

SILENCE AND REPRESENTATION
IN SELECTED POSTCOLONIAL TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses female silence, voice and representation as portrayed in four postcolonial novels written by Asian female writers or those from the Asian diaspora. The novels included in the corpus are *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mootoo, *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali and *Brixton Beach* by Roma Tearne. This thesis aims to explore the different strategies adopted by the authors to represent different forms of silence of the type highlighted in theoretical work by Spivak, Olsen and Showalter. The novels analysed open up new contexts in which issues of silence, migration, displacement and multiculturalism, which are central in postcolonial literature, are explored. In its examination of these issues in detail, the thesis has been influenced by postcolonial and diasporic studies, with a focus on women's issues and feminist thought. Instead of focusing on the role of silence solely in relation to specific characters, the thesis attempts to engage with the complex ways in which these narratives represent various forms, moments and scenes of silence. From the analysis, we can exemplify that the novels can also be used to suggest the ambivalences of speaking/not-speaking via the narrative representations of silence. Authorial silence involves the author's deliberate refusal to speak directly in the text ; instead, the author utilises several literary devices to convey something indirectly to the reader. Silence is also linked to concepts such as shame, secrets and gossip. One is likely to refrain from speaking if he or she is ashamed, secretive or is the topic of gossip in one's community. There are also some female characters who are portrayed as not-speaking, or choosing to remain silent so as not to cause problems for the family. A few other characters have been portrayed as refusing to speak out as they have been traumatised into silence. Lastly, women can also be complicit in holding on to patriarchal structures and in the process, attempt to speak out in order to to silence or to cause problems to other women.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all other critical sources (literary and electronic) have been specifically and properly acknowledged, as and when they occur in the body of my text.

Signed:

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CHAPTER 1

SILENCE AND REPRESENTATION IN SELECTED POSTCOLONIAL TEXTS

This thesis aims to discuss female silence, voice and representation as portrayed in four postcolonial novels written by Asian female writers or those from the Asian diaspora. The novels included in the corpus are *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mootoo, *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali and *Brixton Beach* by Roma Tearne.. By looking at a set of representations by ‘Asian’ female authors, this thesis aims to explore the different strategies adopted by the authors to present permutations of not-speaking highlighted by Spivak. We can see a similar pattern in the portrayal of the Asian woman, who is often expected to present herself as quiet and submissive and to honour her husband and family above all things. The novels examined in this thesis open up new contexts in which issues of silence, migration, displacement and multiculturalism, which are central in postcolonial literature, are explored. The act of breaking down certain barriers is a central issue in many situations in the novels. We witness female characters who show their rebellion in various ways ; nevertheless, the women who show such resistance face dire consequences in their community later on, by being ostracised, marginalised or totally silenced.

In order to examine these issues in detail, the thesis will be influenced by postcolonial and diasporic studies, with a focus on women’s issues and feminist thought. Instead of focusing on the roles of silence solely in relation to specific characters, the

thesis attempts to engage with the narrative representation of various forms, moments and scenes of silence. Some of the ideas which will be discussed are i) shame, ii) secrets, iii) gossip, which can sometimes be used as a form of subverting silence, and sometimes of silencing, iv) the choice to remain silent (or to make noise that is not recognisable as language) as a possible form of empowerment, v) women's complicity in silencing other women, and lastly vi) authorial silence, which involves an engagement with the author's choices about what not to tell the reader.

This thesis will be situated at the interface between feminist and postcolonial studies. Spivak, among other postcolonial critics, emphasizes the intersections between gender and race. As suggested by Ashcroft et al (1989 :174-175) women 'share with colonized races and people an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression'. Women, like colonized people, have been deprived of an independent voice or space throughout history. Both feminism and postcolonial theory seek to reinstate the marginalized in the face of the dominant.

The novels which make up the corpus for this study portray Asian women or women of Asian origin who cannot express their situation to the world. They can be described as voiceless, powerless individuals; a view which was infamously discussed by Spivak in her essay about the subaltern. The term 'subaltern' which means of 'inferior rank' was first used by Antonio Gramsci to define particular groups in society who may be subject to the hegemony of the ruling elite (Ashcroft et al,198). These groups may include peasants, workers and people who have been denied access to 'hegemonic' power.

The role of feminism in the largely postcolonial nations of the Global South has been

a particularly fraught area of critical debate in recent decades. The feminist movement, which was initiated and dominated by White, Western female writers and theorists and became popular in the 1960s and 1970s, has been challenged and in some instances rejected by women from 'Third World' countries. Many activists from Third World countries viewed the feminist project as a rigid construction based on Eurocentric values and views and did not take into account the differences of the Third World women. According to Audre Lorde:

By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preferences, class and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word 'sisterhood' that does not in fact exist. (116)

Writing in the same vein, Mohanty argues that white feminist theorists do not genuinely engage in dialogue with women of colour which has led to a poor understanding of the latter's experiences. What is needed is an approach which takes into account the needs of black and Third World women to prevent them from becoming the silenced objects of Western analysis. In her view, Third World women writers who write about the politics of feminism should practice writing in the form of 'storytelling or autobiography' which would be useful as 'a discourse of oppositional consciousness and agency' (39). She further states that in order to change patriarchal ways of thinking and oppressive discourses, it is not enough to publish these stories but it is also vital to think about how they are disseminated and most importantly, heard.

Similarly, bell hooks calls for the articulation of marginalised voices and the self-affirmation of these oppressed groups:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonised, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is the act of speech, of ‘talking back’, that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice. (211)

Weedon in ‘Key Issues in Postcolonial Feminism : A Western Perspective’ views the project of postcolonial feminism as one that involves women in both the developing and developed world. While Western feminism and its Eurocentric values lead its proponents to view their societies and cultures as models for the rest of the world, Third World countries also have their own active indigenous women’s movements which are concerned with specific issues in their countries. Weedon argues that much of the feminist theory and scholarship produced by Third World women tends to be ignored by Western theorists, although it must also be pointed out that there are also feminists from the Third World who are increasingly making their voices heard due to their location in the West. Weedon notes that the Third World women are not only analysing their own situations but they also openly criticise Western feminism and its Eurocentricism, the West’s amnesia about colonial history and its tendency to reproduce colonial modes of representation .

Although many postcolonial writers have prioritised this process of talking back, some have been accused of perpetuating the stereotyped image of Eastern women as

weak, helpless individuals in their novels. For Bhachu (quoted in Buijs, 105), this type of novel includes those which have been commissioned by feminist publishing houses . Such novels are deemed to feature characters who fit the ‘passive/victim’ stereotype who are caught in ‘identity crisis/cultural confrontational/desire to return to their homeland’ dilemmas. Weedon in ‘Migration, Identity, and Belonging in British Black and South Asian Women’s Writing’ views writing from women of minority ethnic groups as a craft partly developed from a desire to give voice to a ‘marginalised’ and ‘traumatic’ experience of emigration and settlement. Bhachu further adds that it is easier for Asian writers to find publishers if their novels and characters fit this particular mould. She contrasts this with the way Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American women are portrayed in literature with a much wider range of representations (even though they are sometimes portrayed as ‘superwomen/super macho’ characters as in the work of Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison).

My thesis, however, will not focus on the representation of women as ‘super macho’ characters; on the contrary, as was outlined above, the novels in my corpus will look at female characters who are silenced and marginalised; mainly those from South Asian countries or who are Asian in origin. The authors featured in the corpus are primarily from countries which have previously experienced British occupation: Pakistan, parts of the Caribbean, Sri Lanka and India. These writers share certain common features – they have been educated in English (or at least within a Westernised education system), they have experienced life under certain patriarchal norms, and their texts deal with life after their nation’s independence struggle. The themes of migration and displacement also figure prominently in all four novels. *Brixton Beach* and *Brick Lane* examine the plight of

Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi migrants living in a Western society and how some of the female characters overcome their feelings of estrangement and alienation to emerge as individuals with their own sense of growth and agency. In the case of *The God of Small Things* and *Cereus Blooms at Night*, acts of transgression committed by Ammu and Mala cause them to be displaced from their family homes. As we shall see in the analysis below, Ammu is punished by being separated from her children while Mala is punished and similarly controlled by being put into an almshouse.

My intention is not to present this corpus as definitive or representative of 'postcolonial Asian women's writing' as a whole. Rather, the corpus constitutes a series of case studies each of which allows us to explore different conceptions of silence, voice and representation and to examine how female authors of Asian origin have challenged, revised or in some cases inadvertently reinforced stereotypes of the passive Asian woman. Silence, voice and representation will be discussed in relation to migration, displacement and multiculturalism, concepts that have been at the heart of so much of postcolonial literature. We can ascertain various moments and scenes of silence related to secrets, shame and gossip in the texts, which are generally caused by transgressions involving the main characters, such as inter-caste sex, incest, homosexuality and rape, or on a lighter scale, the act of going against family norms such as elopement and inter-ethnic marriage. These types of misconduct are generally frowned upon in Eastern cultures. The four texts analysed are based in South Asian cultures where women are usually expected to maintain the family honour. As such, there is a need for the womenfolk to be under constant surveillance, in order to ensure that they 'do nothing to bring *sharam* (shame) on their kin' (Kabeer, 34). Additionally, the communities in the novel can also be described

as close-knit, where one is expected to conform to particular norms. There is a high price to pay if one is unable to conform to societal rules and regulations, to the extent that one may be ridiculed or gossiped about by members of the society.

The act of breaking down certain barriers is portrayed in most of the situations in these novels. We find instances of female characters who rebel silently, while others may show total defiance in their rebellion. However, the women who show their resistance also face dire consequences in their community later on, by being ostracised and marginalised or totally silenced. I thus attempt to illustrate through the analysis that the novels can also be used to suggest the ambivalences of speaking/not-speaking via the narrative representations of silence.

The theme of female empowerment is explored in the novels *Brick Lane* and *The God of Small Things*. These novels which feature characters living in the Indian sub-continent undoubtedly deal with the notion of the silenced person who has no means of voicing her problems and concerns to the world. Each of these novels presents different potential solutions for the silenced and marginalised woman. The narrative in *Brick Lane* tries to bring a positive message in that the protagonist Nazneen, who is a marginalized person in a foreign country, manages to struggle against the odds and achieves economic success. Despite Nazneen's portrayal as an example of a financially independent woman in the end, we can also ascertain instances where she is presented as remaining silent as she does not want to cause problems, especially in front of her husband. Ali also uses the text to demonstrate the existence of women who are complicit in silencing other women, in the portrayal of Mrs. Azad. In the case of *The God of Small Things*, we witness scenes and representations of silence where the characters do not talk

openly about certain issues due to the secrets, shame and gossip involved, specifically regarding Ammu's inter-ethnic marriage and later, her transgression with Velutha. Additionally, the author has drawn Estha's character (Ammu's son) as someone who remains silent after being blamed for his cousin Sophie Mol's death. Similar to Ali's *Brick Lane*, Roy's narrative also showcases female villains, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, who can be described as fellow conspirators in their agenda to silence other women.

In Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Roma Tearne's *Brixton Beach*, we can identify the underlying themes of caste, race/ethnic group and class and how the characters appear to be silenced and shamed as they have transgressed certain restrictions in their community. The first novel deals with the story of a mad old woman, Mala, who has been ostracised by the community members in an unnamed West Indies location and the story is told from the viewpoint of a cross-dressing male nurse. For my analysis of this text, I focus on scenes and representations of silence which are indicated from the refusal or avoidance of certain characters to talk directly of particular matters, like sexual transgression, as they do not want to reveal family secrets or bring further shame to someone. I shall also focus on Mala's choice to remain silent in the novel, which can partly be attributed to her trauma at being abused as well as her rejection of all things human. As for *Brixton Beach*, it deals with the story of Sri Lankan immigrants who escape from the civil war and try to adapt to life in the United Kingdom. The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka brings us to the realization of the unsettled situation in particular postcolonial societies after decolonization. Tearne's novel provides narrative representations of silence concerning the secrets, shame and gossip surrounding the

married life of Sita and Stanley, who come from different ethnic backgrounds. The choice to remain silent is evident in Sita's insistence on wallowing in sadness and silence after suffering a postnatal trauma, even after the family's migration from Sri Lanka to England.

A discussion on authorial silence will also be included in my analysis. This section will explore instances in the texts where the authors intentionally leave out certain elements to enable a point or conclusion to be made. My analysis of this strategy will start off with a discussion of the authorial position in JM Coetzee's *Foe*. Authorial silence is especially evident in *God of Small Things* and *Cereus Blooms*, where the authors seem to withhold information from the reader until the very end of the narrative, where the truth is finally revealed.

Having briefly discussed the key questions to be explored in my thesis, I would like, in the pages that follow, to lay out some of the key concepts that have been central to work in the field of postcolonial studies. In the process, I will locate the specific approach taken in my thesis in relation to the broader field and identify my overall contribution to current debates regarding postcolonial literature in English.

Diaspora

The field of 'diaspora studies' intersects with many of the concerns of postcolonial theory. However, the two fields have often existed in parallel to rather than feeding into one another. Diaspora refers to the voluntary or forcible movement of people from their homelands into new regions. According to Ashcroft et al (2000a: 61), it can be considered a central historical fact of colonisation. The practice of slavery and indentured labour are some of the causes of worldwide colonial diasporas. Labourers from India and China

were transported by the British Empire to these new regions to work in rubber, sugarcane and palm oil plantations. Indentured workers from the Indian population worked on plantations in the West Indies, Malaya, Fiji and Mauritius. One particular Indian minority in the West Indies forms the background for Shani Mootoo's novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*.

The diasporic process involves a dislocation or displacement, in terms of a significant crossing from one territory or border to another. This particular experience also affects those who have been placed in certain locations and they need to be 'reinvented' in terms of their language, narrative as well as myth, due to particular colonial practices (Ashcroft et al, 2000a: 65). A valid and active sense of self may be eroded by dislocation, due to the unstable process of being moved, either voluntarily or by force, from one place to another. As we shall observe in the analysis, the sense of displacement which occurs in the postcolonial novels included in this study mainly results from migration, transportation or 'voluntary' removal for indentured labour.

The experience of a new and completely different place encourages the migrants to keep their language, traditions and culture to express their sense of 'otherness' (Ashcroft et al, 2000: 9-11). This is especially evident in *Brick Lane* and *Brixton Beach* in which the characters try to keep some, if not all, of their traditions even though they are living in a foreign land. In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen seems helpless to stop Chanu from beating his daughter Shahana for failing to recite Bengali poems (p.180). In *Brixton Beach*, Alice, Sita's daughter, experiences being alienated in her new environment in England and later, the aftermath of her parents' separation. She is portrayed as struggling for self-expression, which she later manages through her interest

in art, rather than verbally. Towards the end of the narrative, she is seen as trying to retain her cultural identity in her confrontation with her English-born son.

Ashcroft et al (2000a: 62) also point out that in countries such as Britain and France, there has been substantial migration of people from the former colonies especially in the metropolitan areas. Some of these minority groups have been formed by people from the South Asian regions like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and one such setting (London) forms the basis for the novels *Brick Lane* and *Brixton Beach*. The first wave of Bangladeshi migration was started by seamen who had served in the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy (Summerfield, quoted in Buijs, 84-85). Later on, the seamen were joined by their families. Due to the 1971 Immigration Act, which became law in 1973, only Bangladeshis with close relatives in the United Kingdom were allowed to settle down. Summerfield further states that the 1971 Civil War, which resulted in East Pakistan becoming Bangladesh, caused a major influx of immigrants from Bangladesh. Another trend occurred throughout the 1970s and the 1980s when Bangladeshi men, realising that they would not be able to retire in 'luxury' back home in Bangladesh, tried to bring over their families to the United Kingdom. Summerfield notes that the 1981 census suggested that at that time there were 26,000 Bangladeshis in the Tower Hamlets area of London (quoted in Buijs, 86).

In terms of Sri Lankan migration into the United Kingdom, Shah (138) states that the first movement of migrants occurred in the 1960s and this group was made up of Sri Lankans who were involved in professions such as law, medicine and engineering. The second phase of immigration involved Tamils who came to Britain in the 1960s and 1970s as students who aimed for a professional status. Shah also mentions that this group

migrated partly due to the consequences of the anti-Tamil policies back home. In July 1993, the anti-Tamil pogrom backed by the armed forces killed thousands of Tamils (137). Since then, a significant number of Sri Lankans have appeared as asylum seekers in the Home Office Statistics.

These developments indicate to us that while the majority of immigrants may choose to migrate due to force (civil war, instability, famine etc in the country of origin), other immigrants may choose to do so for economic purposes as they look for a better future for themselves. Additionally, as suggested in the storyline of the novels, while some immigrants hold on to the traditions of their country of origin, others appear to be eager to embrace the culture and language of the new country, sometimes creating a conflict between the older characters and the younger characters. Ashcroft et al (1989: 9-10) ascertain a link between alienation with the sense of dislocation or displacement that some people, especially those from immigrant groups, feel when they look to a foreign or distant nation for their values. An example of one such character can be seen in *Brick Lane*, via the portrayal of Mrs Azad, the Doctor's wife. Nazneen seems to be shocked into total silence by Mrs Azad's Western appearance and manner, especially when she orders her husband to bring her a beer (109) and her loud approval of the Western way of life (113)

Feminism and the Postcolonial

Feminism, as defined by Smith (quoted in Minh-ha: 86) refers to 'the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women [...] Anything less than this vision of total

freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement'. Bentley has identified several strands of feminism which emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s. One form of feminism advocated by Betty Friedan proposed the development of a society in which women could compete on equal terms with men in public and professional life (11). This was known as liberal feminism and its target was mainly women in middle-class and upper-class environments. Another form of feminism was influenced by the works of French feminists such as Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva and this focused on the notion that Western language and philosophy had been based on 'dual, hierarchical systems' which placed females in an inferior or invisible position (12). As was stated at the start of this chapter, earlier forms of feminism have tended to focus on the experiences of white, middle-class women and can be seen to be mainly Eurocentric in approach.

However, postcolonial feminist critics have rejected this Eurocentric form of feminism. While Western feminists may think of themselves as the model for developing nations and the rest of the World, Third World feminists are working hard to make themselves heard by rejecting the negative portrayal of Third World women as victims of ignorance forced to live in restrictive cultures and societies. Mohanty argues that the Western feminist writings which she analysed have colonised the material and the historical 'heterogeneities' of women in the third world and produced a composite, singular 'Third World Women' image (*Third World Women* 53). She comments that there is a tendency for Western feminists to 'homogenise' or group the complexities and conflicts of the women of different classes, religions, cultures and castes in one easy category, which she defines as 'Third World Difference' (53). These women tend to be depicted as victims who have been controlled by men and traditional cultures. The typical

image of the 'average third woman', usually seen as 'ignorant, poor, uneducated...etc', is contrasted with the typical representation of the Western woman as 'educated' and 'modern' (56). Mohanty argues that this distinction between the two groups of women is made based on the privileging of a particular group (the Western feminists) as the desired norm or the referent. In her view, the issues of Third World women should be analysed in detail within the exact social relations in which they occur, to enable more complex pictures to emerge (64). She argues that Third World women, like Western women, are produced as subjects in historically and culturally specific ways by the societies in which they live and act as agents. Mohanty's aim is to allow Third World women to have agency and voice in the same way as Western women. This is exactly what Monica Ali tries to achieve via her narrative *Brick Lane*, in which she portrays Nazneen, a village girl from Bangladesh who later overcomes the odds and emerges as the maker of her own destiny as well as the joint owner of a small business.

In Minh-Ha's view, Western feminists have created a division between them and the Third-world women resembling two separate groups of 'I-who-have-made-it and You-who-cannot-make-it' (86). This is similar to the situation in colonised societies regarding the unequal status between the superior and the subordinate or the colonised and the coloniser. As elaborated by Audre Lorde, 'to imply [...] that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women, is to lose sight of the many tools of patriarchy' (quoted in Minh-Ha:101). Minh-Ha also views the rare participation of Third World women in feminist meetings as comparable to the experience of shopping in a supermarket, where a limited choice of 'other' fashionable goods is offered along with the usual goods on sale. The Western feminists seem adamant in preserving and observing the

‘other’ women, considered as the endangered species (Ashcroft et al, 2000b: 266). In Minh-Ha’s view, oppression exists in both racism and sexism, and she insists that both types of oppression are present in the work of decolonisation via the (Western) women’s movements.

Additionally, Minh-Ha comments that the idea of separate identities, ethnic and female, is actually part of a Euro-American system of ‘dualistic reasoning’ and certain ‘divide and conquer techniques’ (104). She calls this notion ‘triple jeopardy’, which is described as the situation in which a coloured woman takes part in a feminist fight and she immediately qualifies for three possible ‘betrayals’. She could be accused of betraying her man or her ethnic community or her own group of women. Minh-Ha observes the problems which are evident with ‘the perception of sex as a secondary attribute [...] that one can add or subtract’ (104). She also notes that ‘difference [...] is not opposed to sameness, nor synonymous with separateness’(372) to describe the complexity of Third world women’s multiple conflicted subject positions. When one is oblivious to these complexities, we act ‘as if oppression only comes in separate, monolithic forms’ (104).

Mohanty’s views above are shared by Heung (597) who states that the culturally and historically specific conditions of women’s lives require readers to effectively contextualise and refine their readings of individual texts. Heung further cites Hirsch’s views about the need for Western frameworks to be modified, reconstructed and transformed in considering works by Afro-American women writers. This is in line with the views of Sadoff, Watson and Brownley (cited in Heung) regarding the African-American family which needs to be understood through alternative models as it

has been distorted through the experience of slavery. While Heung focuses on the works of Afro-American women writers, I would argue that these ideas are also relevant for women writers of Asian origin. For example, one of the texts in my corpus, Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms*, is set in a community made up of whites, Indians and blacks. Mala, the female subaltern in the novel, comes from a family of former Indian indentured workers. The postcolonial feminist framework is especially useful for understanding the experience of slavery in colonial times as well as the weak male figure seen both in Chandin's and Ambrose's characters.

