

## Conclusions to Part II:

Given the polyphonic nature of literary language, and its multi-layered opacity, I will grant that there are several possibilities of meaning for one given text. Still, there is a set of central ideas and themes, structured according to narrative codes and formulas, which assemble the elements of the text in such a way that would be met with agreement by most lines of interpretation. It is from this claim to reasonable agreement that I present my conclusions.

I have approached the three selected Indo-English novels from two different, though compatible, angles: feminist and postcolonial. I will start with the results of my feminist readings, moving on to postcolonial topics. I will equally consider the productive intersections between both of these critical frames and I will reflect on the adequacy of the critical theories I have been using.

Both feminist and postcolonial theories worked as a structured set of guidelines to organise my reading, engaging in such a way that my private impressions with wider intellectual dialogues, be it in terms of ideology, ethics or aesthetics. I thus invite other readers to think along the same paths I have chosen to travel. That is, in my view, the advantage of critical theories: to create an explicit common ground to discuss, learn from and enjoy literature. Obviously, the relevance of this or other critical approach is determined by the text itself. My first reading of the selected novels immediately confronted me with a sense of exciting, encyclopaedic material wrapped up in challenging narrative forms: a double treat. Hence, my belief in the relevance of the texts I picked as cases studies for this research.

From a feminist angle, the three novels I have discussed above share some common points both in the feminist agendas they envisage for the future and in the identification of current sexist practices. All of the three texts settle a diagnosis of the evils of patriarchal society through the creation of women characters that experience the oppressive, claustrophobic expectations of the gendered social order around them as stressing, constraining barriers. At the same time, there are, in the represented social landscapes, cases of women characters that have adjusted happily to the traditional gender roles. Certainly, the happy charms of domesticity and motherhood are not denied, and I also think that it is important to consider a great variety of interests and aspirations within the frame of women's issues, respecting different groups of women. What is signalled by the representation of different degrees of women's adjustment or, by opposition, resistance and psychological struggle, is that women may want different things from their lives, and the lack of elasticity in patterns of social organisation may create high levels of frustration and suffering. By representing different aspirations among women, as well as changed expectations according to generation, these texts put into sharp focus relevant variations to define agendas of reform.

On a more public scale, feminist issues are linked to power hierarchies and local forms of communalism or caste segregation. The study of Indo-English literature is particularly interesting for this last matter for it makes very explicit how women's bodies are used to create lineage borders between different social groups, literally embodying the continuity of privilege, segregation and communal self-definition.

The feminist writing carried out by these Indian women writers was equally important to suggest a re-definition of symbolic cultural references, exploring affection, desire and popular myths, as forms of empowerment that can break with the narcissist

wound (that is, lack of self-esteem) that each woman has to face as she grows up in a patriarchal environment where her gendered self is considered “second best”.

The discussion of India’s traditions as a rigid system in need of reform, a shared point in the two of the analysed texts (Rich like Us and The God of Small Things), consolidates women’s writing in India as a powerful source of intra-national confrontation, creating enough of critical distance to revise a cultural heritage too easily misused, with possible violent consequences for women, ranging from psychological pressure to “domestic accidents”.

In the represented social landscapes of India, the presence of strong gendered codes inculcated from childhood, embodied in everyday routines, and interfering with the most private dimensions of individuality, is simply pervasive. Following Homi Bhabha’s definition of pedagogic strategies (see section I.1.2), the coherence and the tightness of these codes, guarantees that individuals tend to assimilate dominant patterns of collective identity, accommodating to certain mentalities and committed to communal/collective allegiance. Against the communal background represented in these novels, the inscription of feminism amounts to an effort to make women free of “the dependency syndrome”, to quote the blunt words of Chaman Nahal<sup>292</sup> that make women wait on husbands, fathers, extended family, the traditions of the community or religious belief to determine their priorities and routines. This means that feminism implies a problematic re-thinking of traditional Indian patterns of feminine identity (communal, heavily dependent on others), making it look suspicious, even for the majority of women themselves. The challenge, for women writers was to create characters that unlearn the pedagogic lesson, a step that liberates them to fashion their own selves in uncharted ways: that is the exemplary value of Sonali, Ammu and Rahel.

