The Multiple Cosmopolitanisms of the Indian Novel in English

In 1981 the India-born, England-residing Salman Rushdie exploded onto the global literary stage when *Midnight’s Children*, a magical-realist novel about postcolonial India, was awarded the prestigious Booker Prize for Fiction. In terms of literary innovation, as Makarand Paranjape writes, *Midnight’s Children*’s “energy, its self-indulgence, irresponsibility, disorder, and cockiness really shocked the daylights out of the staid form of the Indian English novel”; subsequently, “heaps of novels” have been shaped by “Rushdie’s liberating touch [ . . . ]” (“Inside and Outside the Whale” 220). Novelist Anita Desai said, indeed, that Rushdie showed Indian English novelists “a way to be ‘post-colonial’” (qtd. in Dingwaney 317). Besides such contributions to Indian and global literature, however, the aura of radicalism that continues to surround Rushdie’s novel points to its achievements on a much broader level. Critics regard the 1981 Booker as the moment of arrival for the entire field of postcolonial literatures in India.
English—literatures whose narrative strategies and cultural-political imaginaries are grounded in contexts shaped by British colonization and subsequent decolonization. While other postcolonial texts had already captured the Booker by 1981, including novels by V. S. Naipaul and J. M. Coetzee, Midnight’s Children and its author have gained iconic status as English literary studies has truly gone global. As if to underline the point, Midnight’s Children won awards for the Booker of Bookers in 1993 and the Best of the Booker award in 2008—securing, in the latter case, the support of thousands of readers in a worldwide vote.¹

Midnight’s Children stands out, in hindsight, for its ideological and stylistic affiliation with and contribution to new tendencies that were already transforming the Western intellectual landscape by the late 1970s and early 1980s. The rise of French poststructuralist and postmodernist thought out of the crucible of the 1960s has been well documented, weaving together and working against the ideas of earlier European philosophers from Friedrich Nietzsche and Ferdinand de Saussure to Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre. Developing in more or less tension with these ideas were various articulations of Marxian thought, including the work of Frantz Fanon around colonialism and racial oppression, E. P. Thompson in historiography, Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt School in cultural studies, and Louis Althusser in philosophy. Midnight’s Children can be read in light of Anglophone works that emerged slightly later, as the radical moment of the 1960s and early 1970s came to a close. Along with texts as different as Gayatri Spivak’s English translation of Jacques Derrida’s Of Grammatology (1976), Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978), Ranajit Guha’s Subaltern Studies, Volume 1 (1982), and Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities (1983), Rushdie’s novel was part of a self-consciously avant-gardist network of writings that specifically sought to challenge the Eurocentrism and violence underpinning the dominant structures of thought about history, politics, language, and aesthetics.² The novel fictionalized and popularized the “linguistic turn” in the humanities and allowed for a more joyous and intimate experience of the liminal and fractured subjectivities described in the heavy theoretical and philosophical works of its time. It is precisely within this intellectual milieu that the category of “the postcolonial” first emerged in Western disciplines as a way to describe cultures and societies from decolonized spaces—a term distinct from “the postmodern” yet closely linked to it insofar as postcolonial texts also seemed to target the Enlightenment through their critique of both colonial and nationalist discourse. Standing at the intersection where the postcolonial and the postmodern met, as it were, Midnight’s Children
Chapter 1

contributed to their development and convergence, helping to open up the postmodern globally and pushing postcolonial writing in new directions.

These days, the newness of that moment in the early 1980s might be difficult to imagine. Postcolonial Studies and postmodernism are now bulwarks of many a humanities department and academic journal in the West—making some non-Western scholars ask whether Postcolonial Studies and its theoretical apparatus itself constitutes a form of cultural imperialism. Rushdie’s legacy in the Western literary establishment is immensely secure and, in the United States, his voice emerges from New York Times opinions pages and interviews with Charlie Rose with the ring of authority. But Rushdie’s writing from the 1980s reveals that the Booker victory appeared in the midst of a much larger debate about the place of the non-Western world in Anglo-American and global discussions about culture, ideas, and politics. Reaganism and Thatcherism had risen up from the ashes of the anti-establishment and anti-imperialist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the euphoria of decolonization in Asia and Africa was giving way to despair as authoritarian regimes came into power, and “actually-existing socialism” in the Soviet Union and China was proving to be, let’s just say, a disappointment. To the left-leaning intellectual and artist in the West, especially one with links to the Third World, raising provocative questions about imperialism and culture must have seemed like a necessary act of self-preservation. This radical edge is apparent in Rushdie’s “‘Commonwealth Literature’ Does Not Exist” (1983), conducted in the discourse of “crashing the party.” I revisit this piece in order to read the Rushdie of the early 1980s as being on the cusp of the old and new, well positioned to make demands of English literary studies and yet marginalized by it.

The premise of the essay is simple and direct: Rushdie rails against the very notion of “Commonwealth Literature,” “this very oddest of beasts” that throws together writers whose “differences were much more significant than their similarities,” simply because of their national and racial identities (“‘Commonwealth Literature’” 61, 63). He contends that the category, one of the predecessors of today’s “Postcolonial Literature,” gives second-class status to non-Western/nonwhite writing in English—and, as the first epigraph above suggests, no status at all to postcolonial writing in the vernacular languages. With a keen awareness about the conditions shaping his own rise in the world of letters, Rushdie deplores the fact that the global dominance of English and the lack of interest in or resources for widespread translation has led to a situation in which “Indo-Anglians seize all the limelight” even though “[m]ajor work” is being done
in non-English writing (69). “Commonwealth Literature,” then, not only “has the effect of creating a ghetto” for writers on the basis of nationality and race, but an “exclusive ghetto” that keeps out, ironically enough, non-English texts from Asia, Africa, and elsewhere (63). With rebellious flair Rushdie seeks to dismantle the category of Commonwealth Literature that implicitly placed “Eng. Lit. at the center and the rest of the world at the periphery” (66).

The essay’s critique of “Commonwealth Literature” as a segregationist category, then, is grounded on its defense of postcolonial writing in the vernacular languages. In particular, his narrative and understanding of the aesthetic devaluation of non-English Indian writing is historicist and political. English became the dominant world language, first, because of the “physical colonization of a quarter of the globe” by the British and then as a result of the “primacy of the United States of America in the affairs of the world” (“‘Commonwealth Literature’” 64). The lack of Western interest in vernacular writing, then, rests not on the “worthiness” of the writing itself but on the political underpinnings of categories such as “Commonwealth Literature.” The cosmopolitan compatriot must bring these texts to light by constructing a transnational space that escapes both the Anglocentrism that constructs ghettos based on nationality and race, and the “ghetto mentality” of a nativist response that mirrors it (63). By requesting a seat at the table not only for the elite, English-educated writer such as himself but for also the entire, polylingual spectrum of postcolonial authors, Rushdie conceptualizes a comparative and horizontal model of global cultural production. The presence of literature from the ex-colonies—both English and vernacular—would not only force a decentering of England from “English Literature” but would encourage the rewriting of literary studies itself, demanding the construction of an non-Anglocentric category that was much more radically comparative. Though the language was not available to Rushdie in 1983, he is effectively demanding that the category of postcoloniality be expanded to include a much broader range of cultural production and experience from the formerly colonized world. Implicit in this gesture is a certain ethical sensibility: the cosmopolitan-elite writer of English-language texts has a responsibility to employ her/his voice in the service of those that are being ignored.

“‘Commonwealth Literature’” ends with a grand, anti-imperialist flourish: “The English language ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago. Perhaps ‘Commonwealth Literature’ was intended to delay the day when we rough beasts actually slouch into Bethlehem. In which case, it’s time to admit that the centre cannot hold” (70).
Rushdie’s invocation of W. B. Yeats’s “The Second Coming” does an incredible amount of discursive work in the interests of rewriting the Western “metropole” from the vantage point of the non-Western “periphery.” First, it cleverly uses a classic metaphor from a high modernist poem in order to describe and enact the dismantling of the literary canon, both heralding the arrival of the “rough beasts” (who know their classic Yeats poetry very well, thank you very much) and fulfilling the anarchistic scenario imagined by the poem. Second, the content of Rushdie’s argument—confirming the value of literature in English from the colonized world—reminds us of the double anticolonial resonances already linked to Yeats’s poem when we recall it today: the Irish context of the poem itself, and Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe’s groundbreaking novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), whose title is derived from the lines to which Rushdie alludes. Ultimately, the passage suggests that the issue at hand is not simply one of inclusion but the very transformation of the center-periphery paradigm and our understanding of it. In reminding us of the earlier entry of Irish writers into the English literary universe under processes of colonialism and (cultural) resistance to it, the passage inscribes the arrival of the postcolonial “rough beasts” within a larger narrative of the perpetual cross-pollination of languages and literatures, dismantling the notion of a pure English canon at the center.

So far, so good. But as the reader undoubtedly suspects from the second epigraph above, the Rushdie of the 1983 essay undergoes a major shift. What explains the narrowing of Rushdie’s vision in his now infamous denunciation, in the introduction to his edited anthology, *Mirrorwork* (1997), of Indian writing that is not in English? Why would Rushdie, only fourteen years after lamenting that there was “just about no interest” in Indian writing in the indigenous languages, exemplify that lack of interest by including only one non-English story in a collection that supposedly commemorates the best Indian writing of the past half-century? How does one judge the sweeping aesthetic claim that English-language texts are unequivocally “stronger” and “more important” than “most of what has been produced in the 16 ‘official languages’ of India” (“Introduction” viii) in light of the earlier piece—which suggested that comparative aesthetic judgments are problematic when political and socioeconomic factors so limit the availability of non-English texts that “very few of the best writers [. . .] or the best novels are known, even by name” (“‘Commonwealth’” 69)? What happens to a marginalized literature when a select few of its practitioners make what Said calls “the voyage in” (*Culture and Imperialism* 295), and are then allowed to define the whole?
Apparently the center can hold. The long-awaited “second coming,” represented by the “rough beasts” of the postcolonial world taking their place in literary studies, has turned out to be merely a changing of the guard—not the beginning of a new order. As with the decolonized nations so with postcolonial literature: the displacement of white European figures by Brown or Black ones, while quite significant in many ways, has not sufficiently challenged the basic paradigms of power. Understanding the difference between Rushdie’s pronouncements in 1983 and 1997—understanding, in other words, the shifts that have occurred in postcolonial cosmopolitan writing and thinking about the nation over time—is crucial to the argument I make in this book about the Indian novel in English, its permutations over the postcolonial period, and the critical lens through which we study the genre.