Lim ('Feminist and Ethnic Literary Theories' 571) raises the issue of the divide between women's studies scholars and ethnic studies scholars in the United States. She cites Smith's view that some white feminists have defined feminism in specific terms according to their privileged position as whites while some male ethnic scholars seem adamant to 'maintain power over their women at all costs' and resort to scaring the women from taking part in the women's movement. Lim agrees that feminist and ethnic critics generally oppose hegemonic disciplines and these critics have intervened in matters which promote the 'totalizing naturalisation of white male culture' (572).

According to Ashcroft et al, feminist theory does share certain parallels with postcolonial theory (1989: 175). Both theories have been constructed as a means of resisting patriarchal norms which are apparent in colonisation as well as situations of gender inequality. Mills views gender as crucial within both theories, as there is a complicity between colonialism and patriarchy. Both theories deal with issues related to the concept of the Other, like suppression, subordination, identity, silence, voice and representation. As such, the interface between feminist and postcolonial theory is seen as

an intervention which can provide voice and agency to postcolonial women so they can challenge their subjugation (Ibrahim et al, 29). Lewis and Mills (53) further suggest that feminist post-colonial theory is a body of knowledge with its own aims – to racialise mainstream feminist theory and to include feminist concerns within conceptualisations of colonialism and post-colonialism. In doing so, its proponents aim to change the oppressive power relations hidden in concepts such as race, nation and empire as well as gender, class and sexuality.

Despite the complex interrelation between feminist and postcolonial agendas, postcolonial studies is often considered a rather masculinist field. According to Mills, the question of gender in mainstream postcolonial theory has been rather ignored (99). As exemplified in her essay, this theory deals with texts which represent the colonial/imperial context, especially those which had been written by British males in the 19th century. Most of the texts portray British male administrators and explorers as ‘adventurous, unemotional, courageous’ and this was purposely done in order to maintain the appearance of a ‘ruling race’. However, Mills notes that many feminist proponents do not agree with the positioning of post-colonial theory as a masculine subject and also the assumption that colonial subjectivity can be described from the analysis of the male subject (100).

As stated by Ashcroft et al (1989: 177), the theory of feminism generally has not provided post-colonial criticism with a model or models because it has existed more as a coincident and parallel discourse. Nevertheless they note that critics are beginning to draw the two discourses together and that this ‘cross-fertilization of ideas’ would be a positive outcome. Furthermore, they note that a combination of postcolonial and feminist

theories is useful for analysing issues of gender bias and 'double colonization' in post-independence states as there still exists 'neo-colonial' domination of women in national patriarchies (Ashcroft et al 2000a: 67). A combination of the two approaches is useful for analysing the novels in my corpus. A similarity in all the four novels is that the narratives explore the plight of the marginalized female characters, who are often denied the opportunity for growth. The women also face enormous pressure to conform to particular attributes and roles in the patriarchal society that they live in. However, Ashcroft et al maintains that neither term/methodology is without its own problems.

It has been suggested that an application of both the feminist and postcolonial approaches is useful for analysing women's writing in parts of the world. According to Mills, the development of postcolonial feminist theories has brought about 'worlding' of feminist theories, as it moves from a rather 'parochial' focus on white middle-class, English-speaking women towards a focus on women in different national contexts (98). Lewis and Mills (139) further agree that postcolonial feminists can work together in the 'theorizing of difference' because women from all nations and cultures can talk about their issues, not because they seem to share the same contexts or concerns but rather, to develop a set of theoretical principles of 'translation'. In their view, in spite of, or rather paradoxically, due to the 'differences in power and differences in culture', alliances can be formed between the different postcolonial feminist groups (109).

Morton in his book on Spivak (139) points out that the western feminist idea of a global sisterhood had been criticized by Alexander and Mohanty as it tends to define all women's knowledge according to the experiences of 'white, western middle-class women'. Instead, Alexander and Mohanty propose a 'more careful and situated approach'

which is known as transnational feminism. Morton states that Alexander and Mohanty view this approach as one which involves ‘a way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in different geographical spaces, rather than as all women across the world’ (153). In Morton’s view, this concern with situating women’s social location in a transnational framework of economic, social and political relationships can be considered one of the legacies of Spivak’s thought.

However, in Grewal and Kaplan’s view , transnational feminism should not be considered as an ‘improved’ or ‘cleaned up’ version of international feminism or global feminism. The two authors point out that there are forms of alliance, subversion and complicity involved in transnational feminist practices, which enable certain asymmetries and inequalities to be critiqued. In the authors’ view, notions such as ‘orientalism’, ‘subalterneity’, ‘hybridity’ and ‘diaspora’ are the conceptual tools which enable feminists to examine representational politics. Grewal and Kaplan further suggest that the study of transnational movements along with the histories of colonialism and postcoloniality can be used to produce new feminist theories.

Grewal and Kaplan’s views of utilising the notions mentioned above which are useful for commenting on differences and inequalities are shared by Nagar and Swarr who propose a working definition for transnational feminisms as:

an intersectional set of understandings, tools and practices that can a) attend to racialised, classed, masculinised and heteronormative logics and practices of globalisations and capitalist practices, and the multiple ways in which they (re) structure colonial and neocolonial relations of domination and subordination, b)

grapple with the complex and contradictory ways in which the processes both inform and are shaped by a range of subjectivities and understandings of individual and collective agency, and c) interweave critiques, actions and self-reflexivity so as to resist a priori predictions of what might constitute feminist politics in a given place and time. (5)

The views held by these authors inform us that these so-called notions or dichotomies may provide a new presentation of feminist politics. Nagar and Swarr further suggest that grounding feminisms in activities everywhere is a way to examine all forms of implicit and explicit relations of power and to challenge those power relations through a continuous process of critique and self-reflection.

Hawkesworth notes that transnational feminists have established themselves as ‘a voice for women’ and have worked together for causes such as ‘women’s economic well-being, physical security and gender justice’(69). They have also introduced issues such as violence against women into international politics as well as brought about change in certain terms of political discourse evident in topics such as population control and human rights (70). The author views the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military and Sexual Slavery (held in 2000) as the most famous international event organised by transnational feminists (77).

Another term which has been used interchangeably with transnational feminism is global feminism. However, Hill views these two terms as different from one another. She

quotes Geertsma as saying that global feminism is a ‘white, hegemonic, US-based’ movement, unaware of the differences and the global contexts. Hill further defines transnational feminism as a movement which treats differences in experience, location and identity as ‘invaluable wisdom that should inform our activism’ (The F-Word : Feminist Media Collective). On the other hand, Lim (‘Where in the World Is Transnational Feminism?’ 8) quotes Bulbeck’s view that global feminism has now taken into account ‘colonial and post-colonial perspectives and histories as well as Western theories on women’s selves and rights’. Lim suggests that ‘theories and texts concerning the nexus between transnational dynamics and the feminist discourse and representation are to be discovered not only in the West [...] but also everywhere else in the world’ (9), which informs us that the Western world may not always be at the forefront of feminist ideas as there is also much to learn from feminist activists elsewhere.

With this view in mind, The Global Feminisms Project was started in 2002 at the University of Michigan with the objective of injecting ‘new understandings of feminisms into women’s studies’ (Stewart, Lal et al, 890). The project aimed to shift away from the United States as the centre of knowledge production about other societies by working with foreign colleagues on an equal basis and ‘creating a documentary archive’ which could be utilised by scholars and activists around the world (891). The project coordinators worked with colleagues in China, India and Poland as well as the existing team in the United States to produce video interviews of feminist scholars/activists. The authors commented that among others, ‘the complexity and range of individual circumstance and paths to activism’ revealed in the interviews of the activists’ experience serve to counter the inclination of romanticising ‘feminist resistance’(908).

Feminist theories of Silence

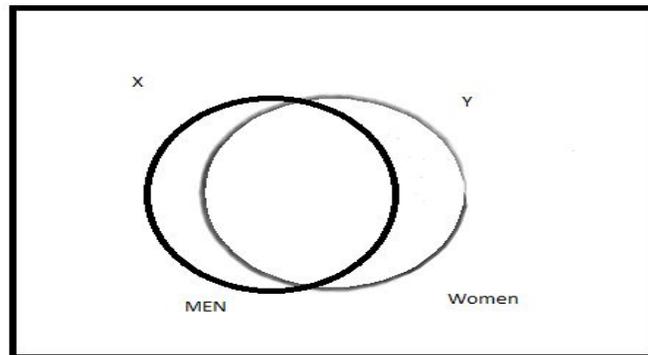
As my thesis looks into the representation in selected postcolonial novels of silenced women who may come from a low social class, there is a tendency to describe these women as being subordinated by patriarchy and capitalism. For this reason, feminist theories pertaining to silence in literature will also be discussed in this section. Feminist writers such as Tillie Olsen have written on the various ways in which women's silence can be read and interpreted. In Olsen's view, silence is considered an inability of voices to find expression. She focuses on those whose voices are unheard and ignored 'in the course of literary history' and also to those whose voices have been prevented from being heard due to particular circumstances: 'Literary history and the present are dark with silences: some the silences for years by our acknowledged great; some silences hidden; some ceasing to publish after one work appears; some the never coming to book form at all' (Olsen, 6). She refers to 'unnatural silences' in her book to bring the reader's attention to social inequality which prevents certain voices from being heard, especially from those who are female and of a particular ethnic race or creed. Other types of silences as categorised by her are *hidden* silences (authors's italics), censorship silences and 'silences where the lives never came to writing', a type of silence which she attributes to those who are struggling for their 'existence', those who are of low education and also women (10). In the second chapter of her book 'One Out Of Twelve', she laments the lack of successful female writers compared to male writers: 'One woman writer of achievement for every twelve male writers so ranked. Is this proof again – and in this so much more favourable century – of women's innately inferior capacity for creative achievement?' (25). Olsen's observation informs us that female writers have a tendency to

be silenced or ignored compared to male writers.

Another feminist, Elaine Showalter, has also written extensively on the concept of silence in literature. She uses anthropological evidence in her paper 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', to show that women in particular cultures have devised a private language among themselves as a type of resistance from the so-called silence imposed upon them (192). She suggests that feminist critics should focus on women's access to language, the lexical range to select words and 'the ideological and cultural determinants of expression' (193). Her argument is not that there is insufficient language to enable women to express their consciousness, but that she views women as not being given access to the 'full resources of language'. This, in turn, leads the women to retreat into silence or forced to use euphemism or circumlocution.

Showalter agrees with the view put forward by the anthropologist Shirley and Edwin Ardener, who suggest that women make up a muted group in which the boundaries of culture and reality overlap but are not wholly contained by the dominant (male) group (199). The term 'muted', as referred to by Edwin Ardener, suggests problems plagued by language and power issues. While the more dominant group controls the forms and structures in which consciousness can be articulated, the muted group has to make its beliefs known through 'allowable forms of dominant structures' (200). In other words, this indicates that all language is the language of the dominant order, and as such, if women were to speak at all, then they must speak through it. Showalter quotes Ardener as commenting that women's beliefs are expressed through ritual and art and these expressions can be interpreted by the ethnographer (male or female) who makes an effort

to understand what goes on beyond the dominant structures. The relationship between the muted and the dominant group as suggested by Ardener is illustrated below:



Ardener's diagram of the relationship of the dominant and the muted group

The two circles, X and Y, representing men and women respectively, intersect in the middle. While much of circle Y falls within the boundary of dominant circle X, there is a small crescent-shaped area of Y outside the dominant area, which Ardener refers to as 'wild'. As suggested by Showalter (200), this 'wild zone', in spatial terms, represents an area which is off limits to men, similar to the small crescent area in X which is forbidden to women. However Showalter also argues that the wild zone has no corresponding male space as the male consciousness is within the dominant structure; as such, the male consciousness is accessible to language. Showalter further cites an example from cultural anthropology, in which she views women as being aware of the male crescent even though they have never seen it, as 'it becomes the subject of legend'(200). On the other hand, men are not conscious of what is in the wild because they only have access to the dominant structure and not what is known by the muted group i.e women.

In Cheung's analysis of 'articulate silences', however, silence does not necessarily

mean something is unheard. In her book 'Articulate Silences', she provides a comprehensive analysis of silences, suggesting that silence 'can speak many tongues, varying from culture to culture' (1). In her analysis of works by the Asian-American authors Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston and Joy Kagawa, Cheung discovers that their works 'reveal the multiple problems of speechlessness and stress the importance of breaking silence,' but at the same time they also 'challenge blanket endorsements of speech and reductive perspectives on silences'(3). She warns against silence being understood as a sign of passivity or weakness as in her view, certain types of silences can also be enabling.

Cheung agrees with what some feminist critics view as 'common tendencies' among women writers 'which result from their exclusion from dominant discourse' (4). The first common tendency is 'woman's writing is characterised by silence, both as a theme and as a method'(4). Silence as a theme can be used to inform other people about the hindrance to 'female expression' (4), while silence as a method includes various 'strategies of reticence' used by female authors to express issues which are forbidden or unspeakable. As I have explained previously, both types of silence will be analysed with regard to the four narratives in this thesis.

The second common tendency among female authors is the distrust of 'inherited language' and the attempts to 'undercut narrative authority' by using literary devices such as 'dream, fantasy, and unreliable point of view' (5). Some of the literary devices such as dream and fantasy are also inherent in a few novels in my corpus, specifically *Brixton Beach* and *Brick Lane*, which both follow a linear narrative structure. The element of dream is used in *Brick Lane* in the scene where Nazneen, after facing

problems about her affair with Kareem and later, falls asleep, meets her departed mother who advises her that 'life is a test' (Ali, 322). As for the element of fantasy, this is evident in the scene where the grown-up Alice feels apprehensive about dating after her divorce from her English husband Tim. Tearne described how Alice seems to hear the voice of her dead grandfather Bee assuring her :

There's nothing to worry about, her grandfather's voice intercepted. You're still beautiful, child. His voice came to her with the slap of waves carrying her youth with it.

But what shall I do ? she asked him, wordlessly.

Nothing, Putha. Just be yourself (author's italics, 383).

From the two examples above, we can ascertain that the elements of dream and fantasy are used by these writers to indicate that the main protagonists are facing a personal dilemma, and the appearance or voice of a departed relative seems to provide them with some guidance on how to solve their problem.

As for the third common tendency, this is identified as the open-ended quality and multiplicity of women's fiction, resulting from the writers' 'skepticism about language and about textual authority' (Cheung,4).The third common tendency perhaps can be exemplified in two of the novels in my corpus, specifically in *Cereus Blooms* and *God of Small Things*. In *Cereus Blooms*, the multiple narrators tell the stories from different viewpoints. As for *God of Small Things*, in the final chapter , Roy provides her

readers with a hope for the future with her description of Ammu and Velutha meeting each other secretly for thirteen days : “She had a dry rose in her hair. She turned to say it once again: ‘*Naaley.*’ Tomorrow” (321). We already know what happens to the two doomed lovers. However, via the open-ended, circular quality of the narrative, in the final chapter, Roy reminds readers in the final chapter that there is always a tomorrow, and there is always a Rahel and Estha to learn from past mistakes.

The three views of silence put forward by Olsen, Showalter and Cheung indicate that the authors all have different views; however we may also agree that some of the views can be overlapping or similar. Olsen, for instance, views silence as the inability of voices to find expression, while Cheung stresses that silence does not always mean that something is unheard. Showalter uses anthropological evidence to suggest that women in some cultures have resorted to using a private language among themselves, as a type of resistance from the silence imposed upon them. As for Cheung, she states that female authors use literary devices such as ‘dream, fantasy, and unreliable point of view’ in their writing due to the distrust of ‘inherited language’ and the attempts to ‘undercut narrative authority’. This suggests that the female authors are rejecting the forms and structures controlled by the more dominant group i.e male authors ; a point previously put forward by Showalter above.

Postcolonial Theories of Silence

Before I go on to discuss the silencing of women and representations of women as silent,

it is necessary to first explain an imperialist ideology which has been imposed on the construction of a silent other, as well as issues connected to racial silencing. Some of the themes and issues related to postcolonial theory are evident in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which we can ascertain the relationship between the silent colonised (natives) and their colonisers. As such, I will first examine the representation of natives in Conrad's text, and then juxtapose it with Spivak's view in her essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. After that, I will look at the debate from other theories as regards Spivak's stance.

Colonial prejudice influences the main characters in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow and Kurtz, to view the natives negatively, even at some points as almost inhuman. A particular example can be seen in Marlow's description of the natives as uncivilised and uncultured: 'The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us-who could tell?... we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a mad house' (Conrad,35). Marlow seems resigned to wonder 'who could tell', instead of trying to understand the natives' speech, thus further indicating that the natives are denied their rights of language in the text. Additionally, while the European travellers are depicted as 'sane' men, the natives are described as occupants in a 'mad house', thus promoting the view that the colonised are backward and inhuman and they need to be saved by the benevolent colonisers.

It is also worthwhile to note that the natives in the text are not given the chance to speak or to express themselves. In this regard, we can argue that they have been completely silenced to further show the dominance of Western imperialism in the text. The exclusion of native speech from the narrative implies the colonialist's view held by Conrad that the uncivilised natives cannot contribute anything worthwhile to the plot. In

Achebe's criticism of Conrad's work, he raises the point that in many parts of the novel, Conrad draws the natives as predisposed towards making 'a violent babble of uncouth sounds' instead of expressing their opinions (341). Curiously, however, in the rare moments when the natives actually speak, they seem to discuss topics which emphasise their barbaric nature i.e cannibalism. As pointed out by Achebe: 'In the case of the cannibals the incomprehensible grunts that had thus served them for speech suddenly proved inadequate for Conrad's purpose of letting the European glimpse the unspeakable craving in their hearts' (341). This indicates that Conrad's strategy of limiting the native speech in the text is geared towards ignoring elements which may disrupt the native stereotype while emphasising elements which perpetuate the negative stereotype.

Even the surroundings, which are places of dwelling for the natives, are depicted as silent: 'The woods were unmoved, like a mask - heavy, like the closed door of a prison - they looked with their air of hidden knowledge, of patient expectation, of unapproachable silence' (Conrad, 93). Marlow's view of the mute surroundings and how they seem to conceal certain knowledge from him informs us of his inability to have an objective opinion of the colonised and the colonised land, as he has been influenced by colonial prejudice.

The natives' silence in *Heart of Darkness* discussed above provides a narrative representation of the issue of the subaltern put forward by Spivak. In her influential essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Spivak presents her pessimism about the possibility of the dominated subjects of having a chance to voice their concerns. As we have seen in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's narrative gains dominance in the text due to the purposeful obliteration of meaningful native discourse. Spivak believes that there is a tendency for

(Western) intellectuals to speak for or represent the oppressed people (275).

She simultaneously argues against essentialist or utopian politics which expects the dominated people to speak, act and know for themselves. According to her, the oppressed are not only subject to the elite rule in the state, but also dominated by Western patriarchy and imperialism. Their disempowered, dispossessed status further marginalises them, as they tend to be dominated by the discourse of people who hold the power and have the possessions. This leads Spivak to conclude that if the male-dominated subject has no history and cannot speak, then the female subject is even more deeply in shadow (288). Therefore, Spivak has her doubts about whether female subjects are ever able to give voice to any injustice, leading her to conclude that they are actually a muted group. This view has been adopted by many scholars, one of whom is Rubinstein (quoted by Heung: 615) who states that if women who make up the demographic majority are muted in their community, then the women who are of the ethnic minority are even doubly muted as their gender and ethnic status have rendered them speechless and of little value due to particular patriarchal practices.

Spivak uses the issue of the abolition of *sati* to prove that the absence of women's voices from the debates indicates that the female subject has been silenced, via the combined powers of British colonialism and Hindu patriarchy (Spivak in Morton, 63). By representing *sati* as a 'inhuman' and 'barbaric' practice, the British administration was able to justify the colonisation of India as a 'civilising' mission; the white British officers believed that they were rescuing Indian women from the violence inflicted by Indian men (62). On the other hand, the Hindu nationalists claimed that the women 'wanted to die' as subjects who fully supported the *sati* practice. In both cases, the women are spoken for by

other people, while their own voices are absent, leading Spivak to conclude that ‘the subaltern cannot speak’ (308).

In Spivak’s essay on the subaltern, she uses the example of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, a young Indian woman who committed suicide in 1926. It was later discovered that Bhubaneswari was an active member in the Indian nationalist struggle (Spivak,307). According to Spivak, Bhubaneswari had been ‘entrusted with a political assassination’; however she was unable to fulfil this, and so she committed suicide in order to avoid capture by the British. In Spivak’s view, Bhubaneswari’s suicide was an elaborate attempt to cover up the latter’s involvement in the nationalist struggle; this was done by disguising her suicide as a modern example of the Hindu widow sacrifice (Spivak in Morton, 63). In doing so, however, Spivak points out that Bhubaneswari’s voice and agency, as a woman who existed in real life, and also as a freedom fighter, disappeared from the official (male-dominated) historical records. Spivak’s act of speaking for Bhubaneswari indicates to us that while she rejects the notion of the female oppressed subject of speaking for herself, she herself as the intellectual intervenes to speak on the subject’s behalf.

Spivak’s view has been criticized by a number of theorists. One of them is Benita Parry who accuses Spivak of turning a deaf ear to the voice of the subaltern in her essay (quoted in Ashcroft et al, 2000b: 47). In Parry’s view, Spivak does not seem to pick up traces of female agency embedded in the text and in Caribbean cultures in the latter’s reading of Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Parry also comments that Spivak seems insensitive to the ways that women in colonised societies ‘inscribed themselves as healers, ascetics, singers of sacred songs, artisans and artists’ which, in Parry’s view, could

actually be helpful in modifying Spivak's model of the silent subaltern (45). In my view, Spivak does not seem to take into account differences between Third World women, preferring to 'essentialise' or categorise them as subalterns, when they all have their own consciousness, agency and history as indicated by Parry's example above.