As far as Nayantara Sahgal is concerned, she takes the reader on a journey through the universe of high caste, Kashmir Brahmin families, exposing the patriarchal logic of India’s caste system and its direct relation to Indian politics. She connects the feudal logic presiding over marriage arrangements (and the life of a closed circle of families) to the relevance of family/caste connections as competent claims to political power. The relevant touchstone to assess women’s position in the represented high caste patriarchal structure is to underline, as a matter of principle, the extent of the invested interests at stake in the control of women’s sexuality and their choice of partners.

From the point of view of feminist literary criticism, the structure of Rich Like Us, a realist text, chronologically linear (with the exception of chapter eleven on *sati*), and working through external factors and circumstances to construct the inner life of characters (as a reaction to the former), confirmed “gender” as a productive tool for textual analysis, organising a reading perspective that outlines women’s problems, exposes the mechanics of the represented, sexist social structures and suggests a set of guidelines for change.

Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things is a different kind of narrative, more centred on memories, perceptions, feelings, and how these hurt and haunt you for a lifetime. Since internal psychological reactions are, at least, as important as the external events that caused them, we have moved away from a more realist focalisation (as in Rich Like Us) to a less chronologically linear narrative, sometimes closer to the lyrical mode than to narrative codes themselves. This different form of narrative focalisation emphasised the necessity of sexual difference theories to read literary pieces where more room is given to internal, psychological processes.

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<sup>292</sup> Chaman Nahal, “Feminism in Indian English Fiction”, in Indian Women Novelists, R.K. Dhawan (ed.), Prestige, 1991, New Delhi, vol I.

Arundhati Roy echoes Sahgal's diagnosis of women's powerlessness as the consequence of a deficient access to property rights and education, the two priorities to be settled effectively by a deep change in the dominant mentalities of India. It is true that the post-independence Constitution of India includes laws to improve women's legal access to property, but, if dominant mentalities stick to tradition and habit, a law is no more than mere words written on paper in a high office, very remote from everyday life. Naturally, one should bear in mind that, as Arundhati Roy said in an interview<sup>293</sup>, "*India lives in several centuries, simultaneously*" ranging from feudal worlds to cosmopolitan cities like Bombay, and it is across these contradictions that feminism has to be negotiated. Still, it is never easy to reform old ways and old myths, moreover in India, where characters like the ideal wife (Sita) are part of popular culture, and constitute important role models for a mass of illiterate, poor people.

Like Sahgal, Roy invokes the presence of Indian traditions as an incisive source of private unhappiness for those women who do not adapt, because the normative patterns are so strong that there is a sheer lack of alternatives. Worse, the mechanisms of social control and social exclusion are aggressively intolerant, as her novel demonstrates.

Roy introduces the problem of the position of women inside their own blood families, writing a powerful novel about the non-place for daughters in traditional patriarchal families, which amounts to displace the claims for better education opportunities and fairer inheritance rights to a previous, more urgent stage, which has to do with sexism in terms of affection, at home, inside the family. Remember that it is through a set of pedagogic and performative strategies of cultural identification that daughters assimilate women's roles according to traditional Indian mentalities. Since the preference for sons is openly established in Indian traditional mentalities, daughters grow up thinking of themselves as second best in relation to sons, developing a low self-esteem and assimilating a disempowering sense of "self".