The Postcolonial Indian English Novel

A Different Lens

The starting point for Decentering Rushdie is the recognition of a significant problem in the current critical understanding of postcolonial literature: since Rushdie’s Booker in 1981, Anglo-American Postcolonial Studies has effectively restricted the category of postcolonial literature to texts that value postmodern epistemologies and narrative forms. As the postcolonial has become conflated with the postmodern—as the postcolonial, in other words, has been dehistoricized—the political and aesthetic diversity of postcolonial Indian writing in English has also been erased. Indian novels in English since independence have negotiated cosmopolitanism and the nation in multiple and divergent ways, but the genre—and postcolonial cosmopolitanism itself—is narrowly equated with a celebration of rootlessness and “hybridity,” a cynicism toward nation-oriented politics and identities, and a magical-realist narrative mode. In short, today’s postmodernized postcolonial theory has reconstructed postcolonial literature in its own image, with dire consequences to literary criticism. The theoretical dismissal of nation-oriented thinking as inherently reactionary is reflected, in the study of Indian literature, with the limiting of the publication and circulating of postcolonial texts by period (few texts before 1980), by ideology (few nation- or subaltern-oriented texts), by form (overemphasis on magical-realist texts), and by language (mainly English-language texts). In fact, “Rushdie” has developed into a lens for viewing and defining the entire field. As Neil Lazarus writes, deliberately overstating the case,
“there is in the strict sense only one author in the postcolonial literary canon [. . .] Salman Rushdie,” whose novels “are endlessly cited in the critical literature as testifying to the imaginedness [. . .] of nationhood, the ungeneralizable subjectivism of memory and experience, the instability of social identity, the volatility of truth, [and] the narratorial constructedness of history” (“Politics” 424).

Decentering Rushdie constructs an alternative lens for viewing the postcolonial Indian English novel, allowing for a greater appreciation of its nuances and a rethinking of prior accounts of postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism. Expanding my purview to texts from across the postcolonial period, I historicize Rushdie’s achievement and draw attention to the multiple cosmopolitanisms produced within the genre over the last sixty years. Each of the novels I have selected is penned by cosmopolitan writers, addresses cosmopolitan audiences, and features cosmopolitan protagonists. But given the variety of formal techniques and range of ideological positions available in these novels, they produce no unitary, homogenous definition of “cosmopolitanism.” In my reading, cosmopolitanism emerges as a category of cultural identity, one that describes the way that certain elites and intellectuals view themselves and experience the world. However, although cosmopolitan identities are always linked to middle-class subject positions, this should not overdetermine our understanding of either a novelist’s ideology or artistic practice. My study thus recovers significant voices from the early postcolonial period, allows new ways of thinking about the contemporary Indian English novel, and reshapes current theoretical concepts of postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism.

I construct this new lens in three ways, decentering “Rushdie” as the pre-eminent sign of “the” postcolonial. First, I employ a historicist methodology to show that there have been different phases in the Indian English novel, revealing a multiplicity of cosmopolitan practices. Since the late 1940s, a broad shift has developed in the genre from nation-oriented/social-realist modes to postnational/magical-realist ones. Before the early 1980s, I contend, the Indian English novel was dominated by “namak-halaal cosmopolitanism”—a cosmopolitanism that, though not necessarily nationalist, was “true to its salt” in imagining national and local spaces as sites for combating postcolonial inequalities. But the authoritarianism and brutality of Indira Gandhi’s Emergency (1975–77), the Indian ruling class’s response to the global economic decline of the early 1970s and the domestic upheavals that had accelerated since the mid-1960s, sharply called into question the emancipatory claims of the Indian nation-state. Midnight’s Children signified the emergence in this literature of a new postnational attitude among many artists and the intelligentsia,
one that has remained interested in the nation and its history but regards nationalisms and nation-states as being always already reactionary and suspect, the product of failed visions. By historicizing the postcolonial and recovering early postcolonial visions, I show that the contemporary Indian English novel represents a crucial development in the genre but not its entirety.

Through such a resituating of the Indian English novel, second, Decentering Rushdie challenges existing theories about postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism. The rigid binary opposition often drawn between cosmopolitanism (marked as progressive) and nationalism (marked as reactionary) fails to explain the various nation-oriented cosmopolitanisms that have proliferated in colonial and postcolonial texts and contexts. Certainly, both pre- and post-Emergency texts tend to be fairly critical of Indian postcoloniality, to expose continuing social inequalities, and to highlight the liminal identities of elite, Westernized Indians. But the early, namak-halaal texts I read here—no less postcolonial or cosmopolitan than their contemporary counterparts—maintain an activist orientation toward the nation and deploy narrative strategies that make ethical demands of their audiences of English-speaking elites, challenging them to confront postcolonial problems in the world outside the text. Acknowledging the presence of such namak-halaal texts when speaking of the genre as a whole requires the development of concepts and categories to better explain its heterogeneity.

The third component of my alternative lens is a Marxist critical methodology that refrains from deterministically relating cosmopolitan-elite location, political ideology, and narrative strategies. While conducting discussions about the sociohistorical determinants of literature, my readings also emphasize the power of literature to “imagine a world other than this” (Scott 21). Ultimately, therefore, I base my critical assessments of the literature on the narrative strategies that drive each text forward and not on assumptions one might make from the authors’ elite subject positions. Decentering Rushdie does not simply champion pre-Emergency writing and/or vernacular texts over contemporary Anglophone writing in order to correct current attitudes. Rather, I have selected novels that allow me to map the complexity of the field, both the larger patterns and the smaller movements and tensions, investigating the complex and dialectical interaction of history and literature, of class position and cultural identity. The chronological organization of my chapters gives evidence for the broad trajectory, over time, from namak-halaal to postnational cosmopolitanisms—but the close readings that constitute those chapters also demonstrate that literature does not march in lockstep with history, that
ideological and aesthetic diversity exists even between texts from similar periods and with similar orientations toward the nation. Through the course of the book, thus, I contrast the ideological paradigms and narrative strategies of different namak-halaal novels, draw out similarities between pre- and post-Emergency texts, trace some early novels’ relevance to contemporary debates about subjectivity and identity, and even note the presence of namak-halaal attitudes in later, metafictional works.

I am attempting, therefore, not only to clear space for less prominent texts and authors but also to recover, in the process, the more popular texts on a new basis. As my title suggests, the critical focus around the work of Rushdie as being paradigmatically “postcolonial” has deterred a truly historicized understanding of postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism. However, I am recovering marginalized voices not to create a new center around Nayantara Sahgal or another writer, but to draw out the organic links between them all. Just as Sahgal’s novels can be seen to have shifted over time within the overall framework of her Nehruvian politics, Rushdie, too, has not been a static figurehead for the postnational and the postmodern. Mapping Rushdie’s own shifts allows us to glimpse the kinds of historical and cultural forces that have instigated a broader movement in the Indian English novel as a whole.

From the vantage point of the first decade of the twenty-first century, as Rushdie has openly supported the U.S. “war on terror” and blamed the global Muslim community for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, we can read his critical work of the 1980s as a veritable transition point between the namak-halaal and postnational moments. Rushdie’s trajectory from rebellious outsider to establishment insider instigates queries about the status of Anglophone postcolonial writing in the age of neoliberal globalization, a process still dominated by the West but one that allows strategically placed postcolonial states such as India to make their mark on the world. “Decentering Rushdie” by historicizing and particularizing him, then, renders problematic assumptions about universality and political oppositionality made on behalf of his novels. His work, in fact, represents the worldview of a specific, elite constituency of Indians after the experience of the Emergency period—liberal yet individualist; eager to speak for India but oriented toward the West; interested in the nation and its history but more as a site of endless narrative possibilities than as a material reality; skeptical of religious traditions but also of the political lessons of mass struggle drawn from the heydays of the anticolonial period. This orientation emerges not as a consequence of cosmopolitan-elite subjectivity in and of itself but in response to a specific historical juncture.
Let’s return to the contrast between the 1983 and 1997 pieces with this argument in mind. Rushdie’s statements in his introduction to *Mirrorwork* caused a huge furor, as they were probably meant to, when he claimed that only one non-English excerpt deserved to be anthologized after the editors reviewed “most of what has been produced in the 16 ‘official languages’ of India,” “both fiction and non-fiction” (viii). Prominent Indian writers such as the Malayali poet K. Satchidanandan, writing as the secretary of India’s Sahitya Akademi, justifiably countered Rushdie’s claims by arguing for the continuing strength of Indian writing in the vernacular languages and drawing our attention to significant texts and authors (Maramkal and Rajadhyaksha). In this vein, though not in response to Rushdie, several scholars have articulated the need to broaden the field to “native voices.”

Recent work by scholars in Anglo-American institutions, such as Priyamvada Gopal and Revathi Krishnaswamy, has added a new richness to our conceptions of postcolonial literature. Such studies reveal the injustice and narrow-mindedness of Rushdie’s 1997 conclusions about Indian literatures; I’d like to interrogate, further, the different yardstick by which he’s measured them, one that has everything to do with his new centrality as the field has moved from “Commonwealth Literature” to “Postcolonial Literature.”

For the *Mirrorwork* introduction refutes precisely what was at the heart of the radicalism in “‘Commonwealth Literature’ Does Not Exist”: the idea that aesthetic criticism, especially when comparing literature across languages and critical traditions, is not a science but a practice whose very enactment exposes the subjective and contingent dimension of aesthetic evaluation itself. By Rushdie’s earlier criteria, his *Mirrorwork* assessments are suspect: a seismic, socioeconomic shift would have had to occur between 1983 and 1997 that would reduce the global hegemony of English and create even the possibility of a fair and equal comparison between English and non-English writing from India (not to speak of comparisons between vernacular literatures). In fact, the opposite occurred: the value of English as a lingua franca for global-elite communication and class mobility intensified by the late 1990s, under the aegis of a United States that continued its “primacy [. . .] in the affairs of the world.”