Bart Moore-Gilbert also critiques Spivak's arguments in his book *Postcolonial Theory* (105). In his view, Spivak's reading of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri's unexplained suicide is regarded as a 'wishful use of history' (105). He talks about Spivak's use of deconstruction as 'a kind of negative science' (83), which cautions against incorporating the Other into dominant systems of representation (102). In Moore-Gilbert's view, Subaltern Studies seems to function in paradoxical terms as a rhetorical strategy in Spivak's essay, as he contends that 'if Spivak's account of subaltern silence were true, then there would be nothing but the non-subaltern (particularly the West and the native elite) left to speak or to talk about' (104). The novels in my corpus reflect the opposite of Moore-Gilbert's comment as works by writers of Asian, African or Third World origin inform us of other views besides the West and the elite in the production of knowledge.

Loomba's (197) example of an excerpt from Tharu and Lalita (359-63), titled 'The Plight of Hindu widows as described by a widow Herself', indicates that the subaltern woman is not without her own voice or point of view as shown below:

Once a widow who was a relative of mine died in front of me. She had fallen ill before her husband died. When he died, she was so weak that she could not be dragged to her husband's cremation. She had a burning fever. Then her mother in law dragged her down from the cot onto the ground and ordered the servant to

pour bucketfuls of cold water over her. After some eight hours, she died. But nobody came to see how she was when she was dying of the cold. After she died, however, they started praising her, saying she had died for the love of her husband...If all [such] tales are put together they would make a large book. The British Government put a ban on the custom of sati, but as a result of that several women who could have died a cruel but quick death when their husbands die now have to face an agonisingly slow death.

Loomba acknowledges the fact that this narrative was written by a woman who was also a widow and potential sati but she also points out that the description of widows is similar to the one constructed in colonial records and accounts. In her view, the speaker does not criticise the practice of sati but instead provides a 'functional' explanation of the widow's desire to die. Loomba further attests that while the speaker's voice may not be considered as a clear proof of rebellion, it does however offer another view to the absolute theory of subaltern silence. Furthermore, Loomba also contends that a majority of satis came from the upper class: women who learnt to write and express themselves, and some of them even participated in campaigns against the British and patriarchal oppression. In her view, these women can be considered the privileged ones in terms of class, even though they might have been oppressed in other ways. As such, she asks a crucial question: Can these women genuinely be defined as subalterns?

Bhabha defines the Subaltern groups as 'oppressed minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority group; subaltern groups were also in a position to subvert the authority of those who had the hegemonic power' (quoted

in Chambers and Curti, 206). In Bhabha's view (cited in Ashcroft et al, 1989: 178), the colonised is constructed within a disabling master discourse of colonialism which views the natives as a degenerate population in order to justify the coloniser's conquest and rule. Bhabha's ideas of 'mimicry' and 'parody' can be read in two ways; firstly, as a strategy of colonial subjection through 'reform, regulation and discipline', which 'appropriates' the 'Other', and secondly, the native's inappropriate imitations of this discourse carries a 'menacing' effect towards the colonial authority. Both these strategies suggest that the subaltern has indeed spoken and that 'properly symptomatic readings' of the colonialist text can and do 'recover a native voice' (Ashcroft et al, 1989: 178). Contrary to Spivak's views Bhabha has asserted that the subaltern can indeed speak and the native voice can be recovered.

The issues laid out in the above discussion of feminist theories of silence and postcolonial silence inform us of the difficulty of representing the oppressed, silenced groups, especially in the context of my thesis which focuses on the representation of Third World women. In the next following chapters, I intend to look at authorial silence. the narrative representations of various forms, moments and scenes of silence connected to the ideas of shame, secrets and gossip, the choice to remain silent and lastly women's complicity in silencing other women.

CHAPTER 2

STORIES THAT CANNOT BE TOLD AND STORYTELLERS WHO WILL NOT TELL: THE ROLE OF AUTHORIAL SILENCE

Introduction

This chapter will look at various forms of authorial silence utilised in the four texts under discussion. It will explore not only the ideas related to silence and narrative representations in the texts but will also examine the authors' silencing of narrative elements, with the intention of withholding certain information from the readers. I will explore instances in the text where the authors purposely leave out certain elements to heighten a sense of mystery or enigma or to enable a point or a conclusion to be made. This is important in the context of my thesis in order to show that silence as a tool is not limited to the authors' representations of certain characters as being silent, but it is also evident in what the authors decide to omit or conceal in the narratives.

The term 'authorial silence' is loosely defined by Bander (52) as a rhetorical device which an author imposes upon the text, or upon herself; in other words, an element of the narrative is silenced by the author. This is different from the silence of the characters within the narrative, in which the narrator describes them as not speaking (52). The choice to remain silent, which may be interpreted as a way to empower oneself, will be dealt with in a later chapter. Booth defines authorial silence as a type of silence which is characterised by the unspoken communication between the author and the reader without the narrator's conscious knowledge (4). This unspoken communication relies on

devices such as symbols, allusions and unreliable narrators. In the sections below, I will deal with strategies employed by particular authors to show authorial silence, as well as the examples of authorial silence in the four texts.

Authorial silence

The texts that form my corpus constitute a series of case studies which enable the exploration and the examination of different permutations of silence, voice and representation and how female authors of Asian origin have been responsible for challenging, revising or inadvertently reinforcing stereotypes of the passive Asian woman. In *Cereus Blooms* and *God of Small Things*, for example, the two authors, Mootoo and Roy, can be described as defying the passive Asian woman stereotype with their portrayal of the seemingly mad yet observant Mala and the rebellious Ammu. On the other hand, Ali, in her novel *Brick Lane* and also Tearne in *Brixton Beach*, tend to reinforce the common stereotype of the Asian woman, with their general depiction of the Bangladeshi women and the Sri Lankan women both at home and abroad. As such, I shall be focusing on authorial silence in relation to certain narrative elements which have been silenced by the authors in order to perhaps defy or even perpetuate the female Asian stereotype.

According to Booth, in his book *The Rhetorics of Fiction*, there are three functions of authorial silence: firstly, to control sympathy; secondly, to control clarity and confusion; and thirdly, to instill a secret communion between the author and reader. The author's so-called silence indicates that he/she is not intruding directly in the text, i.e. he/she does not speak directly to the reader. As the author has refrained from commenting directly in the narrative, he/she instead relies on patterns of imagery and symbol, pace

and timing and manipulation of dramatised points of view to reveal judgement and to mould responses (272).

According to Anderson , authorial silence makes the reader part of the action and it also makes the reader work harder to understand what happens. The answers are not clearly provided by the author but they must be discovered by the reader through further reading (51-52). Booth outlines some of the effects of authorial silence:

By the kind of silence he maintains, by the manner in which he leaves the characters to work out their own destinies or tell their stories, the author can achieve effects which would be difficult or impossible if he allowed himself or a reliable spokesman to speak directly and authoritatively to us. (273)

Guignery outlines some rhetorical strategies which can be used to suggest a reluctance to tell or to confess. These include ‘hesitations, verbal lacunae, incomplete writings, fragmented stories, concision, procrastination, displacement, deferral, avoidance strategies, delaying tactics, aposiopesis marked by suspension points, blanks or dashes’ (3). She also touches on the utilisation of first-person narrators which functions to encourage the reader to look for the truth which may not be directly stated. Guignery’s insight will be helpful later on in my analysis which will look into particular strategies of authorial silence and the function of the first-person and third-person narrator.

An example of authorial silence in a postcolonial text can be found in JM Coetzee’s novel *Foe*. According to Spivak, the novel is a rewriting of two English texts which focus on marginality: *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*, both by Daniel Defoe (4). Authorial

silence involves, among others, Coetzee's decision to allow a character to narrate the story, instead of him directly intruding with his authorial voice in the narrative. As is argued by McHale (197), using examples drawn from writers such as Conrad and Faulkner, this authorial mode was a method preferred by writers of the Modernist movement, who wanted to remove their presence from the surface of their writing, by developing 'narratorless' texts, or by hiding their subjectivities behind the subjectivity of 'a first-person narrator or interior monologist. Coetzee's usage of 'an archaic syntax' and 'epistle-style writings' is described by Poyner as being similar in style to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (96). At the same time, I share the view that the epistolary form is as a way for Coetzee to utilise the Modernist method of writing mentioned above, by hiding his own subjectivity behind the first-person narrator, exemplified in the main narrator Susan Barton's usage of 'I' and 'you' as she tells her castaway tale (Etherington, 2).

However, the portrayal of a female character as the narrator is not without its own problems. This is especially evident in Barton's case, when she appears intent on representing a marginalised figure such as Friday. Poyner suggests that Western-centric feminism, as evoked in Coetzee's fiction, faces the risk of subsuming 'the politics of racial otherness', which in *Foe* would be the 'mute slave' (94). Snead mentions the criticism that Barton's point of view as a female castaway represents the 'silencing of the female perspective' (2). These are just a few of the issue raised regarding Coetzee's strategy of using a female narrator in *Foe*.

As was mentioned above, Booth describes authorial silence as a way for the author to control sympathy. This is achieved in *Foe* via the way Susan Barton tells her tale to an identified 'you'. After we read the text, we discover that she is addressing Mr Foe, but at

the same time the pronoun 'you' can also be used to refer to the reader. As such, the pronoun 'you' allows the reader to participate in the events of the novel and perhaps to feel a certain sympathy with the narrator. Runia (2) argues that the narrative perspective in *Foe* places the reader in a double role of reader and writer/speaker, an idea first suggested by Wolfgang Iser. In Runia's view, the reader of *Foe* is changed by playing the role of the first-person writer/speaker. Runia further maintains that :

...Foe's particular rewriting of the past not only makes today's behaviors and values available for observation and evaluation, but it also - by offering eighteenth century sympathetic models of reading that supplement the reader's assumption of the dual reader/writer role - encourages readers to make a past reality of sympathy their own. (2)

In the case of the novels in my corpus, none of them are rewritings of a famous canon like Coetzee's *Foe*; however, the control of sympathy is present in Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms*. The author refrains from providing direct commentary in the narrative but he can still control the reader's sympathy via the narrator, Tyler. Tyler refers to himself as 'I' and tells his story to 'you', which could refer to the reader or other characters in the novel, as seen in the example below:

Asha Ramchandin. In quiet moments after a long day caring for your sister, when I would rather lie in my bed in the nurses' quarter and have my mind lie fallow, your name repeats itself mantra-like in my head[...]

I often call out Randolph John Hector's name, too. And Sarah Ramchandin's. And

Lavinia Thoroughly's. Where are you all? (90)

Irony is utilised in order to highlight certain anomalies and discrepancies in the narrative which can be attributed to flaws in particular characters. There is also a possibility that the author is using irony to indicate his own opinion of a situation, without directly informing or preaching to the reader. Smit-Marais (131) provides a few examples where irony is evident in *Foe*. The first one concerns the title of the book itself. *Foe* not only refers to the name of the author Susan commissions to write her book (Daniel Foe) but it also stands for the author's antagonistic role in the narrative. He tries to re-structure her idea for the book, preferring to include the story of Susan's quest for her lost daughter, instead of writing her castaway tale. Susan's disappointment is apparent when she learns of the change of plans: 'All the joy I had felt in finding my way to Foe fled me. I sat heavy-limbed' (117). A second example is Susan's negative opinion of Friday, while at the same time she tries to teach him some letters of the alphabet in the hope that he will eventually be able to tell his story. She appears to give 'little thought' to Friday, equating him to any dog or any dumb beast (32) but she still despairs when Friday seems unable to comprehend her teaching. She complains to Foe: 'Friday will not learn [...] If there is a portal to his faculties, it is closed, or I cannot find it' (147).

A particular strategy utilised by some authors is the withholding of information or lack of explanation about a situation or character in the narrative. Chanady defines this strategy as authorial reticence, which involves the 'deliberate withholding of information and explanations about the disconcerting fictitious world' (16). This strategy is often utilised by authors of magic realism, who communicate their ideas to the reader via

techniques such as ‘levels of language, layers of formal and informal dictions, doubles, transformations, stories-within-stories, a blurring of that border between fiction and reality...’ (Hancock, 41-42). Coetzee deploys a certain reticence in *Foe*, with his deliberate blurring of Friday’s homeland and a few other details left unexplained. In the text, Coetzee presents Friday as an ‘African slave’ but he does not specifically disclose to readers the exact location of Friday’s homeland. One answer to the author’s reticence on this matter, as argued by Lin (5), is the possibility that Friday would have taken on a specific national and cultural identity if his home country had been mentioned. Another instance of authorial reticence in the narrative is Coetzee’s refusal to give more information about Susan’s lost daughter. In her role as a first-person narrator, Susan confesses that she had been in Bahia to look for her lost child, before being shipwrecked. However, when she is confronted in London by a girl who claims to be her daughter, Susan seems angry and thinks that Foe is out to torture her (73-75). In Part 3 (penultimate part of the narrative) Susan comes face to face with the girl again (this time in the presence of Foe and Friday) but she still turns the girl away (129-136). Coetzee does not disclose what happens to Susan’s so-called daughter after that, leaving the reader to reach his/her own conclusion. In Snead’s view (6), the daughter as presented by Foe is only a foil to undermine what he calls as Susan’s ‘confidence’ so that she will begin to doubt her existence and endeavour.

In the next section, I will examine the use of authorial silence in some of the novels in my corpus. Through my readings, I find that there are more examples of authorial silence in Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms* and Roy’s *God of Small Things* than the other two novels, mainly due to the non-linear narrative structure and the theme of dark secrets

which will be gradually revealed to the reader, without too much dependence on authorial voice. In my view, authorial silence in Ali's *Brick Lane* is projected via the use of realism, stereotypes and defamiliarisation. Some of the narrative devices and techniques used in *Foe* will be utilised to analyse similar techniques in my choice of corpus.

Authorial silence in *Cereus Blooms*

A similarity between Coetzee's *Foe* and Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms* in terms of the projection of authorial silence involves the use of a first-person narrator to communicate the story to the reader. As we have seen, the narration in *Foe* mainly involves a first-person female narrator (Susan Barton). In *Cereus Blooms*, the story is told using first-person narration in the guise of Tyler, the male nurse, but it is also interspersed with third-person narration at other points in the story. According to Arp (151) the advantage of a first-person point of view is that it usually enables readers to witness a particular incident or feel someone's plight through the eyes of the narrator. However, we must also remember that the first-person narrator can only tell the story in terms of what he sees and hears and observes, thereby limiting his point of view on certain situations and events. To enable the narrator to get a wider view of certain situations, she may have to rely on information he or she heard from other characters. This is where third-person narration takes place in the novel. Mootoo's decision to add in third-person narrators at certain times makes the text unique. In Mohammed's view, Mootoo's 'hybrid strategy' breaks the tradition in canonical writing which demands the utilisation of either a first person or a third person narrator (2) An example of third-person narration thus can be seen in Cigarette Smoking Nana's storytelling as she relates the tale of Mala's family, including

the downfall of Chandin Ramchandin.

The narrative starts off from Tyler's first-person point of view as he relates his meeting with Mala the so-called mad woman and his work at the almshouse. When he recalls that he has heard Chandin Ramchandin's name before from Cigarette Smoking Nana, there is a pause in the narrative as Mootoo inserts an insect drawing to indicate a shift in perspective. At this point (26) it appears as if Cigarette Smoking Nana is telling the story from her point of view; however the story is actually being told from the point of view of another unnamed third-person omniscient narrator, who knows a whole lot more about the characters, even to the extent of delving into their feelings and emotions. This technique, in which another story is told within a story, is called a frame narrative. The original story usually sets the stage for several smaller stories or sub-plots; in the case of this novel, Cigarette Smoking Nana's storytelling leads us to the story of Chandin Ramchandin.

The narrative then briefly returns to Tyler's first-person point of view, as he realises, after listening to Cigarette Smoking Nana's storytelling, that he has actually known Mala Ramchandin 'for many, many years' (46). Just as Tyler begins to discover from his grandmother the terrible secret regarding the incestuous acts that have taken place, the two are interrupted by the arrival of Tyler's mother. In Tyler's view, the story seems to have 'ended right there and then' (47) and he does not dare to bring up the subject years later with his grandmother. Here Mootoo inserts another drawing of an insect. The narrative is then continued from a third-person point of view by the omniscient narrator. The narrator proceeds from Cigarette Smoking Nana's last

position, with further description of Sarah Ramchandin giving birth to Mala, and later, Asha..

The narrative circles around, jumps forward and back in time (a narrative structure also evident in Arundhati Roy's novel), in order to slowly reveal what happened in the past. The pattern of weaving in and out using first-person (Tyler's) and third-person narration, via an omniscient narrator who focuses on different characters, indicates the presence of multiple voices or polyphony throughout the novel. The story of Mala's past is mainly discovered via Tyler. We can generalise that events which occur in the present are seen through Tyler's eyes, while events which have occurred in the past are seen through the eyes of an unseen, omniscient narrator who knows everything about the other characters. Polyphony is used in this narrative which attempts to uncover secrets about Mala and her experience around a taboo subject. Mala herself is unable to talk about her traumatic experience, preferring to retreat into a world of silence and fantasy. As such, what we know about Mala is pieced together from what Tyler observes from Mala herself (99-100) and what he learns from other people (hearsay) like Cigarette Smoking Nana, Ambrose Mohanty and Otoh (102). This suggests to us that there is no direct access to Mala's thoughts, only to what we know from other people's recollection and observation.

Irony is used as an expression of authorial silence to highlight the incongruence between what is presented by the author and what he or she actually means, as understood by the reader. In other words, the author does not present a situation or a use of language clearly or directly in the narrative. A clear example of irony in *Cereus Blooms* is the name given to the town where Mala resides (Paradise) and where she has endured abuse since her childhood. Another example of irony, as suggested by critics

such as Ty and Verduyn (160), is the appearance of Judge Bissey who decides to dismiss old Mala's murder charges. He is actually one of the bullies responsible for the 'social ostracism' suffered by Mala and Asha as children. Perhaps the most ironic situation in the narrative involves a description of the villagers' reverence for Chandin, despite his acts of violence: 'While many shunned him there were those who took pity, for he was once the much respected teacher of the Gospel, and such a man would take to the bottle and to his own child, they reasoned, only if he suffered some madness' (Mootoo, 195). These three examples all involve a moral situation and we can see how Mootoo has employed irony to indirectly present a particular judgement without appearing to preach to the reader.

Similar to the narrative in *Foe*, Mootoo uses authorial reticence in the form of withholding information in *Cereus Blooms*. This can be seen in the deliberate blurring or unexplained details of certain aspects of the narrative. Certain details regarding geographical location and time are not clearly stated in the narrative. While Mootoo has disclosed the origin of Chandin's parents (Indian indentured slaves) in the text, the novel is not set in a specific, named location. Instead, the narrative is set on the imagined island of Lantanacalara, which is a place 'not tied down by real geographies and maps, not limited to the spaces named by colonial rulers and mapped by colonial cartographers' (May,108). Similarly, while there is a mention in the narrative of 'donkey carts' and how the arrival of motorised vehicles would cause the villagers to gather (Mootoo,7), the temporal setting for the novel is not clearly stated either. Mootoo's refusal to use specific temporal and location details in the narrative, implying a vagueness of time and place, is, I would argue, in line with the theme of ambiguity or ambivalence portrayed via some of the characters.

Authorial silence in *God of Small Things*

Authorial silence is conveyed in Roy's *God of Small Things* using a third-person, omniscient narrator, among other narrative strategies. This narrative position enables the author the freedom to go into the mind and conscience of her characters, via stream of consciousness, and to create different emotions and events for each of them, via free indirect speech. The advantage of having an omniscient narrator is that he or she knows every little secret about the characters. He or she reveals what the characters feel about their wrongdoing and fears to the reader bit by bit, in keeping with the narrative's themes of silence and transgression, until the truth is finally revealed at the end of the narrative.

Roy's novel follows a highly complex narrative structure built upon a combination of digression and anachrony. While digressions function to continuously divert the narrative from the central story, anachrony as defined by Rapaport (21) can be considered an element which does not follow a sequential chronology. In Roy's novel, the digressions occur via the characters' recollections or musings. The characters' thoughts are followed by the narration 'as they lead away from, or back to, the principal events of the story' (cited in Tickell, 143). As further asserted by Baneth-Nouailhetas, the narrative is structured according to the characters' traces of memory. The process of bringing up traces of memory is achieved in the narrative in three ways: withholding key information (paralipsis), referring to a future event in the story (prolepsis) and referring to past events or using flashbacks (analepsis) (Baneth-Nouailhetas, cited in Tickell, 144).

An example of the withholding of information can be seen in Chapter 1 in a paragraph about Sophie Mol's funeral: 'Though Ammu, Estha and Rahel were allowed to attend the funeral, they were made to stand separately, not with the rest of the family.'

Nobody would look at them' (Roy,5). Via this paraliptic digression, the reader is left wondering what Ammu and her children had done to deserve being ostracised on that day. As for proleptic analepsis (a combination of foretelling announcement and retrospective musing), an example which refers to 'transgression, rules and punishments' (Baneth-Nouailhetas, cited in Tickell, 146) can also be seen in Chapter 1:

Looking back now, to Rahel it seemed as though this difficulty that their family had with classification ran much deeper than the jam-jelly question.

Perhaps, Ammu, Estha and she were the worst transgressors. But it wasn't just them. It was the others too. They all broke the rules (Roy, 30-31)

Clarke (quoted in Tickell, 135) asserts that Roy's method of bringing back the previous memory 'in a circular, cyclical manner' is a way to illustrate how the past keeps on haunting the present. The repetition of images and 'snippets of sensory associations' are some of the ways in which readers gradually learn of events in the novel. Clarke also believes that the cyclical, imagistic structure of the narrative works in harmony with the focalization of the grown-up Rahel and Estha, as they return to the location of their childhood with the memory of the events which have probably scarred them for life.