Hariharan revisits an old classic, The Arabian Nights, or The Thousand and One Nights, to induce reflection on the misogyny of the original version of the tales. Her writing is also a map of her reading of the translated Arab collection, following its impact in Europe as the source of Orientalist images. In her rewritten version of The Arabian Nights tales, Githa Hariharan emphasises the importance of bonds of affection between women, presenting these bonds as the necessary grounds to create "unheard of" stories. The importance of these new tales is that they are the forerunners of alternative moralities and ways of living as imagined by liberated characters whose conquered self-awareness is beyond the struggle with tradition.

Hariharan shares with Arundhati Roy the option for placing at the centre of the plot dissenting women characters that reinvent the roles appointed to them, going beyond the expected, quiet script. Shahrzad (Hariharan's Scheherazade) turns her martyr's position into the means to manipulate her sultan effectively, so that he postpones her death and forgets his murderous vow. Dilshad starts as a slave in the sultan's harem and ends up arranging the coup d'état that imprisons him. Finally, Dunyazad, after lending an helping hand to overthrow the tyrant, settles for travelling with her new lover, breaking with a life devoted to others like her sister, son, stepson, father, and (silently despised) husband.

Hariharan's novel When Dreams Travel is the one that stands closer to the principles defended by sexual difference theories, exploring the liberating potential of imagination to create a new non-misogynous universe of popular references, which will be stimulating for

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<sup>293</sup> "A India vive em vários séculos ao mesmo tempo." In "Fuck the Prize! Interview with Arundhati Roy", Alexandra Lucas Coelho, *Público*, 2 de Maio, 1998.

women. As an instance of one of these references, Hariharan revisits Scheherazade as an inspirational myth for feminism on account of her qualities of strength, daring and intelligence. In fact, as she hints in her novel, there are very few heroines in the popular gallery of mythical feminine images who succeed in gambling with death and win the game, saving the rest of the community through their deeds. Usually, the role of facing enemies and emerge victorious is a masculine one, being the heroine/bride the prize the hero gets. The worth of feminine wit is seldom given such a flattering representation as in the creation of the famous story-teller, endlessly narrating for her life and the lives of other women... just as committed feminist writers are doing.

The three texts imply, albeit in different ways, a fluid movement back and forth in time, at least in some passages. This treatment of time suggests a continuity of older versions of the same problems between younger and older generations of women. It also denounces the ways in which successive generations of women were differently affected by the negative aspects of local cultural traditions that have led to abuse, misogyny and gender prejudice.

I think that two of the discussed texts (Rich Like Us, and The God of Small Things) have proved that a feminist approach that still relies on gender analysis is worth its salt because of the relevance of a sociological approach to understand the represented socio-cultural world, and the ways in which it is oppressive for women. However, if the studied text grants more room to internal, psychological processes, reflecting on forms of resistance and activism waiting on self-awareness, then, I think sexual difference theories will prove more effective research tools to follow the fashioning of liberated subjectivities and the invention of new feminist myths, much needed models of deviance and transgression

From a postcolonial point of view, the three Indo-English novels I have just analysed led me into travelling through other, parallel roads.

I consider these novels postcolonial texts because they express a postcolonial awareness materialised in a commitment to think through history and the after effects of a long period of colonialism. To think through colonial history implies the revision of old colonial judgements, correcting Orientalist ideas. Nevertheless, this relevant agenda keeps old binaries functional and necessary, which may not amount to the best basis to answer current challenges like sustainability and the preservation of peace, issues that demand serious international co-operation.

At the same time, the nature of multicultural societies, like the Indian one, make it vital to learn to think of the relations between nations and between peoples in innovative ways, breaking intra-national dichotomies, as well. That is why I think these three novels tried to balance the self-assertive drive to “write” the nation with examples of collaboration, exchange and fusion across territorial borders and communal identities. The problematic self-definition of the subcontinent, fragmented across multicultural communities whose co-existence is tense, poses this double problem in the writing of national identity: to consolidate Indian identity is not to assert Hindu majority, because to write to nation, in this location, implies to write multiculturalism, undermining homogenising gestures of a central state. Some sectors of India’s politics and intelligentsia solve this problem by emphasising communal caste borders and investing in the purity of the community as a means to compete with other social groups. The three writers addressed here see the danger in this line of thought. Instead of inviting more violence and intra-national tension, they defend, albeit in different ways, the necessity of sharing India, and co-exist with other groups. Nayantara Sahgal is the most straight-forward writer in her defence of Muslim-Hindu friendship. She does not shun British contacts either. Her view of India is constructed via one’s commitment to a project, in this case, the socialist one, and not by guarding internal borders against those