What Rushdie’s 1997 piece misses is that the valuing of postnational, postmodern Indian English writing in Western publishing houses, bookstores, and college curricula cannot simply be seen as “proof” of the superiority of its literary achievement. Clearly, the rise of India in the post–Cold War hierarchy of nation-states between the early 1980s and the late 1990s has everything to do with the global proliferation of the Indian
English novel and Anglophone Indian writing in general. As the Oscar success of *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) and the Booker victory of Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008) indicate, India sells in the West as never before. On the home front, publishers such as Ravi Dayal and Penguin India, along with new presses like Rupa Paperback and IndiaInk, “have provided a marketing network able to deliver more affordable English-language fiction to the expanding urban middle class” (Mee 319). While the recent crop of Anglophone novels are certainly not uniform—see, for instance, the determined realism of Mukunda Rao’s *Chinnamani’s World* (2003)—the authors best known in the West often follow the “Rushdie” template of uncritically celebrating a cosmopolitan-elite identity that turns away from the nation as an ongoing site of struggle. This postnational turn is paradoxical in at least two ways. First, its emergence within India and its popularity in the West are intimately tied to the growth of the Indian nation-state itself. Second, though writers associated with this turn are often critical of the exotization of India and of ongoing inequalities due to globalization today, their renderings of a radical cosmopolitan identity are quite compatible with the hybrid identities encouraged by those same processes of globalization. At issue is not Anglophone writing or cosmopolitanism in and of themselves but explaining the particularities of their recent emergence.

Undoubtedly, the need for a radical critique of the sort Rushdie made in 1983 still exists. “Postcolonial Literature” has turned out to be not a solution to the problems of hierarchy and ghettoization described by Rushdie with regard to “Commonwealth Literature” but only the latter’s most recent avatar. In the field of Postcolonial Studies, now often under the management of intellectuals with filial ties to the Third World, writers’ and critics’ passports and pigmentation still go quite far in determining their value. Like its predecessor, Postcolonial Literature rarely shows much interest in non-English writing, and the “Indo-Anglians” continue to “seize all the limelight” (“Commonwealth” 69). Rather than challenging the Anglocentric paradigms implicit in such developments, however, Rushdie in 1997 presides over their construction. Earlier, a Eurocentric “Commonwealth Literature” did the seizing of the limelight for writers in English; under “Postcolonial Literature,” apparently, they do it for themselves. We might summarize the shifts thus: in 1983 the dismissal of indigenous literature by the academy was explained as a material consequence of imperialism and the blindness produced by the category of “Commonwealth Literature” itself. But in 1997 it is just a matter of stating the
obvious aesthetic reality, as it were, that these texts are simply inferior. Whereas the 1983 essay was self-conscious about the rise of the Indian English writer, the 1997 piece unabashedly underscores his dominance, securing credibility for Rushdie's utterly subjective statements on little more than his celebrity.

It is important to assert, though, that Rushdie's discursive shift from gate-crashing to gatekeeping does not emerge solely from the unique circumstances of his personal life: from the heights of the 1981 Booker to the vicious attacks against him after Ayatollah Khomeini's 1989 fatwa, from his underground life under protection of the British state to his current place among the glitterati. Whatever we make of the new era that Rushdie ushered in, “it has to be acknowledged that he was more of a sign of the times than their creator” (Mee 319). Specifically, the turn toward the post-national marks the orientation of a specific section of the cosmopolitan intelligentsia whose changed subject positions and left-leaning ideological stances translated, after the Emergency period, into aesthetic practices and political stances that were in vogue in the West. I outline the Marxist methodology that I bring to this project in the next section before moving toward a more detailed discussion of the historical and ideological contexts that have shaped the Indian English novel and its reception.

**History, Politics, Literature**

In *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization*, Helen Scott offers a succinct and useful discussion of Marxist methods for analyzing intellectual and artistic work. Taking up the centrality of the terms “totality,” “contradiction,” “mediation,” and “change” in Georg Lukacs’s *History and Class Consciousness*, Scott expresses the Marxist problematic thus: “Capitalism is a totality, yet is immediately experienced as disconnected parts; the parts are in a relationship of mutual conditioning, or mediation, and this relationship is not static but contradictory and fluid” (14). Marxist (literary) analysis, therefore, is driven toward explaining this totality in opposition to bourgeois theories of knowledge which, according to Lukacs, are engaged in making “of every historical object a variable monad which is denied any interaction with other—similarly viewed—monads and which possess characteristics that appear to be absolutely immutable essences” (qtd. in Scott 12). In other words, as Scott emphasizes, historical-materialist analyses of literary and cultural texts operate not by being “linear,
rigid, reductive” and discovering simplified unities (14), but by developing an understanding of the dialectical interplay between historical contexts, class positions, ideologies, and artistic forms in a way that challenges the linearity, rigidity, reductivity, and simple universalisms that constitute bourgeois thought.

Moving toward an understanding of the whole, thus, also means recognizing the relative separation between and even autonomy of the different parts as they move in relation to one another; their unevenness and tension, indeed, produces newness and change. In terms of individuals and authors in particular, as Raymond Williams writes, recognizing this layered series of relations leads to “the reciprocal discovery of the truly social in the individual, and the truly individual in the social” (qtd. in Scott 18). Indeed, as Williams puts it, tracing the historical and political contexts of novels and the “structures of feeling” that are shared by many different authors goes hand-in-hand with the recognition that individual authors may break the mold. The interaction between the individual and the social “may include radical tension and disturbance, even actual and irresolvable contradictions of a conscious kind, as often as they include integration” (qtd. in Scott 18). As Scott argues in relation to Caribbean literature, then, “despite the class character of the novel—strongly associated with the rise of the bourgeoisie—we are often also able to see beyond this limited perspective and to grasp broader truths about postindependence Caribbean societies. The writer is neither simply a representative of their class position and social environment nor the autonomous subject of bourgeois ideology: the two exist dialectically” (17).

Decentering Rushdie is motivated by this method of examining the postcolonial Indian English novel in terms of its historical contexts, its politics, and its literary forms. Without engaging with the Indian nation-state and its fortunes in a changing world, the shift in ideas that has accompanied the fizzling-out of the national liberation struggles, and the specific impact of these on the middle-class, English-speaking author, we cannot grapple with postcoloniality, its literature, and its production of multiple cosmopolitan identities in any meaningful way. Theorizations of the postcolonial that delimit the field to contemporary and/or postmodern fiction, and then construct generalizations about postcolonial society from these novels alone, participate precisely in the sorts of simplified, antimaterialist approaches that Lukacs and Scott describe—even if they are politically and theoretically opposed to bourgeois methods of analysis. At the same time, to reduce literature to the status of either a sociological artifact or a political tract—and this tendency is especially prevalent with regard to critiques
of Anglophone postcolonial texts—is also to go against the very principles of the Marxist critique of bourgeois thought. Therefore, as John Mee argues, “any assumption that [the Indian English novel of the 1980s and 1990s] is simply doing the work of the globalized middle classes”—though offering “a useful corrective to [critiques that] celebrate postcolonial literature as a subversive rewriting of the authority of the colonial center”—is not considering the complexities of culture and class with regard to, for instance, the continuing role of English in India today as a mediator both within and beyond the nation (335).

A rigid determinism between class position, cosmopolitan identity, and politics very much describes the ways in which postmodernism’s euphoric embrace of contemporary postcolonial writing has been critiqued. Take, for instance, K. Anthony Appiah’s famous argument that “Post-coloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: of a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of Western capitalism at the periphery” (“Is the Post” 348). To a degree, Appiah is concerned about the Western institutions’ labeling of non-Western culture: he wants to separate the writing that happens in formerly colonized spaces from the terms “postcolonial” and “postcoloniality.” This concern is quite understandable, and articulated frequently by scholars who actually live and work in postcolonial nations. But very close to the surface of such remarks is the assumption that class position is simply to be equated with ideology and politics, giving us no way to analyze, for instance, the left/progressive politics of contemporary Indian English writers, the nation-oriented and anticolonial stances of earlier ones, and/or the ways in which all postcolonial writers and critics work in contexts shaped by Western institutions and markets.

This is not to back away from the realities of class and nation that, in fact, enable cosmopolitan experiences and identities. It is absolutely essential to recognize how small a fraction of the postcolonial world we are discussing when we speak of postcolonial novelists and their audiences, Anglophone or not. Timothy Brennan suggests, for instance, that

under the conditions of illiteracy and shortages, and given simply the leisure-time necessary for reading one, the novel has been an elitist and minority form in developing countries when compared to poem, song, television, and film. Almost inevitably, it has been a form through which a thin, foreign-educated stratum (however sensitive or committed to domestic political interests) has communicated to metropolitan reading
publics, often in translation. It has been, in short, a naturally cosmopolitan form that empire has allowed to play a national role, as it were, only in an international arena. (Salman Rushdie 17–18)

As Tabish Khair writes in relation to India, there has certainly been a large increase in levels of literacy, wealth, and leisure time—growing over the course of the twentieth century and accelerating after 1947. General literacy has increased from 6 percent (in 1911) to about 15 percent (in the early 1940s) to about 50 percent in the 1990s; life expectancy has gone from 32.1 years in 1951 to 60.8 in 1992; GNP has risen from Rs. 180,000 crores in 1984 to Rs. 530,000 in 1992, and so forth (Khair 58–59). Nevertheless, though millions of Indians today can afford to “indulge in commoditized leisure activities and . . . have the exposure and education [. . .] to include the reading of novels and stories” within this, “it is a small percentage of this privileged class which actually reads fiction in English” (Khair 59; original italics). So the Indian (English) novel seems to mainly look abroad for its readers, partly because it appeals only to elites and partly because even in the context of a growing middle class there is only a small audience.

Now, what shall we do with this knowledge? We can interrogate Indian English writers’ claims to speak for all Indians or problematize the assumptions made about the writers by foreign audiences. We can use it to trace, as Khair does, why the genre seems to produce so little that speaks about ordinary Indians’ lives, that describes their spaces, that crosses the lines of class and caste. But if we merely isolate these empirical facts and allow them to carry the weight of a de facto ideological critique or literary analysis, we will not be able to grasp, for instance, how new literary forms have emerged out of the same social milieu, how middle-class intellectuals have expressed a range of political positions, or how artists, intellectuals, and novelists both reflect and participate in shaping the world around them. As I show in the next section, Indian English novelists have been linked to the societies they inhabit in complicated ways, engaged in the formation of new movements and ideological currents on multiple levels.