Roy's use of a particular quotation at the beginning of the novel sets the tone for the narrative: 'Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one' (John Berger in *G: A Novel*, published in 1972). Incidentally, this epigraph is used by another postcolonial writer, Michael Ondaatje in his novel *The English Patient*, published in 1992. Roy's use of the epigraph indicates that the story is told not only from the viewpoint of a

particular person, but also from the perspective of other characters who have experienced particular changes and events from the outset of the story to the present time. According to Clarke (quoted in Tickell, 141), this particular use of multiple perspectives or perspectivalism is closely related to Bakhtin's view of heteroglossia or multiple voices. As stated by Bakhtin, 'The novel permits the incorporation of various genres, both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic songs, etc.) and extra artistic (everyday, rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres and others'(358). Bakhtin's view emphasises that no single viewpoint can be adequate in the comprehension of an object; as such, no single voice can create a 'multiplicity of voices' or polyphony.

As in *Cereus Blooms*, irony is also utilised in Roy's narrative, indicating a situation or a use of language which involves incongruency or discrepancy. It is also about partial truths and misunderstanding, which suggest that something is not clearly stated or the silencing of certain aspects.. Irony is evident in the title of the book itself. Many critics have commented that the title refers to Velutha, who is actually an Untouchable who is of a much lower status than other Indian castes. While the novel may revolve around seemingly trivial matters such as the twins' lives and ordinary events, the consequences of one's actions as seen at the end of the novel can actually be major and disruptive. Another example of irony can be seen in Roy's use of the word 'Play', to refer to the show that the family is presenting to Chacko's English ex-wife and daughter, Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol (172). In Rahel's world, the word 'Play' means something fun and filled with happiness. However, the truth reveals that the family members are putting on airs for the benefit of Margaret and Sophie. In reality, Chacko is always at odds with his sister Ammu, Mammachi despises Margaret Kochamma and the

twins are sidelined in favour of their English cousin Sophie.

Authorial silence in *Brick Lane*

A similarity between Roy's narrative and Ali's *Brick Lane* is that both novels utilise third-person narrators to communicate the story to the reader without direct intervention from the author. According to Bentley (88), the main focus of the narrator in the novel is undoubtedly the protagonist, Nazneen, and it is through the narrator that we are able to know about her inner thoughts. The inner lives of other characters are only visible to us via Nazneen's interpretation of them. Even though the narration does not draw attention to itself in the novel, there are times when Nazneen's thoughts and inner feelings are indirectly voiced through the narrator's comments.

While most critics have commented that Roy's narrative structure is postmodernist and non-linear, Bentley (87) observes that the main narrative mode used in Ali's novel is realism. There are a few examples which can be attributed to formal realism, such as the use of identifiable locations and periods of history, characters whom you may come across in real-life, a cause-and-effect plot structure and an assumption that language is referential and denotational. According to Bentley, the plot in *Brick Lane* follows a fairly straightforward linear manner, although there are some lapses in the time period, especially after the death of Nazneen's son. Bentley further describes the chronology of the novel as one which follows a realist framework of cause-and-effect.

However, the realism technique used may also indicate that certain stereotypes are pervasive in a particular narrative. This can be seen from the way Ali describes particular

places and characters. For example, Hiddleston (63) comments that excessive focus on minute details is evident in the description of Nazneen's living room. In Hiddleston's view, Ali's focus on unnecessary details draws our attention to the so-called desire to collect and accumulate worthy bits of information. The details about the family room suggest Ali's attempt to report on every aspect of family life, perhaps to make her novel feel authentic. This reflects Barthes' view of realism (quoted in Bentley) in which he argues that what we understand is actually a set of narrative techniques which produce the lie that what we are reading is directly related to reality.

There are particular elements of realism in the novel, such as the name of the London district where Nazneen lives and the mention of famous British landmarks such as Buckingham Palace. However, Hussain criticises that the narrative only gives an inauthentic outsider perspective and does not show the reality of the Bangladeshi community in East London. In her view, Ali's narrative 'presents an image of Britain's Bangladeshi community which is a textbook definition and it is not a book which is written from 'within' the community it explores' (92). While Hussain's view stresses the expectation that Black and South Asian British writers give a realistic picture of the community they are writing about and should not show negative representations, there are elements of Bangladeshi culture which Ali seemingly chose not to write about. For instance, Ali appears to have conveniently forgotten to include the celebration of Ramadan and Eid by the Bangladeshi community. The only mention of Eid in the novel is in Dr Azad's lament about the alcohol problem among young Bangladeshis: "I told them straight, this is your choice: stop drinking alcohol now, or by *Eid* your liver will be finished. Ten years ago this would be unthinkable. Two in one week!" (31).

If one were to compare the novel with Rachel Lichtenstein's book *On Brick Lane*, we can see that the latter contains more detailed descriptions of Ramadan and Eid than Ali's *Brick Lane* :

During the last ten days of **Ramadan** religious people live and sleep in the mosque, praying all day, devoting their time to worshipping and reading the Koran. It is seen as a spiritual retreat. They have a pre-dawn meal, the fajr, before the first of the five daily prayers, and then they will break the day of fasting with the communal meal, called iftar, the women come with the food. (Lichtenstein, 72)

Lichtenstein utilised her position as someone with deep connections with the area (according to *The Telegraph*, her Polish grandparents had set up a watchmaking shop off Brick Lane in the 1930s) to focus much of her book on the Bangladeshi community in the area; thus, this explains her in-depth observation of the Muslim festivals of Ramadan and Eid. However, the same cannot be said about Ali. Her deliberate exclusion of important events in the Muslim calendar is rather unfortunate as she could have used the opportunity and her position as a British Bangladeshi writer to show how the Bangladeshi community observe the sacred period of Ramadan and Eid.

Some critics have also commented that Ali's depiction of the East London area seems to disregard other ethnic groups existing in the neighbourhood. This indicates Ali's silencing of other communities in the area, for particular reasons. According to Hussain:

The book invokes an atmosphere of community that is entirely British and

Muslim. There is an absence of the indigenous population, except for passing references, and contact between Nazneen and white Londoners is rather limited.

No contact with the host country is sought. (100)

There are only two British people with names in the novel (Wilkie and Mr. Dalloway), who are both staff in Chanu's office. However, what we know of Wilkie and Dalloway comes from Chanu's dissatisfied complaints as neither says anything in the novel. In the case of Nazneen, she is portrayed as watching the tattoo lady on a daily basis; the two of them seem to share a silent conversation:

The *tattoo lady* waved back at Nazneen. She scratched her arms, her shoulders, the accessible portions of her buttocks. She yawned and lit a cigarette. At least two thirds of the flesh on show was covered in ink. Nazneen had never been close enough (never closer than this, never further) to decipher the designs. Chanu said the tattoo lady was Hell's Angels, which upset Nazneen... (18)

The tattoo lady, like Wilkie and Dalloway, is depicted as being silent in the narrative. By not giving them any voice, Ali is able to control them, and in turn give more exposure and voice to the Bangladeshi characters. Additionally, Sandhu (13) comments that the author tends to portray the white British people in a negative way, as in pulling off the girls' hijab and spitting at them, presumably as a response to the Twin Towers incident. Santesso also observes that Nazneen's neighbours view the 'white people' as contributing to 'moral decay' (66); any contact with them is forbidden as their presence can be a threat to the collective identity of the Bangladeshi community.

Sandhu (13) comments that Ali's novel, which is partly set in 1985, fails to mention what he calls 'the campaign of violence and intimidation' which affected the lives of many Bangladeshis before that area was marked to be re-developed. In Sandhu's view, for a writer to write about the present state of the area, he or she has to write about what happened before. Ali depicts Nazneen as searching frantically for her child Shahana near Adler Street and Altab Ali Park (468); however, in the novel she neglects to mention the history behind the name of the park. It has a special significance as it was named after Altab Ali, a Bangladeshi clothing worker who was murdered by three teenagers on 4 May 1978, in what appeared as a racially motivated attack (Troyna and Carrington,30). Similarly, while Ali mentions the characters' reaction to real-life events, such as Chanu and Nazneen watching the Twin Towers incident on television (365) , and Chanu reading a pamphlet requesting donations for Chechen freedom fighters (225), the author omits the events surrounding Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* issue in 1988, especially the burning of the book and the march of Muslim protesters in Bradford. Instead, what we have in the narrative is an epistolary chapter of Hasina's letters from May 1988 to January 2001. One wonders why Ali chooses to be silent about these events, which can be considered significant events in the life of British Muslims. Is it because Ali does not think Nazneen will be sophisticated enough to think, and talk about the effects of such events? It is likely that Nazneen's gradual transformation from 'an unspoilt girl' (22) from the village to a saree shop entrepreneur would not be successful if Ali had portrayed her as an inquisitive woman very early in the novel. In this case, Ali seems more interested in exposing Nazneen's private life as she probably perceives that there is no outlet for a woman like Nazneen to channel her hopes and dreams.

Authorial silence in Brixton Beach

Ali's *Brick Lane* and Tearne's *Brixton Beach* share a few similarities in that both novels rely on third-person and linear narratives. Both novels follow the bildungsroman format as they focus on the growth and development of their female protagonists. However, while *Brick Lane* consists of 19 chapters, mostly narrated in the past tense, *Brixton Beach* is made up of a prologue and 17 chapters, with the prologue, final chapter and selected parts narrated in the present tense. There is also the utilisation of unnamed characters in the prologue and the final chapter. In my view, the present-tense narration and the unnamed characters can be considered devices that illustrate the significance of authorial silence in the text.

In *Brixton Beach*, the prologue forms the opening chapter, and it is titled 'Bel Canto'. It is narrated in the present tense and it focuses on the aftermath of a violent incident. The exact time and details of the incident are unclear (an example of withholding information and hesitation from the author) but there are enough clues in the text to provide some background information to the reader:

There are police everywhere. From a distance it is the first thing he sees [...] Even before the BBC team appears. Acid-green jackets move grimly about, directing the traffic, securing blue-and-white tape, herding people away [...] A red double-decker bus stands parked at an odd angle. (Tearne, 3)

Further down in the opening chapter, there are more clues informing the reader:

Humanity's unanswered questions asked on this ghost of a morning in July [...]
For on this beautiful day, even as Big Ben strikes the hour and swallows fill the
summer skies, a lesser God descends. Fraught with terrible intent. Here, in the
very heart of London. (9)

Clues such as 'police', 'BBC' and 'blue-and-white tape' indicate to us that the situation is indeed serious, that it requires the emergency and media team to be present on site. While the exact time, date and event are not directly disclosed in the opening chapter, further clues such as 'July', 'summer' and 'London' may inform us about that the event in question is the London bombings of July 2005. The aftermath of the bombings is fully described in the novel's final section (chapter 17).

Instead of focusing on Alice the protagonist, the prologue focuses on a male character, who is later referred to as Simon Swann. Tearne does not explain the significance of Simon's character in the prologue; his relationship with Alice is only made clear in Chapter 15. The author's deliberate delay in introducing Alice, and also Simon as Alice's boyfriend, can be considered elements of authorial silence, as important information is withheld in order to build the reader's interest and enhance the tension in the narrative.

The use of present-tense narration is again evident in certain parts of Chapter 1. The paragraphs narrated in the present tense focus on Alice (the protagonist) spending time with her grandparents, Sita (Alice's mother) preparing to give birth in the hospital and also the scene where a drunk Sinhalese doctor delays before offering care to Sita. These scenes can be considered unforgettable moments in the lives of Alice and Sita. As such,

one probable reason for the use of present tense is to make these events more vivid to the reader ; it is as if they are unfolding right before our eyes (Jespersen and Joos, cited in Park et al, 1)

Fludernik (12) refers to the use of the present tense within the narrative as the historical present tense. In her view, novels which utilise this device for aesthetic reasons correlate the use of present tense with a lack of narrative distance, due to thematical or psychological motivation. As such, another reason for the use of this device is to bring the reader closer to the events narrated in the novel. The use of the present tense to describe past events seems to invite the readers to experience the narrator's reliving of the moment, and in turn create a feeling of empathy for the characters.

The rest of the book is narrated in the past tense, except for chapter 17 which is narrated in the present tense. This chapter provides a more detailed picture of the description of events described in the prologue, starting from the break of dawn, focusing on random characters and ending with Simon (Alice's boyfriend) meeting with Ravi (Alice's estranged son) to tell him that Alice has been involved in the bombing incident. There is a sense of urgency implied through the use of the present tense in this chapter, especially since the reader more or less expects that something bad is going to happen to Alice after reading the prologue.

Anonymous or unnamed characters are also evident in the narrative. In Landy's view (541), anonymity is a technique of subordination which can be used to show a social structure and hierarchy. It introduces distance, while at the same time it emphasises aspects of the principal characters and suggests certain interpersonal and ideological tensions. Landy further adds that an anonymous character is a 'metonymy for an entire

society.’ An example of an unnamed character is the Fonseka’s servant woman. She is a minor character compared to the characters of Alice, Sita and Stanley (Alice’s parents); her appearance in the narrative is very brief. She does not say anything in the novel, but her thoughts are filtered through the omniscient narrator’s point of view:

The servant woman standing in the doorway, waiting for a glimpse of the eldest daughter, shook her head sadly. This was not the way in which Singhalese bride returned home. It was a bad omen. The bride and groom should have been given many gifts [...] As far the servant woman could see, shame had descended like a cloud of sea-blown sand on this family... (25)

The servant woman remains nameless in the narrative ; this is purposely done by Tearne in order to indicate the former’s subordinate status in the society. However, we are still given an insight into her thoughts via the narrator’s viewpoint. As stated by Yoon, anonymous characters are usually ‘socially insignificant’, lack distinct goals and appear for particular reasons in a play (6). Yoon also states that these characters ‘are often key to guiding moral evaluation’(8) for the major characters. In this regard, although the servant woman has a minor position in the narrative, she seems to provide warning that something will go wrong with the couple’s future.

Another example of an anonymous character can be seen in the prologue, where Simon is described as thinking about a female character only identified as ‘she’:

Perhaps, he thinks, the thought forming into words, springing into life, perhaps

she is in the tunnel [...] Perhaps if he goes back she will ring. Perhaps she is still at Brixton Beach. Safe, trying to get hold of him. Wildly he looks around, not knowing what to do, and in this fraction of a second a woman dies in front of him... (8)

Tearne does not mention the female character's name in the prologue; this is probably done to pique the reader's curiosity. The reader will start to wonder about the person in Tearne's description, and will have to keep on reading past the prologue to discover more about the particular character.

In the final chapter, which describes the events occurring before the terrorist attack, the author not only focuses on main characters like Alice and Simon, but also on unnamed characters and their actions. Some of these characters are referred to by their occupations, like the Cockney baker and the Halal butcher (393) while one character is mentioned as having a 'Middle Eastern appearance' (394). These anonymous characters are introduced in the final chapter for certain reasons. One reason is to suggest that the unnamed characters could be anyone. Another reason is perhaps to indicate something mysterious about the characters. For example, we learn from the 'Middle Eastern' young man's thoughts (as filtered through the narrator's point of view) that:

since he left home, he has become a shadowy figure [...] After his travels to foreign parts he has been living alone, moving from house to house, learning to sleep anywhere with the minimum of fuss. Last night he moved again [...] None of his family knows where he really is or what he is doing... (394)

Despite the young man's anonymity, he is featured a few more times in the narrative:

The young man washes in the public lavatory. He cleans himself fastidiously, for that is part of the process that he is embarking on. He has no watch, he sold that long ago to fund his cause, but instinct tells him he is late for his appointment. He has folded his bedding into his rucksack and now he slings it over his shoulder and hurries towards Stockwell station, the bitter taste of hunger growing in his mouth. (399)

The man with the rucksack has had his meeting.

'Your family will be proud of you,' they told him, praising him for his courage.

At this the man had hesitated for a fraction of second. He did not want to think of his family.

'We need to take control, you understand? Before they control us!'

The man gives a nod as he gathers up his rucksack. Now he is on his way at last, heading for the tube station to catch the Northern Line. (401)

The manner in which the young man is described in the final chapter seems to suggest his involvement in something sinister. Perhaps we can ascertain from his attendance at the 'meeting' that he is part of an organisation which is fighting for a certain 'cause', and is motivated to take 'control'. As the events in the final chapter ultimately lead to the bombings and their aftermath, the reader perhaps could be persuaded to infer from the clues in the narrative that the young man is involved in the bombing. The author's

decision not to name the young man is probably to prevent readers from unconsciously attaching a particular identity of another person, ethnic group, or social background to that character. This technique is also used to reinforce a theme of lost or changed identity ; especially involving someone who does not want to be known or whose identity is always changing, so it cannot be known.

Conclusion

The analysis conducted in this chapter indicate to us that authorial silence is projected in the four texts using a variety of literary devices. From the analysis, we can ascertain that Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms* and Roy's *God of Small Things* contain more examples of authorial silence compared to the two other novels. The non-linear narrative structure, the use of irony and the withholding of information utilised by Mootoo and Roy are certainly in line with the theme of dark secrets in the novels mentioned above. In the case of Ali's *Brick Lane*, authorial silence is present as indicated in the use of realism and the withholding of information from the readers. As for Tearne's *Brixton Beach*, the present-tense narration and the unnamed characters can be considered devices that illustrate the existence of authorial silence in the text.

CHAPTER 3

SILENCE, SHAME, SECRETS AND GOSSIP

This chapter will look at representations of silence involving ideas of shame, secrets and gossip which are central to the texts analysed. As the novels in my corpus are set in close-knit Asian communities, there are specific requirements and regulations which should be adhered to by members of these communities. Failure to do so, in the form of committing certain acts of wrongdoing or transgression, would mean being punished and made to feel ashamed, forced to harbour certain secrets as well as being ostracised and gossiped about by other community members.

In Western culture, shame is connected with emotions such as guilt, embarrassment and anger or linked with stigmatised identities as well as psychopathology and depression (Caparas and Hartijasti,2). According to Scheff (240), shame is a major component of an individual's moral conscience, which signals a moral transgression without the use of thoughts or words. Pettersen (3) further states that this emotion may arise in individuals facing situations or problems which threaten an interpersonal relationship as well as those

who feel that they have failed to live up to other people's social and moral expectations. One particular aspect of shame as a result of being sexually abused affects the lives of particular characters in my selection of novels, notably Hasina in *Brick Lane* and Estha in *God of Small Things*.

In the case of secrets, these can be referred to as a form of information control, in which certain information is being controlled by an individual who purposely conceals the information (Vangelisti and Caughlin,681). When we talk specifically of family secrets, these can be defined as the deliberate concealment of information by one or more family members who are affected by the information. These family secrets may include a wide variety of issues related to the family such as incest, alcoholism, domestic violence and mental problems, which are evident in the novels in my corpus.

As for gossip, scholars have defined this as an activity which many people engage in, involving the exchange of information with evaluative content about absent third parties (Foster, 81;Wilson et al.,349). Beersma and Van Kleef (2641) state that gossip is often described as an 'exclusively self-serving behaviour' with the intention of manipulating other people and influencing them, often in a 'malicious' and negative way. Interestingly, Keltner et al (154) argue that gossip also functions as a mechanism to control the behaviour of dominant individuals by pressuring them to adhere to specific social norms. Additionally, Awwad states that from the structural functionalist perspective, gossip is utilised to unify the community and establish stability and order, which is vital for the survival of the family and society. In this view, gossip is used by certain community

members to spread an unpleasant story about a certain family's honour; in other words, to remind the family that their social and prestigious status is being jeopardised (45). Gossip as a form of social control is certainly evident in *Brick Lane*, in which the Bangladeshi community members are described as talking about particular individuals who have crossed certain boundaries in their community.

As the concepts of shame, secrets and gossip are evident in the novels in my corpus, which are set in close-knit communities, I shall use the three concepts to divide this chapter into three sections. The first section will focus on the characters' silence or lack of verbal responses as an effect of them feeling ashamed or embarrassed due to a particular wrongdoing or transgression. In the second section, I will explore the characters' silence or lack of verbal responses about certain secrets regarding their families or themselves. As for the third section, this will look at the characters' silence or lack of verbal responses about gossip disseminated by other people in the community. This approach is useful as it allows us to examine the different ways silence is represented in relation to the three concepts in the overall context of the thesis.

Representations of silence involving shame

The root word for 'shame' in Greek, as related by Bond (132), is *aidos*, which refers to genitalia or private parts. Additionally, Bond also states that a different root word for 'shame' originated from the Indo-German word *kam/kem* which means to cover oneself. The original meanings of the word as shown above indicate that the existence of shame is connected to feelings of embarrassment about something sexual or private, or a

particular secret that an individual wishes to hide or cover. Using the meanings above as a guide, I will examine the characters' silence or lack of verbal response in facing shame due to a sexual wrongdoing or transgression.

According to Bose and Varghese (160), in South Asian culture, the concept of shame is known as *sharam* in Hindi and Urdu. The concept is an 'ideological mechanism' which limits the female sex's mobility and social interactions, specifically with males who are not their relatives. Furthermore, it is closely linked to female sexuality and specifically to the covering of the female body (160). Wilson (99) elaborates that the concept of *sharam* is pervasive among Indians and Pakistanis:

Its effects can vary from never looking a man in the eye or never arguing with a man, to wearing a *Burkha*. Few women brought up in India can truthfully say that they have never felt *Sharam*. For the unwary it is a feeling as infectious as embarrassment or flirtatiousness. It can be very enjoyable, amusing and romantic (because it means that a relationship with a man must deepen through glances, smiles and phrases with hidden meanings). But inevitably it robs women of their strength and power and cramps their personalities (99)

Bose and Varghese further state that the male counterpart of *sharam* is called *izzat*, which generally refers to pride, honour or self-respect (161). The concept of *izzat* is affected by the lives and actions of the women in the family. As is argued by Wilson, 'A woman can have *izzat* but it is not her own — it is her husband's or father's' (5). This informs us that unbecoming behaviour, especially by a female family member, has a negative influence

on the family's honour and good name. Additionally, Bose states that although it is shameful in Asian cultures for both girls and boys to have sex outside the marriage, women seem to bear a heavier burden as more shame about the sexual act is attached to the girls (161). This can indeed be seen in the disparity between the heavy punishment meted out to Ammu for her intercaste relationship, while Chacko's dalliances with the village girls tend to be ignored by Mammachi and Baby Kochamma.