India may or may not exclude from “citizenship”. In the same line of thought, Arundhati Roy, problematises the caste system and the definition of untouchability, two systems of exclusion that are the backbone of India’s social structure. In her view, a functional Indian society has to start by dropping prejudice and intolerance as the most important elements to determine social relations. Her argument is insightful and logic: institutionalised elites will never question the basis of their power, preferring to sacrifice individual feelings, sensitivity and good intentions to the cold necessity of perpetuating privilege. Since no improvement can come from this corporate frame of mind, it is the mentalities of individual people that have to change, because if people act in a different way, expressing innovative opinions and starting public debates, they can bring about social reforms. Hence, it is within people’s reach to solve the intra-national tensions of the subcontinent if only they choose to do so. Finally, Hariharan deconstructs the credibility of borders between people by making a parody of their fundamentals, while listing, on a meta-narrative level, a set of examples of human achievement, like the legends of The Thousand and One Nights, the Taj Mahal and famous historical episodes, to prove that cultural heritage stands for world metissage, whose hybrid system of references did not turn “the other” into “the same”: co-existence and exchange of knowledge beyond hierarchical and exclusive binaries is possible because it has already been happening for centuries, even though it might not have been acknowledged from a colonial frame of mind (that denied the worth of any other civilisation apart the Western one).

While thinking of new forms to represent different communities and new basis to think international relations, these writers are also revising Orientalist/colonial views of India, confronting the West with a self-assertive account that answers back to previous colonial projections. Arundhati Roy is the writer that takes the de-construction of colonial mentalities the further through her analysis of the self-hating, split identity of the colonial subject. Her anti-Anglophilia argument also denounces the gap between the promoted standard of English behaviour as example of civilisation, and the low ethical standards of racism and despotism promoted by this culture (in this point, Roy echoes Gauri Vishnawatan and her analysis of the promotion of English literature as a means to make colonialism look acceptable among Indian elites, while political practice just abused the people of the subcontinent).

Apart from assessing alternative constructions of India’s collective identity and highlighting revisionist practices (which de-construct colonial ideologies), another relevant contribution of this study to the definition of postcolonial literature is the demonstration of the clear research focus that gets defined when one picks concrete locations to study the worth of the concepts and categories offered by a postcolonial frame of analysis. The geo-chronological co-ordinates that define a location and the literary system that represents it as “postcolonial” become quite concrete. It is the attempt to develop rampant, abstract theory that weakens the usefulness of such a theoretical frame itself. As I said in the introduction, I regret a certain tendency of critical theories to generalise certain expectations and promote a certain methodological conformity, especially in what concerns the reviewing of postcolonial literatures, when what is at stake is the loss of a precious opportunity to overcome Europe’s parochialism (precisely because of its repetitive, self-centred epistemes) and reach for innovative arguments and views that may fall outside of the scope of a more universal and rigid approach.

From the point of view of Indian literatures themselves, I think the worth of these novels has to be measured by the relevance of their social critique for India’s self-recognition and evolution. The critique of the caste system and its exclusionary practices with unacceptable human costs (Roy), the denunciation of home colonialism under self-serving elites (Sahgal) and the representation of aristocracies as parasites living of the blood

of the city (Hariharan and her despot sultan, hated by the city dwellers) amount to a very stern dis-enfranchisement of India's postcolonial government and the fossilisation of its traditions of privilege. Roy also voices a consistent warning against the careless, polluting industrialisation of India asking for greater concern and monitored choices.