With regard to questions of art and political criticism, Leon Trotsky’s reflections of the 1920s and 1930s, written against both the emerging Russian Formalists, on the one hand, and Stalinist socialist realism, on the other, have helped me negotiate a path between today’s variants of the same: dehistoricized formalism and deterministic political criticism. In Literature and Revolution (1923), for example, Trotsky writes:
It is unquestionably true that the need for art is not created by economic conditions. But neither is the need for food created by economics. On the contrary, the need for food and warmth creates economics. It is very true that one cannot always go by the principles of Marxism in deciding whether to reject or accept a work of art. A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the laws of art. But Marxism alone can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period of history; in other words, who it was who made a demand for such an artistic form and not another, and why. (207)

Trotsky presents a dynamic picture of Marxist methodology in response to the Formalists’ caricature of Marxism as economic determinism. First, he establishes the dominance of material reality (the need for food, warmth, and art) over the theoretical understanding of that reality (economics, Marxism, criticism) by arguing, in fact, that the very existence of the former is what “creates” the conditions of possibility for the latter. The familiar base-superstructure paradigm is in operation here, but in ways that complicate notions of the “base”: the “need for art,” indeed, joins “the need for food and warmth” as an essential aspect of human life. Further, now narrowly focusing on the question of art, Trotsky asserts the primacy of criticism (“the law of art”) in judging any work of art over Marxism per se, though the latter is essential to analyzing the historical conditions of that art and, we might add, of artistic criticism as well. The methodological point being made is that the question of artistic judgment achieves a certain autonomy from the fields of politics and economics even as, following Marxism’s holistic approach, the different fields remain dialectically connected. Given the drab history of the Proletkult and the doctrine of socialist realism, it is worth emphasizing that Trotsky does not draw an opposition between form (to be analyzed by “the law of art”) and content (to be analyzed by Marxism). Indeed, he argues that Marxist analysis is required for an adequate understanding of “artistic form,” which itself has a history. Refusing to simply merge the elements of the base-superstructure paradigm actually has the effect, in this methodology, of emphasizing both their distinctiveness and their dialectical relationship. Art and artistic form need to be related to economic, ideological, and historical analysis but cannot be reduced to it.

As Marx writes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, human beings “make their own history. But they do not make it [ . . . ] under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances
directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past” (595). Eschewing the mechanical determinism that flows from both vulgar formalism and vulgar political criticism, Marxist literary criticism, when at its best, aims to both ground and allow for the expansiveness of the artistic imagination—not only when texts set the discovery of their material circumstances as their own task, but also when their claims to radical indeterminacy aim to make us believe that the search for determinacy and causality is itself a fiction.

**Literature in a Whirlwind of Change**

Three related contexts can help explain the postnational turn: 1) the transformation brought about by the global economic crisis of the 1970s and the ideological shifts corresponding to it, 2) the relationship of the crisis to India and the Emergency period, and 3) the middle-class subject positions constructed in these contexts, and—as a specific subgroup of this—the left-leaning intellectual’s tendency to turn away from the legacies of anti-colonial struggle in constructing a new cosmopolitan identity. In a succinct discussion of the economic and political contexts in which many postcolonial societies found themselves after World War II, Lazarus suggests that we can roughly divide the era into two phases: “a quarter-century or so of explosive growth, marked by significant gains and the [unprecedented and] wide dispersal of social, economic, and political benefits to the population at large,” and a period of decline as, leading up to and following the steep hike of oil prices in 1973, “the world system stumbled into economic recession and attendant political crisis” (“Global” 21). While capitalist accumulation over both phases was undoubtedly marked by exploitation, social hierarchies, and unevenness, movements of marginalized and oppressed peoples had had the scope to demand a bit more from their rulers before the economic downturn. The first phase (1945–73) was marked by the rise of welfare states and movements for civil rights and equality in the West, with Europe now subordinated to the United States, the development of state capitalism in the Soviet Bloc, and the growth of democratization and modernization, however selective and limited, in the newly decolonized spaces of the “Third World,” joining Latin America. The second phase (since 1973) saw the reversal of these trends with capitalist classes everywhere, in the context of a falling rate of profit, embarking on a full-scale redistribution of the wealth toward the wealthy. Neoliberalism and privatization—though challenged everywhere and far
from inevitable—become the order of the day, translating into the disman-tering of welfare states in the West, the outright collapse of Soviet-style state capitalism, and the end of state-protected capitalist growth and development in the global South.¹⁰

As can be expected, the poorer economies of the world faced the greatest consequences, as “structural adjustment programs” under the World Bank and International Monetary Fund prioritized profits over social services and subordinated national sovereignty to global markets dominated by the West. This strengthened the hands of national capitalists for whom governments, both elected and dictatorial, paved the way by beating down unionizing efforts, movements by indigenous peoples and national minorities, and struggles to expand democracy. After independence, the “cross-class alliance disintegrated as the different poles of the national liberation movements pursued their antagonistic class interests” (Scott 16).¹¹ While internal struggles to move from political freedom to true emancipation continued, in other words, they did so in a wretched global context. The newly independent nation-states, already impoverished and exploited by a period of colonial looting of natural and human resources, were forced to take their place “in an inegalitarian, unevenly integrated, and highly polarized world-system of nation-states” (Lazarus, “Global” 19) whose inequalities and polarizations only accelerated over the course of the twentieth century.

On the level of ideas and aspirations, to speak in very broad terms, the two phases were linked to a general shift from the notion that revolution and change were possible and immanent to the notion that “there is no alternative” to capitalism, as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain famously phrased it.¹² It is in these various contexts that we can read Krishnaswamy’s observation that the first generation of Anglophone novels from Asia and Africa “largely reflected the belief [. . . ] that new literatures in new nations should be anti-colonial and nationalistic,” while novels from the 1970s and the 1980s “aimed to expose corrupt national bourgeoisie that had championed the causes of rationalization, industrialization, and bureaucratization in the name of nationalism and nativism” and “repudiated the realist novel because it naturalized a failed nationalism” (“Mythologies” 125–26). This shift in ways of representing the nation has a firm basis in material relations. In India, while popular struggles continued in various arenas—combining leftist, nationalist, and/or “traditionalist” discourses in their demands for local rights, for sustainable development, for education, and so forth—the growing class divide by the 1970s and 1980s meant that unlike during the years of the
anticolonial movement and the building of the new nation-state, middle-
class writers were often cut off from the dynamic possibilities of change
emerging within the nation itself. Their left/progressive orientation drew
them toward investigating the breakdown of the liberation project, but
the nation increasingly became little more than an abstraction in their
writing. It is not only that writers (in all languages) have made a thematic
shift from forging unity with the nation to questioning “the nature of that
unity” (Mee 318–19) but also that—as Scott writes about post-1970s
Caribbean writers—we see a “cavernous” gap between the world of the
writer and of most Indians (Scott 17), one to which metafictional texts
often pointed with various degrees of concern.

Let me focus for a moment on the enormous sense of possibility that
was spawned by the anticolonial struggles—the petering-out of which
explains the depth of the contemporary turn away from the nation among
many left/progressive writers and theorists. The earlier Indian English
texts were generally oriented toward the nation, then, primarily because
it was not seen as antithetical to their cosmopolitan identities and self-
perceptions as progressive, democratic, and antiparochial. The period that
historians have described as being one of “hope and achievement” (Chan-
dra, Mukherjee, and Mukherjee) also extended to leftist activists and the
critical intelligentsia in that the specific conditions of the new India, for
all of its problems, expanded the basis on which deeper and more com-
prehensive versions of democracy and social justice could be enacted. The
Constitution of 1950 established, for the first time, universal adult fran-chise, the basis for civil liberties and an independent press, new oppor-
tunities for education and social welfare, and explicit mandates against
caste discrimination. It is for this reason that the many who opposed the
ongoing inequalities, whether under Nehru or his daughter, often did so in
the name of returning to the original principles of the anticolonial move-
ment and the early postcolonial period, regarded as genuinely radical
and independent. As Basil Davidson puts it in The Black Man’s Burden,
a book whose subtitle (Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State) leaves
little doubt about its recognition of the crises following decolonization,
the hopefulness of the aftermath of independence was based on the real
changes that independence brought: “The social freedoms that had been
the magnet for nationalism were making themselves increasingly felt; and
the grim silence of the colonial years was already shattered by a hubbub of
plans and schemes for a more favorable future” (195–96).

This is not only about charting a simple movement from faith to disil-
lusionment. Among most postcolonial writers, the support for the new
nation-state was hardly ever uncritical. Precisely because of their links to the populist elements of the anticolonial struggle, many Indian writers and intellectuals recognized that Nehruvian India, like other nation-states decolonized after World War II, was always engaged in the decidedly nonrevolutionary work of developing a modern, capitalist nation-state—with all of its attending class divisions and compromises with urban and rural elites, its border disputes and wars, and its internal conflicts between regional, linguistic, and religious groups. For radical writers such as Faiz Ahmad Faiz, for instance, who were critical of the Partition of British India and the contradictions of postcolonial development, the projects of “India” and “Pakistan” were to be challenged from the very start. While such intellectuals and artists supported the anticolonial struggle fully, they were conscious of the class contradictions that it could not resolve and, in that light, refused to “pain[t] the bourgeois-led national liberation movements in revolutionary socialist colors” (Lewis).

The tenor of the following lines from the Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* (1969) is unremarkably common in the literature of the time, mixing the anticipation of self-determination (material, cultural, and otherwise) with a clear recognition of challenges: “Sooner or later they’ll leave our country, just as many people throughout history left many countries. The railways, ships, hospitals, factories, and schools will be ours and we’ll speak their language without either a sense of guilt or a sense of gratitude. Once again we shall be as were—ordinary people—and if we are lies we shall be lies of our own making” (qtd. in Sivanandan 49). The radical desire for sheer ordinariness reminds us of the ending of Langston Hughes’s “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926): “We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. [. . .] We know we are beautiful. And ugly too.” The nation-oriented, realist writings of the early postcolonial period, whether in English or in other Indian languages, were not “legitimations of nationalism” (Appiah, “Is the Post” 353) in the sense of being uncritical celebrations of the present but were engaged in the process of formulating what that nation was and would become. Even in the naively titled novel *A Time to Be Happy*, Sahgal has her protagonist describe the hope and anticipation of the postindependence moment as being ambiguous and amorphous, “the kind of dim reality which exists in a theater before the curtain rises for the next scene of the performance” (182).

