Silent Reading Has Won Itself a Voice: The Differing Tastes of Nobel and Booker Panels Go Depper than Mere Cultural Preference, Writes Peter Toohey," *Canberra Times*, December 22, 1997, Monday, https://advance-lexis-com.ru.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3RKR-4HH0-0045-512C-00000-00&context=1516831.
[40] "The Scene Is Set for the Booker Battle," *BBC* online, September 24, 1998, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/179131.stm.
[41] Bino K. John, Amarnath K. Menon, Suresh Nandi, and Sindhu Jain, "The God of Small Things: Indecent Exposure," *India Times*, June 30, 1997, https://advance-lexis-com.ru.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3RHK-5H10-00DS-01W9-00000-00&context=1516831.
[42] Anindita Adhikari, "Book Review: The God of Small Things," *South Asia Journal* (online), August 1, 2022, https://southasiajournal.net/book-review-the-god-of-small-things/.

also playing into a number of Western stereotypes about India without providing additional nuance.

In the coda to his book *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire* (2002), Mark Strongman briefly discusses *The God of Small Things*. While he acknowledges that the novel makes great strides in freeing Indian literature (and Commonwealth literature in general) from British stylistic influences, he also examines the fact that many critics believe the novel was written with an international audience in mind. He writes, "[p]erhaps the reason for this is that Indian critics are suspicious of authors who seek to market versions of its indigenous culture - a form of government-inspired nationalistic resistance to dominant codes of westernization […]."[43] While somewhat dismissive of the writings of critics of *The God of Small Things*, Strongman does capture the nature of the criticism quite well: allegedly, *The God of Small Things* presents a version of India that is familiar, approachable, and has a tangible link to British and international readers. The "link" that connects British readers to Indian literature is, of course, the spectre of colonialism and the continued presence of British institutions and culture in Commonwealth nations. What makes the presence of postcolonial storytelling in *The God of Small Things* so fascinating is that, while its presence is inescapable, it is not of great importance to the story of the novel as a whole. Shiva Birgani and Sayyed Moosavinia have previously pointed out that the intermingling of British and Indian culture is frequently brought to the reader's attention in *The God of Small Things*. They write that "[h]ybridity is one of the most important features in the novel. The migration forms the hybrid identities. When the migrants interact with the local population, hybridity takes place. It is the most central term in the novel."[44] Indeed, Rahel and her family are strongly influenced by British culture and

[43] Strongman, *The Booker Prize and the Legacy of Empire*, 244.
[44] Shiva Zaheri Birgani and Sayyed Rahim Moosavinia, "The Study of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things: History, Diaspora, Hybridity, Women," *Arabic Language and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2019): 29.

political powers despite the fact that they live in a small, disconnected village. The village of Ayemenem is, to this day, primarily an agricultural community, yet the Yakko family that has lived there for generations has felt the impact of colonialism as much as anyone else. Chacko, the de facto head of the family, is an Oxford-educated gentleman, and he makes no bones about flaunting his international bona fides. As a matter of fact, Chacko's foreign education gives him a certain degree of status and special recognition within the family: "Chacko had been a Rhodes scholar at Oxford and was permitted excesses and eccentricities nobody else was," the narrator says after revealing Chacko's penchant for copiously quoting British literature.[45] Furthermore, it is not just intelligence which is presented as the exclusive purview of British institutions; the same is true of financial success. In detailing Ammu's personal history, *The God of Small Things* sets some time aside to detail her husband's career. He had been working on British-owned tea estates for years when Ammu met him, which made him by far the richest man she had ever associated with.[46] Her father-in-law, who is Cambridge-educated, was rich enough to give them a brand-new car as a wedding gift.[47] Mammachi's husband, an ex-government official, also showed great pride in his association with the British empire. He had been a government official before India regained its independence, and he refused to help Mammachi in the early days of Paradise Pickles & Preserves because he considered the work too far below his station.[48] It is clear that the Yakko family, as Birgani and Moosavinia point out, are deeply affected by colonial powers, even in the postcolonial era.[49]

Besides political power and education, the Yakko family is also enthralled by the United Kingdom when it comes to their romantic preferences. Baby Kochamma, Rahel's great-aunt, was infatuated with Father Mulligan, an Irish monk who frequently visited Ayemanem, when

[45] Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (New York, NY: Flamingo, 1997), 38.
[46] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 39.
[47] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 39-40.
[48] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 47.
[49] Birgani and Moosavinia, "The Study of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things," 28-29.

she was a teenager. Unable to capture his attention during his visits, Baby Kochamma ends up denouncing her Syrian Christian faith and joining a convent in Madras, where Father Mulligan frequently studied. After her advances continue to fail, Baby Kochamma moves back to Ayemenem, where she becomes deeply embittered.[50] It is her inability to secure a relationship with someone who represents Western power and religion that causes a life of emotional and romantic stasis for Baby Kochamma, even as she isolates herself in Kerala. Chacko is similarly unwilling to abandon his romantic connection to the United Kingdom and the former British empire. Before the events of the novel, Chacko was married to a British woman named Margaret, with whom he had a child, Sophie. Chacko is still deeply attached to Margaret despite the divorce and her marriage to someone else. When Margaret and Sophie come to India to visit the Yakko family, Chacko still insists on calling Margaret his wife, much to her frustration.[51] Chacko even goes so far as to wear more traditional Western attire in the form of a tailored suit when picking Margaret and Sophie up from the airport, forgoing his usual *mundu* (skirt-like, folded garment).[52] In an article analysing *The God of Small Things*, Shubhashis Saha noted that many of the relationships present in the novel, both of the romantic and ordinary variety, exhibit a degree of subalternism.[53] Taken more broadly, a *subaltern* refers to those groups of people who are excluded from the hierarchy of power in a colonial relationship. In Saha's analysis, subalternism exists on an interpersonal level in *The God of Small Things* as well: "However, in *The God of Small Things*, beside Velutha, Roy has also dealt with some other subalterns who are dominated by society in different respects. […] Papachi & Chacko are subalterns in terms of colonialism."[54] Sobia Ilyas even argues that the forbidden relationship between Ammu and Velutha comes about as a result of (post)colonial power dynamics

[50] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 28.
[51] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 142, 166.
[52] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 137.
[53] Shubhashis Saha, "'Subalternism' in The God of Small Things: An Appraisal," *Journal of ELT and Education* 1, no. 1 (2018): 84.
[54] Saha, "'Subalterism' in The God of Small Things," 91.

flattening the pre-existing power dynamics in India. She writes, "[t]heir newly acquired freedom [from the British empire] is essentially related to the blurring of social boundaries and the creation of new identities: Ammu is therefore, no longer the superior elite and Velutha, a loathsome Paravan."[55] The birth of this countercultural relationship, one between an elite woman and an untouchable man, that lies at the heart of *The God of Small Things* is, therefore, predicated on the flattening effect that colonialism had on India's caste system. Despite a stable and healthy life relative to many other Ayemenemi families, many members of the Yakko family still either desire for or desperately cling to colonial power structures.

For a country that is so far removed from India from a geographical point of view, the United Kingdom has an incredibly strong presence in *The God of Small Things*. Its characters never travel to England and the British empire has long since abandoned India at the time the novel takes place, but a sense of unworthiness and subjugation in the shadow of the British empire still lingers. If the United Kingdom is the titanic mountain whose shadow is cast by an absence of sunlight, then India in *The God of Small Things* is the cold, barren land at its feet. In presenting India to its readers, *The God of Small Things* chooses to emphasise the India that international readers are likely to already be familiar with: one that is poor, filthy, crowded, and captured by deeply backward social norms. The very first page of the novel puts in a lot of work to establish a recognisable India: it is blisteringly hot, even in May; fruits and vines grow in close proximity to poorly built houses and abundant electrical poles; and a small, destitute village is situated alongside a flowing river.[56] The average British reader could set this scene all by themselves, albeit in less meritorious prose. The view through which India is presented in *The God of Small Things* hews closely to what M. S. Veena and P. V. Ramanathan called

[55] Sobia Ilyas, "The Subaltern Voice in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things: A Postcolonial Approach," *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Sciences* (2019): 1925.
[56] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 1.

"New Orientalism": a manner of portraying nations of the Orient in a way which is genuine to the lived experience of its people while still adhering to the existing tenets of Orientalism.[57] After all, is it Orientalism if it is true to life? Veena and Ramanathan, citing Edward Said, argue that it is.[58] It is not the mere presence of poverty and social arch-conservatism in *The God of Small Things* that makes it a New Orientalist text, but rather the fact that it chooses to zoom in primarily on those details of Indian life that conform to Western stereotypes of India as a whole. One perspicuous example of this is the way in which the character Murlidharan is portrayed. Murlidharan is an aging, partially naked homeless man who is interminably seated on a millstone by a busy intersection. He is described as a "lunatic" but is also seen to be deeply serene and introverted.[59] Introduced as an aside while the Yakko family is on their way to the theatre, Murlidharan bears no strong relevance to the plot—he does not speak and none of the primary characters interact with him. Despite this, the novel devotes an ample number of pages to descriptions of his poor hygiene, lack of clothing, tragic life story, and his sage-like patience and concentration. Murlidharan is a perfect encapsulation of the wise beggar character that is endemic to the Indian stereotype. K. K. Guar described Murlidharan as being but one part of the "heart of darkness" atmosphere—a sense of remoteness and primitiveness despite the near-urban setting of the novel—that permeates throughout *The God of Small Things*.[60] It is not merely the people of Kerala who are afflicted with poverty and defilement, after all. *The God of Small Things* also goes to great lengths to detail the state of defilement and decay in India, often to the detriment of outsiders rather than the Indians themselves. When a group of expats return to India by airplane after having lived abroad for years, they are appalled by the state of the country they ought to be very familiar with: "And the airport itself! […] The birdshit on the

[57] Veena & Ramanathan, "New Orientalism in Literature," 3.
[58] Veena & Ramanathan, "New Orientalism in Literature," 7.
[59] Roy, *The God of Small Things,* 62.
[60] K. K. Guar, "The Symbolism of 'Heart of Darkness' in The God of Small Things," in *New Light on Indian Women Novelists*, ed. A. N. Prasad (Derby: Sarup & Sons, 2004), 201.

building! Oh the spitstains on the kangaroos! Oho! Going to the dogs India is!"[61] Every hygienic shortcoming of Kerala is laid out in painful detail in this passage, from the lack of proper plumbing and dental care to dirty clothes.[62] In the eyes of many characters, being out of one's own home means being exposed to filth, and the only way to shield oneself from putrescence is to touch as little as possible. Ammu, in particular, makes hay about keeping her family "CLEAN" while everything around her is "DIRTY".[63] During a later scene that primarily takes place inside a train car, some paragraphs are set aside to describe the train station as Ammu and Estha pass through it. There is a "lumpy pool" of vomit on the floor, there are vendors selling broken and defective items and lepers with all sorts of horrific, ailing conditions, all surrounded by an air that is "thick with flies."[64] As was the case with Murlidharan, the attention that is paid to the grungy details of the train station is almost entirely incidental. Two homeless men even carry out a conversation out of earshot of the Ammu, the focaliser for this scene. This extensive description of the state of the train station serves primarily to enumerate how far Ammu has fallen in terms of her comfort of living after falling out with the rest of the family. As Michelle Giles notes, decay appears to be the natural state of life in India in *The God of Small Things*, and only those who are connected to foreign wealth and cleanliness can stave off the encroaching gothic.[65] It is no surprise, then, that the death of Chacko's English daughter sets the deterioration of the Yakko in motion.

K. K. Guar's aforementioned "heart of darkness" refers not just to squalor, but also to the social divisions and inequalities that are emphasised in Roy's version of India.[66] Another small plot point that is given notable weight in the novel is the nature of *locus standi* in India

[61] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 140.
[62] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 140-141.
[63] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 149.
[64] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 301.
[65] M. Giles, "Postcolonial Gothic and The God of Small Things: The Haunting of India's Past," *Postcolonial Text* 6, no. 1: 8.
[66] K. K. Guar, "The Symbolism of 'Heart of Darkness' in The God of Small Things," 195.

in the late 1960s. *Locus standi*, which is persistently mislabelled as "Locusts Stand I" in the novel to humorous effect, refers to someone's plain right (or lack thereof) to petition a court of law and stand before a judge. Because women do not have *locus standi* in India during the events of *The God of Small Things*, the women of the Yakko family have no power to stop Chacko from seizing control of the Paradise Pickles & Preserves factory.[67] Despite the legal doctrine's obvious Latinate name, this injustice is presented by the narrator as being a product of the Indian "male chauvinist society".[68] While Chacko's legal ownership of the factory is not frequently discussed in the novel, "Locusts Stand I" is routinely mentioned whenever the subjugation of women comes to the forefront. Dreadful as it may be, one has to keep in mind that, even in the ostensibly progressive West, women were not allowed to take out a credit card in their own name in the United States and were denied seats in the British House of Lords in the time period the bulk of *The God of Small Things* takes place in. This condemnation of Indian patriarchy, valid as it may be, is not quite as uniquely damning of Indian social norms as the novel makes it out to be. The caste system receives a very similar treatment in the novel, albeit through far greater prominence. While the indignation the novel espouses towards the caste system is certainly forward-thinking, it is pertinent to note that the Indian caste system is among the most well-known and visible elements of historical Indian society to Western readers. For this reason, the tale of forbidden love being so central to the novel makes for a story that adheres to the very limited understanding of India that many British readers are likely to have. Despite existing within the caste framework and its many complexities, the story of Ammu and Velutha's love across social boundaries is no more difficult to grasp than that of *Romeo & Juliet*. Having a front-row seat to such a tragic, plausible love story—one that ends in brutal violence and death—might feel voyeuristic to some foreign readers, akin to a scene

[67] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 57.
[68] Ibid.

of a drawn-out and vicious beating of a black slave in a modern American western film. Anis Shivani describes this simplified presentation of complex foreign injustices as "Oriental strangeness" for the "imperial or tourist gaze".[69] While the notion of the caste system may be foreign to a British reader in the literal sense, it is balanced in such a way that it remains both foreign enough to be interesting, but simple enough to be easily understandable. Any detail on the caste system more intricate than its basic framework is explained in detail, such as the strict rules the untouchables must abide by: "As a young boy, Velutha would come with Vellya Paapen to the back entrance of the Ayemenem House to deliver the coconuts they had plucked from the trees in the compound. Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would."[70] *The God of Small Things* being so stringently dedicated to keeping even the most uninformed reader fully emerged in the caste system makes the novel feel like a sort of peephole into a remote culture, rather than a text written for an audience with a shared understanding of said system. As a result, *The God of Small Things* reads less like a furious tract against the indignities of the caste system and more like a condemnation for one's country's oppressive history aimed at an outside reader.