Aesthetically, the worth of Indo-English literature will have to be measured by its contribution to Indian modern (and postmodern) literatures, possibly comparing it to current literatures being produced in other Indian languages. I can only suggest that, in the distance that separates Nayantara Sahgal's realist text, retrospectively following the fashion of the 1930s, when nationalist writing was at its zenith, to Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan's greater exploration of the power of fantasy and myth, I read a literary trend, heavily influenced by Salman Rushdie, to create more surprising and magical texts.

My situated approach to postcolonial literatures answers to the complains of Marxist intellectuals like Aijaz Ahmad<sup>294</sup> and Arif Dirlik<sup>295</sup> who have been openly resentful of the apparent lack of concern of postcolonial criticism for history and politics. I would add that not all the critics writing in the West have to be complicit with neo-colonialism, neither do they have to be reduced to renegade "informers". It is up to each of us (both writers and readers) to be accountable for the effects of one's contribution to current critical debates. In fact, the three Indo-English writers considered above resist neo-colonial practices strongly, tentatively establishing ways to negotiate international contacts (that India needs), but without allowing for a worsening of India's poverty.

Nayantara Sahgal believes in a form of socialism adapted to the material circumstances and the cultural universe of India. Hers is a project that believes in the nation-state, as long as it is ruled by really committed politicians, of the kind that is not willing to "sell" India (and the needs of its people) in exchange for private wild profit. The sense of crisis in the post-independence Indian state is represented as the consequence of Indira Gandhi's dictatorship and the capitalist, bourgeois mentality of her followers.

Arundhati Roy's anti-Anglophilia and ecological concerns define a distance from external interference that is only emphasised by her dismissive view of emigration as a sort of "giving up" on India, falling for a second colonial myth. However, contrary to Sahgal, Arundhati Roy does not really support a collective project to oppose the complicity of governments and transnational capitalism. Her revolution is a private one, starting from individual commitment to an ethic and fraternal behaviour. According to the options offered in *The God of Small Things*, both "the nation" and cultural traditions have oppressed individuals in the name of the self-serving interests of different elites. None of the main three references for collective affiliation mentioned in the novel, namely the caste system, communism and religion seem really positive or helpful forces in terms of social organisation. On the contrary, love, friends and affection do feature as energising forces and sources of inspiration to find better ways of accommodating individual subjectivity to the demands and needs of other people around you. Through the small family circle of her characters, Arundhati Roy represents the way history and socio-political forces invade and damage the most private dimensions of subjectivity, in the name of the preservation of certain power structures, the prejudice these live off, and the social conformity that grants their continuity. Inversely, subversive reactions at the private, individual level are deemed powerful political acts that can implode the capillary bases of power of the three mentioned systems of collective identity, creating a less oppressive (less traumatising, really) society. That is Roy's project to resist both home colonialism and neo-colonial threats.

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<sup>294</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality" *in op. cit.* Mongia (ed.), 1996: 276, 291.

<sup>295</sup> Arif Dirlik "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism", *in* Mongia (ed.) 1996: 294, 321.

Githa Hariharan's novel inhabits a fantastic landscape, which makes the assessment of the ways it handles a collective sense of postcolonial location more difficult. She seems rather interested in underlining the constant flow of trade, emigration and cross-fertilisation that evolved from the history of European colonialism. In *When Dreams Travel*, to think collective postcolonial contexts implies to learn to live with a shared memory and heritage, regardless of being "Eastern" or "Western": we share as much as we differ. Hence, the complementary gifts of cultural diversity have to be praised for their worth, and not feared or manipulated for political purposes of oppression and violence. Still, Hariharan's perspective is not that de-territorialised (it is Eastern) nor does she erase the distinctive identities of "East" and "West", which are compared to the differences between day and night. However, she does transcend dichotomies, trying to think beyond international threats and national defence. Within the logic of her text, self-awareness is survival. By constructing a disgusting sultan as the embodiment of despotic power, Hariharan is advocating a strong line of resistance and non-complicity with abuse. Instead of siding with Sahgal's party logic, Hariharan is closer to Arundhati Roy's incitement to shape individual identities along lines of non-complicity with abusive power.