In these early postcolonial Indian (English) writers, we see the continuing articulation of what Priyamvada Gopal, in *Literary Radicalism in*
India, calls the “critical spirit” of those associated with the All-India Progressive Writers Association (PWA)—a national organization that, like its partner group the Indian People’s Theater Association (IPTA), provided venues for an entire generation of artists and intellectuals “who shared the conviction that art, literature, and film could help share and transform the nascent nation-state in progressive directions” (2). In their manifesto of 1936, drafted by the Indian English writer Mulk Raj Anand in conjunction with those who wrote primarily in vernacular languages, the PWA attested to the “[r]adical changes [. . .] taking place in Indian society” and set the goal of constructing an Indian literature focused on “the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness, and political subjection” (qtd. in P. Gopal, Literary 13). In the process, though, they reminded themselves and others that not all elements of the anticolonial movement were progressive: “All that drags us down to passivity, inaction and unreason we regard as re-actionary [sic]. All that arouses in us the critical spirit, which examines institutions and customs in the light of reason, which helps us to act, to organize ourselves, to transform, we accept as progressive” (13–14). PWA writers such as Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Ahmad Ali, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Ismat Chughtai, Rashid Jahan, Saadat Hasan Manto, and Sajjat Zaheer took up a wide variety of themes and social issues, contesting colonialism, communalism, sexism, caste hierarchy, and traditional notions about sexuality, and always seeking to push the limits of social consciousness. Realism dominated aesthetically, but rather than simply offering a cover for mainstream nationalism, it engaged in the process of constructing the nation through an independent lens.13

The PWA’s critical orientation toward anticolonial nationalism demonstrates the claims that many historians and theorists have made since. Although decolonization and its aftermath had many failures, anticolonial nationalism was not a unitary or homogenous enterprise; it was made of up an incredible amalgam of elite and subaltern interests, and “the nation” was a site of struggle that could be shaped in any number of ways. We are not speaking of theory or ideology here but of history. As Ranajit Guha articulates in an early critique of Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities: “By conceptualizing nationalism exclusively in terms of interaction between the indigenous elite and the colonizers, it fails to acknowledge and explain the sturdy nationalism of the mass of the people, especially in the Indian peasantry [. . .] As recent work on Indian history [. . .] has established without a doubt, much of this movement originated in popular initiatives independently of elite leadership” (“Nationalism” 104). Living in the moment itself, many Indian writers realized that “there was a range
of radical possibilities that were thrown up by the very nature of the anti-colonial struggle and the process of decolonization; what happens after independence does not negate these possibilities even as it may eliminate, co-opt, or reshape them” (P. Gopal, Literary Radicalism 23). Whether or not early postcolonial Indian English novelists explicitly agreed with the agenda of the PWA, its critical support for the nationalist project motivated writers across the board.

Though it has been relatively understudied and even minimized, the Emergency period and its aftermath represented India’s break from the early phase of decolonization, in terms of both socioeconomic and ideological trajectories. The Emergency was a “critical event” in the sense that Veena Das and Emma Tarlo use the term: in the context of the deterioration of the project of decolonization, it produced an environment in which relations between ordinary Indians, bureaucrats, politicians, and the state were reorganized and produced anew. Whereas India’s turn to neoliberal expansion of the economy is usually linked to the regimes of Rajiv Gandhi (1984–89) and P. V. Narasimha Rao (1991–96), the rejection of Nehruvian state capitalism and the accelerated transfer of wealth toward private capital originated earlier, in Indira Gandhi’s second term (1980–84), and even in policies enacted during the Emergency. Gandhi’s militarism and foreign policy, including the suppression of Leftist radicals during the 1971 war for Bangladeshi liberation and the first nuclear explosion in 1976, laid the groundwork for India’s rise today, as a subimperialist power. The crushing of labor struggles, as in the Railway Workers strike of 1974 and the Bombay textile strike of 1982–83, the suppression of civil liberties, the overt abuse of executive power over the legislative and judicial branches, atrocities such as slum demolition and forced vasectomies and hysterectomies—all of these cleared the way for the new phase in capitalism. It is in this context that, as host of the Non-Aligned Movement conference in 1983, Indira Gandhi effectively sided with those who wanted to turn the “Third World” from being a political project that stood for anti-imperialism and economic sovereignty into a doormat for neoliberal ideology and corporate globalization (Prashad 207–23). Ironically, “socialism” remained the mantra for a whole host of Third World nation-states like India that, after the 1970s, increased the rate of exploitation of their own people by intensifying their integration with Western capital.

As Nagesh Rao writes in relation to Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines (1988), therefore, the postnational turn and “the discourse of diaspora, hybridity, and migrancy [have] not been conjured up by [Indian
English novelists] out of thin air” but have “a material and historical referent” in these ideological and socioeconomic contexts (“Cosmopolitanism” 112). It is worth remembering that many in the same class of people, after all, had radicalized in periods of mass struggle and given support to anticolonial nationalism, often through an internationalist lens—and the afterglow of this association continued into the 1970s. But the postcolonial intellectuals faced a host of contradictions in the 1980s and 1990s. The socioeconomic forces of transnational capitalism that made the labor of mobile, English-educated writers and scholars incredibly marketable—along with everyone from white-collar workers in software, professionals from the technical-managerial ranks, and members of the Indian bourgeoisie—also enabled the demise of the great movements of the twentieth century (national liberation, nonalignment, socialism) and of left visions more generally.

Certainly, most of these elites have embraced liberalization and privatization enthusiastically and celebrated the end of the obstacles that Nehruvian protectionism placed on their advancement. The period after the Emergency period meant, for them, the opening up of vast horizons. But while Indian English novelists have certainly benefited from the new dynamics, they have also been critical of “the pernicious globalism surfacing in dispersed local contexts” (B. Ghosh 5). As such, they have consistently “looked back” to the Emergency in order to launch a left and progressive critique of the nation. An explicit referent in many post-1980 novels, including The Great Indian Novel, Midnight’s Children, Rich Like Us, and Rohinton Mistry’s A Fine Balance (1995), the Emergency appears as both a historical marker of and a symbol for the demise of the nation—engendering, in Rushdie, Tharoor, and Mistry, a historiographical argument that forges direct links between Indira Gandhi’s policies and those of her father. For many left/progressive intellectuals and artists—or, at least, the ones who dominate Postcolonial Studies—their class status has linked them to the cosmopolitan middle and upper classes benefiting from neoliberal globalization while their politics has led them to adopt, amidst the general demise of secularism and the Left, a postnational stance, postmodern aesthetics, and/or postmodernist epistemologies.

These are the historical, political, and ideological contexts that can help explain not only Rushdie’s shifting perspectives on Indian writing between the early 1980s and the late 1990s but the general movement of Indian English writers from namak-halaal to postnational views on the nation. In the following sections, I turn specifically to the category of cosmopolitanism and how it can be used to understand the Indian English
novel if we recognize its malleability in relation to the nation and its histories. In particular, I offer a clearer discussion of what I mean by “namak-halaal cosmopolitanism.”

**Indian (English) Cosmopolitanisms**

Cosmopolitanism in Indian English writing is nothing new. A cosmopolitan perspective has been implicit in the genre since it came into its own in the early nineteenth century when, for instance, Raja Ram Mohun Roy agitated for English education to replace Orientalist-supported Sanskrit and Arabic seminaries that would only “load the minds of youth with grammatical necessities and metaphysical distinctions with little or no particular use to the possessor or to society” (qtd. in Viswanathan 138). As Nehru said of himself, he was “a queer mixture of East and West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere” (L. Gandhi 171). While such examples hint at the pervasiveness of cosmopolitan attitudes and questions in the colonial period, they also show that cosmopolitan identity, especially for colonized/postcolonial subjects, is always specific and contingent, shaped by class, nation, race, and gender. In this study of English-educated elites, then, I define cosmopolitanism in the following way: it describes the experience of sections of the (urban) bourgeoisie and middle-class intelligentsia, who because of their class location, upbringing, and national location (and often their gender) can engage with and inhabit European cultures (languages, foods, dress, music, art, mythologies, social customs)—with a degree of comfort and even “competence.”

My restriction of the term is not meant to exclude or devalue the innumerably diverse array of cross-cultural experiences that make up the fabric of every individual and community. Rather, I’m being specific in order to cut “cosmopolitanism” down to size. Tragically, therefore, cosmopolitanism can never be as universal and all-encompassing as it desires, countering Paul Rabinow’s claim that “We are all cosmopolitans” (qtd. in Brennan, *At Home* 4). We can define a few limits right away. First, cosmopolitanism does not include all types of cross-cultural contact throughout history because it is embedded within the period of capitalist modernity and the economic and political processes through which nation-states have emerged throughout the world. It is on the basis of the (unequal) historical relations between these nation-states that this modern cosmopolitanism is even made possible. As a consequence, second, the cosmopolitanism of colonized/postcolonial elites in particular is always
directed toward developing a comfort with the West, looking toward it from a position of inferiority deriving from the contexts from which the very desire emerges. Finally, my definition excludes a specifically working-class “comfort” with different national cultures because “cosmopolitanism” has historically been associated with classes that have a more direct relation to the ownership of economic and cultural capital. There is a tremendous volition, a veritable “will to cosmopolitanism,” that is the calling card of cosmopolitan identity—apparent even in Rabinow’s characterization of cosmopolitanism as a universal state of being. The term applies easily to Roy and Nehru, as well as the novelists being studied here, because they explicitly interrogate their relationships to Englishness and the West.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the fact that cosmopolitan identity is always tied to class and national identity does not mean that cosmopolitanism automatically implies certain ideological positions. Over time, for instance, Indian English writing has contained many different ideological currents—from loyalism to anticolonial nationalism, from parochialism of all kinds to liberal and socialist versions of internationalism. The construction of cosmopolitan identity and perspective in a given historical moment—and not simply the fact of a writer’s access to English education (i.e., of class position)—becomes important, then. While the Indian English novel has always been located in elite centers of production and consumption, its contradictory position, simultaneously tied to structures of British colonialism and literary tradition on the one hand and the imperatives of anticolonial and/or cultural nationalism on the other, has allowed different possibilities for the ideological perspectives and representational strategies emerging from that location. In reading the Indian English novel, we can recover the progressive, antiparochial thrust that lies behind the term even as we gauge the ways in which the class position and historical contexts of such cosmopolitans shape their political views—and representations of postcolonial life. By grounding postcolonial cosmopolitanism thus—but without necessarily linking this to any specific ideology or perspective—we can account for its different articulations over time. My readings show that cosmopolitanism’s (literary) identities are multiple and uneven; the Indian English novels I have selected display a variety of perspectives on and approaches to the nation—“looking back” in the process of “looking away.”