In *Brick Lane*, Ali juxtaposes the situation of the main character, Nazneen with the minor character, Hasina, her sister. The two sisters keep in touch with each other via letters which the novel records across a long period from 1988 to 2001. While Hasina has written countless letters as well as told her about the plight of her fellow workers in her letters, she cannot adequately tell Nazneen about a terrible event in her own life. In actual fact, Hasina has been sexually abused by her landlord Mr Chowdury but she cannot use the exact words in her letter to describe it as she thinks she has brought 'shame' (165) upon herself:

I say nothing I do nothing and then it done and he sit in the chair. He ask me to rub feet and I do it. He tell me not to cry and I stop. He ask if it he who taking care of me and I say yes it him.

This is what happen and afterward I cry. (166)

Hasina's letter is dated May 1991 but it is only in 2001 that Nazneen has the heart to tell her husband Chanu about what actually happened to her sister. In addition, she faces difficulty in trying to name the crime that had been committed against her sister as it

carries extreme shame and dishonour for women:

When she spoke of the rape, she named it in the village way, Hasina was robbed of her nakphool, her nose ring; and the selling of her body she did not name, saying only my sister had to stay alive and she saw that Chanu understood. (351)

In Tearne's *Brixton Beach*, the Sinhalese community in Sri Lanka can be described as closely-knit, with everyone knowing each other and helping one another when it comes to events such as weddings and funerals. However, if an event is not conducted according to certain requirements in the community, there is a tendency for some community members to express their disapproval and make their views known to other people in the community. In the case of Sita and Stanley, the two of them had married in 'secrecy' (24), which caused her father Bee to become angry, thinking that she did not trust him enough to tell him about his future son-in-law.

As the newly-married couple only returned to the family home a week after their marriage, their presence at the house can be portrayed as a very awkward occasion. Sita is described as being silent and looking 'uncomfortable' (24) in her father's house, which may point towards a certain feeling of shame about the elopement, while Stanley seems to do all the talking. He expresses his wish that Sita and he might emigrate to the United Kingdom not once, but twice, causing Sita's mother Kamala to view him as a 'boastful' (25) person :

‘I want to go to England one day [...] I want us to go to the U.K [...] After we have children, of course [...] This bloody place is no good for children to grow up in. Everything is denied to us Tamils. Education, good jobs, decent housing — everything. The bastard Singhalese are trying to strangle us.’ (25)

Stanley seems to have forgotten that his in-laws are Singhalese, and his insensitive attitude of using the word ‘bastard’ shocks everyone in the family. Sita, who has remained silent all this while, has to call out his name as a way of warning him not to cause more shame and distress for them.

The feeling of shame is also evident in Tearne’s description of the servant woman’s viewpoint :

The servant woman standing in the doorway, waiting for a glimpse of the eldest daughter, shook her head sadly. This was not the way in which a Sinhalese bride returned home. It was a bad omen. The bride and groom should have been given many gifts [...] And before all of this, right at the very beginning, the servant woman believed, before the wedding date had ever been set, the couple’s horoscope should have been drawn up. But none of this had been done. It was very, very bad. As far as the servant woman could see, shame had descended like a cloud of sea blown-sand on this family. Sita had brought it to the house, trailing her karma carelessly behind her, fully aware but indifferent to the ways in which things worked in this small coastal town. (25)

The reaction towards Sita marrying without the family's knowledge can be described from two different viewpoints: the traditional view, as seen through the eyes of the servant woman, and the modern and practical point of view, seen through the observations of Bee, her father. The servant woman seems more concerned that the two newly-weds did not get married in a proper Sinhalese wedding. This can be proven as later in the novel, she manages to persuade Kamala, Sita's mother, to have the latter's horoscope drawn up after the wedding (26). In the servant woman's view, Sita has darkened the family name by marrying someone from another ethnic group, as well as lacking awareness about how certain customs are upheld in the small town.

Sita's status as the black sheep of the family does not seem to improve with her temporary return to her parents' home before she and Alice leave for England. It seems that some members of the community still view her as bringing shame and bad luck to the family. This can be determined from Bee's meeting with his ex-schoolmate Gihan at the railway station while waiting for Sita and Alice. At first glance, Gihan appears a nice person as he offers greetings to his old friend. However, his body language is awkward as he is talking to Bee while 'looking at his feet'. There is a lack of sincerity on his part as he does not want to make eye contact with Bee. Nevertheless, he presses to know more about certain family matters as he casually mentions: '[...] I heard the wedding was cancelled' (120). Bee informs Gihan that the family has postponed the wedding until Sita recovers from her condition. Gihan responds to Bee's answer in an agreeable and smiling manner. At this juncture Tearné includes a description of the community's view of the matter: 'The whole town knew about May's wedding and that it was being

delayed. Once again, because of Sita' (120). In my opinion, while Gihan may appear to be understanding about the wedding being postponed, the actual truth may be reflected via Tearne's description of the townspeople's opinion. From the description, the community still places the blame on Sita for causing the delay. For the time being, however, Gihan can only accept Bee's explanation quietly and not to pry too much into the issue. As for Bee, he continues to smoke his pipe in 'silence', which shows his reluctance to elaborate on the matter. Gihan tries to show his friendly side by inviting Bee to his house: 'Come for lunch, men[...] With your daughter, too, if she likes' (121). This action shows that he still cares for his old friend but he cannot bring himself to mention Sita's name, perhaps due to the ripples that Sita has caused by eloping with Stanley. Gihan's reluctance to even say Sita's name aloud indicates that certain matters, like inter-ethnic marriage and eloping with one's partner, are issues which bring shame, and remain shrouded in silence for certain communities.

In the case of Ammu in *God of Small Things*, Roy describes the twins' mother returning to Ayemenem after being repeatedly beaten by her husband. Unfortunately, she seems to suffer a double blow as she is 'unwelcomed' by her family. Pappachi does not even seem slightly concerned that his daughter has suffered domestic violence and this is hardly surprising as silence surrounds his own bouts of violence towards his wife. I would contend that Ammu's need for some support is met by a wall of silence from her parents as they do not really show any concern for her problems. As pointed out by Dube in Rao (236), the preferred type of marriage in Indian communities is a primary marriage, where a virgin gets married to a man from an appropriate caste group with the full rites conducted. Dube further adds that a woman goes through such a marriage only once in

her entire life, which confirms that the divorcee status carries a stigma in certain societies. As such, the silence on the part of Ammu's family could be attributed to the family's shame and embarrassment at having to shelter a divorced daughter from an inter-community marriage in the family home.

Mohini Khot in her paper 'The Feminist Voice in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*' focuses on the issue of the female as the inferior gender in India via her study of the depiction of the four female characters (215). Khot's contention is that Ammu's inability to speak towards the end of the novel functions as a metaphor to emphasise the subservience and silence of women (216). Ammu's transgression with Velutha causes her to be thrown out of the community as well as being forced to spend her final days alone, struggling with her sickness.

Ammu's situation takes a turn for the worse after the discovery of her affair. At the police station, instead of gaining justice for Velutha, she is reminded of her lack of standing in society by the Inspector: 'He said the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam Police didn't take statements from *veshyas* or their illegitimate children' (8). Her 'mistake' of having married a man outside her community continues to scar her for life, to the point that she is referred to as *veshya* or prostitute, and her children remain marginalised. To compound matters, she is sexually abused by the Inspector in front of her children:

'If I were you,' he said, 'I'd go home quietly.' Then he tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. *Tap, tap*. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing the ones that he wanted packed and delivered. Inspector Thomas Mathew

seemed to know whom he could pick on and whom he couldn't. (8; author's italics)

Roy portrays Ammu as 'crying' after leaving the police station; however there are no sounds of 'sobbing' from her (8). Only her tears continue to run down her 'rigid' cheeks (8). This probably suggests that Ammu realises this is how society judges people who have transgressed certain boundaries like her. She will not get any sympathy from the community around her, so there is no point in her crying

Her inter-caste transgression with Velutha causes her to be remembered by her family as a person 'who never completed her corrections' (159). Her wrongdoing causes her to be banished from the family home and, gradually, she seems to disappear into total silence. Her asthma makes conditions even worse. Not only is she reduced to a mere whisper, she faces difficulty even to breathe: 'Each breath she took was like a war won against the steely fist that was trying to squeeze the air from her lungs' (160). Her sickly appearance causes her to be met with 'silence' at the family's dining table. When Mammachi suspects that Ammu has been drinking and suggests that she cuts down on her visits to Rahel, Ammu decides to leave 'without saying a word' (161). When she finally dies of asthma, her death is described in terms related to silence: 'the faraway man who lived in her chest had stopped shouting' (162). She is marginalised during her lifetime, as well as after her death as the church refuses to bury her. Rahel and Chacko are forced to take her body to the crematorium, seemingly a place for 'People who died with nobody to lie at the back of them and talk to them' (162). Instead of being buried in a graveyard with other corpses, Ammu's body, including her 'teeth' and 'bones', is cremated into 'ashes',

symbolising nothingness (163). Years after her loss, the twins return to her bedroom in the old house, where ‘Silence hung in the air like a secret loss’ (91). I would argue that, via the examples above, she seems to be reduced to a voiceless persona and her presence is obliterated from the face of the earth after her transgression with Velutha.

Representations of silence involving secrets

In *Cereus Blooms*, the unusual relationship between Sarah and Lavinia is first discovered by Pohpoh, the young Mala, who notices them communicating with their eyes and ‘long looks’. Later on, the sight of her mother and Lavinia standing together in the kitchen, with the latter’s hands around the former’s waist, seems too big a discovery for the girl that she has ‘no words to describe’ (56) her knowledge of their secret. Just as the discovery of the affair is seen through Pohpoh’s eyes, it is also symbolic that Chandin discovers the affair via another person’s eye (specifically, the use of a camera which he borrows from Lavinia): ‘He watched through the lens. In the midst of their laughter and frivolity, he did not fail to see Lavinia place herself behind Mama, and he saw Mama press herself against Lavinia...’ (58). Both Chandin and Pohpoh now realise the extent of the affair but they seem to be unable to find a name to describe the relationship. Not only that, as the family head home after the beach outing, their time together is mostly spent in silence:

On the ride home no one spoke... Had it not been for the wheels of the buggy crunching the stone and dried earth beneath, and the horses’ hooves clopping around steadily, the speechlessness would have been unbearably loud... She

listened hard but all that came from her parents' room were quiet, indistinguishable exchanges. Abruptly, there was silence. (58)

The lack of conversation between the family members during their trip home perhaps suggests a sense of deep shock experienced by Chandin and Pohpoh, that they are unable to fully comprehend what had happened, while Lavinia and Sarah remain silent probably as they fear that their secret would be found out.

Otoh's inquisitive nature causes him to come face to face with the legendary Mala, who mistakes him for Ambrose, her former lover. His real identity is obscured in the eyes of Mala due to his 'resemblance to his father' (160). Nonetheless, he refrains from correcting this particular case of mistaken identity. Mala, who seems to have regained her trust in people after all these years, leads Ambrose/Otoh to the room where Chandin's decomposed body is kept. However, the sight of Chandin's body is too much for Otoh, who faints 'over Mala's shoulder' (163). He tries to escape from Mala's yard but only ends up fainting again in the middle of the narrow road. The villagers' responses as they gather around him indicate that they have their own doubts about Otoh's identity:

'But ent he is Ambrose son?'

'He name Otoh.'

'I thought he name Ambrosia.'

'Doh be stupid. That is a girl's name.'

'But that is Ambrose son self. Look how he looking. He looking like Ambrose self.

You can't see a trace of he mother in he...' (164).

The subject of Otoh's real name presents a conundrum to the villagers. Only one villager can recall Otoh's birth name Ambrosia, but the rest of the villagers ignore the suggestion in favour of the name commonly used. The only voice of reason in the village is abruptly silenced by what the majority believes to be the absolute truth. Otoh's close resemblance to his father, as well as the villagers' rejection of the name Ambrosia as a girl's name, further work to conceal his true gender identity.

The narrative in *Brixton Beach* provides a look at what happens when a country is plagued by inter-racial disputes and civil wars. When violence occurs, it is not only a particular ethnic group that is victimised; very often innocent members of the public are involved too. In the case of Sri Lanka, the violent atrocities cause the whole community to live in fear: a fear that generates an atmosphere in which silence reigns on key social issues. This is evident in the first few pages of Chapter 1, when we come across Sita's conversation with Alice's teacher before they leave for the village. Mrs. Perris, the teacher, seems 'glad' to get out of the school to talk to Sita. However, Alice notices that her teacher keeps on looking 'nervously' over her shoulder, as if she is expecting someone to tell her off. Mrs Perris seems afraid that she might be seen talking to Sita. Other parents also appear to be looking 'curiously' in the direction of Mrs Perris and Sita. The reason for the parents' curiosity is confirmed via Tearne's explanation: 'It was unusual for a member of the staff to talk to a parent in this informal way outside the classroom' (15). We later learn that due to the 'tight security' after a bomb explosion, the community members are restricted in their movement and they

cannot remain as free and easy as in the old days.

The body language, as well as the way the teacher and parent communicate with each other seems to indicate a certain secrecy as well as a feeling of dread on their part. Mrs Perris tries to tell Sita about the riot, while keeping her voice low and moving her head from side to side. From her actions and her voice, we can ascertain her fear and disbelief at the whole situation. Sita informs Mrs Perris in a low voice that she knows about the riot. The two women are described as sharing an awkward situation: 'There was a pause and both women fell silent' (17). They seem to want to share their feelings about the ethnic conflict but they also fear certain repercussions if they voice their feelings in public.

A scene in the narrative focuses on the silencing of the authority's ill-treatment towards certain Sri Lankans. One example can be seen in the way Sita and Stanley are treated by the police due to Stanley's status as a Tamil. When Stanley is beaten up while returning home from work, Sita's call for a doctor, as well as the police to help them with the case, is met with indifference. The policeman's comment that 'these things happen to everyone. Not just the Tamils. You mustn't be so sensitive' (30) is received by a speechless Sita. Not only that, the policeman's insensitive question ('Why doesn't your husband think of going back to Jaffna?'), as well as suggestive comments towards Sita ('I'm doing this because I like the look of you') further shows the marginalised position of Tamils. This scene is similar to the one in *The God of Small Things*, in which Ammu goes to the police station in order to report the disappearance of Velutha, only to be sexually and verbally abused by the policeman at the station. When Bee (Sita's father) learns of her experience at the police station, he is adamant he should make a report to

the chief constable, but he is advised against doing so by Sita and her mother Kamala. Sita's words of consolation ('Everything's fine here, Father [...] Don't make trouble [...] Leave it') indicate to us the attitude of the marginalised who have to keep the injustice a secret so as not to harm their family and friends.

Alice herself is secretly regarded as someone who brings bad luck, and also a spy by her friends. Her presence at Jennifer's house is not warmly received by the latter, who points out the cause of the misfortune which has fallen on Alice's family: 'Your mother married a Tamil, that was the problem' (86). She has no way of refuting Jennifer's comment, nor is she ready for another verbal onslaught from Jennifer the next day at school: 'Oh, and by the way, we threw away your mother's dead-baby clothes. My brother has plenty of things to wear. We don't need your bad luck clothes' (87). As her friendship with Jennifer slowly comes to an end, Alice herself does not seem inclined to make friends with the Tamil girls, who look at her 'curiously' due to her differences from them:

She was supposed to be a Tamil, but she didn't look much like one, nor could she speak proper Tamil [...] What was the point in being friendly with her when she was probably a spy for that Singhalese mother of hers? The Tamil girls had been warned to be very careful when they went to school, not to talk to dangerous people. (91-92)

The Tamil girls' opinion about Alice being a spy for her mother can be described as an example of free indirect speech; it appears to be voiced by one of the girls but it is actually partly mediated by the author's voice. The views expressed point out to us that

Alice does not seem to fit in with any of her friends, whether they are Sinhalese or Tamils. On the one hand, her father's Tamil heritage causes Jennifer to view her as bringing bad luck. On the other hand, her mother's Sinhalese roots causes her Tamil friends to think of her as a spy. Both examples indicate that there is a secretly negative view of certain racial groups in the community, and the villagers are not ready to talk openly about it.

The idea of silence and secrets is also foregrounded through Tearne's introduction of a Tamil rebel, Kunal, in the narrative. Kunal's presence in the novel as a crippled freedom fighter further works to emphasise the status of Tamils as a marginalised people. It is Alice who discovers Kunal hiding in her grandfather's studio in the backyard. Bee warns her to keep Kunal's existence a secret: '[...] No one knows about this, Alice. *No one*. Kunal will be taken by the army and killed if they find out. Do you understand?' (129). Bee's serious warning causes his usually inquisitive granddaughter to become 'speechless'. Kunal's identity as a Tamil freedom fighter represents a threat to the Sinhalese nationalist government and the family must do all they can to hide him while he recuperates from his injury.

It seems that Kamala and Bee are 'experts' in hiding people from the authorities as they have devised a secret code if they have to hide someone: '[...] why didn't you tell me there was a catch?' (135). Alice, after meeting Kunal, informs Sita that there is a sick person in the house. Initially, Sita takes no notice of the news as she is used to her father doing 'crazy things' (140). She appears to be drifting 'further' away from her loved ones as she tries to sound uncaring about events around her. However, when she hears Kunal's

scream of pain, it seems to trigger ‘something terrible’ in her memory (141). Sita decides to lighten Kunal’s suffering by talking to and caring for him; something which takes the family members by surprise. She even takes out her shoebox containing her dead baby’s garments, a possession which is very private and dear to her, to try and get him to talk. When Kunal opens up and tells her how he had married a Sinhalese girl against her parents’ wishes, and how his wife later died due to labour complications, Sita could not find the right words to comfort him. The two of them just spend time together ‘without speaking’ (158) with Sita holding on to her beloved shoebox. While Sita has managed to distract Kunal from his suffering by getting him to talk, it is she who becomes speechless at the end as she probably realises that Kunal’s story sounds eerily similar to the story of her life with Stanley.

In *Brick Lane*, Razia is portrayed as becoming brave enough to lift the silence about Mrs Islam’s so-called righteous attitude:

‘She never kept purdah. She says she’s adapted now, that she has to walk outside because she’s a widow. All rubbish. Even if she stayed outdoors, she never kept purdah. Her husband would bring associates home, and they would do their deals there. Mrs Islam was always present. She kept in the back, serving and tidying. But she knew what they had come to talk about, and how she pulled the strings.’
(98)

This example informs us that Mrs Islam objects to women who leave their homes to go out to work, all the while emphasising the (unspoken) community norm of women being secluded from men who are not their family members. In Mrs Islam’s view, the traditional

way of life must be preserved at all costs. It appears though that she is a hypocrite as she does not follow the rules that she expects others to follow. However, when further pressed for information on the type of business, Razia shakes her head and refuses to say more. Razia's silence regarding this matter suggests an atmosphere of dark, unspoken truths about Mrs Islam's business dealings. This particular issue of Mrs Islam's dark secret will be dealt with later in the analysis.

When Razia finally informs Nazneen that Mrs Islam and her sons have been offering high-interest loans to people in the community and threatening those who cannot pay, Nazneen looks 'scandalised' and unable to speak (129). Razia further reiterates that some people in the community already know about Mrs Islam's dealings, but they remain 'hypocrites': 'That is the thing about our community. All *sinking, sinking, drinking water*' (129). Razia's use of the expression in italics indicates that the people in the community are afraid to reveal the truth about Mrs Islam, even though some of them would be 'sinking' in the end due to the matriarch's consistent demands for payment. Later, Nazneen tries to relay the information about Mrs Islam to Chanu; instead of sounding surprised, Chanu's response sounds very much like Razia's: '*Sinking, sinking, drinking water* [...] Some things have to stop' (132). This indicates that Chanu, like others in the community, knows that Mrs Islam's shady activities should be stopped. However, nothing is done by the community members to challenge her as it appears that opposing views cannot be expressed openly in the community.

Despite Chanu's initial perception of Nazneen as a shy, 'unspoilt girl' (23) from the village, the latter becomes brazen enough to start an affair with Karim, the middleman

who brings her clothes to sew. Their clandestine meetings are held solely at Nazneen's flat when Chanu is away at work. The narrator describes them as following a 'routine of sorts':

In the early afternoon she watched from the window. When he appeared, she raised her hand as if she were about to scratch her face. Then he would come up. If Chanu was still at home, she leaned her head against the glass, and he did not wave or smile or do anything other than continue his walk across the yard. (299)

The way they plan to meet can be described as the *modus operandi* of two partners in crime. Their routine is essential to ensure that nobody suspects anything and nothing goes wrong at the last minute. If they are found out, they face being ostracised by their community, since Karim has committed adultery with Nazneen who is a married woman. Via free indirect style, Ali presents Nazneen as feeling guilty and torturing herself about the love affair: 'They committed a crime. It was a crime and the sentence is death' (299). She realises the severity of what she has done with Karim as the narrator describes the protagonist as feeling 'sick with shame' (299) about the affair.