The somewhat stereotypical view of India that is presented in *The God of Small Things* might not even be its most visible overture to British readers. In reading the novel, one cannot help but notice that Indian art and culture is presented in a manner that is completely different from the way in which its British and American counterparts are presented. To be more specific, Indian art and culture are consistently contextualised or even explained in great detail when it is brought to the forefront in *The God of Small Things*. British and American culture, meanwhile, take the stage in a way which exemplifies that the novel expects the reader to enter

[69] A. Shivani, "Indo-Anglican Fiction: The New Orientalism," *Race & Class* 47, no. 4 (2006): 15.
[70] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 73.

the experience with some degree of familiarity with the art and culture in question. While numerous scholars have analysed the nature of postcolonialism and Orientalism in *The God of Small Things*, this element of the novel has gone mostly unexplored despite being such a noteworthy overture to British and other Western readers. In her 2007 doctoral dissertation, Elizabeth Taryn Mason notes that "Roy metaphorically dwarfs local media by overloading [*The God of Small Things*] with references to Western media"; allusions to Indian culture are present as well, but they are nowhere near as omnipresent within the novel as Western culture is.[71] She also makes note of the colossal satellite dish attached to the Yakko family's home, appraising it as a symbol of the power contemporary Western culture has over many Indian families.[72] It appears that there is no other published scholarly material analysing the presentational dichotomy between Western and Indian culture in *The God of Small Things*, but Edward Said's *Orientalism* can still provide a framework through which such matter can be analysed. This seminal work was meant to "[propose] itself as a step towards an understanding not so much of Western politics and of the non-Western world in those politics as of the strength of Western cultural discourse, a strength too often mistaken as merely decorative or 'superstructural.'"[73] Citing Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico, Said makes note of the belief that all of the world's cultures are in some way coherent—Vico used the term "the world of nations" to describe this theory—but that the strength of individual cultural forces within this superculture heavily affect how the interaction between them plays out.[74] In *The God of Small Things*, Western culture is greatly galvanised within the presented superculture not just through its omnipresence, but through the pre-existing familiarity that the text assumes the reader to have.

[71] Elizabeth Taryn Sirkin, "Popular Images and Cosmopolitan Mediation: Mass Media and Western Pop Culture in the Anglophone South Asian Novel" (doctoral dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 2007), 108-109.
[72] Sirkin, "Popular Images in Cosmopolitan Mediation," 113.
[73] Said, *Orientalism*, 24.
[74] Said, *Orientalism*, 25; 118.

The intertextual use of cartoon character *Popeye the Sailor Man*—in particular, his animated incarnation—is perhaps the most distinct example one could point to in attempting to explain the extent to which *The God of Small Things* expects the reader to be well-versed in English pop culture. When the Yakko family arrives at a film theatre on their journey to pick Sophie and Margarat up at the airport, the ever-energetic Rahel begins to stomp rhythmically up a flight of stairs, taking two steps for every one step her family members take. The narrator presents the rhythm of this stomping in the form of a parody of the *Popeye the Sailor Man* theme song. This parody is typeset in the form of a block quote with special emphasis placed on certain beats:

> *I'm Popeye the sailor man* dum dum
> *I live in a cara-van* dum dum
> *I op-en the door*
> *And Fall-on the floor*
>
> *I'm Popeye the sailor man* dum dum[75] [76]

The "dum dum"s indicate two orchestra hits or double bass notes (depending on the rendition) which follow the lyrics in a call-and-response manner. Within the text, these "dum dum"s are meant to show the reader at what tempo Rahel is stomping up and down the stairs. Playful as this instance of intertextuality may be, one cannot deny that it asks a lot of the reader in terms of cultural knowledge. Not only does the reader have to be familiar with *Popeye the Sailor Man*, they also have to recognise an edited version of the series' theme song and be familiar

[75] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 98.
[76] The original typesetting has been retained for the sake of example.

with its rhythm. The above passage would most likely seem gratuitous or nonsensical to a reader unfamiliar with *Popeye the Sailor Man*, which puts its presence in such stark contrast compared to the way Indian art and culture is presented in the novel. *Popeye the Sailor Man* is put forth as an endemic cultural icon to the point that he requires no introduction and can be used as a vessel for the reader to visualise the rhythm of Rahel's movements.

Similar expectations are made of the reader when it comes to the 1965 film adaptation of the stage musical *The Sound of Music*. In discussing what film the family wants to see at the theatre, Chacko initially argues against going to see *The Sound of Music*, considering such an act to be "an extended exercise in Anglophilia."[77] Ammu then rebukes Chacko by saying that "the whole world goes to see *The Sound of Music*. It's a World Hit."[78] The position that Western culture holds within Vico's notion of the world of nations is neatly encapsulated in this brief snippet of dialogue: people are well aware of the fact that Western culture plays a dominant role even in the Global South, but they choose to participate in it so that they can belong to the cultural hegemony. This may also explain why Western media is so frequently presented without introduction in this Indian novel: the Western cultural empire is so powerful that it simply does not need an introduction, no matter who the reader is. Even so, the way in which *The Sound of Music* as a text is used in *The God of Small Things* is striking. When the film starts, the narrator describes the opening scene as follows: [t]he camera soared up in the skyblue (car-coloured) Austrian sky with the clear, sad sound of church bells."[79] This introduction to the film reads less like a detailed description for the sake of the unfamiliar and more like a brief recollection of the scene to spark the reader's memory. The rest of the paragraph detailing the opening shots of *The Sound of Music* puts little effort into painting a vivid picture of the scene in question, choosing instead to make note of how different *The Sound of Music* is compared

[77] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 55.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 99.

to Bollywood cinema: the women in *The Sound of Music* have shaved legs and do not wear breast padding. The first song in the film, "The Hills Are Alive with the Sound of Music", is similarly introduced without any informational content on its context within the film. Instead, Estha begins to sing along to the song, and the lyrics are provided to the reader in the form of intermittent block quotes. Such a direct recitation is never granted to Indian music in *The God of Small Things*, and it is representative of the assumption on the part of the novel that the reader is already familiar with the material. Where the events of *The Sound of Music* are recollected in detail, it is done to assist the twins in understanding the film. Rahel and Estha bombard their mother with questions, and while she does answer them by providing plot details about the film, these details come in the form of simplifications aimed at children: "(a) *Did Baron von Clapp-Trapp shiver his leg?* / He did not."[80] Baron/Captain von Clapp-Trapp (the novel's playful name for the character Captain von Trapp), is even introduced in a way which expects familiarity with the scene order of *The Sound of Music.* "And there was Captain von Clapp-Trapp. Christopher Plummer", the narrator states when Estha re-enters the theatre after purchasing a beverage.[81] The narrator provides some information on the set-dressing of the relevant scene, implying that they expect the reader to be able to identify what scene Estha is faced with when he returns to his seat through the provision of minimal details. *The Sound of Music* is endemic to the entire chapter set in the Abhilash Talkies theatre, yet the details about the film that the reader is made privy to are sparse. It is, after all, a "World Hit", a Western cultural icon, and because of this it can be referenced in the most minute ways without confusing the implied reader of the novel.

It is striking just how much more work *The God of Small Things* puts into contextualising any given instance of intertextuality when it concerns an example of Indian art

[80] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 106.
[81] Roy, *The God of Small Things,* 105.

of culture. Take the presence of Kathakali, for example. Kathakali is a form of classical Indian dance theatre native to the state of Kerala and mostly performed in the Malayalam language. In the preface to his book on the art of Kathakali, Phillip Zarrilli describes Kathakali as "a distinctive genre of South Asian performance which developed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Malayalam speaking coastal region of south-west India known today as Kerala State."[82] He also notes that, by the turn of the millennium, Kathakali had earned some degree of international renown through cultural dissemination and performances in Kerala staged specifically for tourists.[83] Despite this, *The God of Small Things* presents Kathakali as if it is a concept which ought to be entirely foreign to the reader. Whereas Western cultural mainstays like *Popeye the Sailor Man* and *The Sound of Music* are introduced without any pomp or circumstance, Kathakali is introduced to readers through a lengthy primer: multiple pages detailing the generic elements of the artform, as well as a lengthy summary of the particular Kathakali performance that Rahel goes to watch. Mundane details about Kathakali, such as the fact that all parts are played by men, are introduced to reader by way of exuberant prose: "[t]hen Kunti appeared. She too was a man, but a man grown soft and womanly, a man with breasts, from doing female parts for years."[84] Similar details about Kathakali, like the matter of their multi-hour play length and the history of their shortening for tourist performances, are extolled in this style as well.[85] In an interesting stylistic choice, the plot of the performance, which is an adaptation of the Hindu epic *Mahābhārata*, is not so much summarised as it is presented as a short story full of artistic flourishes, and this telling of the story of *Mahābhārata* takes up the vast majority of the chapter.[86] If Zarrilli's characterisation of the popularity of Kathakali is correct, this approach to incorporating Kathakali into *The God*

[82] Phillip B. Zarrilli, "Preface," in *Kathakali Dance-Drama: Where Gods and Demons Come to Play* (London: Routledge, 2007), xi.
[83] Zarrilli, "Preface," xii.
[84] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 232.
[85] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 228-229.
[86] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 230-235.

of Small Things might seem very strange to a Keralan reader. To compare, imagine a French novel introducing the concept of opera by explaining the meaning of the phrase "it ain't over 'till the fat lady sings" before providing a detailed retelling of *La bohème.* The reader would rightfully be puzzled.

This is not an exhaustive breakdown of the use of Western and Indian art and media in *The God of Small Things*, but it is illustrative of just how differently the two bodies of work are used. Western literature, from *Moby Dick* to *The Jungle Book*, is featured heavily in *The God of Small Things*, and it is usually brought up in passing. Indian literature and cinema, by contrast, play a much smaller role in the text, and they are almost always accompanied by a synopsis at the very least. The result is a novel that is set in India and written by an Indian author yet seems mostly designed to be read and enjoyed by English readers.

Many critics and observers have made a point of the fact that *The God of Small Things* paints an overly simplified, stereotype-affirming picture of India and the dynamics of Indian society, a stance which this chapter has, so far, concurred with. Were this thesis to conclude its discussion of *The God of Small Things* here, one could easily take away from this text that the novel perfectly encapsulates those traits which others have observed to be so common in Commonwealth Booker Prize winners: overly simplified, or even stereotypical, portrayals of the subject country; very direct attempts to grapple with the aftermath of British colonialism; and a lack of distinct regionalism, which makes the novel accessible to readers even if they are entirely unfamiliar with the subject country's geography and history. Much of these observations are, indeed, true of *The God of Small Things*, but to claim that the novel is completely bereft of more specific Indian historical and cultural depth would be doing it a disservice. One example of the way in which *The God of Small Things* engages in degrees of regional specificity is in its handling of communist protests and political movements. As

mentioned in the plot summary at the start of this chapter, *The God of Small Things* prominently features a communist party march through the streets of Kerela, which also serves as the inciting incident for Ammu's affair with Velutha. A minor role in the novel is also reserved for a communist party candidate by the name of K. N. M. Pillai, who is agitating for a labour union at Paradise Pickles & Preserves and hopes to win in assembly seat in the next Kottayam city elections.[87] Chacko is a close acquaintance of Pillai's, and while he is no card-carrying communist himself, he claims to be sympathetic to the labour movement at the Paradise Pickles & Preserves.[88]

When the novel was first published, *The God of Small Things* was quite harshly criticised for its portrayal of communism and communist hopefuls. As Pranav Jani lays out in his analysis of the progressive aspects of the novel, many communist and leftist commentators in India considered the novel to be an anti-communist polemic that reinforced the capitalist preferences of the Western-dominated global publishing market.[89] In reading *The God of Small Things*, one can imagine how commentators came to this conclusion. Pillai, the novel's most prominent communist character, is consistently portrayed as an opportunist who is using his communist platform largely for the purpose of attaining political power.[90] The communist march through the streets of Kottayam is not explicitly denounced by the narration or any of the characters, but the open humiliation Baby Kochamma suffers at the hands of the protestors does cast a grim shadow over the event as a whole, one that lingers for the entirety of the narrative. Additionally, real-life communist and former Chief Minister of Kerala, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, is an associate of Pillai's in the novel.[91] Notably, the real E. M. S.

[87] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 13-14.
[88] Roy, *The God of Small Things,* 64-65.
[89] Pranav Jani, "Beyond 'Anticommunism': The Progressive Politics of The God of Small Things," In *Globalizing Dissent: Essays on Arundhati Roy* ed. Ranjan Gosh & Antonia Navarro-Tejero (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2009), 47.
[90] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 120, 280.
[91] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 67-68.

Namboodiripad was among the fiercest critics of *The God of Small Things*, calling it a work of bourgeois decadence and a blatant attempt to smear the Communist Party of India.[92] However, as Jani notes, *The God of Small Things* remains incredibly nuanced in its portrayal of communist movements in India. He writes that "whatever else may be said of the novel's representation of the [Communist Party of India], its criticism emerges from a leftist perspective, which argues that Indian communism counterposes class to caste and disregards the long oppression of Dalits."[93] For the purposes of this thesis, Roy's stance on communist politics in India is not entirely relevant, but it is important to note that *The God of Small Things* presents communism and communist parties in a way that is unmistakably Keralan and gives the novel a highly specific sense of place. As has already been mentioned, real-life Keralan politician E. M. S. Namboodiripad plays a small role in the novel. His appearance is no mere cameo, however, as the history of his two terms as Chief Minister of Kerela, once as a staunch radical and once as a more moderate progressive, is presented in an aside that is by no means brief.[94] It is no wonder that Namboodiripad was so critical of the novel, since it presents such a frank portrayal of his political downfall. It should also be noted that a story revolving around a communist march could not simply be set anywhere in India. Historically, Kerala has been more strongly associated with communism than any other Indian state. It is the only state in India which has elected Chief Ministers from both the Communist Party of India and its more explicitly Marxist offshoot, the CPI(M), and the CPI(M) is still the dominant party in the state to this day.[95] Smaller communist movements, such as the Naxalites, are named and introduced only in the briefest sense, asking the reader to either be familiar with them already or go along with the story without fully understanding the real-life factors at play.

[92] Jani, "Beyond 'Anticommunism': The Progressive Politics of The God of Small Things," 47.
[93] Jani, "Beyond 'Anticommunism': The Progressive Politics of The God of Small Things," 60.
[94] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 67-69.
[95] "List of Chief Ministers of Kerala & Their Tenure Periods," *OneIndia* (online), accessed September 14, 2023, https://www.oneindia.com/list-of-chief-ministers-of-kerala/.