Intellectuals, incessantly reflecting on themselves as a group, have often taken up the movement between “home” and “world” in a number of ways, but there has been a tendency in Postcolonial Studies and
other fields to emphasize the importance of “looking away” much more than “looking back.” Liberation and freedom in thought seem to be linked much more to discourses of rootlessness than rootedness. One example is the category of “cosmopolitics” that has been put forward by critics and theorists in different disciplines, asserting that cosmopolitan location is inherently associated with radical and democratic ideologies. This is true even of intellectuals such as Edward Said, whose writings are quite supportive of radical nationalist movements and whose celebratory comments about “exile” are often qualified by the recognition that it is a condition constituted by loss and pain. In *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), for example, Said points to the dynamic by which the intellectual 1) learns how to identify her/his “filiative” and “natural” moorings, 2) develops a critical consciousness and moves outside of the native space through “affiliative” links and associations, and then 3) moves toward either a reappropriation and restructuring of filial spaces or a radical break from them (16–30). For Said, indeed, this movement describes not only the work of intellectuals but human consciousness in general. But although Said, unlike many more explicitly postmodernist critics, often leaves room for the multiple possibilities inherent in the process of filiation/affiliation, he clearly values “looking away,” seeing it as fundamentally more radical and necessary than “looking back.” In order to grapple with the fact that intellectuals have often defended and played a role within anticolonial and progressive nationalist movements—a task that Said himself both encouraged and embodied—we need to be able to describe the multiple formations of cosmopolitan (literary) identity and production in ways that are not proscriptive. Rather than rejecting nation-oriented cosmopolitanisms out of hand, we need categories that bear witness to its presence—regardless of our own positions on the national question.

The category of “*namak-halaal* cosmopolitanism” allows me to group together one such set of cosmopolitan perspectives and strategies that dominated Indian English novels from the late 1940s to the Emergency period but appears only fitfully after this time. It’s worth emphasizing that in India, as elsewhere, the development of the novel was itself linked to the emergence of the nation. The novel form became prominent among Indian English writers only in the 1930s and 1940s, at the height of the nationalist movement (L. Gandhi 173). These *namak-halaal* texts value a mode of cosmopolitan-elite identity that 1) remains committed to the project of popular emancipation from oppression and poverty; 2) envisions a national and/or local space, as opposed to a Western or transnational one, as a potential vehicle for that emancipation; and 3) educates its
cosmopolitan-elite readers about their role in constructing such a national space. I call this cosmopolitanism “namak-halaal” rather than “nationalist” in order to emphasize the difference between orientation and ideology, and, thus, to group together texts that continue to align themselves with the nation whether or not they are also sympathetic to the Indian government and leaders sanctioned by nationalist historiography. While some novels of this period do subscribe to a mainstream nationalist ideology, many others, such as Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956) or Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966), are fiercely skeptical of official India even while remaining optimistic about the possibility of transforming the nation into a fit vehicle for popular progress. *Namak-halaal* novels are “true to their salt,” therefore, not because they engage in flag-waving or naïvely swallow the populist rhetoric of politicians, but because they continue to privilege “India” as the reference point for emancipation and progress.

Indeed, many novels of the early postcolonial period positioned themselves as critical supporters of the legacies of the national liberation struggle as part of their general desire to transform society anew. Through characterization, voice, plot, and theme, *namak-halaal* texts foreground the explicit criticism of British-colonial racism; the victimization of Indian subjects, especially oppressed groups, under Western modernity; the growing national and subaltern-centered consciousness of Westernized elite protagonists; and the betrayal of cosmopolitan-elites who either turn away from Indian languages and culture or romanticize India in ways that mask existing inequalities. “Namak-halaal cosmopolitanism” describes both the lens through which these novels are structured and the identities that they construct. The classic tale of the transformation of the cosmopolitan-elite protagonist, marked by his/her development of a nationalist and/or activist consciousness, is offered here in a didactic mode. The characters become models for training and molding the cosmopolitan-elite readers in the novels’ real and implied audiences.

When noting the influence of the anticolonial movement on Indian writers in English, it is important not to divorce their cosmopolitan experience too sharply from that of Indian (elite) writers in all languages. On the structural level, British colonialism not only brought English to India but decisively shaped Indian modernity and the production of the indigenous petit bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie. Further, as several commentators have noted, through its educational institutions and the introduction of print capitalism, colonialism shaped the very development and spread of the modern Indian languages and literatures (e.g., Iyengar 30). It would have
been impossible for any Indian intellectual, not to speak of an Indian English writer, to produce writing without having the structures and themes of colonialism penetrate into their work. As Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha suggest, “What was to become modern Indian literature was largely produced by an English-educated urban middle class” (9); many of the early writers in the various Indian languages were bilingual and also published in English. On the individual level, both late colonial and early postcolonial writers in English influenced and were influenced by literary and artistic movements that inevitably involved them in the political questions all around them. “We are all instinctively bilingual,” says Indian English novelist Raja Rao in the foreword to Kanthapura (1938).

As an illustration of this “bilingualism,” let’s look again at the role of Mulk Raj Anand in the PWA, alluded to in the last section. The PWA writers’ links to English, English-influenced institutions, and England itself are multiple and varied, but they seem to associate with “Englishness” without—as Tayeb Salih phrases it—“either a sense of guilt or a sense of gratitude” (qtd. in Sivanandan 49). While many of Anand’s PWA associates wrote in vernacular languages, many also published in English on occasion, and critical discussions of literature often occurred in English (P. Gopal, Literary 25). All were open to inspirations wherever they found them; Chughtai, for instance, primarily wrote in Urdu but received a B.A. in English and the Arts from Isabella Thoburn College and claimed to be stimulated by everything from the Bible to Darwin, Freud, and nineteenth-century European novels (P. Gopal, Literary 68). Indeed, the nucleus for what became the PWA was initially formed by a group of Indian expatriate writers in London, at a meeting in the Nanking Restaurant in 1935.

We see, in Anand’s reminiscences, an interesting tension between the pull toward and away from English and England. Anand’s attraction to the PWA and its unquestioning anti-imperialism emerged from his disillusionment with the Bloomsbury group, its “undeclared ban on political talk,” and its acceptance and even endorsement of British imperialism in India (P. Gopal, Literary 23; Ranasinha 33). The concerns that dominate Rushdie’s “‘Commonwealth Literature’ Does Not Exist” reverberate here; Anand and fellow-founders of the PWA such as Sajjat Zaheer felt that unless an organization was formed in India, in proximity to the struggle of “the ugly face of Fascism in our country” as Anand called it, the group would just end up representing India to the West and the West to India in simplistic ways (P. Gopal, Literary 25). For intellectuals such as Anand, this turn to the nation was completely in conjunction with their cosmopolitan identity and (in his case) internationalist politics—not only theoretically but
practically, as Anand was jailed briefly during the Non-Cooperation movement of the early 1920s, participated in conferences on fascism and racism across Europe in the 1930s, and joined the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War in 1936 (L. Gandhi 174–75).

Perhaps Anand’s famous discussion with M. K. Gandhi about his novel *Untouchable* (1935), one of the earliest and most important Indian English novels, exemplifies the fluidity with which cosmopolitan subjects moved across borders of language and ideology. The novel itself was inspired by Gandhi’s account in his (English-language) newspaper *Young India* about the story of Uka, an ordinary Dalit sweeper-boy. Moving “from Bloomsbury to Sabarmati,” Anand lived in Gandhi’s Sabarmati Ashram, received comments from him on the initial draft of *Untouchable* (Gandhi recommended revision on the grounds that the protagonist, Bakha, was too much like a “Bloomsbury intellectual”), and took Gandhi’s counsel on writing in English on Indian themes (L. Gandhi 175). Gandhi’s response to Anand on the politics of English—“The purpose of language is to communicate, isn’t it? If so, say your say in any language that comes to hand” (qtd. in Mehrotra 13)—privileges language’s use-value over any perceived political stigma engrained within it. The Anand-Gandhi exchange can serve as an example of the openness of English-educated cosmopolitanisms toward the nation, the openness of nationalists toward English, and the ways in which Indian English writers were part of the same terrain as other nation-oriented cosmopolitans, both writers and political leaders. Indeed, English was structurally tied into the very working of the postcolonial state as the only all-India language: at Nehru’s insistence, the Constitution of 1950 decreed that English would “continue to be used for all the official purposes of the Union” as an all-India language was necessary (Mehrotra 13).

Consider, in contrast to my definitions and methods of discussing the dynamics between class position, cosmopolitan identity, and ideology, Makarand Paranjape’s and Adil Jussawalla’s criticisms of Indian (English) literature. In “Inside and Outside the Whale,” Paranjape argues: “During the mass movement for independence the bourgeois Indian English novelists had identified themselves with the aspirations of the proletariat, but after independence, they retreated back to their traditional class positions of elitism and aloofness” (214). Since no Indian English writer “was jailed or tortured for his or her beliefs as in some other Third World countries” and all “remained insulated and secure from most of the major shocks of post-independence India” (216), the Indian English novel remained a thoroughly bourgeois novel. While Paranjape does imply that writing
from India in the vernacular languages has been politically committed, Jussawalla, in *New Writing in India* (1974), gives no quarter to any Indian literature. He writes that the metaphors of dismemberment, obsession with death, and sociopolitical paralysis in Indian literature are reflections of

the Indian petty bourgeoisie’s present inability to find a dynamic role for itself in a society which is slowly transforming itself from the semi-feudal [to the capitalist]. Wedged between the class that employs it and the broad masses of peasants and the growing urban proletariat, it can only torment itself with its own contradictions or turn on itself in a fury of self-destruction. This is the writing of a bourgeoisie at a dead end. (qtd. in Dharwadker, “Indian” 237)

Jussawalla’s attempt to relate literary metaphors, the class positions of the writers, and the broader context of postcolonial India mirrors the type of integrated analysis that my book conducts, simultaneously considering the relationship between history, class position, ideology, and aesthetics. However, there seems to be a deterministic relationship between the different elements that is centered on an assumption about the cosmopolitan, middle-class intellectual, namely that s/he always turns toward the paradigms established by the bourgeoisie.