Nazneen is understandably worried that other people will find out about her secret meetings. This is indicated by her reaction towards the knocking sounds that she hears from her neighbour's flat. She assumes that the sounds are from the bed moving, and that her neighbour has a new boyfriend. In her mind she cannot help wondering if other people know about what happens in her own bedroom: 'She wondered if others listened to her bed and how much it had already told' (304). When she remembers that her neighbours are the English who tend to mind 'their own business' as mentioned by Mrs

Islam years before, her feelings are full of relief: ‘For this English peculiarity, she was grateful’ (304). Nazneen seems relieved at having ‘white’ neighbours as there is less tendency for them to spy on her every move, compared to the Bangladeshi community who are portrayed in the narrative as knowing everything which goes on in other people’s household. Nazneen’s relief on realising that her neighbours are English and not Bangladeshi implies that certain aspects of English life can be attractive and appealing, especially the part where one is not always subject to scrutiny.

The Ipe family members in *God of Small Things* certainly have their share of secrets. Rahel, who shares a secret telepathy with her twin Estha is portrayed as being able to experience her brother’s emotions and fears :

Rahel has a memory of waking up one night giggling at Estha’s funny dreams. She has other memories too that she has no right to have. She remembers for instance (though she hadn’t been there), what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha in Abhilash Talkies. (2)

Rahel seems able to make sense of the events occurring to her brother even though she herself is not present. Azzam attributes this to the twins’ joint identities, which are manifested via the ‘uncanny commingling of one twin’s memories and experiences with another’ (169). There are indeed many instances in the narrative where Roy portrays one twin (either Estha or Rahel) as being able to sense what is happening to the other twin. For example, after Estha had been sexually molested by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, he tries to warn Rahel not to go near the vendor :

But Rahel had already started towards him. As she approached him, he smiled at her and something about that portable piano smile, something about the steady gaze in which he held her, made her shrink from him. It was the most hideous thing she had ever seen. She spun around to look at Estha. (111)

Estha's terrible experience of being molested is a secret that he keeps for life, along with another secret in which he and Rahel are forced by Baby Kochamma to implicate Velutha for Sophie Mol's death:

In the years to come they would replay this scene in their heads. As children. As teenagers. As adults. Had they been deceived into doing what they did? Had they been tricked into condemnation ?

[...] They both knew they had been given a choice [...] They hadn't given it more than a second of thought before they looked up and said (not together, but almost) — 'Save Ammu.' Save us. Save our mother. (318)

Estha, compared to Rahel, seems to be badly affected by these two events. While Roy portrays him as being a 'quiet' person, he seems to have 'stopped talking' (10) altogether in the present-day narrative. He seems to be unable to shake off the secret and the guilt that he had been partly responsible for Velutha's death:

[...] The memory of a swollen face and a smashed, upside-down smile [...] Of a

bloodshot eye that had opened, wandered and then fixed its gaze on him. Estha.

And what had Estha done? He had looked into that beloved face and said: Yes.

Yes, it was him. (32, author's italics)

The burden of the two secrets, as well as the separation from his mother have caused him to shut himself off from other people. In fact, the adult Estha does not say a single word in the narrative. Estha's silence is eagerly reported by Baby Kochamma to the newly arrived Rahel:

'Watch!' Baby Kochamma said. She seemed excited. 'He'll walk *straight* to his room and wash his clothes. He's very overclean... he won't say a *word!*'

[...] Estha's hair was plastered down in clumps, like the inverted petals of a flower. [...] He walked to his room.

A gloating halo appeared around Baby Kochamma's head. 'See?' she said.

(90, author's italics)

Estha also appears to have a secret obsession with cleanliness, reflected in the extremely tidy condition of his bedroom. His tendency to keep everything obsessively clean probably stems from the incident when he is sexually molested by the Orangedrink Lemondrink man at the Refreshments Counter. After the incident, the traumatised Estha has to make his way back to the theatre, watching 'clean white children' (105) in *The Sound of Music*, all the while feeling 'vomity' (107) about the occurrence.

Rahel and Estha also share a terrible secret which is described by Roy using certain

suggestive tones in the penultimate chapter of the novel :

TWENTY-THREE YEARS LATER, Rahel, dark woman in a yellow T-shirt, turns to Estha in the dark.

[...] She whispers.

She moves her mouth.

Their beautiful mother's mouth.

Estha, sitting very straight, waiting to be arrested, takes his fingers to it. To touch the words it makes. To keep the whisper. His fingers follow the shape of it. The touch of teeth. His hand is held and kissed. (327)

From Rahel's and Estha's actions in this scene, we get the impression that the twins are trying to make sexual contact. According to the religious and social laws of their society, such contact is prohibited between siblings. The way Roy portrays Estha as 'waiting to be arrested' gives us the impression that Estha himself feels that it is wrong to touch Rahel in an intimate way; yet he goes ahead with it. However, since Estha and Rahel have experienced many punishments in life, inflicted by laws which do not favour their status as inter-caste children, then it is also understandable that, as adults, they have the tendency to rebel and refuse to conform to any social laws. The narrator's explanation of what occurs between them provides us an idea of the serious situation: 'There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that (in Mammachi's book) would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings' (328). This probably suggests that Rahel's feelings towards Estha and vice versa cannot be defined easily as

the love that Chacko has for his English wife Margaret, or Chacko's sexual 'Needs' from the female factory workers, because what the twins have dared to commit is a taboo, to the point that it would be something indescribable in society.

The aftermath of the sexual contact seems to end on a sad note for the twins, as the scene is described in terms related to silence and misery :

Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons. Only that there was a snuffling in the hollows at the base of a lovely throat. Only that a hard honey-coloured shoulder had a semi-circle of teethmarks on it. Only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief. (328)

This indicates that their sexual involvement is not one geared for pleasure but rather, an attempt by Rahel to heal Estha's pain at missing their mother Ammu, as well as to wash away his guilt for betraying Velutha. Estha, who seems deprived of his mother's love, appears to find Ammu in Rahel. The 'teethmarks' on someone's shoulder reminds the reader of how Rahel, as a child, used to suck her mother's stomach and leave red marks on her skin (221). In the scene above, it probably refers to Rahel biting her brother, perhaps in an attempt to reconnect to their past. The twins still cannot talk about what happened to them many years ago; their sadness appears to be obstructed inside. Perhaps the only way for them to express their pain and loss is to reconnect with each other physically; hence the narrator's description of their 'hideous grief', which suggests to us that the twins' sadness and unhappiness have turned into something ugly, even grotesque,

due to their sexual involvement with each other.

As for the twins' other relatives such as Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, they too have their share of secrets. Mammachi, for one, is actually a victim of wife-beating, despite her image as the family matriarch and businesswoman. Roy portrays Pappachi as being jealous of his wife's success, and it is this jealousy that drives him to beat her: 'Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren't new. What was new was the frequency with which they took place' (47). It seems that the domestic violence is a trade-off for her show of (business) independence. Pappachi's high status as a government official and his fondness for 'immaculately tailored suits' provide a stark contrast to his secret life as a wife-beater. Furthermore, Roy's description of the violence in a casual, off-hand manner suggests to the reader that Mammachi accepts her husband's beating without any protest, quietly. There is no hint in the novel which informs us about Mammachi's intention to rebel against her husband and there is also very little information given as regards to her feelings in their married life. Mammachi seems to accept everything that happens in her marriage with quiet obedience.

Despite the beatings, Mammachi is secretly loyal towards her husband. This can be ascertained from Roy's description of Mammachi during Pappachi's funeral: 'Mammachi cried and her contact lenses slid around in her eyes' (48). She appears to remain a loyal wife to the end even after Pappachi's death, as she never has a bad word to say about her husband. Her action of cutting out the newspaper clipping about Pappachi's death and pasting it in the family album (50) can also be read as a show of loyalty on her part, to preserve Pappachi's memory. In fact, Pappachi and Mammachi seem to thrive in a relationship dominated by silence and violent actions. There is no mention of Pappachi

saying a word to his wife even before he formally starts the silent treatment. Similarly, there is no mention in the novel of Mammachi saying a word to her husband. As such, it can be hardly surprising that Mammachi seems to wallow in silence all the time, refusing to cry for help against the domestic violence. In Bulbeck's view, this situation is common in cultures where the wife has a duty to guard her husband's and her own reputation. Bulbeck further explains that some wives may be prevented from 'speaking of domestic violence publicly because this shames both wife and husband' (62). Mammachi was indeed a victim of male patriarchy and violence but unlike her daughter, she did not fight against the injustice.

Although Mammachi has been a victim of domestic violence, she herself silently condones certain patriarchal attitudes in her favouritism towards her son Chacko. This is evident from Roy's description of Mammachi's overbearing affection for her son:

The day that Chacko prevented Pappachi from beating her (and Pappachi had murdered his chair instead), Mammachi packed her wifely luggage and committed it to Chacko's care. From then onwards he became the repository of all her womanly feelings. Her man. Her only love. (168)

From the above quotation, we get the impression that after Chacko's heroic act, she seems to have transferred her emotions towards her son. Mammachi regards Chacko as her true love ('Her man. Her only love.') and she appears to carry secret 'womanly' feelings towards her son. She shows her love by feeding him and sewing his clothes; the household tasks previously done for Pappachi before Chacko's discovery of the beatings.

On the other hand, Roy portrays Chacko as still harbouring affection for Margaret Kochamma. This can be seen from his remark about their divorce: 'She traded me in for a better man,' he would say to Mammachi, and she would flinch as though he had denigrated her instead of himself' (249). Mammachi's hurt response shows that she is secretly jealous of Chacko's obsession with Margaret.

In the case of Baby Kochamma, Roy depicts her as being secretly obsessed with a Jesuit priest, Father Mulligan, since her teenage years. She is portrayed as trying to attract Father Mulligan with 'weekly exhibitions of staged charity' and bible discussions (23). When her efforts do not produce 'tangible results' (24), she devises another plan. She decides to become a Roman Catholic, an act which is described as defying 'her father's wishes' (24). By embracing Catholicism, in many ways she is rejecting her family heritage as Syrian Christians with its unique branch of Christian faith. However, her time at the Convent in Madras later proves to be a futile 'endeavour':

She found that the Senior Sisters monopolised the priests and bishops with biblical doubts more sophisticated than hers would be, and that it might be years before she got anywhere near Father Mulligan. She grew restless and unhappy at the convent [...] She felt she spoke much better English than everyone. (24-25)

She attempts to convey her loneliness to her parents in Ayemenem in her letters. However, since all letters from the convent would be read by the Mother Superior before being posted, she decides to use a secret name, Koh-i-noor to refer to herself (25), something which initially puzzles her father. Her parents only realise her misery in the

letters when her mother recalls that Koh-i-noor is a nickname given by Baby Kochamma's grandfather to one of his grandchildren. Her decision to use the code name informs us that she does not want the nuns to know about her problems at the Convent.

In the present-day narrative, Roy depicts Baby Kochamma as being secretly frightened by what she sees on television about 'desperate' and 'dispossessed people' (28). This drives her to keep the doors and windows locked as well as storing her cream buns and insulin medicine in her locked fridge. Her paranoia even extends to the lack of trust she displays towards the twins. In her view, the twins were 'Capable of Anything'. The author's deliberate capitalisation of the phrase seems to give an extraordinary feature to the twins. Baby Kochamma is portrayed as being suspicious of the twins as Roy delves into her consciousness: '*They might even steal their present back*, she thought, and realised with a pang how quickly she had reverted to thinking of them as though they were a single unit once again' (29, author's italics). She seems to fear that the twins will find out that she has been partly instrumental in uprooting them from their mother. Even though the twins are now reunited, she still denies them their moments of 'happiness' (46), just like in the past.

In the past, she feared the threat of a Communist revolution and 'the Marxist-Leninist menace' (28). As stated by Tickell, in March 1957, Kerala became the first Indian state to have a 'democratically elected communist party' in power (28). Later in the narrative, the narrator states that the majority of the Syrian Christians in Kerala were 'wealthy' landlords who rejected the Communist Party in favour of the Congress Party (66). Baby Kochamma's fear of Communism is thus understandable as the Ipe family are part of the middle-class landowners who would have been threatened by the rise of communism in

Kerala. It is this fear that partly drives her to create problems for Velutha, the handyman of the Ipe family and also a secret member of the Communist Party.

Representations of silence involving gossip

The narrative in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* reveals key aspects of social life in the Bangladeshi community. As we have seen in the novel, the existence of forms of social organisation that govern social life in Bangladesh are carried over to the new country by the immigrants. In this new environment, the immigrant community exists side by side with the new culture, which may present a new set of pressures. While the environment in the Bangladeshi community can be described as one with clear social and religious boundaries, there are noticeably fewer restrictions in the secular, capitalist society in London. The community members are often expected to conform to the social and religious norms; anyone who challenges these norms is seen to have transgressed certain boundaries. An example of this can be seen from the opinion of a London homemaker who was included in Naila Kabeer's study (277). (Some parts of Kabeer's study were later used by Ali in the narrative.) In the case of the homemaker, she expressed how 'embarrassed' she felt when she had to do her shopping in Bangladeshi shops. In her view, the men had a tendency to stare, and the women could not protect their reputation if the men were to say 'something'. The negative perception and gossip towards women who venture outside their homes on their own is not something that Ali has dreamt up on a whim for her novel. Such a negative scenario is also experienced by some of the respondents in Kabeer's study. There are quite a few other examples in the narrative which show how characters who have overstepped certain perceived norms are treated by

the community members.

Kabeer notes the choices the female garment workers had to make in order to improve their material conditions; in particular, the Dhaka female workers' decision to work outside their homes even though some people saw it as a 'shameless' decision (Kabeer, 89). Some of the female workers risked being seen as immoral due to their decision to work in the factories. As stated by one female worker in Dhaka: 'Islam forbids women to work but Allah won't do anything for me if I just sit at home. I have to try and help myself, only then Allah will help me...' (89). This struggle between personal agency and reliance on fate is presented in Ali's novel as one of the main themes. In the case of the Bangladeshi community depicted in the novel, where there is a silent acceptance of fate, the increase in possibilities for female agency, independence and autonomy may not be perceived and welcomed as positively as they are in the west.

The tendency for people in the community to gossip about females and female workers is evident in certain descriptions in the novel as portrayed by Ali. One such example can be read in Hasina's letter (152) : 'Some people making trouble outside factory. They shout to us. 'Here come the garment workers. Choose the one you like.' From Hasina's letter we get the impression that some community members seem to equate the female workers with prostitutes. Another example from Hasina's letter informs us of the gossip about the female workers: 'Zainab say one hundred and fifty girls in one factory getting pregnant. This is kind of thing people say. Who going to stop them?' (155). In this example, it appears that the female workers are powerless to stop gossips going around about some of them being pregnant.

Hasina faces more problems as she is living in Dhaka as a single, independent woman. She falls in love with a man but her lover later decides to exploit her emotionally. He appears to have told everyone about their relationship, which is probably misunderstood as a love affair by other people. Hasina writes to Nazneen how she is reprimanded by the administrator at her work place :

“The boy admit to all he say. Don’t tell me your shameless lie. Go before I beat shame into you.’ I look at Abdul but he not look at me. His shirt sticking to his chest I remember I never see him sweat before. He say nothing and I go out.’(162).

In this situation, Hasina seems unable to defend herself against the gossip as anything that she says will be regarded as a lie. Not only that, she is being threatened with a beating if she makes a fuss. In this regard, it appears that the man’s word carries more weight and honour compared to the woman’s word , which informs us about the clear gender bias in such a society.

As for Nazneen, her first meeting with Mrs Islam and Razia at her flat can be described as her introduction into the Bangladeshi ladies’ gossip club. Ali draws Mrs Islam as a person who is eager to share stories about other people as she barges straight into the flat: ‘No one is saying it to his face [...] but everyone is saying it behind his back. I don’t like that kind of gossip’ (26). There is much irony in Mrs Islam’s words as she pretends that she is not interested in what people say about that person, when in reality she takes delight in giving her own account of what actually happened. She appears to sound sympathetic about the victim, but later justifies her busybody attitude by saying that everyone in the community knows about the issue: ‘A terrible accident [...] But

everyone is whispering behind the husband's back' (27). The phrases 'whispering' and 'gossip' indicate that the incident that they are talking about is something that is not usually talked about openly or something extraordinary (indeed, it appears that someone's wife has committed suicide in the area). At the same time, the truth about what happened is shrouded in silence as no one has actually confronted the people involved face-to-face. In the context of our discussion of silence and representation, Ali's approach in the narrative reveals to us that certain taboo subjects are not dealt with directly; instead, gossip is being passed around as the version of the truth. The matter is not dealt with directly as to do so would bring embarrassment, especially in a close-knit community such as this.

The need to conform to certain societal norms is again indicated in Mrs Islam's comment about another Bangladeshi lady, Jorina. In Mrs Islam's view, Jorina seems to have gone against certain norms by going outside the house in order to find work: 'The husband is working but still she cannot fill her stomach' (16). This comment shows that she is disgusted with Jorina's decision to work. Not only that, Jorina's career at the factory is viewed by Mrs Islam as something which will eventually be detrimental to her Bangladeshi culture: 'Mixing with all sorts : Turkish, English, Jewish [...] But if you mix with all these people, even if they are good people, you have to give up your culture to accept theirs' (29). The same attitude towards women who dare to venture outside their home can also be seen from Chanu's advice to Nazneen when he comments that people will gossip about his wife if they see her spending time outside instead of remaining at home (45). Within the narrative, the negative views are primarily expressed by two people (Mrs Islam and Chanu); however these views are presented as though they

represent the view of the whole community. Not only that, Jorina's voice seems to be subdued in the narrative; there is no mention of her talking back or voicing her own opinion about her decision to work.

The fear of being gossiped by the community is also shared by Razia, who seeks Dr Azad's assistance in curing her son's drug addiction:

'If he wants to come off the drugs I can help him.' Dr Azad looked down at his feet. He made a small adjustment so that the ends of his shoes lined up precisely.

'I have come to you for help,' said Razia. 'And the other thing is, nobody can know about it.'

'You have my assurance – they will not hear it from me.'

Razia jumped up [...] 'But they know already. I can feel it' (358).

Despite her tough, tomboyish demeanour, Razia seems worried that people in the community will know her son's secret, and she already imagines that they are talking about it. Her paranoid attitude reiterates the need to conform to what is acceptable in the community. Failure to do would probably mean having to bear the brunt of the gossip as well as being ostracised by the rest of the community.

The element of gossip is also evident in *God of Small Things*, a novel which switches

back and forth between events happening in the past and the present. The grown-up Rahel's return to Ayemenem can be considered a relatively quiet one as Comrade K.M. Pillai is the only person who can recognize her after all these years. The latter tries to introduce Rahel to another old man, who seems to be able to recall the Ipe family after a lot of prompting on Pillai's part:

He remembered vaguely a whiff of scandal. He had forgotten the details, but remembered it had involved sex and death. It had been in the papers. After a brief silence and another series of small nods, the man handed Comrade Pillai the sachet of photographs. (129)

This implies to us that the scandal which occurred has been largely forgotten by the townspeople. Perhaps it has been forgotten due to the fact that it had involved an inter-caste transgression, and such an issue could be considered taboo, that no one wanted to talk openly about it.

Ammu, Rahel's mother, is also plagued by gossips after returning to Ayemenem as a single parent when she leaves her alcoholic husband. She has to contend with facing gossiping villagers who seem to be talking about her in 'high, whining' tones. Not only that, she also receives visits from 'ugly' (43) female relatives who appear to sympathise with her; however in reality they gloat over her misfortune. Even though her return to Ayemenem is unplanned and unannounced, the locals have a way of knowing about her private life, thereby breaking the silence about her marital status. Ammu's divorce actually provides the fodder for their conversation. Here I would argue that all the gossip

from the community is tantamount to a form of punishment as she appears to have crossed society's boundaries in three ways: firstly, marrying someone from another community; secondly, getting married in a love marriage and not in the traditional arranged marriage; and, thirdly, breaking away from the marriage (albeit a violent one) to come back to her parents. Similarly, she also suffers marginalisation in three ways: she is unwanted by her husband, her relatives and the community.

Her action of escaping from the clutches of her parents to find her own suitor in Calcutta can be described as a secret rebellion against certain patriarchal structures in society, by not bowing down to dowry demands and also not consenting to the abuse at home. Roy's description of Ammu's grudging acceptance of the female relatives who visit her after the divorce can be read as silent rebellion against society's 'busybody' ways: 'She fought off the urge to slap them. Or twiddle their nipples. With a spanner. Like Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*' (43). In other words, she wishes she could annoy them as much as they have annoyed her, but she knows that she has to maintain some respect due to society's requirements. On the other hand, as she is forced to depend on her family after the divorce, she knows that she cannot totally reject certain customs. As such, she decides to tolerate 'small weddings in ordinary clothes' (44). In a way, she tries to be mindful of society's need and traditions while maintaining a low profile, indicating that Ammu is not totally accepting of certain patriarchal structures.

In the case of the main female characters in *Brixton Beach*, the aftermath of the baby's death seems to have deeper consequences for Sita and Alice as they try to deal with their friends and relatives who are wary of their half-Tamil, half-Sinhalese heritage. Sita is described in the novel as the unfortunate woman who has to suffer for marrying a

man from another ethnic group: ‘Headstrong wife of that Tamil man Stanley whom she had married in haste and who could not even afford to pay for a private confinement’ (88). This is an instance of free indirect speech, in which one of the characters appears to be stating her view, but it is partly mediated by the voice of the author. The benefit of using free indirect speech here is that it provides a more comprehensive way of telling the story. The reader is allowed to see events and experience thoughts not only through the narrator’s eyes, but also through the character’s eyes. In other words, it makes the story more varied and diverse.

Sita’s marriage to a Tamil remains a thorny issue among her relatives who come to visit her. They are supposed to show their sympathy but, in truth, they only make hurtful remarks to Sita: ‘What can you expect? [...] God is punishing you for marrying a Tamil’ (89). Another relative’s comments seem to equate child-bearing with an everyday sport: ‘Never mind [...] Try again, child. These Tamil fellows can breed, I tell you!’ (89). In this instance, while the Tamils are thought of as being inferior to the Singhalese, they are also viewed as capable of multiple breeding or in other words, they are virile or oversexed, further pointing them towards the status of ‘Other’ in the eyes of the Singhalese. Despite all these disparaging remarks, Sita finds it impossible to defend herself as her speech would only return ‘spasmodically’ after the operation (89). Furthermore, she herself is saddened by her husband’s planned departure to England. Sita’s inability to answer back to her relatives is a clear example of how the marginalised are doomed to wallow in silence without a chance to express her dire situation to others.