While Sahgal is clearly the most nationalist of the three, none of the above writers defended any form of nativism nor did they promote any exclusionary practices. Sahgal transcends old colonial dichotomies in so far as she defends the promotion of cosmopolitan forms of awareness, enabling scholars and entrepreneurs to co-operate in the preservation of specialised production (what a country is best at) and accepting each others ways with the same educated charm they adapt their "savoir faire" to different dressing codes, evening parties under different climates, business agreements under different legal systems. In this point Hariharan is closer to Sahgal than to Roy. Her wise survivors adapt and learn, travelling to different landscapes with the integrity of wise nomads.

As for Arundhati Roy, she prefers to stick to clear dichotomies, analysing colonial relations between Indian citizens and British colonisers, dislocating this same dichotomy for the present through her resistance to current forms of globalisation. Yet, the extent of Roy's defence of "India's rights" (a self-assertive argument) does not necessarily promote "nationalist" ideas. The sense of "home colonialism" (exploitation of the people by high caste aristocracies or political elites), already mentioned by Sahgal, becomes a really bitter and spiteful topic in Roy. From the point of view expressed in her novel, the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, or the party, should be treated with distance and suspicion, rather as foes to be feared than as representatives to be trusted.

As concerns the discussion on forms of individual identity, the three novels invest a lot in the fashioning of new forms of awareness and subversive subjectivity, embodied in surprising and captivating characters expected to work as a sort of role models. Since this appeal is intensely personal, these novels also demand an active reader, willing to "play along" in considering the amazing wealth of material for intellectual reflection and ideological translation offered by character and plot, against a masterfully controlled sketch of a specific social background. The provocation to the reader in terms of intellectual thought is accompanied by a quite extensive set of alluring ingredients, taken from popular formulas of success, like romance, sex, gothic settings and detective stories (from the suspect business enterprise of the "Happyola" factory in Sahgal, the "why did Sophie Mol die?" of Roy, to the mysterious disappearance of Shahrzad in Hariharan's tale), not to mention certain melodramatic excesses in Roy's representation of childhood emotions and the Hollywood glamour all over Hariharan's re-creation of the sultan's palace. This appropriation of popular culture is more noticeable in the two younger writers (Roy and Hariharan), who seem to invite a postmodern approach through several other aspects of their

novels, like intertextual play, the deconstruction of established ideologies (and canons), and, especially in Hariharan, the self-replicating, multiple structure of the narrative.

These texts also share with postmodernism the revisionist (deconstructive) mode focused on identities and history. In the case of postcolonial literatures, the master narratives under erasure are the colonial and neo-colonial systems of knowledge and power. However the political agendas and the activist social criticism contained in these narratives breaks up with the text-centred allure of a postmodern approach, more textual, abstract and ahistorical. That kind of critical approach would be gross injustice to texts such as these ones, so involved with history, politics and ways of conceiving better forms of social organisation.

Sahgal excludes anti-colonial views directed at past British colonisation from her text. In fact, there are, in Rich Like Us, several meaningful exchanges and forms of collaboration between British and Indian characters, which amounts to say that Sahgal reserves anti-(neo)colonial resistance to the threat posed by American capitalism, deconstructing the notion of happiness as consumerism or profit. Arundhati Roy is equally resentful of the increasing marginalisation of the dispossessed from any improvement, which she reads as a side effect of capitalism. By writing a novel that confronts the most vulnerable sense of self (children's) with the intolerant demands of different power structures, Roy corrodes the ethical claims of dominant institutions to rule in the name of order, not only because social institutions are represented as intolerant and aggressive forces, unable to allow room for deviance, but, furthermore, because the worth of this same order is revised by the assertion of untouchable selfhood, feminine desire and the undeniable rights of children, either from "divorced couples", or "second best" daughters. On her turn, Hariharan resists the credibility of fundamentalism, racism and the East/West dichotomy as serious references to justify all the violence and abuse that ensued from their use as political discourses.