I sympathize with the observation that the postcolonial Indian English consistently turns inwards decisively and remains remarkably “untouched by mass movements and mass aspirations” (Paranjape, “Inside and Outside” 215). Compared with the postcolonial African novel in English, for example, the genre appears to be far less willing to construct narratives through the voices of oppressed and marginalized subjects. Nevertheless, the deterministic paradigms of causality at play here lead Paranjape and Jussawalla to lump together all Indian English writing and to misread important shifts that do develop—including political shifts. For instance, Paranjape’s comment that Anita Desai’s “psychological studies of half-mad women” and Kamala Markandaya’s “clumsy and unconvincing naturalism of course, do not show any political commitment” (215) is not only blind to the deep political concern with which these novelists address the failed project of national liberation, but also depends on and constructs a masculinist category of the political that excludes issues concerning women, especially middle-class women, from its purview. In actuality, we find that at key historical moments—decolonization, the Emergency, recent globalization—Indian cosmopolitan writers, especially
those concerned with women’s oppression, have often turned *against* the postcolonial bourgeoisie, such that their writing cannot be called “the writing of a bourgeoisie” in any useful way. Ideology, form, and content do not follow from a particular class position or cultural identity—*especially* when that class is the petit bourgeoisie, whose definition, in classical Marxism, is precisely that it moves back and forth between classes in ways that are sometimes unpredictable. A more fluid definition of cosmopolitanism allows us to see, rather, when and how the cosmopolitan-elite artist breaks with the project of national liberation, and to investigate aspects of the political whose relationship to the nation may be tangential precisely because of the masculinist and elitist limitations of mainstream nationalist consciousness and the inequities of postcolonial reality.

Theories of cosmopolitanism create strange bedfellows. What Paranjape and Jussawalla negatively describe as cosmopolitan-elite aloofness from the nation and its struggles is supported by writers such as K. Anthony Appiah, Richard Rorty, and Robert Reich who have questioned cosmopolitanisms for opposing and/or lacking patriotism and national feeling. From a diametrically opposed view, in terms of content but not form, those who celebrate cosmopolitan rejections of the nation, such as Martha Nussbaum, Bruce Robbins, and Carol Breckenridge, to take a few examples, root their support for cosmopolitanisms of various kinds in their implicit criticism of nationalisms as being already reactionary. The cosmopolitanism/nationalism opposition holds in each case (though Appiah has a category called “cosmopolitan patriotism”). Only a few theorists, such as Tim Brennan, Pheng Cheah, and Hamid Dabashi—coming from a variety of positions themselves—have developed notions of cosmopolitanism that are more thoroughly historicized and open to the fact that the nation, especially in anticolonial contexts, has often been central to cosmopolitan and/or internationalist visions of change. Indeed, Brennan interrogates the ways in which certain antinationalist cosmopolitanisms actually end up defending the existing hierarchies of nation-states by seeking to delegitimize “legacies of decolonization” and minimizing the self-determination won by communities terrorized by imperialism now and in the past (*At Home* 25–26). In terms of literature, the rejection of nation-oriented thinking as unitary and simplistic has meant, for the most part, disregarding the postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism of early postcolonial literature: texts whose defining feature—like that of their contemporary counterparts—is the reimagining of the possibilities following the end of colonial occupation.
Why “Namak-Halaal”?  

My choice of the word “namak-halaal” to describe cosmopolitan orientations toward the nation might initially seem odd to readers already familiar with the Urdu term, whether through regular usage or scholarly knowledge. In common parlance, namak-halaal signifies loyalty to a superior, describing someone who will not “bite the hand that feeds.” Indeed, it is possible that the term’s meaning may be hopelessly overdetermined by the classic Bollywood masala movie Namak-Halaal (1982), in which Amitabh Bachchan plays Arjun, the son of a security guard who is killed while un成功fully trying to defend his boss from murderous and appropriately mustachioed ruffians. Ignorant of his family history, Arjun grows up with his grandfather in a village and comes to the city to become “a man”—only to miraculously end up becoming a servant for Raja, the boss’s son, who has returned from his European exile to take his place among the wealthy, post-Emergency elite. By celebrating Arjun’s faithfulness to Raja, the film underlines the conservative and even feudal connotation to “namak-halaal”: servants will quietly serve their masters, happily locked in that relationship from generation to generation. Coming to South Asian usage via Persian and Arabic, “namak-halaal” has consistently been used to mark fealty and loyalty. How can the term stand for anything critical and oppositional, then, when its contemporary and historical usage seems to denote a fundamental unwillingness to critique those in power? Indeed, the preeminent Sayyid Ahmad Khan used its antonym, “namak-haraam,” to describe the Indian soldiers in the British army who mutinied in 1857: “To be faithless to one’s salt is to disregard the first principles of our religion” (Khan). Scholars familiar with this deliberately political usage of the concept may be inclined to associate “namak-halaal” with a pro-colonial loyalism, not a national orientation.

I find the term useful, however, when I translate it not as “loyal” or “traditionalist” but, more literally, as “true to one’s salt.” First of all, this works ideally as a translation in a double way: the idiomatic expression in English not only conveys the sense of the Urdu phrase but also alludes to a common metaphorical usage of “salt” as a positive signifier of value (namak means “salt”). The common use of the metaphor in Urdu and English and other languages is not a coincidence, given the world-historical value of salt to human life. Second, the use of the self-reflexive pronoun (“one’s own”) allows me to construct “namak-halaal cosmopolitanism” as an open, descriptive category: it describes an ethics of commitment to and
engagement with the nation without overdetermining how that orientation is constructed. From its etymology, then, the word “namak-halaal” works by associating loyalty with the fulfillment of material needs; it highlights a social relationship (to be loyal to “the giver of salt”) and not necessarily a particular individual or entity as such (the boss, the nation, the family). Defining the term in this way opens up a space for describing how allegiances shift and change over time—for examining the critical assessments occurring during times of historical and/or personal crises when individuals and communities think through where their loyalties really lie and who really “butters their bread.” In terms of the subject at hand, as I will explain, the phrase “namak-halaal cosmopolitanism” does much more to describe the complexity of nation-oriented, early postcolonial literature than a term such as “nationalist cosmopolitanism” because it better allows the separation of orientation from ideology, avoids the difficulty of using a term (“nationalism”) that is seen as being unitary and elite-oriented, and allows for an explanation of how elite and subaltern loyalties often converged around the nation in the midst of the anticolonial struggle. Just as “salt” has become a symbol of value historically because of its material importance as a commodity and a staple of human health, “nation” in an anticolonial context gained credibility among different classes and groups because it linked itself to various material and political needs such as land, food, cultural freedom, and self-determination.

As Michael Kuransky’s Salt: A World History reminds us, salt has always been crucial to human existence. Within the body itself, the form of salt we like best, NaCl, is necessary for transporting nutrients and oxygen, transmitting nerve impulses, and moving muscles (sodium), and for digestion and respiration (chloride) (6). Salt also preserves food—making it one of “the most sought-after commodities in human history” until about a century ago (6). Cities were built around places where salt was formed naturally; “salt roads” were built for distribution; salt taxes were central to state revenues; and the control of salt was often central to clashes between peoples. For example, a monopolized control of the price of salt was crucial to the government of ancient Rome which would raise and drop prices based on political necessity. The English language has certainly recorded this history; the word “salary” comes from the Latin salarium, referring to the fact that Roman soldiers were either paid in salt (Latin, sal) or paid so that they could purchase salt.26 The 1882 Salt Tax in colonial India, similarly, enabled the British monopolization of salt production and distribution—smashing indigenous centers of salt manufacture, criminalizing the making of salt (which was also available naturally on the
seashore), and taxing its usage. This control of salt yielded “a large part of the revenue” of the colonial government, according to a contemporary source (Balfour 504). The destruction of these established industries, especially in Orissa, led to impoverishment and even famine as the livelihood of so many was linked to such networks (Kuransky 336–38).

Because of its high value both in material terms and in the realm of social power, salt gained a broad positive significance as a metaphor and symbol, and has been linked to God’s will, to good luck, to love and sexuality, and to moral substance and character. As such, Kuransky details, parables and idioms around salt have been recorded in languages and cultural practices all over the world. In particular, as a brief survey of friends and family familiar with South Asian languages quickly revealed, salt has been used as a signifier for relations between people in a variety of ways—not necessarily for the purpose of maintaining the status quo. A proverb in Kannada, for instance, advises that “uppitavana muppina tanaka nene” (“The giver of salt should be remembered until one has reached a ripe old age”).27 Here, appealing to “salt” is neither an inherently conservative nor radical gesture; as with all language and symbolism, usage and context matters immensely.

Indeed, one can discern different threads within proverbs and idioms around salt that identify its value but not necessarily in order to cement hierarchies. In English, the idea that someone is “worth his salt” can signify a relationship of power and exchange (“he’s worth our investment”) but can also be an evaluation of character and moral “fiber” in a more general sense. Another Kannada saying, “uppunda manege droha bagayabaradu” (“One should never think of harming a house where salt has been eaten”), can thus be used to describe horizontal relationships (between neighbors and equals), not just vertical ones (between, say, bosses and workers). Even further away from explicit political and social hierarchies is the English phrase “salt of the earth,” describing worthiness in a more organic way that rests on characteristics and ethical behavior. This is in line with the Gujarati idiom that expresses the same idea negatively in describing a person who has no depth or backbone: “e mitthaa vagarno maanas cche” (“He is a man without any salt”).28 One might say, then, that there is a spectrum of possibilities here between ethical guidelines and compulsory responsibilities, between salt as a signifier of moral substance and as a signifier of power relationships. But even when proverbs allude to the exchange of salt as a metaphor for describing social hierarchies, it is crucial to note that many expressions configure the taking of salt as a volitional act and, giving agency to the person being advised,
emphasize that s/he ought to be aware of the consequences. A third saying in Kannada, for example, warns “uppu thindava neeru kudiyale-beku” (“One who has consumed salt has to drink water”), while a Santal custom apparently forbids the taking of salt in food offered by someone from an out-group, symbolically rejecting any implication of subservience or social obligation. There is a recognition, here, that hierarchical relations can be bent and resisted.