It should be noted that the historical picture that *The God of Small Things* paints is not entirely accurate. As K. R. S. Mani and M. V. S. Kotesware Rao have pointed out, the timeline of the massive communist march through Kottayam does not line up with the real-world era of deep political unrest in Kerala that would have allowed for a march of that scale to take place.[96] They are of the opinion that *The God of Small Things* represents a more personal, experiential version on Kerala in the 1960s, likening it to *Midnight's Children*'s middle ground between history and fantasy.[97] Even so, as Mani and Kotesware Rao also say, the novel is a Keralite story through and through.[98] While it may be critical of communism and communist actors, the story remains sympathetic, non-hostile, and (most notably) unperturbed by the presence and concept of communism. In presenting communism on the home front in such a frank and detailed manner, *The God of Small Things* establishes itself as a novel that was unmistakably written by a Keralite author.

Another authorial decision which undermines the argument that *The God of Small Things* of is an Indian novel written primarily for English readers is the manner in which the novel goes about using terminology and phrases that are not native to the English language in the United Kingdom, but that are instead highly specific to India or even the region of Kerala. As Sangeeta Mukherjee argues, *The God of Small Things* engages in a form of "literary multilingualism", the use of multiple different languages within a text in such a way that the two languages are synthesised to a certain extent, creating a "cross-cultural or experimental" text in the process.[99] *The God of Small Things* does this through its use of vernacular, song, religious verses,

[96] K. R. S. Mani, and M. V. S. Kotesware Rao, "Fiction and Political Representation in The God of Small Things," in *Indian Women Novelists in English*, ed Dipak Giri (Latur: Vishwabharati Research Centre, 2018), 172.
[97] Mani and Rao, "Fiction and Political Representation in The God of Small Things," 175.
[98] Mani and Rao, "Fiction and Political Representation in The God of Small Things," 170.
[99] Sangeeta Mukherjee, "Sustenance of Native Culture in Multilingual Written Texts: A Case Study of The God of Small Things and The Hungry Tide," *Media Watch* 8, no 3 (2017): 378.

proverbs, and even snippets of conversations, all of which are presented in untranslated Malayalam. Malayalam is one of India's 22 scheduled languages, and it is spoken by over 96 percent of all Keralites—a percentage which exceeds even the dissemination of Hindi within any individual Indian state.[100] In Mukherjee's view, *The God of Small Things* manages to breathe life into a very specific, regional Indian culture through its use of language: "[t]he authors have successfully used these procedures as a means to encapsulate the Indian culture and sensibility and sustain it in their texts.[101] Indeed, the use of Malayalam words and phrases places *The God of Small Things* into a particular cultural context, one that would be foreign and perhaps even alienating to a majority of British readers. One clear example of this is the use of the word *mol* (girl/daughter) in the novel. Chacko's niece, Sophie, is unerringly referred to as "Sophie Mol" by the narrator and characters alike. From her very introduction, Sophie and *mol* are inseparable: "The government never paid for Sophie Mol's funeral […]."[102] The use of capitalisation is worth noting in and of itself; one could easily mistake "Mol" as Sophie's surname before the family dynamics are spelled out. The novel makes no attempt to explain this term, which points to the fact that *The God of Small Things* is not ready-made for British readers with no knowledge of Malayalam. Similar gendered and familial phrases, such as *chachen* (father), *ammaven* (uncle), *appoi* (father), and *ammoi* (mother), are used in the novel as well, all left for the reader to understand through context clues alone.[103] The same is true for the regular use of Malayalam phrases throughout the novel. Stretching far beyond familiar terms such as *namaste*, *The God of Small Things* allows characters to speak in brief Malayalam phrases quite frequently. During an argument, Velutha at one point exclaims, "*[a]iyyo kashtam!"* (What a pity!), as an ironic reproachment.[104] Similar small Malayalam phrases are

[100] "Indian Languages," *India, Ministry of Education* (online), accessed September 29, 2023. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/languagebr.pdf.
[101] Mukherjee, "Sustenance of Native Culture in Multilingual Written Texts," 385.
[102] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 4.
[103] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 37, 182,
[104] Roy, *The God of Small Things,* 172.

dotted throughout the novel, often in a way that makes them inscrutable to monolingual English readers, even within the proper context. Regional cultural objects and concepts, such as the *koojah* (a water jar) and *kanji* (rice soup) are also named in untranslated Malayalam.[105] Their presence is particularly interesting, since a British reader without any knowledge of Keralan culture might be unfamiliar with these concepts regardless of the language they are presented in. Returning to the crux of Mukherjee's article, the use of Keralan songs should also not go unmentioned. While their cultural context is often explained in detail for the reader's benefit, Mukherjee argues that the presence of these songs lends a very specific regional character to the novel: "though the language used in the narrative is English, the native culture is sustained through the use of native song."[106] Songs and verses, such as the song film the Malayalam film *Chemeem* that Mukherjee is referring to above, are presented unredacted in their original language, though it should be noted that English translations are provided in parentheses in most of these cases.

Indeed, the case for the presence of literary multilingualism in *The God of Small Things* should not be overstated. While the novel undoubtably blends British English, Indian English, and Malayalam in a freeform, naturalistic manner, it is equally clear that Malayalam is used in such a way as to make it subservient to English as a communicative tool. Malayalam is never present on the pages of *The God of Small Things* in phrases longer than a few words, and even then these are often mere exclamations. "*Chacko Saar vannu"* (Mr. Chacko has arrived) is among the longest Malayalam phrases in the novel, coming in at a mere three words.[107] While entire conversations are held in Malayalam, the reader is made privy to these conversations; their use of Malayalam is noted by the narrator, but the contents of these conversations are always provided in English. In the most noteworthy example of this obfuscated use of

[105] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 208, 210.
[106] Mukherjee, "Sustenance of Native Culture in Multilingual Written Texts," 383.
[107] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 171.

Malayalam, Chacko and Pillai explicitly switch to the use of Malayalam to signal a sense of in-group trust and exclusivity: "Comrade Pillai switched to Malayalam and a confiding, conspiratorial voice. 'I'm speaking as a friend, *keto*. Off the record.'"[108] The use of italicisation in this phrase, as well as many others, is worth noting, too. While Malayalam words which make frequent appearances in the novel, such as *mol*, are presented as plain text, incidental use of Malayalam is frequently presented in italics. The fact that even standalone words like *kushumbi* (jealous woman) are italicised indicates that a complete fusion of Indian English and Malayalam is not present in *The God of Small Things*.[109] While a working knowledge of Malayalam may allow a reader to process certain passages more quickly, modern English is ultimately the only language one needs to be able to understand *The God of Small Things* in full. To wit, no notable changes were made to the text in preparing it for publication in the United Kingdom compared to the original manuscript, and the versions published in the United Kingdom and India are virtually identical. *The God of Small Things* was made to be a fully accessible text for English readers from the word go.[110]

In his article on post-Imperial British literature and the Booker Prize, Chris Holmes says that *The God of Small Things* is a story about Rahel and Esta "confront[ing] their status in a postcolonial India still grappling with its perceived indebtedness to English culture."[111] Holmes characterises this as a break from prior Booker Prize-winning novels about India, such as 1973's *The Siege of Krishnapur*, which indulge in wilful nostalgia for the Raj and British imperial control over India in general. While it is true that *The God of Small Things* is far more conflicted about the lingering legacy of colonialism in India than many of its Booke Prize-

[108] Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 277.
[109] Roy, *The God of Small Things*,
[110] Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, (New Delhi: IndiaInk, 1997).
[111] C. Holmes, "The Booker Prize and Post-Imperial British Literature," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* (2021): 14.

winning predecessors, this does not mean that the novel eschews colonial and orientalist narratives entirely. The Yakko family, despite the fact that they live far away from any and all metropolitan cities, are anglophiles well-versed In British and American culture, and they hold English-language education and romantic partners in extremely high regard. The novel itself also permits a high degree of privilege to English culture and media, presenting mainstays like *The Sound of Music* and *Popeye the Sailor Man* intertextually in a way that assumes familiarity on the part of the reader, a sense of self-evidence that is not afforded to Indian and Keralan culture. *The God of Small Things* also makes no bones about portraying a stereotypically filthy and backwards version of India, one that often lacks the nuance necessary to make this portrayal palatable. All of these narrative and stylistic choices result in a novel that, while highly critical of (post)colonial attitudes about India, is highly approachable, relevant, and familiar to British readers. As was explained in the introduction, these characteristics—the presence of the postcolonial spectre and a willing indulgence in familiar stereotypes—perfectly align with Huggan's definition of the postcolonial exotic. While the novel does create some difficulties for the international reader through its unapologetic use of Malayalam vocabulary and a highly particularised Keralan backdrop that might leave non-Indian readers somewhat lost, these difficulties are ultimately not consequential enough for *The God of Small Things* to mystify readers from around the world.

As was mentioned in the introduction, it is not the purpose of this thesis to ascribe intent to the writers of the novels that are analysed herein. A Booker Prize-winning novel from a Commonwealth author may come in the form of a highly digestible postcolonial text, but that does not mean the author wrote it as a cynical ploy for fame and fortune. What makes *The God of Small Things* notable for the purposes of this thesis is not its intent, but the fact that it is a postcolonial exotic novel that was consecrated by British readers and Booker Prize judges. Many English-language Indian novels came out in 1997, and many of them were less

preoccupied with the history of colonialism in India or presented a more nuanced, unfamiliar image of India. However, those novels did not receive the Man Booker Prize, and their writers were not on the receiving end of 1.6 million dollars in advances from publishers, like Arundhati Roy was.[112] According to readers, publishers, and literary prize judges alike, *The God of Small Things*, in all its postcolonial exoticism, was the kind of Indian novel worth reading.

[112] Kenneth J. Cooper, "For India, No Small Thing," in The *Washington Post*, October 20, 1997, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1997/10/20/for-india-no-small-thing/55341440-88e5-41e5-aaed-c9de9f6cb891/.

Chapter 2: *The Inheritance of Loss* – Myself, Elsewhere

After Arundhati Roy received the Booker Prize for *The God of Small Things* in 1997, India would have to wait nearly a full decade for another one of its denizens to receive the same honour. The aforementioned British Booker Prize-winners of Indian descent, Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul, earned themselves a spot on the longlist in 2001 and 2005, respectively. Indian-born authors Manil Suri and Rohinton Mistry were, respectively, longlisted in 2001 and shortlisted in 2002. Anita Desai is the only Indian citizen who the Booker Prize jury gave the nod to between 1997 and 2006, as she was shortlisted for her novel *Fasting, Feasting* in 1999. Interestingly enough, it would be Anita Desai's daughter, Kiran Desai, who would bring Booker Prize gold to the Republic of India once again with her 2006 novel *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Bouncing back and forth between the Bengali city of Kalimpong and various boroughs of New York City, *The Inheritance of Loss* tells the story of its protagonists, Sai and Biju. Sai is the granddaughter of the retired judge Jemubhai, and she lives with him in the mountains of Kalimpong along with the Judge's unnamed cook, who is also Biju's father.[113] Early on, they are robbed at gunpoint by members of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), a revolutionary movement which is agitating for the creation of an independent state within India for Nepali-speaking Indians. Many of their possessions are taken, including two antique firearms.

Sai is engaged in a blooming romance with her tutor, a well-educated young man named Gyan. Gyan, an Indian Nepalis himself, initially appears quite timid, but he grows increasingly agitated by Sai's spoiled behaviour as he becomes more involved with the GNLF. Tensions come to a head when Sai visits Gyan at his house, which turns out to be much more run down

[113] With the exception of flashbacks to his youth and adolescence, Jemubhai is consistently referred to as "the judge" in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Similarly, Biju's father is only ever referred to using the epithet "the cook". For the sake of clarity, they will be referred to exclusively as "the Judge" and "the Cook", respectively, throughout this thesis.

than she expected, and Gyan assaults her during the ensuing argument. Rising tensions between the GNLF and the local municipality eventually result in a violent protest which is met with gunfire from the police. An all-out conflict ensues, and by the end of the novel the Gorkhaland movement has managed to install a heavily militarised guerilla government in Kalimpong.

Biju, who lives in New York as an illegal immigrant, is struggling to hold down employment in the restaurant industry. He routinely gets fired because of his perceived poor personal hygiene and spends most of the novel living in dingy basements shared with other immigrants. He strikes up a friendship with Zimbabwean immigrant Saeed Saeed, though Biju ends up resenting him for being able to integrate into American society better than he himself can. Biju ends up finding stable employment at a restaurant named "Gandhi" which primarily serves Indian food, though the terms of his employment are closer to indentured servitude than proper paid labour. When Biju slips and injures himself while on the job, his boss ends up taking pity on him and pays for a ticket back to India, which Biju is desperate to return to by this point. Biju encounters numerous roadblocks on his journey home, including being kidnapped and stripped of all his possessions by a group of GNLF grunts, but he still manages to arrive at the Judge's house in Darjeeling in the end. The novel ends on Biju and the Cook's tearful reunion.

Interspersed between the twin main narratives are the Judge's recollections of his personal and professional life. His lower-class family poured all the money they had into his legal education in the United Kingdom, which he parlayed into a position with the ICS solely because the British Empire wanted to expand the percentage of Indian judges on the bench. The Judge's marriage to an unattractive woman from a higher caste, whom he is both physically and mentally abusive towards, comes to an end after he grows so resentful of her that he fears he will beat her to death. The Judge grows more and more isolated and bitter in his loveless

years as a lowly travelling judge. He eventually retires and moves to the Cho Oyu mountainside, where Sai moves in with him years later.