Taking the above positions and arguments into account, I can conclude that the revisionist drive of postcolonial literature is quite alive and active. However, mind that the analysed texts were produced a few decades after independence, which means that the previous nationalist struggle has been translated into forms of social critique, both intra-national and international, as I have just outlined in these conclusions.

I also read the anti-colonial or anti-globalisation arguments of these novels as a matter of self-assertion, only, I think national (or ethnic, regional) self-assertion no longer is so dependent on the parading of cultural differences as it happened during the initial stage of the independence struggle, when local cultures and their corresponding traditions were deified, as a strategic frame of identity to oppose to Western culture and its myths of white superiority. In the case of the three studied writers, strategies to enhance India's self-definition and self-promotion are more entwined with the reformulation of postcolonial notions of identity, discussing the current postcolonial situation, its past genealogy and its prospects. Consequently, cultural differences are not presented under a very positive light neither is there any political momentum extracted from them. As I said, I am not dealing with pre-independence, nationalist literature but rather with post-independence writing. Because of this time frame, there is no strategic necessity of answering back to racist colonial stereotypes that diminished Indian culture and Indian identity (at least not with the same vehemence). On the contrary, the self-assertion of India as a postcolonial state had to work through the fragmenting impact of distinctive cultural identities in the subcontinent, where caste references and communal Hindu/Muslim rivalry are frequently closer to one's heart than Indian citizenship. These fragmenting forces are rather repeatedly mourned as sources of social tension and intra-national division, which erases the relevance of such a concept as hybridity to understand dominant social forces in the subcontinent.

Of the three writers, I think only Arundhati Roy pushed her use of the English language to such a level of innovation and creativity that its “degeneration” in relation to norms of Standard English becomes an issue, and unanimously, a matter of praise. However, her “style”, literally meaning the unique, genial way an artist “marks” his/her authorship, only becomes a postcolonial issue (besides being an aesthetic one) because of the previous colonial prejudice in relation to non-metropolitan literature that did not conform totally to the standard (European) version of the displaced, shared language.

The gains ensuing from the option for a combined approach, using a double critical frame woven out of both feminist and postcolonial critical theories is demonstrated by the above conclusions and the double discussion of each of the novels. Although some topics may overlap, the two critical frames did not exclude or exhaust each other. Plenty of the issues assessed from a postcolonial perspective would be mute under an exclusive feminist approach and most of the agendas spelt out from my feminist readings would be reduced to sociological arguments, or to psychological studies of women characters, without connecting, neither social background nor character, to an established kind of committed literature, whose aims (consciousness raising, identification of sexist problems, discussion of empowerment strategies) determined, at least in part, the design of these novels.

As I hope to have proved in the sections devoted to a postcolonial analysis of the selected texts, the use of a set of critical categories and concepts to think of these modern literatures in relation to wider historical processes (of de-colonisation, national consolidation, modernisation and resistance to neo-colonial practices) only increases the stand of literature as site of ethical and political thinking, without denying any of its entertaining and seductive charms. I do not see how it is possible to read these texts without following the historical comment and the socio-political reflection they invite. Hence the validity of a situated approach, for you cannot deny the context, which inspired the text. Naturally, this amounts to say that I expect this research on the voices of these postcolonial women writers, grounded on their specific locations, has had an effect of making the reader more aware of the challenges, hopes and problems of current India, as these Indian writers see them. That is also my way of deconstructing the hold of Western-centric ideas and their narrower horizons.