Clearly, the symbol of salt has been used in a variety of ways, whether to fix existing relations of power or even to foment rebellion. Kuransky’s chapters on the role of salt in the American and French Revolutions are eye-opening, but it is when he discusses the anticolonial Salt Satyagraha in British India that it all comes together, for salt is invoked both as a material need and as a metaphor on many levels simultaneously. The grassroots manufacturing of salt initiated by the Salt March of 1930 provided self-sufficiency on the immediate, day-to-day level and moved forward the fight for political and economic self-determination. The very process through which this lawbreaking happened—a 240-mile trek through Gujarat, from Gandhi’s Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad to the seashore in Dandi—constructed a broad, rebellious anticolonial space, physically connecting together thousands and thousands of people in marches, speeches, organizing meetings, and cultural festivals as it passed through many villages and towns (see Hardiman, Peasant Nationalists 194, 198–99). The illegal production of salt spread through the country, quickly snowballing into a mass, all-India satyagraha that included the defiance of forest laws (Maharashtra, Karnataka), the withholding of various taxes (Bengal, Gujarat), and the general boycott of British goods (Habib 57). Though the British government initially scoffed at the enterprise, the Salt Satyagraha became an explosive site for mass rebellion and repression: a global media event that made Gandhi a household name after tens of thousands were beaten and arrested.

Crucially, for our purposes, the Salt Satyagraha became a site at which the historic, cross-class alliance against colonialism was forged, bringing together those whose opposition to the British was based on questions of law and democracy and/or those for whom the high price of salt was literally impoverishing. The radical possibilities engendered by this event ought not to be minimized. Indeed, the Salt Satyagraha famously engendered the activism of women in large numbers (see Hardiman, Gandhi 113), and the bullets that Gaffar Khan and the Khudai Khidmatgar faced in Peshawar gave a concrete manifestation to hopes for communal harmony in the nation-to-be. It is crucial to remember, further, that the tens of
thousands who joined the Salt March were not only responding to a call from the Congress Party; salt had been part of anticolonial agitations of various sorts since the late nineteenth century, especially in Orissa (Kuran-sky 342–43).

It is more than appropriate, therefore, to speak of “namak-halaal” in a late colonial and postcolonial context as commitment to the nation and its people even when—during the colonial context and earlier—it may have been used to justify colonialism, feudal relationships, and other hierarchies. On the level of ideas and consciousness, the anticolonial movement had to enact a reversal of signs, demanding that Indians’ allegiance to their own welfare (their land, their salt, their home) be linked not to the British Raj but to a new entity, the nation. The movement sought to define what it meant to be loyal, to be “namak-halaal”—even though it did not and could not dissolve the many different positions and ideas from which people arrived at that common ground. In effect, this signified not a real discursive break from previous uses of namak-halaal but a struggle to redefine the idea through displaying the contradiction between British claims and material realities—expressed concretely through laws like the Salt Tax. Whatever theoretical position on nationalism we hold, we must explain why movements such as the Salt Satyagraha worked: why they resonated with people who required and/or desired far more radical changes than those promised by the official nationalist organizations. We need to make room for the ideological debate and complexity engendered by the emergence of the nation in anticolonial struggle, a series of tensions and contradictions whose trace can be found in literature and elsewhere.

Namak-halaal cosmopolitanism, then, signifies the cultural identity of middle-class intellectuals and writers whose ways of looking toward “the world” are explicitly centered on “the home,” constructing the nation as their space of engagement. “Postnational cosmopolitanism” is also complex in its negotiations of home and the world—but its explicit orientation is the “look away” from the nation as an emancipatory space. I do not call this “namak-haraam cosmopolitanism,” however, because the connotations of that term (“disloyal, ungrateful”) would skew the perception of my project and fail to describe the progressive and even radical tendencies that generally motivate the turn away from the nation after the Emergency. Such a category might imply a wholesale rejection of English-language texts as such, regarding Anglophone writers as “anti-national,” and would be unable to account for postnational writers’ explicit critiques of colonialism, of racism, and of the violence that the modern nation-state has inflicted on ordinary people. “Namak-halaal” and “postnational” cosmo-
politanisms are labels, in this book, both for demarcating the broad shift that has occurred within the Indian English novel and its representations of the nation and for mapping the organic links between pre- and post-Emergency texts.

I identify the majority of Indian English novels from the 1980s and after as expressing postnational orientations because their narratives tend to construct nations and nationalisms in dehistoricized ways, as little more than barriers to emancipation and progress. It is not that interest in the nation, in politics, or in history disappears with the postnational turn, and it is unquestionable that the narrative and linguistic innovations with which contemporary writers are involved have shed a powerful light on new Indian realities. Novels such as Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August* (1988), Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995), and Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* (1995), for instance, are profoundly shaped by an interest in India—its history, its institutions, its cultural and social identities. Furthermore, for all of the epistemological and methodological differences between them, such texts powerfully highlight questions of power, especially the ongoing impact of colonialism, political repression, class and caste divisions, and communalism. Indeed, like many namak-halaal texts, postnational ones also implicate elite Indians in these processes precisely for their turn away from Indian-ness; Rushdie’s hilarious employment of the term chamcha (sycophant) in *The Satanic Verses*, for example, stands out in this regard. On the thematic level, then, there is much overlap between these novels and earlier ones—and part of the argument of *Decentering Rushdie*, indeed, is to show that such “postcolonial” and “cosmopolitan” concerns do not begin with *Midnight’s Children*.

The crucial difference between the two phases, however, lies in the fact that the post-Emergency texts constructed a new lens for viewing the nation and its history. Writing in a different moment, most of Indian English novels of the past three decades portray nationalisms as being inherently fanatical and violent. Historiography is important here, but reflections on the politics of history-writing are raised in opposition to the understanding of history itself as dynamic, as the product of contending human and structural forces. Characterization, voice, plot, and theme are fashioned in ways that represent, for instance, anticolonial nationalism as being always already suspect as a utopian, elitist, and/or atavistic project; postcoloniality as a condition of endless violence and crises; the cosmopolitan-elite subject as victimized by the nation for her/his hybridity and
cultural “impurity”; and migrancy and “rootlessness” as the only genuine conditions for knowledge of postcolonial oppressions. Very often, the nation is constructed as the enemy of both transnational and subaltern-centered views, and Indian crises can be grasped only from spaces outside the nation. The (unacknowledged) telos of postnational texts is the construction of an implied audience that can transcend the nation; we are encouraged to support cosmopolitan-elite protagonists who come to recognize not only the “pitfalls” of national consciousness but also its reactionary nature. Indeed, in most novels after the Emergency, models of mass, national struggle are generally dismissed as utopian; when masses of people do appear, they are often portrayed as violent mobs. For the most part, representations of ordinary people are of distant, victimized figures whose agency, when it emerges at all, is limited to the minimum: the act of survival.

And yet commonalities persist, too. Early postcolonial novels, as we shall explore in the next two chapters, run the risk of essentializing the nation and its traditions as positive force for good. But it is also true that a unitary, monolithic representation of India often pervades more recent novels, often linked to similarly flat representations of the West (Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Perishable* 174). Indeed, as I discuss in chapter 4, despite their often explicit desire to transcend the nation, post-Emergency novels remain haunted by it; as with “postcolonial” and “postmodern,” the category “postnational” continues to be constituted by the entity it aims to supersede. Moreover, many post-Emergency novels belie the reputation of radical political oppositionality mistakenly associated with their radical aesthetic experimentations, as they articulate a rejection of the present through a fairly mainstream political discourse that—at times—is indistinguishable from what I call in chapter 3 an “NRI [Non-Resident Indian] nationalism.” Rather than a new articulation of “hybridity,” we are led by novels such as Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* into the arms of a fairly liberal understanding of community under the rubric of “unity in diversity”—an idea that had emerged in Indian political and cultural discourse alongside the earliest expressions of anticolonial nationalism and was, often problematically, enshrined in Nehruvian state institutions. Make no mistake: the slogan is a welcome and necessary one in a practical sense as communalist and other reactionary forces continue to disfigure the subcontinent. But the positing of a unitary nation to defuse conflicts of social and cultural difference does not answer the question of why the “imagined community” of the Indian nation was an insufficient basis for liberation in the first place. In fact, my effort to establish the presence of an alternative,
*namak-halaal* tradition in the Indian English novel draws attention to a paradox. In many cases, Indian English novels that “look away” from the nation in the context of neoliberal globalization are, in fact, less perceptive about the workings of the postcolonial nation than early, *namak-halaal* texts that, in the aftermath of decolonization, allied themselves with the national project but “looked back” with full awareness of its ongoing challenges.

**When “Rough Beasts” Slouch In**

The 1980s were monumental for postcolonial (Indian) English literature. Eurocentric grand-narratives were questioned and “Commonwealth Literature” was challenged. Ghettoization was reviled. Rough beasts slouched in. In a reversal of the dynamics of modern history, a sort of poetic justice perhaps, Rushdie and “Rushdie’s children” have dominated global English literature, producing, as many have attested, some of the most important and exciting fiction in the English-speaking world since World War II. When Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay infamously asserted in his “Minute on Education” (1835) that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia,” he certainly didn’t have in mind a shelf full of novels by today’s postcolonial Anglophone authors, descendents of parents and grandparents who had the direct experience of the Raj and had, perhaps, participated in overthrowing it.

But what happened to those beasts as they took over the master’s house, slept in the master’s bed, wore the master’s clothes? They talked of revolution and transformation, but what changed and what remained the same? Did the rebellious beasts start turning human, like the Orwellian pigs of *Animal Farm*, or—yes, why not?—did they start losing their pigmentation, as it were, like the postindependence Indian businessmen in *Midnight’s Children*? Did they begin to resemble those they had replaced, creating new canons and ghettos and hierarchies, renaming “Manor Farm” to “Animal Farm” but then reverting back again? When the greatest of these beasts were feted and honored, what happened to those who, despite making the voyage in, were forced to watch the coronation from the outside? How might a literary genealogy that seriously considered the work of pre-Rushdie, non-postmodern, *namak-halaal* authors change our view of which things fell apart and which things remained quite intact despite the literary revolution of the 1980s? How might we challenge the
postmodernized notions of the postcolonial and the cosmopolitan that, ironically, have helped build rigid binary oppositions between national/cosmopolitan, vernacular/English, and realist/magical-realist texts?

At the very end of *Animal Farm*, the only sliver of hope that remains is expressed by the fact that the implied author of the text describes the debacle of Napoleon’s transformation from outside the farmhouse. In light of the uncritical reduction of the Indian English novel to its post-Emergency phase, it is this sort of outside space we need to recover in order to reassess the genre and its relationship to shifting aesthetic, historical, and political contexts. In doing so we would only be insisting, as Rushdie does in his critique of Orwell in “Outside the Whale” (1984), that artists and critics remain aware of the intimate and unavoidable links between literature and the world in which it is produced and received.