Gossip is presented in *Cereus Blooms* with the introduction of Mala’s character in the first few pages. Mootoo portrays the old lady as an enigma to the locals of Lantanacamara.

This can be ascertained when she first arrives at the almshouse in a black police vehicle. We are told by Tyler that the ‘gossipmongers’ among the nurses are too shocked to say anything when they learn about Mala’s arrival (7). This indicates to us that Mala could be implicated in a very dark secret which is too horrible to be spoken about by the locals.

Certain issues in the community, like gender and sexual issues, tend to be shrouded in secrecy and silence. The villagers are aware of the issues, but they avoid talking about them in public. It is only when they gather in small groups that they exchange the gossip via certain looks, nudges and unfinished sentences, perhaps implying that the secret is so heavy or terrible that they cannot speak openly about it. In some situations depicted in the narrative, certain words are used to refer to particular taboo matters. They are never directly mentioned and dealt with. The truth seems to be suppressed as it could potentially present a threat to the specific hierarchy that exists in this imaginary Caribbean society. In the case of other characters, revealing the truth could disrupt what the society views as widely-accepted norms.

Mootoo’s narrative moves back and forth between the past and the present, and the reader is presented with scenes from Mala/ Pohpoh’s childhood. One such scene depicts her mother Sarah’s elopement with her lover Lavinia. The news of the two lovers running away spreads among the villagers swiftly like ‘a brush fire’ (64). Everyone seems to know about it. However, most of them are likely to talk in whispers or ‘under their breath’ (65), rather than openly commenting on it. There is a sense of shame about the whole issue, and this can be seen from the way the villagers talk about it in ‘unfinished sentences’ (65) and gestures and nudges in the direction of the church. Mootoo describes the villagers who are gossiping as having ‘pangs of guilt’ (65). The villagers are talking

about the issue without tackling the matter head on, by using euphemism or certain codes. Their response of talking in hushed tones, as if trying to cover up something already known to the public, implies to us the need to maintain certain patriarchal systems in the community as they attempt to preserve what is left of the Reverend and Chandin's good name.

The lack of specific words for taboo issues pertaining to sex in the narrative is further shown in the community's description of what Chandin did to his daughter. Chandin's identity has indeed taken a complete turn from being a respected preacher to an incestuous father. Despite the townspeople's common knowledge of what happened, they seem to be more comfortable saying things like 'Chandin pick up with the older daughter' (47) instead of a precise sentence such as 'Chandin rapes Mala'. This example shows the townspeople's apathy, and also use of euphemism when it comes to taboo issues such as incest. The villagers avoid tackling the issue directly, as it is too painful. Even worse is that the crime seems to occur on a frequent basis; however, the locals do not seem to try to break the cycle of violence. Instead, he is still accorded a special status as a former teacher of the gospel. The villagers simply dismiss Chandin's crime as an act of madness: 'While many shunned him there were those who took pity, for he was once the much respected teacher of the Gospel, and such a man would take to the bottle and to his own child, they reasoned, only if he suffered some madness' (195). It is more convenient for the locals to attribute Chandin's abuse of his children to an effect of 'insanity' (195), instead of publicly acknowledging his crime of raping the children.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the representations of silence involving ideas of shame, secrets and gossip. Shame, secrets and gossip are inter-related concepts which appear to carry a much heavier weight in Eastern communities in the setting in my corpus, compared to Western societies. This is evident from the authors' portrayal of the female characters who have been shamed, gossiped and harboured dark secrets in their lives. In Hasina's case, it is a burden so heavy that she cannot bring herself to use the exact words in her letter to inform Nazneen that she has been raped. As for Ammu, Roy portrays her as 'crying' after leaving the police station; however there are no sounds of 'sobbing' from her. Ammu appears to feel so much pain after being humiliated and sexually abused by the Inspector that her despair is beyond any words. This chapter was divided into three sections, with the first section exploring the characters' silence or lack of verbal responses as an effect of them feeling ashamed or embarrassed due to a particular wrongdoing or transgression. In the second section, I examined the characters' silence or lack of verbal responses about certain secrets regarding their families or themselves. As for the third section, this provided an insight into the characters' silence or lack of verbal responses about gossip disseminated by other people in the community.

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN'S CHOICE TO REMAIN SILENT :

SILENCE, CHARACTERISATION AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

This chapter will look at representations of characters who choose to remain silent in the four texts of our corpus. While silence is usually seen as the failure to say something or to communicate, and may sometimes be thought of as a weakness, this chapter aims to show that silence can be used as a strategy by certain characters in the texts. The characters analysed have not entirely lost their ability to voice words and sentences; however, due to certain circumstances, they have chosen not to do so, opting for what some critics have termed voluntary silence or strategic silence.

Silence does not necessarily indicate weakness or a lack of power. Gal in her essay 'Between Speech and Silence', maintains that silence 'like any linguistic form, gains different meanings and has different material effects within specific institutional and cultural contexts' (176). In Fulton's view, that silence has the potential to convey significance in certain circumstances (65). She believes that strategic silence may be

considered as the ‘discursive inverse of vocal orality’ (66). Strategic silence, as Fulton maintains, exists within the contexts of orality. She further labels this concept as “silent orality”, which includes ‘print language and speech acts that resist and subvert oppression, or control representations, and substantiate subjectivity’. Fulton further emphasises that strategically employed silence is a form of ‘mute demonstration’ which can be utilised to affirm or to protest about an issue (66).

Laurence (1994) has analysed the form and content of female silence in fiction authored by nineteenth-century English women writers. In her assessment, women’s silence, from the patriarchal viewpoint, is a symbol of ‘absence and powerlessness’ due to the limited expression allowed to women in the public eye until the twentieth century (157). However, Laurence also maintains that women’s silence, when viewed from a female perspective, can be seen as ‘a presence, and as a text, waiting to be read’ (158). In her study she discovers that the vocal silence employed by the female characters reveals active strategies of choice and resistance. The silences, exemplified in the characters’ actions of observing a particular object, listening, thinking or dreaming, indicate ‘active presences’. In Laurence’s view, such silences are also used to convey truths and inner consciousness and can be considered modes of expressions in particular historical and cultural circumstances (158).

There are other views regarding silence in literature. For example, Jorgensen (cited in Campbell, 15) views the choice to remain silent for the female hero in fairy tales as ‘a coded form of protest’. She further notes that the female hero chooses to maintain her silence as a coded protest against male-dominated norms and constraints. In some cultures, like in Algeria as observed by Lazreg (19), strategic silence can be identified

as a voluntary act of self-preservation for women, when they feel that it is better to remain silent than to cause someone else to become angry or disapproving of a particular matter. As stated by Hejaiej, while confrontation is considered as an expression and strength of the self in Western cultures, in Eastern cultures it is seen as showing one's lack of restraint and self-centredness ; qualities which disrupt harmony in a community (54).

One of the main characters analysed in this section involving the choice to remain silent is Nazneen. In *Brick Lane*, she seems to appear passive in front of her husband, Chanu, in order not to create problems at home. Nazneen's character can perhaps be categorised as the patient wife. According to Hejaiej (54), the patient wife motif, which is globally known (especially in folktales), carries various political agendas usually related to the role of the women in the family. She further elaborates that, in such tales, the wife would endure her husband's cruelty silently for many years, while he would deprive her of her family and friends, children, as well as her position as wife. Typically in such stories, when the wife finally speaks out, the husband praises her patience, acknowledges her as his wife, and reunites her with the children.

Other key characters analysed in this chapter include Mala, the so-called madwoman in *Cereus Blooms* and Sita, Alice's mother who has endured a traumatic childbirth in *Brixton Beach*. I will also include Alice in this analysis as well as Rahel and Estha, the child characters in *God of Small Things*. For these characters, I have decided to categorise them under a special heading as individuals traumatised into silence. The trauma experienced by both Sita and Mala can be described as causing harm to the two characters' mental faculties, such that they choose to become reticent or refuse to

communicate using human language. As for Alice, Rahel and Estha, these children have also been silenced after witnessing violence occurring in their respective communities.

The patient wife: Nazneen

In the narrative, Ali focuses on Nazneen's actions rather than her verbal responses to what other people say. This is similar to the focus on Mala's non-verbal communication and actions, which we shall see in the discussion on *Cereus Blooms at Night* in Chapter 4. Ali constructs her narrative through a mix of classic third-person and free indirect style so as to give the reader access to Nazneen's thought processes. As such, anything that occurs in Nazneen's mind or emotions, like her silent rebellion, for instance, is given expression through actions rather than words. Nazneen actually says very little that articulates her position, but we as the reader more or less know what she is going to do as we have access to her thoughts. Within the context of this thesis, Nazneen's non-verbal communication and the focus on her actions are highly significant as they reveal the different potential strategies used by writers with the aim of giving voice to their characters.

On first impression, Nazneen appears as a meek and submissive wife. Her voice seems to be silenced when her husband warns her against spending time outside the flat:

She did not often go out. 'Why should you go out?' said Chanu. 'If you go out, ten people will say, "I saw her walking on the street." And I will look like a fool. Personally, I don't mind if you go out but these people are so ignorant. What can you do?'

She never said anything to this.

‘Besides, I get everything for you that you need from the shops. Anything you want, you only have to ask.’

She never said anything to this. (45)

In this scene Nazneen herself does not express her wish to go out of the flat, but Chanu seems to be always ready with an answer or an explanation that he voices in place of his wife’s hesitant reply. Ali draws Chanu as someone who always has something to say to defend himself, especially in coming up with excuses to reject his wife’s needs and wants, while Nazneen is portrayed as a person who quietly accepts other people’s decisions while continuing to work hard on the household chores.

After Hasina goes missing, Nazneen manages twice to muster enough courage to ask her husband to go to Dhaka and look for her sister. However, Chanu responds to his wife’s suggestion in a sarcastic manner: ‘I shall go to Dhaka and pluck her instantly from the streets and bring her back to live with us. On the way I could pick up the rest of your family’ (62). Nazneen does not respond verbally to her husband’s suggestion, but deep down in her heart we can sense her silent rage as indicated by Ali’s description of Nazneen’s emotions:

Anything is possible. She wanted to shout. Do you know what I did today? I went inside a pub. To use the toilet. Did you think I could do that? I walked mile upon mile, probably around the whole of London, although I did not see the edge of it.
(62)

In reality, she is tired of listening to her husband’s excuses as she herself has shown that she could venture out on her own and manage to find her way back. When Chanu tells her to ‘just wait and see’, something that she has heard before from her elders, she sounds as

if she has given up: 'I have heard it. I know it' (63). She appears calm on the outside, but her actions and her emotions, as mediated through Ali's description, suggest the start of a silent rebellion. Her actions suggest that she has stopped being the good wife :

Nazneen dropped the promotion from her prayers. The next day, she chopped two fiery red chillies and placed them, like hand grenades, in Chanu's sandwich. Unwashed socks were paired and put back in his drawer [...] All her chores, peasants in his princely kingdom, rebelled in turn. (63)

The birth of her son Raqib seems to have transformed Nazneen into a more defiant person. She informs her husband that she does not want to be disturbed by guests: 'Mrs Islam is coming again today. If I'm napping, don't wake me' (82). Chanu, however, seems unperturbed and keeps on singing the praises of Mrs Islam's educated and 'respectable' family. Nazneen appears to listen to her husband, although in reality she is described as wishing that Chanu would leave both the baby and her 'alone' (82). We can sense that she is increasingly dissatisfied with aspects of her life. However, she puts up silently with her dissatisfaction as she knows that her baby's well-being is more important than anything else:

Nazneen kept quiet. Her guts prickled. Her forehead tightened. All he could do was talk. The baby was just another thing to talk about. For Nazneen, the baby's life was more real to her than her own. His life was full of needs: actual and urgent needs, which she could supply. What was her own life, by contrast, but a series of gnawings, ill-defined and impossible to satisfy? (83)

As the narrative unfolds, there are some noticeable changes as Nazneen appears to gain her own agency. This can be exemplified via her growing confidence in talking back to other people, especially to her husband. In one humorous scene, she actually corrects her husband during one of his ramblings:

‘A sense of history,’ he said. That is what they are missing. And do not forget – the Bangladeshis they are mixing with are Sylhetis, no more, no less. They do not see the best face of our nation.’

‘Colonel Osmany,’ said Nazneen quietly. ‘Shah Jalal.’

‘What?’ said Chanu. ‘What?’

‘Our great national hero and - ’

‘I know who they are!’

Nazneen apologised with a smile, and then added, ‘And that they both come from Sylhet.’ (186)

This informs us that she does have knowledge of Bangladesh’s national figures as she recalls their names aloud. However, her manner of reminding her husband is done in a quiet, unobtrusive way, in order not to upstage Chanu’s know-it-all attitude. When Chanu loudly claims to know the two national figures, we can ascertain some annoyance on his

part as, for once, Nazneen has stolen his thunder. Nevertheless, Nazneen soon returns to her passive mode as Ali portrays her as agreeing with Chanu and apologising through her smile.

When Chanu quits his job and prepares to go back to Bangladesh, it is Nazneen who becomes the breadwinner for the family. Although she sews at home mainly to fund the family trip to their native land, she manages to hide some money from her husband for Hasina's use and Shahana's toiletries (213). The fact that she has become brave enough to hide certain things from her husband indicates her growing confidence. Not only that, Ali depicts Nazneen as secretly avoiding Mrs Islam's house calls by not opening the door and hiding 'under her covers' (271) in bed, so that she could escape paying Chanu's loan. From Nazneen's quiet actions, we observe that she mainly avoids confrontation with her adversaries, preferring to let her actions rather than her words make a difference.

The same situation can also be seen in Nazneen's relationship with her husband Chanu. Nazneen is given the chance to further develop her sense of agency with the return of Chanu to Bangladesh. The scene below describes what appears to be Chanu's plea to Nazneen for the whole family to follow him home :

'You coming with me, then? You'll come ?'

'No, ' she breathed. She lifted his head and looked into his face. It was dented and swollen , almost out of recognition. 'I can't go with you,' she said.

'I can't stay,' said Chanu, and they clung to each other inside a sadness that went beyond words and tears, beyond that place, those causes and consequences, and

became part of their breath, their marrow, to travel with them from now to wherever they went. (478)

Ali draws Nazneen's character as uttering a quiet 'no' to her husband ; this shows Nazneen's way of defying her husband's wish without any show of threat or force. She seems to take him by surprise from the expression on his 'dented' face as she hints silently at her choice to stay at the very last minute. Chanu's similarly brief response, and the way the two embraced each other quietly before the flight departure inform us that their sadness of being separated from each other is so unbearable that it is beyond any words or tears.

Traumatised into silence

Certain events in one's life, like the loss of a child or a loved one, being taken away by force from one's parents or at the extreme, being subjected to pain or physical and sexual abuse may cause trauma to children as well as adults. Some of the characters in the novels in my corpus can be considered as victims of trauma due to the loss of a loved one, like Sita, Alice and Rahel, while others have been traumatised after experiencing physical pain and sexual abuse, like in the case of Mala and Estha, Rahel's male twin. As observed by Perry (8), children who have experienced a traumatic experience may appear stunned and numb. Some of them may appear to gaze off into the distance and will not readily respond to enquiries made by adults. It is difficult for the young victims to avoid direct reminders of the trauma, and often they will withdraw into themselves to avoid having more thoughts about the terrible event (Perry, 9). These are indeed some of the

effects of trauma on the characters in my corpus as can be seen from their tendency to withdraw into themselves or to become reticent, refusing to communicate with others.

Sita and Alice

Motherhood, as portrayed in this narrative, appears to have a negative impact on Sita. Katrak in her analysis of postcolonial literary texts (2006: 212) provides another view of mothering, which is put forward as m-othering. This occurs when the experience of being a mother, or of not being one (due to infertility or choice) may prove to be alienating or destructive to the woman's psychic state. In the case of Sita, her vulnerable state of mind caused by the postnatal trauma does not improve as the family prepares to leave for England. She appears to have lost the will to continue with life, as she begins to imagine dark thoughts. Tearne draws her character as prone to thinking murderous thoughts especially when she is left alone, suggesting to us the fragility of her mind as someone who is still mourning the loss of her baby. Sita, seeing a piece of rope in the kitchen yard, imagines it being turned into 'a knot, a noose, a gallows' (98). Tearne wants us to further believe that Sita is fixated with the memory of losing the baby as she is described as feeling 'trapped' when she meets Jennifer's mother at the sari shop. The description of the shop itself as a place of 'dead silk worms', and the description of Sita as an unfortunate woman ('Pramless, lifeless and incomplete') further highlight the futility of Sita's circumstances.

Sita later loses her unborn baby as she is denied treatment by a Singhalese doctor due to her husband's Tamil name, and she does not fully recover from the postnatal

trauma. Tearne draws Sita as further drifting into depression after the tragedy: ‘Knowing there was no longer any point in resurrecting her hopes, she packed her soft-cotton sorrows carefully inside the large empty trunks that seemed to have invaded her mind. Then, quietly, she climbed into it and shut the lid’ (88). These two sentences suggest to us someone who has ultimately given up on her hopes and dreams. Not only that, the adjective ‘soft-cotton’ and the adverb ‘quietly’ further indicate the fragility of Sita’s mind and emotions, as well as the tendency for her to retreat into solitude and silence.

After a few weeks of silence, Sita’s parents finally receive a reply from their granddaughter. Alice does not mention her mother until the end of the letter: ‘*Mama says to send her love and she will write when she can...*’ (240). The family members seem puzzled by Sita’s silence. It is only after Bee writes for the second time that he manages to get a brief, unemotional reply from Sita. Again, her parents are astonished that she does not appear to know about Kunal’s death. Sita’s decision not to reply the first time, as well as her dispassionate reply the second time, perhaps indicate her decision to remain voiceless about her situation, as well as the start of her retreating into silence.

Sita’s attitude towards letters from home is further explained in Chapter 9, where Tearne describes her character as finally realising that her family will never be ‘going back’ to Sri Lanka. Tearne further presents Sita’s as avoiding any news from home and being uncommitted in writing back:

Silence issued from abroad. Sita had not answered her father’s first letter in the manner in which she knew he had wanted, and she had not mentioned Kunal [...]
She had no idea if her father understood, and she no longer cared what he or

anyone thought. Dangling by a thread, existing by invisible means, Sita ignored May's last letter too. (261)

It seems Sita would rather bury herself in her work than talk about her problems either to her husband or her daughter. She loses herself in her work to the extent that Alice would find her mother doing 'exactly' what she had been doing before the latter left for school. Sita would remain silent throughout her work with the only sound coming from the sewing machine's 'whirring'.

Sita not only stops writing to her family in Sri Lanka; soon Alice notices her taking out the old baby clothes and ironing them. Without exchanging 'a single word' with her mother, Alice comes to realise that she would be the one protecting Sita. Alice seems to partly adopt Sita's defence mechanism of remaining silent: 'So when her mother started taking out the baby things once more, Alice kept quiet, not drawing any attention to this change' (244). Sita's action of folding and unfolding the baby clothes does not go unnoticed by her husband. Stanley appears to mock his wife's habit of quietly folding the baby clothes: 'Say something, men [...] Don't just ignore me. You'll go off your head again if you don't talk. Remember how you were before I left?' (244). He admonishes his wife for wallowing in her depression; however he himself seems unable to maintain his voice of authority:

'If you don't throw them out, Sita,' Stanley threatened, 'I will. It's for your own good,' he added, sounding uncertain, now. 'You've got to stop brooding in this way.'

Then Alice heard his voice soften as if he was talking to himself. And a moment later, as she strained her ears, then came the eternal sound of her mother's weeping. (244)

Though Stanley comes across as a chauvinistic, controlling husband in this scene, he also appears to falter as indicated by his changing tone of voice. Stanley is supposed to console his wife but what we actually find is that he himself appears to be in need of consolation and soothing words during this difficult moment. His use of strong words to admonish Sita does not seem to be effective as his voice is gradually reduced to a whisper, sounding as if he were talking to himself. As for Sita, she can only retreat further into her shell and comfort herself by crying. This indicates to us that Sita's battle with post-natal depression is beginning to take a toll on the family's well-being, especially on Stanley and Alice.

As for Alice, initially, she can be described as an inquisitive and playful child who likes to ask a lot of questions. However, her arrival in London seems to have made her a more withdrawn person. We could probably attribute this to a change in her environment. This is made worse as her parents seem to resume their squabbling just a few days after being reunited in London. An example of this can be seen after the family return from dinner at Rajah's place. Stanley had disclosed the story of their dead child to his Swiss female friend, causing Sita to become very annoyed: 'How dare you talk to that tart about my private affairs?'(233). Upon hearing the word 'tart', Alice quickly makes an association with the 'Queen of Hearts' nursery rhyme and starts to recite it. She keeps on repeating the rhyme as she finds it 'impossible' to go to sleep, with her father's 'slurred' voice in the background. She recites the rhyme for a last time

before stepping near the window. Here we get a glimpse of her true feelings:

Condensation lay across the glass. She wrote her name on it. Then she drew a face. Then she added a bubble coming out of the mouth. Help, she shouted. She wasn't sure who could help her mother. The front door closing marked her father's absence at breakfast the next day (233).

Alice cannot help but indulge in a bit of child play in her life (by reciting the nursery rhyme). As her parents begin to argue more that night she keeps on repeating the nursery rhyme, perhaps as a means of shutting out their arguments. She probably realises the futility of the situation when she starts writing her name and drawing her face on the icy window. She appears to abandon the spoken word by her action of writing in the steam of her own breath. The child play element is evident in her drawing; however we can also ascertain her sense of helplessness in her drawing. Her family life is slowly disintegrating in front of her eyes as her father starts spending more time away from home.