Despite its focus on a bloody revolutionary movement that is still a controversial topic to this day, *The Inheritance of Loss* was almost universally positively received in both the Indian press and abroad. Natasha Walter of *The Guardian* called it an "impressive" and "ambitious" novel, and Sarah Hughes of *The Observer* positively compared Desai's work to those of V. S. Naipaul.[114] *Indo-Asian News Service* published that the novel "soars" over its competition and Desai's own debut novel, and Nilanjana Roy wrote in *India Today* that *The Inheritance of Loss* was the perfect culmination of Desai's talents.[115]

Many commentators said Desai's victory was well deserved, even if it came as somewhat of a surprise. John Ezard of *The Guardian* noted that Desai quite literally "beat the odds", as betting organisations had given her a mere one-in-five chance of winning the prize.[116] Katrina Strickland of the *Australian Financial Review* reported that the "long shot" victory of *The Inheritance of Loss* sent the novel's Australian publisher into a frenzy to print new copies to match the unexpected number of new orders.[117]

Commentators were also quick to note that *The Inheritance of Loss* is awash with postcolonial themes. Hermoine Lee, chairman of the judges for the 2006 Booker Prize, noted that Desai, like her mother before her, "write[s] not just about India but about Indian communities in the world."[118] She also said that Desai was "aware of her Anglo-Indian inheritance of Naipaul, Narayan and Rushdie", explicitly placing her within the pantheon of

[114] Natasha Walter, "Mutt and the maths tutor: Natasha Walter greets an impressive novel that has caught the attention of the Booker judges," *The Guardian*, August 26, 2006; Sarah Hughes, "Uncle Potty and other guides to truth," *The Observer*, September 3, 2006.
[115] "Kiran Desai novel chronicles modern immigrant angst," *Indo-Asian News Service*, February 6, 2006; Nilanjana S. Roy, "Mists Of Kalimpong," *India Today*, January 30, 2006.
[116] John Ezard, "First-timer beats the odds to take Booker prize that eluded her mother," *The Guardian* (online), 11 October, 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/oct/11/books.bookerprize2006.
[117] Katrina Strickland, "Long shot wins the Booker Prize," *Australian Financial Review*, October 12, 2006.
[118] "Kiran Desai is youngest woman winner of Booker Prize," *Indo-Asian News Service*, October 11, 2006.

postcolonial authors of Indian descent.[119] David Sexton of *The Evening Standard* introduced his coverage of the 2006 Booker Prize by calling *The Inheritance of Loss* a "classic postcolonial novel", and *The Sunday Times* used Desai's Booker victory to note that the Booker Prize apparatus has a "seeming obsession with post-colonial novels".[120] Especially notable is Desai's own view on the expectations that were placed on the novel. In an interview with *St. John's Telegram*, she said the following: "publishers desire a certain kind of book because we all desire certain images of different countries. In India, we want certain pictures of Switzerland – we want cows and the hills to look a certain way. In English literature, you want daffodils and the vicar on his bicycle."[121] Even in the early days after publishing her novel, Desai was already aware of the very strict genre conventions and aesthetic elements that novels by Indian authors—and other authors that could be considered "foreign" by English-speaking readers—are expected to uphold.

While much of the reception was positive, Desai's novel did receive some backlash in the wake of its Booker Prize victory. Reporters from the Indian newspaper *Outlook India* visited Kalimpong to poll residents who had read *The Inheritance of Loss*, and many of them were "not amused" by the novel's portrayal of their community.[122] A member of Desai's family who resided in Kalimpong went on record to say that she kept their familial connection a secret in her community because she felt that Desai's novel contained insensitive subject matter.[123] Desai herself even revealed that she was on the receiving end of hate mail because of her portrayal of Kalimpong and West Bengal in general.[124] It is clear that *The Inheritance of Loss* is a novel of great literary merit, but it also appears to feature numerous postcolonial trappings

[119] "Writer Kiran Desai Wins Man Booker Prize," *Associated Press,* October 10, 2006.
[120] David Sexton, "Crossing of Cultures brings exoticism that has prized appeal," *The Evening Standard*, October 11, 2006; "A passage from India to a literary Goldmine," *The Sunday Times*, October 15, 2006.
[121] Jill Lawless, "Kiran Desai mines experience of immigration for novel," *St. John's Telegram*, November 19, 2006.
[122] "Indiaas stadje is boos om boek Kiran Desai," *NRC Handelsblad*, 15 September, 2006,
[123] "Residents of town in Desai's Booker novel upset about portrayal," *CBC News*, November 2, 2006.
[124] "Kiran Desai's 'The Inheritance of Loss' made her a target of hate mails," *Hindustan Times*, January 15, 2007.

that Commonwealth Booker Prize winners tend to gravitate towards. As this chapter will show, *The Inheritance of Loss* echoes *The God of Small Things* in the way it revolves primarily around characters with strong connections to Britain and paints a stereotypical version of India. This reaffirms the notion that Commonwealth Booker Prize winners tend to be ones which engage heavily with postcolonial topics. However, the novel also focusses on a regional historic event and employs Hindi words and phrases in a way which may alienate casual British readers. This is another parallel to *The God of Small Things*, but *The Inheritance of Loss* employs these two defamiliarising storytelling tools to a much greater extent.

As mentioned above, *The Inheritance of Loss* is a striking parallel of *The God of Small Things* in many ways. Like Roy's novel, the majority of *The Inheritance of Loss* is set long after India's independence from the British Empire—the only exceptions being the Judge's recollections from before his divorce. Moreover, Sai's half of the narrative is set in the mountainous extremities of Kalimpong, resulting in a feeling of familial isolation similar to the one Rahel experienced in *The God of Small Things*. Yet, much like that novel—and perhaps even more so—British imperial and cultural power still looms large over Sai's half of the story, seeing as she is deeply smitten by British culture and the Judge is a relic of British control over the Indian Criminal System (ICS).

The three main characters of *The Inheritance of Loss*—Sai, Biju, and the Judge—all have strong ties to Western sociopolitical institutions despite living in the era of Indian independence. Oana Sabo argues that the three of them exist in a state of displacement, both literally and figuratively. Biju is displaced in the most literal sense, having immigrated to the United States in the hopes of finding financial success there. However, as Sabo states, his heart remains in India, and the result is that Biju is not capable of settling in the United States to find

a sense of peace or stability.[125] He attaches himself to the United States not because he thinks it is the right place for him, but because he hopes the country's financial wellbeing will be granted to him as well simply by being there. Sai's situation is the inverse of Biju's. She lives in India, but her Christian convent upbringing has left her in a state of cultural displacement; she is more familiar with the customs and lifestyles of England than she is with those of India. This leaves her feeling estranged from her country, and by the end of the novel she comes to believe that India is too constrained of a country for her to remain in.[126] It should be noted that this a belief that is wholly imbibed rather than born from experience: Sai was born in India and has never lived anywhere else, yet her Westernised education has led her to believe that she has to leave the country and settle elsewhere if she wants to be whole. The Judge's presence in the story acts as a warning from the past of what chasing a postcolonial identity might do to you. Sabo considers the Judge to be the ultimate example of the "postcolonial dilemma": a man who attempted to supplant his native identity with an identity attached to the former colonial power of the United Kingdom but instead found himself disillusioned with both his own country and the country he aspired to be a part of.[127] He has already lived through an attempt to create a postcolonial identity like Sai and Biju want to do, and it has left him wholly estranged.

With so many of the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss* being deeply indebted to British and American institutions, it should come as no surprise that they are strongly preoccupied with British and American culture as well. While *The Inheritance of Loss* has a fairly large cast of characters, the characters that get the most time in the limelight tend to be the ones who are either well-versed in British and American culture or are estranged from India and its culture altogether. Sai, being one of the novel's protagonist, is the most obvious example of this. Despite the fact that she was born and raised in India, Sai is deeply enamoured by

[125] Oana Sabo, "Disjunctures and Diaspora in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 47, no. 3 (2012), 387.
[126] Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 330.
[127] Sabo, "Disjunctures and Diaspora in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*," 383.

British culture. She is an avid reader and spends much of her time reading classics of English-language literature like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Cider with Rosie*.[128] This love for literature does not extend to books written in Hindi or any other native Indian language, since Sai is monolingual. As mentioned previously, Sai spent some of her formative years in a convent, and while she lived there she was taught " [that] English was better than Hindi", along with English customs, like eating with utensils and taking communion.[129] Dina Yerima and Damian Opata argue that Sai embodies a "third space" between being an English and an Indian person, seeing as she is not truly immersed in English culture while at the same time being alienated from her native Indian culture.[130] While it is true that Sai's captivation with English and American culture is far from profound, it could be argued that Sai is so heavily alienated from Indian culture that the third space she inhabits is not one between Indian and English culture, but one which is merely a slightly skewed version of English culture. In fact, it is Gyan's frustration with Sai's complete disconnect from Indian culture that ends up creating a chasm in their relationship:

> She who could not eat with her hands; could not squat down on the ground on her haunches to wait for a bus; who had never been to a temple but for architectural interest; never chewed a paan and had not tried most sweets in the mithai shop, for they made her retch; she who left a Bollywood film so exhausted from emotional wear and tear that she walked home like a sick person and lay in pieces on the sofa; she who thought it vulgar to put oil in your hair and used paper to clean her bottom; felt happier with so-called English vegetables, snap peas, French beans, spring onions, and feared—feared—loki, tinda, kathal, kaddu, patrel, and the local saag in the market.[131]

[128] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 69.
[129] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss,* 30.
[130] Dina Yerina and Damian U. Opata, "Psychosis in Hybridity: Locating the Identity of the Postcolonial Subject in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*." *Forum for World Literature Studies* 10, no. 3 (2018), 459.
[131] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 183.

Gyan's denunciation of Sai's sociocultural shortcomings is so thorough as to make her a foreigner in his eyes. The Cook is similarly smitten by the notion of England and the United States, but his perception of those countries is very vague because his lower-caste upbringing was bereft of cultural education. For example, he believes that English food is inherently superior to Indian food. Because Biju sends him letters saying that he is working in American restaurants, the Cook automatically assumes that Biju is employed at a high-quality venue.[132] The fact that Biju spends most of the novel working in fast food restaurants and holes in the wall is completely lost on the cook because of the innate divide in quality between English and Indian food that he believes in. This perception extends into other matters as well. Despite being raised to be fully subservient to his employer, the Cook is secretly resentful of the fact that he works for an Indian judge, since his father spent his life in the employ of white people.[133] While the Cook's sense of servility is strong, his belief in English superiority is even stronger. This belief is all-encompassing, too. When Sai explains the concept of time zones to the Cook through the use of an inflatable terrestrial globe, the Cook is surprised to find out that India "comes first" in this one respect: "a funny back-to-front fact that didn't seem mirrored by any other circumstance involving the two nations."[134]

To drive home just how all-encompassing the postcolonial themes in *The Inheritance of Loss* are, it should be noted how heavily the cast of the novel is skewed towards characters with some connection to the United Kingdom and America. Besides the characters which have already been mentioned in this section, the most prominent members in the cast of the novel are Saeed Saeed (an immigrant from a former British colony), Father Booty (a foreign priest), Noni and Lola (an Anglicised pair of sisters), and Harish-Harry (the owner of restaurant Gandhi who is obsessed with Indian authenticity). The strands that tie the postcolonial India of *The*

[132] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 17.
[133] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 64.
[134] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss, 18.*

Inheritance of Loss back to the West permeate throughout even the novel's smallest subplots because almost all of its key players are strongly connected to the United Kingdom and America. One could imagine that Kalimpong is full of people who live lives that are almost entirely divorced from colonialism and its aftereffects, but their stories are largely absent from *The Inheritance of Loss*. It is its focus on this particular group of Anglicised denizens of Kalimpong that makes *The Inheritance of Loss* such a deliberate postcolonial text.

One could easily argue that *The Inheritance of Loss* takes aim at British, American, and Indian culture in equal measure. In telling the Judge's backstory, British institutions of higher learning are presented as being so stuck-up and xenophobic that they force the Judge into complete social isolation. Americans, meanwhile, continuously trample on the rights and dignity of immigrants, with Biju being endlessly abused for cheap labour until the authorities come knocking, at which point he is told to leave and find employment elsewhere. However, where British and American people are dealt with in occasional digressions, Indians and India itself are persistently under fire from the narrator, since the reader mostly sees the country through the eyes of characters who are estranged from it or embittered by it. Affirmations of India's inferiority to Western nations are commonplace in *The Inheritance of Loss*, not just in the characters internalised beliefs, such as those of the Cook detailed in the previous section, but in the narration as well. It is difficult to come away from *The Inheritance of Loss* without feeling like the novel treats Indians like a lower class of people, and certain subgroups of Indians especially.

In *Re-Orientalism and Indian Writing in English* (2014), Om Prakash Dwivedi makes note of a pernicious theme that can be found in many postcolonial Indian novels: the "shining

India and its dark cities".[135] Dwivedi argues that as India grew into global economic force in its own right, its burgeoning but often poorly maintained megacities started to become a point of fascination for authors. Here, Indian novelists—people who often come from wealthy and well-educated backgrounds—are able to create their own version of the seedy metropolises of American and British literature by painting a picture of the dirty streets of Indian cities.[136] These images should be all too familiar to British readers: market stalls in the middle of busy streets, congestion on even the most out-of-the-way roads, and spiderwebs of electrical wiring hanging overhead. Dwivedi settles for a throwaway reference to *The Inheritance of Loss* on this topic, but Desai's version of Kalimpong is an unmistakable example of the dark Indian city. In describing the throngs of the markets in Kalimpong, *The Inheritance of Loss* never foregoes an opportunity to make the area seem unhygienic and unpleasant. One of the Cook's journeys into Kalimpong is accented by descriptions of muddy mushrooms, demonic-looking strands of yak hair, false teeth, and a potpourri of stolen goods that are purchasable at various stalls.[137] The air is thick with exhaust fumes, the bus station is greasy, and pornographic films can be viewed in "dark cubbyhole[s]".[138] This is directly contrasted with the Cook's first arrival in Kalimpong many years earlier, when markets still gave visitors room to breathe and the villagers were blessed by visits from the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama.[139] Kalimpong's transformation into a modern Indian city has made it into an odious place in the Cook's eyes. The sorry state of Kalimpong does not even elude the eyes of children. When the Cook asks the child of a merchant if their rice is worth buying, she warns him that it is full of small, dirty rocks you will break your teeth on.[140]

[135] Lisa Lau and Om Prakash Dwivedi, *Re-Orientalism and Indian Writing in English* (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2014), 81.
[136] Lau and Dwivedi, *Re-Orientalism and Indian Writing in English*, 84.
[137] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 90.
[138] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 91.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 93.

Most strikingly of all is the fact that the dark Indian city is not even limited to India itself in a geographical sense; Biju experiences it in New York as well. While most of the living quarters he inhabits throughout the novel are quite dingy, his standard of living reaches its nadir when he moves into the basement of the Indian restaurant Gandhi. He shares the room with the restaurant's other employees and the restaurant's stock of non-perishable foods, their sink barely works, the room is in a constant state of dampness because the employees have to hang their laundry up above their beds, and legions of rats roam the floor chewing on the food and Biju's hair.[141] It is here that the thought of returning to India begins to dawn on Biju. If he is destined to live in squalor anyway, he would prefer to do so in the presence of his loving father.

The people of the inner city of Kalimpong do not escape judgement either. When recounting the many diseases carried by animals in India, Biju specifically mentions the "mad toad throated dwarves" that roam around the outskirts of the city, for example.[142] However, it is the Lepcha people that are especially frequent victims of Orientalist character descriptions in *The Inheritance of Loss*. While Lola, Noni, and their acquaintance Mrs. Sen are discussing the matter of immigration and minority populations in India, it is the Lepcha people who inspire the brunt of Lola's vitriol. She is initially sympathetic to their claim to land in Kalimpong, but she is quick to cast them as lazy opportunists who coast off of government loans upon reconsideration.[143] When the police later attempt to trace the guns that the GNLF stole from the Judge, they end up pinning the crime on a middle-aged Lepcha man, who they savagely beat in an attempt to get him to confess.[144] While this instance of police profiling can be attributed to the characters rather than the narrative itself, the narrator also describes the man as a "miserable drunk" and paints him as a useless wretch.[145] This runs counter to the fact that

[141] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss,* 147.
[142] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 154.
[143] Desai, *The God of Small Things*, 137.
[144] Desai, *The God of Small Things*, 227-228.
[145] Desai, *The God of Small Things*, 227.

his wife and father are later revealed to have been financially reliant on him when they visit Cho Oyu to beg for food and money. They are granted even less dignity than their former breadwinner, with the wife's teeth being described as "rotten corn kernels" and the narrator noting that tourists once photographed her as "proof of horror".[146] Despite their lot, the Lepcha family is made difficult to sympathise with because they end up forging a cunning plan to steal the Judge's dog in the hopes of either selling her or using her to breed puppies.[147] The Lepcha people receive no quarter within the pages of *The Inheritance of Loss*, as they are consistently portrayed as the filthy and degenerating other to Sai and the other protagonists' self.

There is a tragic irony to the laser-targeted manner in which Re-Orientalism is used in *The Inheritance of Loss*. The novel puts in a lot of legwork to impress on the reader that the stereotypes and presuppositions that the people of New York project onto Biju and his cohorts are exaggerated at best or inaccurate at worst. Yet when it comes to the Lepcha people of Kalimpong, the novel has no qualms about painting them with an overly board brush. The portrayal of Lepcha people in Desai's text is, from time to time, sympathetic, but they are ultimately still portrayed as a lower and altogether different class of people. In *The God of Small Things*, the Orientalism of the nineteenth-century British novel has been rerouted to focus on a smaller, more marginalised subsection of Indians.

Yet another way in which *The Inheritance of Loss* mirrors *The God of Small Things* is the way in which it is set against the backdrop of a major event in Indian history. In the case of *The Inheritance of Loss*, this event is the rising profile of the Gorkhaland movement and the eventual establishment of an autonomous Indian-Nepalis governing body in Darjeeling by the GNLF. Like in *The God of Small Things*, the effect of the novel being grounded in a real

[146] Desai, *The God of Small Things*, 271.
[147] Desai, *The God of Small Things*, 283.

historical event is the creation of a setting which is highly particularised. The Darjeeling of the 1980s that is portrayed in the novel is unmistakable, since numerous unique GNLF tactics and key dates and events of the Gorkhaland movement are presented throughout. The key difference between *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss* on this point is the degree of prominence their respective historical backdrops are granted. The Keralan communist movement has a significant impact on the narrative of *The God of Small Things*, but this comes about mostly through the continuing reverberation of a single event within the story of the novel. By contrast, *The Inheritance of Loss* introduces the GNLF in its very first chapter and much of Sai's half of the novel continues to involve the Gorkhaland movement throughout.

Instead of opting for a non-specific point in time within a broader cultural context, *The Inheritance of Loss* is set within a timeline of real-world events that can easily be delineated. The most clear-cut example is the clash between the GNLF and the police of Kalimpong, which those sympathetic to the Gorkhaland movement now call "the Kalimpong Massacre".[148] The date of this event, July 27, 1986, is provided to the reader at the start of the relevant chapter, something the novel never chooses to do elsewhere.[149] Other significant events, such as the barricading of the Gymkhana Club and the surrender of arms in 1988, surround the events of the novel, allowing readers familiar with this saga to pinpoint what months individual chapters take place in. In her deeply critical article on the handling of the Gorkhaland movement in *The Inheritance of Loss*, Namrata Chaturverdi argues that the use of this historical backdrop is deeply flattened, turning an incredibly complex historical event into mere set-dressing for a character study. However, she does admit that the novel provides a highly detailed and temporally accurate portrayal of the Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling.[150] As much as *The*

[148] "Gorkhaland and the Kalimpong Massacre," *The Darjeeling Chronicle*, July 26, 2020.
[149] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 281.
[150] Namrata Chaturvedi, "Imaginary Homelands and the Excesses of Imagination: Trivialization of History in Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss," *IUP Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 3, no. 1 (2011), 8-9.

Inheritance of Loss is "a reaffirmation of the stereotype of a disturbed North East India", as Chaturverdi writes, its recollection of facts and timelines is quite accurate.[151]

The presence of the Gorkhaland movement and the GNLF in *The Inheritance of Loss* is especially noteworthy in how heavily it leans on tiny historical details. At multiple points throughout the novel, characters are pressured to purchase, among other items, cassette tapes which feature recordings of patriotic songs and the speeches of GNLF leader Subash Ghisingh.[152] To a reader who is unfamiliar with the history of the Gorkhaland movement, such a detail might seem patently absurd: a very small revolutionary group funding its operations by selling specialised merchandise. This is not a case of poetic license, however. These guerilla media vendors are well-documented, and some commentators have even described them as prototypical versions of present-day social media activists.[153] A number of other documented strategies that were highly characteristic of the GNLF make their way into *The Inheritance of Loss* as well. As Chaturverdi notes, the GNLF were known for being polite in their interactions with locals even while they were at their most militant.[154] This can be seen in the first chapter of the novel, where the young revolutionaries who break into the Judge's house have a frank and measured conversation with him while they are in the middle of assessing what they should steal.[155] A group of GNLF members later break into Lola and Noni's house and very gently ask if they want to purchase some calendars and cassettes, acting as if the situation is not a coercive one.[156] Lastly, the GNLF were known for their attempts at astroturfing attendance for important rallies by forcing every family in Kalimpong to send one of their men to the rallies. As Sushita Awashti explains, *The Inheritance of Loss* does an excellent job at portraying this detail of the

[151] Chaturvedi, "Imaginary Homelands and the Excesses of Imagination," 15.
[152] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 237.
[153] A.S. Chakraborty, "Representing and Performing the Contested Trans-Himalayan 'Shared Heritages of 'Gorkha'," in *Conference Proceedings 2018: The Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal &The Himalaya*, 2018, 64-65.
[154] Chatuverdi, "Imaginary Homelands and the Excesses of Imagination," 6.
[155] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 6-7.
[156] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 238.

GNLF's story by delving into the ways families tried to avoid this mandate, such as by claiming all their male family members were ill or out of town.[157] While it may be true that *The Inheritance of Loss* is deserving of criticism for its one-sided portrayal of the Gorkhaland movement, it is equally true that the novel goes into great historical detail on the movement, and that much of these details might seem peculiar or even fanciful to readers who are unfamiliar with the history of Kalimpong and the struggle for independence of its Indian-Nepalis population.

While the story of the rise of the GNLF helps a lot in giving *The Inheritance of Loss* a very specific sense of time and place that would be entirely foreign to British readers, it should be noted that the level of self-evidence attributed to the Gorkhaland movement is applied unequally to other historical episodes that are presented in the novel. For example, the novel at one point dedicates half a page to explaining the political achievements of India's third prime minister, Indira Gandhi.[158] This explanation is intended to contextualise why a character might be reminded of Gandhi while conversing about the notion of semiautonomous states within India. Being that this reference to Gandhi is of passing relevance, one could easily imagine a slightly different version of the novel in which this passage is only a single sentence long. The fact that these kinds of sections occasionally crop up indicate that the novel was, at least to certain extent, written to ensure that readers are brought up to speed on mainstream Indian history when needed, even if its most significant piece of historical grounding is considered self-evident.

As a final point, *The Inheritance of Loss* mirrors *The God of Small Things* in its use of non-English languages native to India. Like *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss* is

[157] Suchitra Awasthi, "The GNLF Dilemma with Special Reference to Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss," *Dialogue: A Journal Devoted to Literary Appreciation* 11, no. 2 (2015), 24.
[158] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 128.

peppered with words, phrases, and sentences that monolingual British readers are unlikely to be familiar with and which may serve to inhibit their ability to read the novel without having to pause to figure out the meaning of a passage. However, whereas *The God of Small Things* appears to be hesitant to hide key phrases and exchanges behind a language barrier, *The Inheritance of Loss* is occasionally willing to use non-English words in places where their indecipherability may puzzle the reader to a significant extent.

Minisha Shah argues that the way in which Hindi and Indian speaking mannerisms are used in *The Inheritance of Loss* "impart[s] a touch of the genuine" by using the appropriate bits and pieces of the native language and culture in ways that would make the novel feel perfectly at home to a West Bengali reader.[159] One example she points to is the way in which characters will say an idiom or word in Hindi before repeating it in English, such as Uncle Potty saying "no *ghas phoos*, no twigs and leaves!" while objecting to the idea of going to a vegetarian restaurant.[160] "*Ghas phoos*" means "rabbit food", so the Hindi and English parts of this sentence ultimately contain the same meaning. According to Shah, this kind of repetitious interlingual speech is very common in rural India. Shah also points out that Hindi words which are spoken in *The Inheritance of Loss* are often transcribed phonetically rather than in their most common English transcription, giving readers who are more acquainted with Hindi script than the Latin alphabet a legible indicator of what words they are reading.[161]

The use of Hindi in *The Inheritance of Loss* could be quite challenging to a monolingual English reader, as phrases of key importance are often "hidden" behind the language barrier. An early example of this is the use of the phrase "*Jai Gorkha*" by members of the GNLF.[162] "*Jai*" quite plainly means "hail" or "glory to", but the fact that this phrase is used before the

[159] Manisha Shah, "Linguistic Devices Hybridized: A Reading of Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss," *The Criterion* 8, no 5 (2017), 125.
[160] Shah, "Linguistic Devices Hybridized," 125; Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 212.
[161] Shah, "Linguistic Devices Hybridized," 124-125.
[162] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 7.

Gorkhaland movement is contextualised means it might be completely meaningless to a British reader when they first encounter it. *The Inheritance of Loss* is not afraid to throw full, untranslated Hindi sentences at the reader either. The sentence "*[O]i, koi hai? Khansama*? [Hey, is anyone there? Servant?]" is said by a taxi driver early in the novel.[163] This sentence comes at the end of a paragraph and is not responded to by anyone, so its meaning is difficult to ascertain from its context. In a later chapter, Harish-Harry's wife says to Biju, "*[a]rre, Biju . . . to sunao kahani* [c'mon, Biju . . . tell me a story]".[164/165] She actually repeats her request in English afterwards ("what's the story?"), but an interruption on the part of the narrator implies that these are disparate statements. As a result of the interplay between languages of this kind, *The Inheritance of Loss* seems like it would be a much easier read for a bilingual Indian reader than for a monolingual British reader.

Additionally, there are a handful of passages in the novel which, while postcolonial in nature, confirm above all else that Indian English is the language which is considered to be the central language by the narrator, whereas other dialects are placed on the periphery. When Biju arrives at the airport in Calcutta, he overhears a conversation between two sisters, one of which is a non-resident Indian (NRI). The NRI sister, who lives in Chicago, has part of her dialogue transcribed phonetically to emphasise how unusual her manner of speaking might be to an Indian listener. She speaks of getting "value for her daaller [dollar]" and claims that less affluent Indian residents are "jealous of our daallers."[166] When the novel takes such transcriptional liberties with the speech of characters who speak with an Indian accent, it is used to accentuate how forced their attempts at sounding like British English or American English speakers are. Earlier on, a store clerk's dialogue is transcribed as "who aez these [who is this]?", and this is done to denote a "[v]ery Indian-trying-to-be-American accent", for

[163] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 19.
[164] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss, 146.*
[165] Note the use of "arre" here, instead of the more traditionally accepted transcription "arré".
[166] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 298-299.

example.[167] When the narrator chooses to make a point of the peculiarities of a resident Indian's way of speaking, they are more likely to make a broad reference to how much their accent sticks out in a crowd of British or American speakers.[168] This, combined with the ease with which the novel lets characters break out into Hindi phrases, indicates that this novel would feel the most familiar to an Indian reader, with British and other readers serving as peripheral audiences, as they are less likely to familiar with the phraseology that the novel expects the reader to understand.

As has been noted throughout this chapter, *The Inheritance of Loss* has been on the receiving end of a lot of criticism for its portrayal of Kalimpong and its people throughout the years. It goes without saying that the novel has also been praised extensively—it won the Booker Prize, after all—but that does not preclude the novel from containing elements that some might consider unsound. The portrayal of the Gorkhaland movement as an unambiguously harmful force has drawn a lot of ire, in particular. The purpose of this thesis, however, is not to determine right from wrong. It may well be true that *The Inheritance of Loss* portrays the Gorkhaland movement in a deeply insensitive way, and it may also be true that *The Inheritance of Loss* is a shining example of the empire writing back with an excellent postcolonial novel; as far as this chapter is concerned, this is merely background information. What matters most within the confines of this thesis is how strong the presence of postcolonial and Orientalist themes within *The Inheritance of Loss* are, and this chapter has shown that this presence is quite strong indeed. Nearly the entire central cast of the novel has some kind of connection to the lingering spectre of colonialism that resides in India. Sai is so heavily immersed in British customs and cultures that she does not feel like she truly belongs in India, and the Judge has turned his back on

[167] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 137.
[168] Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, 40.

Indian society entirely because he exists in a postcolonial quantum state of an Indian man with a British education and British aspirations. Biju left India to find a future in a country with a longer history of independence from the United Kingdom, but he eventually comes to realise that he cannot bloom by himself in a foreign country, choosing the squalor at home over the squalor abroad. A British reader never has to go long without being reminded of the way this Indian novel connects back to them. They will also find an India that is fairly familiar within the pages of *The Inheritance of Loss*, as much of the story is set in a highly stereotypical urban Indian environment that throws few surprises and curveballs their way.

The novel is not entirely without elements that might alienate a British reader, however. Much like *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss* is set during a period of historic upheaval that is brought to the reader's attention in great detail, asking them to immerse themselves in a very specific time and place in India's history. The use of Hindi and uniquely Indian modes of speech may also serve as the occasional speedbump for the British reader. Even so, *The Inheritance of Loss* still falls within the parameters of the platonic ideal of the Commonwealth Booker Prize winner: a novel with strong ties to the United Kingdom and colonial history along with a portrayal of a former colony that should be highly digestible and familiar to the British reader. So far, the Booker Prize is two for two in choosing Indian winners that affirm British cultural capital within the Commonwealth.

Chapter 3: *The White Tiger* – Neon Orientalism

After claiming its first Booker Prize victory in 1997 with *The God of Small Things*, India had to wait nearly a decade for *The Inheritance of Loss* to secure a second notch on its belt. In the years that followed this 2006 victory, Indian authors managed to maintain a much stronger presence within the ranks of the Booker Prize's nominees than it had in the preceding decade. In 2007, Irish author Anne Enright won the Booker Prize for the novel *The Gathering*, but two Indian authors managed to secure their spots among the nominees: Indian-born novelist Nikita Lalwani graced the longlist with her novel *Gifted*, while Indra Smith, a novelist of Indian descent, secured a spot on the shortlist with *Animal's People*. The very next year, an Indian author managed to win the prize once more: debut novelist Aravind Adiga received the 2008 Booker Prize for his novel *The Whiter Tiger*, making him the third and, to date, most recent Indian Booker Prize winner.[169]

An epistolary and picaresque novel, *The Whiter Tiger* tells the story of an Indian chauffeur-turned-entrepreneur named Balram Halwei. Balram is excited about Chinese premier Wen Jiabao's upcoming state visit to India and decides to write a letter to Jiabao in the hopes of ingratiating himself with Jiabao and getting to expand his business into China. Balram writers his letter over the course of seven days, detailing the course of his life from his birth in the small Rajasthan town of Laxmangarh to his plot to murder his employer, Mr. Ashok.

Balram is born into a large but incredibly poor family, their income mostly relying on milk produced by a singular water buffalo. One day, while working in a tea shop, he overhears a group of miners discuss the possibility of changing careers to become taxi drivers, and Balram decides that this is the path he wants to follow himself. After being denied by many prospective

[169] Adiga was in good company that year, as previous Booker Prize-winner Salman Rushdie also graced the longlist with his novel *The Enchantress of Florence*.

employers, he finds a job as a private chauffeur/all-round servant for one of Laxmangarh's landlords, who is nicknamed "the Stork". Through his new function, Balram comes into contact with the Stork's two sons, Mr. Ashok and Mukesh Sir, as well as Mr. Ashok's wife, Pinky Madam. Balram soon finds out that a big part of the Stork's family fortune comes from their tax-free exploitation of government-owned coal mines, a racket that the region's ministers let them get away with in exchange for massive bribes. Mukesh Sir, Mr. Ashok, and Pinky Madam, with Balram in tow, frequently visit Delhi to deliver bribery payments to politicians.

During a raucous and drunk night out meant to reaffirm Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam's love for each other, Pinky Madam takes the wheel and ends up running over and killing a young street urchin. Makesh Sir forces Balram to sign a written confession saying that he is the one responsible for the urchin's death. It quickly turns out that nobody has been reporting missing, meaning no one has to go to prison. Even so, Balram is furious with Mr. Ashok for nearly making him take the fall for someone else's crime. Balram begins to mull over the possibility of murdering Mr. Ashok as he grows more resentful of him. Upon bearing witness to a massive bag of money meant for a new bribery payment, Balram decides to shoot his shot: he kills Mr. Ashok with a glass bottle on the way into the city before making off with hundreds of thousands of rupees.

Soon to be a wanted man, Balram escapes to Bangalore with his cousin, Dharam, who his family sent to Delhi to become a driver like Balram. Balram uses his stolen fortune to start a taxi service, a venture which results in him having to bribe the police to keep other taxi services off his turf and to keep himself out of prison after one of his drivers runs over a child. Balram, now evading the law under the name "Ashok Sharma", concludes his letter by wondering if any members of his family have been killed as retribution for the murder of Mr. Ashok.

Whereas *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss* were generally well-received by critics from the established media, *The White Tiger* was met by a mixed response. Adrian Turpin of the *Financial Times* was so fond of Adiga's "sympathetic psychopath" protagonist that he felt the character deserved to be admitted to the proverbial "hall of fame" of that archetype.[170] David Mattin of *The Independent* wrote a similarly glowing review, stating that all but the most ardent believers in India's political incorruptibility would surely "be seduced by it."[171] *The Observer*'s Francesca Segal was less impressed, noting that, while the book was "good fun", it left a lot to be desired as a work of social commentary, treading ground that should be more than familiar to any well-informed reader.[172]

Beryl Bainbridge's review, written for *The Guardian*, is particularly interesting where the overall theme of this thesis is concerned. While she commends the novel for its wit, she also sees it as part of a trend of inauthenticity that is entering Indian literature, in which the perspectives on India that are espoused are growing more distant from India itself, and therefore less likely to paint a truthful picture of the country. She believes that *The White Tiger* is "fundamentally an outsider's view and a superficial one".[173] She goes on to express her frustration at the novel's rather stereotypical narrative, wishing that other types of stories from "uncontacted and unheard" India would get the level of exposure *The White Tiger* got instead.[174] While she does seemingly mistake Adiga for an Indian expatriate—he studied at Columbia University and the University of Oxford, but had already moved back to India by the time he was writing *The White Tiger*—Bainbridge nevertheless makes note of the flattening

[170] Adrian Turpin, "Review: The White Tiger," *Financial Times* (online), April 19, 2008, https://www.ft.com/content/886f92c4-09c8-11dd-81bf-0000779fd2ac.
[171] David Mattin, "Driven to Success; A Chatty Murderer Exposes the Underbelly of India's Tiger Economy in This Thrilling Debut Novel; The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga," *The Independent*, May 11, 2008.
[172] Francesca Segal, "First Novels: When the Eternal Allure of India Wears Thin," *The Observer*, April 13, 2008.
[173] Beryl Bainbridge, "His Monster's Voice: Kevin Rushby Tries to Warm to an Indian Adventurer: The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2008.
[174] Bainbridge, *"His monster's voice*."

Western perspective which is so common to Indian literature that gets significant exposure, the very same observation which lies at the heart of this thesis.

Opinions on *The White Tiger* continued to clash after the novel won the Booker Prize. Writing for the now-defunct Indian media outlet *Desi Critics*, Vinod Joseph made note of the novel's many inconsistencies and inaccuracies when it comes to portraying Indian society while also pondering if the novel would have been as successful with Western critics as it was if they had had any firsthand experience with life in India.[175] Stuart Jeffries of *The Guardian* reported that many commentators from India were unhappy with the "literary tourism" of *The White Tiger*, seeing it as a novel which casts India in a singularly negative light.[176] However, some voices also chimed in to claim the opposite: that the uncompromising nature of *The White Tiger*'s portrayal of India could make it a helpful tool in educating Western audiences about a country on which they are largely uninformed. This was the opinion of a group of researchers at Manchester University, who noted that many of the takeaways about India readers got from *The White Tiger* and other novels were mostly accurate.[177]

While all three of the Booker Prize-winning novels under review for this thesis were, to different extents, criticised for their portrayal of India, it is worth noting that the underlying controversies were quite different across the three novels. Where *The God of Small Things* was considered to be a morally compromised text by its fiercest critics and *The Inheritance of Loss* was attacked for its inaccuracies and uncaring nature towards India's rural population, *The White Tiger* was considered guilty of the exact charges which this thesis aims to investigate: it presents a version of India which is lacking in nuance and aligns strongly with Western stereotypes about the country. As this chapter will argue, these accusations are partially correct.

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[175] Vinod Joseph, "Aravind Adiga's Booker Prize: A Time for Introspection," *Desi Critics*, October 15, 2008.
[176] Stuart Jeffries, "Roars of Anger: Aravind Adiga's Debut Novel, The White Tiger, Won the Booker Prize This Week. But Its Unflattering Portrait of India as a Society Racked by Corruption and Servitude Has Caused a Storm in his Homeland," *The Guardian*, October 16, 2008.
[177] Stephen Adams, "Never mind academia, to understand the world read a novel," *The Telegraph*, November 7, 2008.

The White Tiger is, in many ways, an affirmation of the most basic and negative stereotypes about India one can imagine: a nation which is impoverished, unhygienic, corrupt, overpopulated, and starkly divided along class lines. However, the novel manages to partially overcome its New Orientalist tendencies by providing a perspective which is entirely internal to India and does not aim to address Western views of the country.

The previous chapter of this thesis detailed the numerous similarities shared between *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. One such similarity was the way in which the state of postcolonialism affected the lives and lived experiences of their protagonists, Rahel and Sai (and, to a lesser extent, Biju). Both are Indian natives living in poor, remote villages of India who nevertheless have a strong connection to the United Kingdom. Rahel and Sai are both precocious learners and consumers of British culture, and both of them are close relatives of people with British educations. The presence of postmodern themes springs forth very naturally from such perspectives. *The White Tiger* could not be more different in this regard. Protagonist Balram, like Rahel and Sai, was born in a remote Indian village, but he has no propensity for learning and his family is entirely unplugged from the remnants of British colonial power. As such, his early life in Laxmangarh is mostly free from postcolonial turbulence: while he is dissatisfied with his impoverished life in rural India, this dissatisfaction comes in the form of an innate longing for a better life rather than an instilled dream of a Western lifestyle.

While Balram may be an outsider to colonial modes of thought, that does not mean that the entire cast of *The White Tiger* is free from such burdens. Of all the major characters in the novel, Mr. Ashok has by far the strongest connection to Western culture, and it is through him that the novel most often explores themes of postcolonialism and conflicted identity in a postcolonial India. Whereas the other members of his family, like the Stork and Mukesh Sir,

seem to have no interest in engaging with the world outside of India, Mr. Ashok has spent a portion of his life living in the United States and has become Americanised as a result. Upon his return to India, he realises that he is now deeply uncomfortable with the mechanisms of Indian life that once felt so natural to him. Literary historian and scholar Alex Tickell notes that many of Mr. Ashok's actions can be attributed to his unwillingness to slot back into his old Indian life: he yearns for American moral purity and rural Indian simplicity, both of which are imagined.[178] He attempts to assuage his guilt over the unscrupulous and uncaring business of his family by tinkering at its margins. In one of his earliest scenes, Mr. Ashok attempts to convince his father and brother that they should cut the regional ministers out of their coal mining scheme and move towards a more legitimate business model.[179] He does not seem to care about the wellbeing of the Laxmangarh miners, who are noted to be working under poor conditions, worrying only about bringing his business above board. His approach to the treatment of Balram is very similar: rather than offering Balram a long-term contract with respectable pay and benefits, he offers Balram occasional tokens of generosity when his guilt gets the better of him. These tokens can be as small as defending Balram's honour and aptitude as a driver in front of Makesh Sir, but they also come in a more material form, such as offering to pay Balram a small sum for his wedding.[180] Regardless, these tokens of generosity never make for structural change: Balram is still grossly underpaid, forced to live in squalid servant quarters, and nearly made to be the fall guy for Pinky Madam's manslaughter. Having witnessed what he considers to be superior and morally righteous business operations in the West, Mr. Ashok thusly attempts to incorporate greater compassion and legitimacy into his

[178] Alex Tickell, "Driving Pinky Madam (and Murdering Mr Ashok): Social Justice and Domestic Service in Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger," in *Reworking Postcolonialism: Globalization, Labour and Rights*, ed. Pavan Kumar Malreddy, Brite Heidemann, Ole Birk Laursen, and Janet Wilson (London: Palgrave McMillan UK, 215), 158.
[179] Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2008), 88.
[180] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 100, 220.

family business, but his actions ultimately achieve nothing more than to create a facsimile of the world he witnessed in America.

Mr. Ashok is equally dissatisfied with life in Delhi as he is with his family's business. After spending time in vibrant and lively New York City, the distinctly artificial feeling of Delhi begins to irk him. Tickell notes this too, stating that Mr. Ashok "harbours a false nostalgia for rural life" in India.[181] Because he sees Delhi as a twisted reflection of Western metropolises, Mr. Ashok cannot help but romanticise rural Indian life, as this is the only part of India he feels emotionally attracted to. When he is at his lowest following his divorce with Pinky Madam, Mr. Ashok finds solace in a meal he shares with Balram at a cheap food truck. He associates this meal with Balram and life in Laxmangarh, even though he only ever spent a limited portion of his life in the village and, even then, lived a sheltered life in his father's mansion.[182] In fact, Mr. Ashok sees Balram as the avatar of a purer India, one which has not been corrupted by Western capitalism and agnosticism. He frequently shows appreciation for and jealousy of Balram's generosity, family-mindedness, and piousness—all traits which Balram merely pretends to embody to leave a positive impression. During an early car ride with Balram and Pinky Madam, for example, Mr. Ashok makes note of a motion of religious respect Balram does as they pass a temple. Mr. Ashok is exultant in his praise of Balram's piousness, calling it a "beautiful" trait and directly contrasting it with his own family's irreligious lifestyle.[183] He feels a similar attraction to Balram's close ties to his family and simpler life he lived in Laxmangarh. When they visit their shared birth village, Mr. Ashok asks what life is like there, and imagines that "it must be so nice" before Balram can even respond.[184] When he argues with

[181] Tickell, "Driving Pinky Madam (and Murdering Mr Ashok)," 159.
[182] Adiga, *The White Tiger,* 202-203.
[183] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 77-78.
[184] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 68.

Pinky Madam about returning to New York, the only thing he can proffer in defence of India is that "[it] is going to be like America in ten years."[185]

What makes Mr. Ashok's increasingly negative opinion of life in Delhi so notable is that it is entirely based on imagined truths and comparisons to life in the West. Balram is slowly growing estranged from his family and has no love for Laxmangarh; he merely pretends to associate life in rural India with bliss to placate Mr. Ashok. Hours before Mr. Ashok praised Balram's piety, Balram even used his time in the local temple to curse God.[186] Meanwhile, Mr. Ashok's newfound disillusionment with life in Delhi appears to be defined entirely by the ways in which it cannot live up to life in New York. His family members note that a lot of Mr. Ashok's newfound traits, like his bouts of vegetarianism and his attempts at treating his servants humanely, were picked up during his time in the United States.[187] Moreover, all of his attempts at finding joy in Delhi take the form of activities that he associates with America: visiting the mall, going to a discotheque, watching blockbuster films, and paying for white, blonde prostitutes. Where he used to be perfectly content with India as it was, his exposure to the Western world leads to Mr. Ashok seeing India in a different, more negative light, one which his family members who are unaware of life and culture outside of India are not able to understand.

While Balram himself is an outsider to Western culture, he, like those around him, is aware of the subaltern position that Indians inhabit and knowingly attempts to reach a higher position in the hierarchy of power by adopting Western traits and ways of life. In an early act of rebellion, Balram purchases a pair of jeans and a plain white t-shirt—a far cry from the colourful servant's clothing he is made to wear most of the time.[188] He does this in an attempt to mimic Mr. Ashok's casual attire and to gain access to one of Delhi's many malls. Notably

[185] Adiga, *The White Tiger,* 77.
[186] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 74.
[187] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 73, 163.
[188] Adiga, *The White Tiger,* 127.

enough, Balram identifies both his casual clothing and his trip to the mall as unbecoming of a servant. Entering the mall is, quite literally, illegal for servants, and Balram sees his detour through the shopping plaza as his "first taste of the fugitive's life."[189] As the plot progresses, it becomes clear that Balram does not possess a coherent ideology underpinning his belief that Western norms are the way of the future, but rather that he experiences this axiom as a sort of primordial truth. He harbours no love for America, endlessly berating the country for its naivete and its excesses, but he appears to be convinced that the American lifestyle and business style will send him on the path to prosperity. In an article on the ethical quandaries of *The White Tiger*, Lena Khor argues that even the murder of Mr. Ashok is an attempt on Balram's part to break free of the subaltern position by employing Western means. Now familiarised with the cutthroat nature of Western capitalism, especially for those at the bottom of the proverbial ladder, Balram cuts a literal throat to enrich himself and improve his social status.[190] Near the end of the novel, he explicitly condemns the feudalistic master-servant relationship that he had with Mr. Ashok, stating that a more distant and professional relationship with one's employees is the way forward.[191] By making this move away from the Stork's method of treating his subordinates, Balram states that he is "in the Light now", indicating that he associates the Western capitalistic model of doing business as a sign of progress.[192]

Conspicuous consumption plays a big role in Balram's life as well. Whenever he attempts to free himself from his status quo as a lowly servant, purchases which connect him to (what he believes to be) Western expressions of wealth are sure to follow. The abovementioned purchase of jeans, a plain t-shirt, and sneakers is one example of this, as Balram attempts to mimic the Americanised casual attire of Mr. Ashok. At an earlier point in

[189] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 129.
[190] Lena Khor, "Can the Subaltern Right Wrongs?: Human Rights and Development in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger," South Central Review* 29, no. 1, 56.
[191] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 259.
[192] Adiga, *The Whiter Tiger,* 269.

the novel, he uses his salary to buy a bottle of liquor. Instead of settling for an affordable bottle of Indian alcohol, Balram goes to a store which exclusively sells "English" liquor to buy a bottle of whiskey, making a point of having his order be heard by everyone in the store.[193] Additionally, when he solicits a prostitute later on in the novel, he makes sure to order a blonde, white woman, only to create an uproar when he finds out she is a natural brunette who dyed her hair.[194] It is clear that all of Balram's purchases in the early stages of his employment as a servant are made not to attain pleasure, but rather in a vain attempt to mimic and, more importantly, project the Western style of consumption that he is newly acquainted with. "If only the other drivers could see me now!" he thinks to himself as he explores the mall, revealing that being observed as a Westernised consumer is just as important to him as the consumption itself.[195]

In an article on literary depictions of urban wealth, Helga Ramsey-Kurz makes a point of just how much Balram's approach to aping Western consumption changes as he grows wealthier. He transforms from someone who wants "to be seen by his own kind as part of this forbidden realm of abundance" to someone who "shun[s] recognition and stays hidden in his office"—an office which is richly decorated with American computers and European vehicles in its garage.[196] While it is true that Balram becomes somewhat reclusive after starting his own business, Ramsey-Kurz's analysis fails to account for the fact that Balram continues to court acknowledgement through the letter he is writing. While his audience may no longer be in his direct vicinity, Balram continues to make a point of his Western patterns of consumption by bringing them to the attention of premier Jiabao. The aforementioned flaunting of Western technology are examples of this, but the most pointed instance of present-day Balram's

[193] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 128-129.
[194] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 197.
[195] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 129.
[196] Helga Ramsey Kurz, "Looking Behind Grand Facades: The Ambiguous Visibility of Urban Wealth in *The Unknown Terrorist*, *Saturday*, and *The White Tiger*," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 52, no. 3 (2021), 129.

conspicuous consumption is his ownership of an excessive number of expensive chandeliers. The massive chandelier that hangs in Balram's office is one of the first subjects he brings up in his letter to premier Jiabao, intending to prove how successful his entrepreneurship has been. He later halts his story to talk about the sheer number of chandeliers he has at home, making special mention of the chandelier in his bathroom.[197] Perhaps the most interesting facet of Balram's love of chandeliers is that he appears to have some level of awareness of the fact that they do not signify wealth and class quite as much as he likes to think. He is able to recall Pinky Madam complaining about the chandelier in her hotel room, calling it tacky, and openly admits that the many chandeliers in his apartment were bought in bulk from a poor street vendor.[198] Even so, Balram sees the chandeliers as a symbol of wealth, saying that they remind him of the splendour of 1970s Hollywood films.[199] In attempting to mimic the opulence of the Western upper class, Balram has created an exaggerated facsimile of it: chandeliers are a symbol of wealth, so he buys as many chandeliers as he can to appear wealthier, regardless of the quality and usefulness of said chandeliers.

When it comes to postcolonialism, *The White Tiger*'s biggest overarching statement appears to be that the influence of Western culture affects groups of subaltern people even if their connections to the West are minor at best. Mr. Ashok spent only a few years of his life in the United States and is adamant about staying in India upon his return, but he still ends up yearning for American comforts and ways of life after returning to his native country. Balram, who has no familial or cultural connection to the West whatsoever, falls into patterns of Western consumerism as soon as they become available and visible to him in the metropolitan Delhi. *The White Tiger* lacks characters like Rahel from *The God of Small Things* and Sai from *The*

[197] Adiga, *The God of Small Things*, 84.
[198] Adiga, *The God of Small Things*, 64, 84-85.
[199] Adiga, *The God of Small Things*, 7.

Inheritance of Loss who are wilfully and intentionally engaged with Western culture, but its major characters are in the clutches of postcolonial cultural powers all the same.

The White Tiger is, in many ways, a satirical novel. The combination of Balram's close-mindedness and his complete lack of filter results in him expressing many thoughts which polite society would consider deplorable. These thoughts take the form of homophobic, sexist, and racist opinions from time to time, but they also come in the form of very blasé, mostly negative commentary on the state of India. They also often end up covering a lot of othering stereotypes that are endemic to the Orientalist perspective, and, as this section will show, indulge in these stereotypes intentionally in order to achieve the goals that Balram sets out when writing his letter to premier Jiabao. In their article on New Orientalism in literature, M. S. Veena and P. V. Ramanathan name *The White Tiger* as one of the most clear-cut cases of New Orientalism. In contrast to *Midnight's Children*, which they see as a New Orientalist work that actively rejects Western stereotypes about India, they classify *The White Tiger* as a novel which "represent[s] the Orient in such a way so as to confirm and reinforce Oriental stereotypes."[200] Rather than painting a new picture of India that fights back against Western presuppositions about India, the branch of New Orientalism that *The White Tiger* belongs to uses the internal Indian perspective to transform the otherising Orientalist view of India into a homespun reflection of the self.

Orientalism, as it manifests itself in *The Whiter Tiger*, is not merely subtext or even a natural byproduct of its setting and plot. Balram, who serves as the novel's narrator through his letters, is a self-conscious (New) Orientalist. In attempting to denigrate himself and appease premier Jiabao, Balram routinely indulges in stereotypes about India. In one early example of this, Balram says the following: "[y]ou know how we Indians take to technology like ducks to

[200] Veena and Ramanathan, "New Orientalism in Literature," 7.

water."[201] Hoping to open up business opportunities for himself in China, Balram attempts to present India as fertile soil for economic development: it is a nation full of poor people who are willing to work incredibly hard. Balram bolsters this by infantilising the extent to which his country has developed as compared to global superpowers. He quips that India, Bangalore included, has no electricity, running water, or public transportation, though it is rich in entrepreneurs.[202] This is another case of Balram indulging in Orientalist stereotypes to paint India as an economic target: there is a lot of room for development in the country, and there are many workers willing to kickstart said development. Even in its capacity as a developing, agile nation, Balram chooses to subordinate India to China, using its reputation as a country filled with outsourced labour to claim that it is a country that can serve as the backbone for other countries. He notes that many of the most successful businesses in India are start-ups with contracts from Western companies, such as American Express and IBM.[203] It is later stated that outsourcing is the only "clean" business in India, with Mr. Ashok desperately wishing he were in that line of work instead.[204] Indian outsourcing companies "virtually run America now[,]" Balram claims, but he acknowledges that this structure leaves India as the labourer to another country's capital holder. In his opinion, the greatest invention to come out of India is the proverbial "Rooster Coop", the system of social pressures through which Indians remain passive and subservient.[205] While he tries to spin this Orientalist view of India as a positive feature, it is an Orientalist view all the same.

A cognisant reader may also notice that Balram attaches every negative quality he witnesses in his surroundings to structural issues, explicitly reinforcing Orientalist stereotypes rather than simply incidentally indulging in them. For example, Balram is witness to numerous

[201] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 9.
[202] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 2.
[203] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 38.
[204] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 179
[205] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 112.

instances of government corruption in his early life: he sees all of his village's votes in a national election extorted from them by local power brokers and the police, and he is a cog in the bribery scheme that keeps the Stork's illegal mining operation running, as previously mentioned. Rather than seeing these as isolated instances of corruption, Balram is quick to state that corruption is inescapable in India. "My country is the kind where it pays to play it both ways: the Indian entrepreneur has to be straight and crooked […]", he says of Indian business dealings, and he projects the election interference he witnessed in his home village onto all of India's impoverished regions, blaming it for the unexpected victory of a number of radical left-wing parties.[206] Even Balram's father's untimely death is used to diagnose a structural problem in Indian society. A sickly Muslim patient at the Dhanbad regional hospital explains that there are no doctors at the hospital to treat Balram's father because a bribery scheme allows physicians to forego touring rural hospitals.[207] While the Muslims patient clearly states that this scheme is the work of the current local regent dubbed "The Great Socialist", Balram uses this information to cast doubt on the healthcare system of the entire country.[208] Even in the present day, as a successful businessman, Balram's knowledge of India is still limited; he has never set foot outside of Laxmangarh, Dhanbad, Delhi, and Bangalore, and he has become a hermit by the time he begins writing his letter. Despite this, he uses his limited experiences to develop sweeping hypotheses about how India works, all so he can create a devastatingly negative image of the country to subordinate it in the eyes of premier Jiabao.

It should come as no surprise that *The White Tiger* indulges in a lot of stereotypes about India and Indian people that are especially negative, too. The novel is, ultimately, about a man's disenchantment with India as a result of the inequality and seedy criminality he witnesses in an Indian metropolis. Even so, the frequency with which Delhi is portrayed at its most negative

[206] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 6, 229.
[207] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 41.
[208] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 37.

and unappealing in the story is staggering. The reader gets a taste of this before any insight into Balram's personal life is brought up, as Balram instead chooses to bring up the well-worn trope of poor, inner-city urchins trying to sell people dubious goods by the side of the road: "when you come to Bangalore, and stop at a traffic light, some boy will run up to your car and knock on your window, while holding up a bootlegged copy of an American business book […]."[209] Even when he is describing the splendour and sheer scale of Indian cities, Balram chooses to attach a negative sentiment to it. Modern buildings that are made entirely of glass are blinding to the eye, and gold can be found primarily in the molars of rich men.[210] Indian cities are, as a matter of course, horribly overcrowded and polluted as well. Upon arriving in Delhi, the traffic is so chaotic and the air so polluted with diesel that Mr. Ashok cannot bear the thought of being behind the wheel of a car.[211] Balram stretches this very basic fact into an observation about the corrupt nature of Indian politics: "the President's House was covered in smog and blotted out from the road; it seemed as though there were no government in Delhi that day."[212] He has a way of describing many facets of life in Indian cities in an exaggerated, mocking way, almost as if he is trying to paint urban India as a parody of itself. A bus that is headed for Delhi, for example, is described as being jampacked with passengers to the point where it is literally bursting apart. "You'd think the whole world was migrating[,]" Balram snidely comments as he witnesses the bus driving by.[213] Even when comforting Pinky Madam about the child she ran over, Balram chooses to do so by denigrating Delhi's abundant poor: they have so many children, they might not even realise one has gone missing."[214] These portrayals of India would seem absurd were it not for Balram insistence that they are truthful. Indian cities, Balram says,

[209] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 4.
[210] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 44.
[211] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 70.
[212] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 209.
[213] Adiga, *The White Tiger, 94.*
[214] Adiga, *The White Tiger,* 140.

are not real cities with a "sense of history, planning, and grandeur", but rather "half-baked cities for half-baked men."[215]

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said explains that Orientalist depictions of South-Asian countries do not necessarily have to be bereft of truthful observations about those countries: "[o]ne ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away."[216] He later adds to this that there is inherent Orientalism in simply writing about peripheral countries from the centre—even a fully factual account of India, for example, would look different depending on whether a British author or an Indian author wrote it.[217] *The White Tiger* proves this to be true: it is a very different look at India than a Western observer might provide, but it still indulges in stereotypes all the same. Whether or not these stereotypes are truthful is less important than the fact that Balram uses them to denigrate and other India, his own country, in the very same way a Western author might do so.

While *The White Tiger* may well be the most overtly Orientalist of the three novels covered by this thesis, there is one modulating factor at work within the novel which partially disarms the argument that it is Orientalist, or New Orientalist, to its very core: the Western perspective is entirely absent from the internal text of the novel. If New Orientalism is South-East Asia giving its own input on Orientalist discourse—"the empire [writing] back", as Salman Rushdie phrased it—*The White Tiger* is more akin to a rerouting of Orientalism, one in which the Western centre is cut out of the discourse entirely to make place for a roundtable discussion among countries from the global periphery—in this case, India and China.

[215] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 44.
[216] Said, "Introduction," 15.
[217] Said, "Introduction," 21.

The characters in *The White Tiger* are most definitely aware of the Western perspective on India, but within the text this perspective exists entirely as an outside force that is occasionally gestured at. Mukesh Sir and the Stork, who are perturbed by the Americanisation that Mr. Ashok underwent during his time in New York, are the primary vessels for these transposed observations. When Mr. Ashok asks for his father to be more gentle with Balram, the Stork immediately snaps: "this isn't America, son. Don't ask questions like that."[218] Mr. Ashok's Americanised belief that India's strong family values are unnecessarily restrictive is abhorred by Mukesh Sir, and Mr. Ashok ends up apologising for this belief after his marriage falls apart. "When I was in America, I thought family was a burden […] but without family, a man is nothing. Absolutely nothing," he admits.[219] It is not just the rich who get to cast aspersions on the Western view of India, either: one of the Stork's doormen is permitted a quick jab at the colonial centre's distaste for the Indian caste system. "They married in America. When we Indians go there, we lose all respect for caste," he says, making his disapproval of Mr. Ashok's marriage to the out-of-caste Pinky Madam known. As these examples show, the Western perspective on India exists mostly in the background of *The White Tiger*, usually as something for characters to scoff at and quickly cast aside.

In fact, Balram is so heavily detached from the realities of postcolonial power structures that he disregards the global political power of the United Kingdom and the United States entirely. As he moves into the rich partitions of Bangalore and begins to come into contact with white people more often, Balram is quick to undermine them as potential power brokers on the global playing field. In his letter to premier Jiabao, Balram derides white people for their emaciated appearances, permissiveness towards homosexuality, and use of cell phones, all of which he expects will result in the white race "being finished within [his] lifetime."[220] The West

[218] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 61.
[219] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 123.
[220] Adiga, *The White Tiger,* 262.

is on its way out, Balram seems to say, so what point is there in him starting up a dialogue with its people? Balram is well aware of the fact that the business opportunities that are arising in India as a result of outsourcing are mostly coming from the West, but he sees this as an inverted power dynamic. "*We* entrepreneurs […] virtually run America now!" he proudly proclaims.[221] America is no longer of interest to Balram except for its riches, which he expects to extract from them as they move to Bangalore in droves.[222] In addressing America, and the West at large, in this manner, Balram erases any kind of history of colonial power imbalance in his mind. The countries of the Western hemisphere are simply a series of potential client states, and beyond that he, along with the novel as a whole, pays them no mind.

Lisa Lau and A.C. Mendes identify the form of New Orientalism—or "Re-Orientalism", as they prefer—that appears in *The White Tiger* as one which coincides with changing expectations from Western audiences about what form stories from South-East Asia should take. Where these types of novels (and other media) used to be about white protagonists discovering an exotic Asian country, they are now more likely to be made to indulge the "poverty tourism" desires of audiences.[223] Indeed, *The White Tiger* is a novel which lacks notable Western or Western-raised characters, but it does still appear to be written with the preferences of contemporary Western readers in mind. Lau and Mendes see this as a lack of motion within the New Orientalist space, as it merely indicates a shift in audience expectations and an identical shift from authors to meet these expectations, but one could also argue that the shift in perspective used to meet these expectations is a form of progress in and of itself. By presenting the bulk of *The White Tiger* as a one-way exchange of letters between an Indian man and a Chinese man, Adiga cuts the Western perspective out of the novel entirely. While Balram affirms a seemingly endless list of Orientalist stereotypes about India in his letter, his ultimate

[221] Adiga, *The White Tiger,* 4.
[222] Adiga, *The White Tiger*, 205.
[223] Lisa Lau and A. C. Mendes, "India through Re-Orientalist Lenses," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 17, no. 5 (2014), 711.

aim is not to buttress the Western view of India but to convince the Chinese premier of India's usefulness and exploitability. This is not a noble goal by any means, but it does stray away from Anglocentric modes of postcolonial and Orientalist discourse that were at play in *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. While *The White Tiger* may confirm many of the preconceived notions Western readers have about India, those readers will find their gaze and perspective almost entirely absent from the novel.

Because of its satirical nature and its roguish, sardonic protagonist, *The White Tiger* can be a difficult novel to analyse. Any analysis of the critiques that *The White Tiger* aims at modern Indian society have to wrestle with a number of uncertainties, such as whether or not the reader is meant to agree with Balram's perspective on India and to what extent his portrayal of India should be taken as read. These are complex queries that fall outside of the scope of this thesis. How harmful, truthful, genuine, or cynical the narrative of *The White Tiger* might be is not directly relevant to the research question at hand. The question continues to be "to what extent do postcolonialism and Orientalism play a role in *The White Tiger*?" and the answer, on both counts, is: quite a lot, but with a caveat.

Since *The White Tiger* lacks characters with well-informed Western perspectives, the presence of postcolonialism is felt mostly through the sentiment of absence and longing that some characters feel towards a Western empire that they do not really know. Mr. Ashok spent a brief period of his life in America, and as a result he is no longer able to view India the way he once did. His eyes are open to the corruption and cruelty of the Indian business world and he can neither tolerate it nor reject it wholly. He wishes to insert the American lifestyle he got a brief taste of into his Indian life, but is unable to find satisfaction within this schism. Balram's even more remote interactions with Western culture lead him down a path of conspicuous consumption and excessive business-mindedness. He convinces himself that life in America is

superior to life in India and ends up chasing the only American pursuits he knows in search of an American life. Whereas the presence of colonialism in *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss* was akin to a spectre, invisibly haunting the novels' characters, *The White Tiger* chooses instead to portray the postcolonial state of mind as a sort of void. Postcolonial awareness takes away the sense of place and belonging of the characters of *The White Tiger*, rather than merely displacing it.

Orientalism, meanwhile, is inescapable in *The White Tiger*. Balram is constantly engaged in a project of undermining and stereotyping India, whether it be by going into great detail about corruption, lack of hygiene, or the innate lust for servitude of the Indian people. The novel presents a version of India that confirms almost every negative stereotype a Western reader can imagine. However, it does so while leaving the Western reader conspicuously absent, choosing instead to turn inward and exclusively address South-East Asian perspectives. Ultimately, the insinuations of Lau, Mendes, and many literary critics that *The White Tiger* is a work of poverty tourism that fits squarely within the lineage of Orientalism ring true to a certain extent. Of the three novels that fall within the purview of this thesis, *The White Tiger* is by far the most reliant on Orientalist stereotypes about India. However, when analysing a lineage, it is pertinent to acknowledge that time is passing and change, however slight, is occurring. The fact alone that *The White Tiger* chooses not to provide Western readers with an internal perspective they can latch onto may seem like a minor step forward in the project of escaping Orientalism, but it is a step forward nonetheless.

Conclusion

Before concluding this thesis, it is pertinent to lay out once more what this text aims to prove and, more importantly, what it does and does not intend to say about *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger*. The notion that provided the foundation for this thesis is that novels written by writers from Commonwealth countries are unlikely to win the Booker Prize unless they centre the lasting effects of colonialism or de-emphasise the complexities of their country of origin. In arguing whether or not this applies to the three Indian Booker Prize winners, one stands right on the edge of the pitfall of ascribing a particular motivation to some of the actors involved in the Booker Prize machinery writ large. Therefore, the following needs to be emphatically said: this thesis was not written with the intent of ascribing blame to the authors of these three books for writing novels that adhere to the apparent preferences of Booker Prize juries when it comes to Commonwealth novels. Whether or not a possible Booker Prize victory was taken into consideration in the writing process of these novels is impossible to ascertain and ultimately irrelevant to this thesis. It is equally gauche and impertinent to ascribe, with any sense of authority, a motivation to the numerous Booker Prize juries who have selected Commonwealth novels which emphasised the lingering effects of colonialism many times over. For the purposes of this thesis, all that can and needs to be said about the Booker Prize and its relation to Commonwealth novels is that these books appear to have a much higher chance of being nominated and of winning the Prize if colonialism and its reverberations play a big role in their narratives. This thesis aims to reveal is to what extent the three Indian Booker Prize-winning novels fit this understanding about the Booker Prize in order to partially prove or disprove its veracity.

This thesis aimed to find out how strong the presence of postcolonial and Orientalist themes in *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger* is, as well

as whether or not these novels contain narrative and structural elements that could serve to alienate British readers. In doing so, this thesis intends to prove whether or not these books fit into the narrative of Commonwealth Booker Prize-winning novels all being highly postcolonial and culturally flattening works, with a lack of narrative diversity being the result. The rest of this conclusion will aim to synthesise the results of the previous chapters of this thesis in order to summarise their arguments.

Postcolonialism undoubtably plays a huge role in the narratives of all three Indian Booker Prize winners. In *The God of Small Things*, it is clear that many residents of Ayemenem, and Rahel and her family in particular, still hold British culture, education, and institutions in incredibly high regard despite living in the era of Indian independence. Characters who behold the United Kingdom with reverence are the sole purveyors of the novel's spotlight: the numerous characters who are not connected to British culture whatsoever are located at the periphery of the story. The influence that colonialism had on Indian culture is also felt throughout the novel, most notably in the way the introduction of the British class system to India has started to put cracks in the foundation of India's own caste system. *The Inheritance of Loss*, which also mostly takes place after India gained independence, is similarly focussed on characters who are bound to British culture. Despite being mistreated horribly during his time in England, the Judge aims his contempt squarely at what he considers India's backwardness compared to the United Kingdom. Sai, who was born after India gained independence, is the product of an Anglicised education at a Christian convent, being that she is a monolingual English speaker and a bookworm who cares exclusively for English literature. Her complete disconnect from India's own culture ends up driving a wedge in her romantic relationship with the Indian-Nepalis Gyan. In *The White Tiger*, the lingering effects of colonial powers are instead felt through the magnetic effect that Western culture has on Indians, even when they are otherwise disconnected from the history of colonialism. Balram and Mr. Ashok

are both smitten by Western-style consumerism, even choosing to express this through Western hobbies and clothing styles. Both of these characters enjoy a very thin awareness of the true nature of Western culture, but their continuous exposure to its Indian counterfeits still lead them to believe that Western culture is inherently more worthwhile than Indian culture.

The God of Small Things, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger* are also quite heavily laden with New-Orientalist discourse and narratives. While all three novels go to great lengths to criticise Indian society and—to a certain extent—the lasting impact colonialism has had on it, they choose to do so through Orientalist methods which perpetuate the othering and simplification of India in the broader culture. All three novels adhere to the imagery of India being unusually crowded and unhygienic, especially in its major cities. Highly stereotypical characters, such as the sage-like beggar Murlidharan from *The God of Small Things* and the unsavoury groups of foreign leppers from *The Inheritance of Loss*, add to the notion that poverty takes on a very distinct form in India. *The White Tiger* adds to this feeling by painting New Delhi as uniquely corrupt, even in the eyes of characters who have some level of awareness of politics outside of India. *The Inheritance of Loss* even seems to argue that the dereliction of Indian metropolises follows Indian people wherever they go, as Biju encounters it in Indian districts of New York City as well. *The God of Small Things* is especially noteworthy in the lengths it goes to otherise Indian culture, focussing on intensely Indian subject matter like the caste system and going to great lengths to explain cultural practices and artifacts which might be unfamiliar to non-Indian readers. Through the use of these creative decisions, the three Indian Booker Prize-winning novels continue to operate within the realm of Orientalist discourse, even as they are trying to criticise many elements of prior generations of Orientalism.

While all three of these novels show strong elements of both postcolonialism and Orientalism, this does not mean that they are novels which are fully Anglicised in the way in

which they are written and narrated. Both *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss* feature complex renditions of regional historical events that are introduced and grounded with such brevity that those unfamiliar with these events are likely to miss out on some of their nuances. In the case of *The God of Small Things*, this is the growing presence of the communist movement in Kerala, whereas *The Inheritance of Loss* leans heavily on the rise of the GNLF and the Kalimpong Massacre. To readers unfamiliar with these events, the fact that the nuances of these historical backdrops go largely unexplained means that not every plot beat may be easy to understand. Moreover, both of these novels, and *The Inheritance of Loss* especially, make significant use of non-English languages. *The God of Small Things* mostly uses Malayalam to enforce a sense of regional character, rarely hiding key information behind its second language. *The Inheritance of Loss,* meanwhile, regularly applies Hindi to entire phrases and sections of dialogue, creating the occasional information gap for readers who do not speak the language. *The White Tiger* is the only novel out of the three which makes for an easily digestible read for British audiences. The complex historical backdrop and uncontextualized use of Indian languages of *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, which may leave British readers at an occasional loss, are nowhere to be found in *The White Tiger*. The novel instead paints a highly stereotypical and straightforward picture of modern India. While the novel is immensely critical of the India that it aims to reflect, it is nevertheless a deeply New-Orientalist novel in the way it indulges in the imagery of the forgotten Indian villages and the crowded, busy Indian metropolis. Therefore, *The White Tiger* is the quintessential Commonwealth Booker Prize-winning novel.

As stated previously, Paula Morris and Ronit Frenkel have argued that Commonwealth novels need to have a (post)colonial link to the United Kingdom in their narratives to have a shot at the Booker Prize. Morris additionally proffered the idea that a largely anonymised sense of place can also be cause for a Booker Prize victory. Interestingly enough, all three Indian

Booker Prize winners appear to fall into the former category. *The God of Small Things*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The White Tiger* all portray an India which is still in the throes of lingering Western cultural and political powers. While these novels may indulge in Orientalist stereotypes at times, they are nevertheless unmistakably Indian, routinely describing and deliberating on the current state of India, from its smallest villages to its busiest metropolises. For all the ways in which these novels link back to the United Kingdom and the West at large, they are deeply embedded in Indian culture and geography, resulting in stories with themes that might not all resonate fully with Western audiences. If there is one claim that can be made with near-certainty, it is that these novels did not win the Booker Prize because anyone, anywhere could project themselves onto their stories and themes.

Ultimately, it appears to be the case that the three Indian Booker Prize-winning novels do indeed carry many elements of the stereotypical Commonwealth Booker winner. All three novels engage with colonial history and/or Western culture at length, and they also spin yarns that play into many Orientalist narratives and stereotypes. The result is three novels which share a lot of similarities despite being very different from each other from a synoptic point of view. All three novels are populated with characters that are preoccupied with Western culture and power, explore the dichotomy between the West and periphery nations, deal with the significant cultural and material disconnect between Indian villages and metropolises, and appear to be carefully crafted to allow audiences worldwide to read them without suffering significant culture shock. These three novels, different as their premises may be, share a significant number of narrative elements. Therefore, the hypothesis which states that Commonwealth novels with a significant postcolonial bend are far more likely to win the Booker Prize appears to be true. Because of this, the narrative diversity of the selection of winners is somewhat hampered, as the aforementioned list of elements that are shared between the novels shows. That said, *The Inheritance of Loss* and *The God of Small Things* both manage

to rise above the stereotype of the postcolonial, British-facing Commonwealth novel to a certain extent by incorporating non-English languages and complex historical events into their narratives. *The White Tiger*, despite being the most unambiguously postcolonial and Orientalist of the three novels, also deserves some credit for existing entirely outside of the Western gaze. No British or American characters exist within the pages of the novel, and Balram's portrayal of India is constructed purely for the purposes of pleasing a Chinese politician. As such, while there are certainly elements shared between the three novels which create a body of Indian Booker Prize winners with a level of narrative diversity that could have been much higher, the novels also engage in narrative strategies which allow them to diverge from each other to a limited extent.

(Word count: 26830)

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