In the absence of Stanley, Alice and her mother seem content with spending their time quietly:

At home, life settled into a rhythm. It was the happiest it had been for years. Conversation between Alice and her mother was desultory. Relieved to be let off the communication hook, they both sank gratefully into what passed for a companionable silence. (274)

This may indicate to us that the pain of being uprooted from Sri Lanka, as well as the pain of being abandoned by Stanley, has been unbearable to the two of them, that they would rather spend their days together in silence. While Alice pours her anguish into her art work, Sita appears to focus only on her sewing: 'In her mind the sound of her sewing machine had completely replaced the sound of the Indian Ocean' (274).

Since they are also facing financial difficulties due to Stanley's absence, Alice and Sita cannot afford to go on a holiday during the summer:

For both mother and daughter, keeping their heads above water took most of their effort, and when they saw an advertisement in the shop window for a holiday let beside the sea, they simultaneously looked away. They had no need to consult each other; the sea was part of an intractable past. (274)

The advertisement might have reminded them of their house by the sea in Sri Lanka. Their simultaneous action of looking away and not needing to talk about it may suggest a few issues. The two of them are not only determined to keep their expenses to the minimum but they also have experienced so much distress about leaving home that they do not wish to talk about things which remind them of the past.

Mala

Direct access to a particular character's thoughts and feelings is often denied as we

almost always get a version of the story which is filtered via someone else's point of view. As we shall see in this analysis, Mala's trauma, after suffering constant abuse at the hands of her father and betrayal by her loved ones, causes her to reject human communication. Instead, she appears to favour non-verbal communication in the form of animal sounds, an observation made by Tyler, her nurse. Mala's rejection of human communication, therefore, is a form of silence as no one can properly understand her except for Tyler. The story of Mala's past is mainly discovered via Tyler. We can generalise that events which occur in the present are seen through Tyler's eyes, while events which have occurred in the past are seen through the eyes of an unseen, omniscient narrator who knows everything about the other characters. The use of polyphony is necessary in this narrative which attempts to uncover secrets about Mala and her experience around a taboo subject. Mala herself is unable to talk about her traumatic experience, preferring to retreat into a world of silence and fantasy. As such, what we know about Mala is pieced together from what Tyler observes from Mala herself (99-100) and what he learns from other people (hearsay) like Cigarette Smoking Nana and Ambrose Mohanty and Otoh (102). This suggests to us that there is no direct access to Mala's thoughts but, rather, what we know from other people's recollection and observation. I shall return to Mala's inability to use language in a later section.

From the start, Mala is portrayed as an enigma to the locals of Lantanacamara. This can be ascertained when she first arrives at the almshouse in a black police vehicle. We are told by Tyler that the 'gossipmongers' among the nurses are too shocked to say anything when they learn about Mala's arrival (7). This indicates to us that Mala could be implicated in a very dark secret which is too horrible to be spoken about by the locals.

On Mala's first night at the almshouse, Tyler tries to get her to talk while he coaxes her to eat some soup. However, the old lady's response seems limited to staring and watching Tyler, with 'a slight change in her face' to show her wonder (16); nevertheless, Tyler's efforts finally pay off when the latter dozes off. When Mala causes a commotion in the middle of the night with her 'eerie' and 'mournful wailing' (17), as well as defecating in her room, the Sister in charge of the almshouse has no choice but to give Tyler the full responsibility to care for Mala. Thus starts what we can see as Tyler's close observation of Mala's pattern of communication: 'Miss Ramchandin made no sounds besides crying, moaning, wailing and sighing' (23). Tyler seems undeterred from talking to his patient even though he thinks she cannot speak. In his view, her eyes seem to communicate many things.

Her lack of human speech is compensated in other ways. While taking Mala out for an evening walk, Tyler discovers that his patient is capable of making animal sounds: 'She made no movement but I distinctly heard a perfect imitation of the parrots' calls' (23). Gradually, Tyler is able to make a record of sounds that he hears from Mala:

Days passed with her calling out, only loud enough for me to hear, perfect imitations of all the species of birds that congregated in the garden [...] I would catch her watching me ... as she did bird, cricket and frog calls as though she meant to entertain me. (24)

There is an unspoken bond between the two of them that makes Mala feel comfortable

enough to watch Tyler's reaction, and then to make animal sounds seemingly for the purpose of entertaining the nurse. After making these animal sounds, the old lady begins to mumble word-like sounds:

Just then Miss Ramchandin started mumbling. Jumbled, mumbled words came from her mouth [...] Slowly I made out individual words and then sentences. She was reciting over and over, a ditty that children sing and play games to:

Ole lady walk, ole lady fall.

Hit she belly. 'Lord!' she bawl.

Crick crack, all say oops!

Brick brack, break she back,

Le we go tief pom-er-ac.

Ole lady walk, ole lady fall.

Hit she belly.'Lord!' she bawl. (71)

Tyler is confident that one day he will be able to understand more things about Mala after the discovery of the old lady's ability to mumble words. Mala's communication is somewhat similar to the way little children talk, as Tyler describes her as laughing and waving to a bird flying nearby, all the while calling: 'Poh poh poh poh' (75). Tyler seems unprepared when Mala attempts to hold her first conversation by whispering:

'What? Did you say something, Miss Ramchandin?'

‘Asha? You know Asha?’ she whispered. Her voice was cracked but she had spoken.
‘Yes, yes. I know Asha. I mean, I know of her. I heard of her. But I don’t know her.’
She was mentioned in the rumours. No more was said of her than that she was the
other Ramchandin child, of no consequence because she had disappeared long, long
ago. (75)

Tyler, having spent some time with Mala, and witnessed his patient’s development, calls out to Asha Ramchandin (90) for the second time in the narrative with the hope that the latter would know that it is safe to return to the village. Tyler appears to be in despair when he witnesses Mala calling her pet cat ‘Pohpoh’ and ‘Asha’ interchangeably. Here, he seems to compare Mala’s vulnerable state of mind with Asha’s decision to run away from home:

I wonder at how many of us, feeling unsafe and unprotected, either end up running far away from everything we know and love, or staying and simply going mad. I have decided today that neither option is more or less noble than the other. They are merely different ways of coping, and we each must cope as best as we can. (90)

In this section, Tyler tries to rationalise Asha’s decision to leave as well as Mala’s decision to stay behind and risk going mad as a consequence. Tyler seems absorbed in talking about Mala to the faraway Asha, informing the latter that he does not ‘begrudge’ her decision to leave her elder sister (90). However, we know that Tyler is only involved

in a one-sided conversation with the reader or the audience. There is no way that Tyler's message can be disseminated to Asha as there are no responses on her part throughout the narrative.

While outsiders may view Mala as having a 'limited vocabulary', Tyler becomes confident enough to inform the reader that she is actually able to speak and her head is full of 'tales and thoughts' (99). Apparently, she trusts Tyler as she starts chattering only in the nurse's presence. Whenever someone else is around, she would immediately revert to her silent self (99). Tyler makes it a point to watch Mala and jots down notes when she starts her rambling; however from the narrative we find that the person watching is also being watched at the same time: 'When she saw me awaiting her next word and writing it down as soon as she uttered it, she drew nearer' (99). Mala's lack of response towards people she does not trust, as well as her inquisitive nature towards Tyler's recording of her utterances, show that she may not be as mad as the villagers have thought her to be.

The sudden arrival of Ambrose and Otoh Mohanty at the almshouse provides an opportunity for Tyler to learn more about Mala's history. Previously, Tyler recalls hearing the old lady mumbling Ambrose's name (100), as well as the mention of gramophone, spiders and snails (101). With the help of the two visitors, Tyler is able to fill in the blank details in his notes when he listens to Ambrose and Otoh relating stories featuring the 'very same' things which Mala has mentioned (102). Mala's tale is slowly put together, piece by piece, as Tyler introduces the second prologue: 'You will hear little more of me as I apply myself to the story of Mala Ramchandin, fashioning a single garment out of myriad parts...' (105).

Mala's non-verbal communication

Mala's behaviour at the almshouse can be seen as strange or uncivilised to people who ascribe to certain norms and conventions in their daily lives. Her silent behaviour and preference for animal sounds may create the impression that she is 'mad'; someone who exists on the periphery or the Other. Mala's descent into non-verbal communication, however, can be attributed to a terrible event which is described in Part 4 of the narrative. In other words, the narrative maintains a deliberate silence for a long time ; this approach is also evident in Roy's *God of Small Things*.

In Part 4, Mootoo describes Mala's traumatic experience of being continuously abused by her father Chandin and later, being abandoned by her lover Ambrose. The horrifying incident occurs after the two lovers are caught together in the house by an angry Chandin. What follows is a terrible struggle as Mala and Ambrose fight for their survival. When her father lies motionless after being hit by a heavy door, Mala is overcome with a deep shock. She sees Ambrose and calls out to him: 'Ambrose, don't go. Don't leave me, Ambrose. Please don't go' (228). However, Ambrose, who sees in Mala an 'unrecognisable wild creature' with a bloody face, decides to flee as he thinks that she has gone 'crazy' (228). Mala rushes to the verandah to look for him but he is nowhere to be seen. Mala suddenly recalls her father experiencing something similar many years before: 'She remembered her father clutching at the same banister, and felt herself lying on the verandah in that same position. Long ago. Today' (228). The realisation seems to hit her hard as she stops 'crying' and calls out: 'Asha? Aunt Lavinia? You there? Mama? Boyie?' (228). This later proves to be her final spoken utterance before she slowly

descends into a world of silence and isolation. Both her calls for help from Ambrose and from her family members and friends are met with silence. She keeps on looking and listening for signs that someone was nearby: 'Every few paces she stopped and listened for sounds of a buggy, her sister's voice, Ambrose returning, her father stirring' (228). Unfortunately, her waiting is in vain as no one is there to comfort her.

In the end, faced with the realisation that her loved ones have ultimately abandoned her, she seems intent on isolating herself from other people. We can see this from her action of building a wall to separate herself from her father's dead body:

She spent the evening intricately arranging these and every piece from the drawing room and kitchen [...] into a tight barricade from floor to ceiling. She worked until she had created an admirable wall that was almost impenetrable. It would be dangerous for anyone who attempted to dismantle it. (230)

We can see that Mala is beginning to withdraw herself from what can be called normative or civilised behaviour. Firstly, she has built the wall of furniture inside her house. Secondly, she refuses to spend her nights inside the house, probably due to the terrible incidents which have occurred: 'She never lit a lantern in that house again. Nor did she, since that day, pass a night inside its walls' (230).

As she has formally isolated herself from other people, her need to use human language slowly diminishes. Instead, she takes to spending her nights among the little animals and the fauna in the garden. Her rejection of human contact in favour of the company of the natural environment slowly manifests itself in what appears as Mala's

non-verbal communication:

In the phase just before Mala stopped using words, lexically shaped thoughts would sprawl across her mind, fractured here and there. The cracks would be filled with images. Soon the inverse happened. A sentence would be constructed primarily of images punctuated by only one or two verbalisations: a noun tentatively uttered in recognition, a descriptive word confirming a feeling or observation. (126)

Unlike usual human communication, Mala's communication seems to focus on images rather than sounds. The way the images are described as 'fractured' and 'cracks' can be attributed to the psychological and physical pain that she has endured as a result of the abuse. Mala's communication later deteriorates to only one or two sounds to indicate a sentence made up of images. Eventually, words seem inadequate for Mala to indicate her feelings as she seems to follow her bodily sensations: 'Every muscle of her body swelled, tingled, cringed or went numb in response to her surroundings – every fibre was sensitised in a way that words were unable to match or enhance' (127).

The way Mala utilises certain sounds in her daily life can be described as a rejection of the usual norms as accorded by so-called civilised people: 'She dredged and expelled phlegm [...] Cried and belched unabashedly. She coughed and sneezed and spat and wiped away mucus with no care for social graces...' (127). Since there is no one to advise her about her behaviour, Mala can do as she wishes. Her preference for making animal sounds further shows her affinity with the creatures in her garden, as well as her

abhorrence of the so-called? civilised way of life: ‘She started cooing, rasping, gargling – the sounds made by the pigeons on her roof’ (127).

Mala appears to show total disregard for the ways of the civilised. Her behaviour can perhaps be understood as a mockery of certain rules and regulations which govern the lives of people in society. After being abused by her father, who used to hold a very honourable position in the society,, as well as being looked down upon by members of the community, her abhorrence of society’s ways and graces is understandable. However, she does not completely forget her human communication, as she still has knowledge of the English language, and can demonstrate her usage of the language. This is evident in the scene involving the discovery of Chandin’s corpse by Otoh. As the police arrive to search her property (on the pretext of protecting her from harm), Mala turns the tables on them, speaking audibly in English: ‘You never had any business with my safety before...Why now for? You taking advantage of an ol’ lady, that is what you doing. Besides, you think I stupid or what. I know you can’t search people house without search papers’ (179). Despite her usual appearance as the village’s mad old woman, Mala surprises the villagers with her ability to communicate and her awareness of the law. As such, her preference to dwell in a world of silence, characterised by her non-verbal communication and involvement with animals, is nothing more than a way for her to escape from the trauma that she has experienced with humans.

Rahel and Estha

In *The God of Small Things*, events whether in the past or present are depicted from the viewpoint of a third-person omniscient narrator who knows every little secret about the

characters. The characters themselves do not talk about their plight; everything is seen and described through the observations of the omniscient narrator. Interestingly, the narrator chooses not to tell the reader every aspect of the story all at once ; instead, the story is being told in a non-linear, indirect way.

In the first chapter, the reader is introduced to Rahel, who arrives home from in the the United States. The first person Rahel comes across upon her arrival at the family home is her grand aunt Baby Kochamma. Roy depicts Baby Kochamma as beaming with an air of ‘triumph’ when she discovers that after the ‘twenty-three years’ (9) of separation, Estha has not ‘spoken’ (20) to Rahel after her arrival at the family home.

The ex-nun’s negative attitude towards Estha and Rahel suggests that there is some friction between the family members. There is an uneasy silence at home with the arrival of Rahel, and via Roy’s description, we find that Baby Kochamma appears to be a little afraid of her niece:

The silence sat between grand-niece and baby grand aunt like a third person. A stranger. Swollen. Noxious. Baby Kochamma reminded herself to lock her bedroom door at night. She tried to think of something to say.

‘How d’you like my bob?’ (21)

Roy draws our attention to Rahel’s grand aunt in the first chapter, with her dyed hair and make-up, which seem to be incongruent with her position as an ex-nun. Rahel herself appears to view Baby Kochamma’s appearance with a feeling of disgust as can be ascertained from her inner thoughts: ‘*She’s living her life backwards*’ (22, author’s italics). She does not say it out loud, perhaps out of respect for an elder person.

There is a repeated emphasis on Baby Kochamma's distrust and also fear of Rahel and her twin Estha. The elderly lady seems to be disturbed by the twins' 'eerie stealth' and ability to remain very quiet and still. She is 'intimidated' (29) by Rahel's quietness as her voice seems shrill and faltering as she speaks to her grand niece. As the narrative eventually reveals, Baby Kochamma was partly responsible for separating Rahel from her twin Estha, as well as exposing the illicit affair of Ammu's relationship with Velutha. The apprehension on Baby Kochamma's part could be due to her fear that the twins, who are now adults, will finally find out and probably voice out about her involvement in separating them, and subsequently the disposing of Velutha. In Baby Kochamma's view, it is a hidden truth that cannot be revealed.

Ammu's death during the twins' teenage years has a further negative impact on Rahel's life, causing her to drift 'from school to school' (15). She is 'largely ignored' by her uncle and her grandmother, who provide the money for her food and education but do not show their love and 'concern' (15). The loss of Ammu, as well as the 'neglect'(17) from her relatives, ultimately cause her to become a reclusive and problematic person. As there is nobody to advise her on her life choices, Rahel faces a difficult time at school and in college. She is expelled from school for smoking and setting fire to the headmistress' hair bun (17). She seems to show an 'indifference' and 'waywardness' (17) which caused her college mates and lecturers to be wary of her.

As for Estha, although he has always been a 'quiet' person, he seems to have 'stopped talking' (10) altogether. It is as if something has happened which causes him to 'run out of conversation' (10), with nothing else to say. One probable reason for his silence could be the pain of being separated from his mother and Rahel. Another reason

could be his inability to shake off the memory of, and guilt about, turning in Velutha, the twins' childhood friend, to the police:

[...] The memory of a swollen face and a smashed, upside-down smile [...] Of a bloodshot eye that had opened, wandered and then fixed its gaze on him. Estha. And what had Estha done? He had looked into that beloved face and said: Yes.

Yes, it was him. (32, author's italics)

The effect of the separation, as well as his immense guilt about Velutha's death, have caused Estha to become reclusive and silent. Roy draws the adult Estha as someone who refrains from saying anything, unlike his former childhood self. Estha's silent behaviour is eagerly reported by Baby Kochamma to Rahel:

'Watch!' Baby Kochamma said. She seemed excited. 'He'll walk *straight* to his room and wash his clothes. He's very overclean... he won't say a *word!*'

[...] Estha's hair was plastered down in clumps, like the inverted petals of a flower.

[...] He walked to his room.

A glaring halo appeared around Baby Kochamma's head. 'See?' she said. (90; author's italics)

Estha's obsession with cleanliness, reflected in the extremely tidy condition of his bedroom, is described as the 'only positive sign of volition' (91) from him. His

pre-occupation with cleanliness [acts as a reminder of] his experience of being sexually molested by the Orangedrink Lemondrink man. Roy describes how, after the incident, the abused and distressed Estha has to return to the theatre, watching ‘clean white children’ (105) in *The Sound of Music*, while at the same time he feels ‘vomity’ (107) about the tragedy. His obsession with cleanliness could be considered as an expression of his willingness to make his own decisions.

There is much emphasis on the twins’ adult appearance as they have not seen each other for a long time. Estha is described as ‘smooth’, ‘slim’ and ‘muscular’ (91), while Rahel is depicted as resembling their mother at ‘first glance’, with a ‘longer’, ‘angular’ (92) build. In Natov’s view, the ‘two-egg’ twins have evolved distinctly into different people with different genders, but they still connect ‘primally’ (2014:192), seemingly sharing a ‘dream’ world. This means that they can still read each other’s ‘inner thoughts’ as well as undergo each other’s ‘bodily experiences’.

Roy describes the adult Rahel’s private encounter with Estha (an event taking place in the latter’s room on one particular day) in several short scenes throughout the narrative (92, 191, 295, 299, 327). One probable reason for this is to slowly build up the tension for the final outcome of the encounter. After their long separation, we do not know what to expect from them, especially since they are now ‘as old as Ammu’ (3) when she passed away. In fact, the way the author depicts Rahel watching her grown-up twin is rather disturbing:

Rahel watched Estha with the curiosity of a mother watching her wet child. A

sister a brother. A woman a man. A twin a twin.

She flew these several kites at once.

He was a naked stranger met in a chance encounter. He was the one that she had known before Life began. The one who had once led her (swimming) through their lovely mother's cunt. (93)

Rahel seems amazed to see how Estha has grown into a young man with a 'sculpted', 'taut' body (93). From the author's description of Rahel's feelings and how Rahel vacillates between feeling like a 'sister' to a 'woman' and back to feeling like a 'twin', we can sense that Rahel seems confused about her emotions. There is a sexual undercurrent to her feelings as suggested by the words 'naked' and 'cunt', which carry heavy sexual connotations.

The culmination of the scene is described many pages later, where Rahel and Estha appear to share an intimate moment:

TWENTY-THREE YEARS LATER, Rahel, dark woman in a yellow T-shirt, turns to Estha in the dark.

[...] She whispers.

She moves her mouth.

Their beautiful mother's mouth.

Estha, sitting very straight, waiting to be arrested, takes his fingers to it. To touch the words it makes. To keep the whisper. His fingers follow the shape of it. The touch of teeth. His hand is held and kissed. (327)

Rahel's and Estha's actions in this scene seem to suggest that the twins are starting a sexual relationship. According to religious and social laws, such a relationship is prohibited between siblings. As stated by Natov : 'The strange love that restores the twins to each other, the incest that marks their banishment from the larger world, underscores both the impossibility of inclusion in the macrocosm and a kind of fulfilment in the microcosm'(202). The twins may have found comfort in each other's presence, but the manner in which they re-connect with each other after 23 years would probably cause them to be banished from their immediate community.

Roy's portrayal of Estha as someone who is 'waiting to be arrested' signifies that he probably feels that it is wrong to touch Rahel in such a manner; nonetheless, he goes ahead to touch her. However, as Estha and Rahel have experienced many punishments in life, inflicted by laws which are unsympathetic towards their status as inter-caste children, perhaps it is also understandable that now, the adult twins have the tendency to become rebellious and disobey the social laws. What occurs next in the text, as explained by the narrator, indicates a serious situation : 'There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that (in Mammachi's book) would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings' (328). This informs us that the twins' feelings towards each other cannot be defined in simple terms, as what they have dared to commit is an act of taboo, an act which is indescribable in any society.

The aftermath of their contact seems to end on a sad note for the twins:

Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like

stacked spoons. Only that there was a snuffling in the hollows at the base of a lovely throat. Only that a hard honey-coloured shoulder had a semi-circle of teethmarks on it. Only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief. (328)

Their contact with each other could probably be understood as an attempt by Rahel to heal Estha from the pain of missing their mother Ammu ; it could also be a way provide a way for him to wash away his guilt at betraying Velutha. Estha seems to have found Ammu in Rahel after being deprived of his mother's love. The 'teethmarks' on someone's shoulder perhaps carry a certain significance, as Rahel used to suck her mother's stomach and leave red marks on her skin when she was little (221). In the scene above, the 'teethmarks' draw our attention to Rahel's act of biting her brother, in their attempt to make a connection with their past. The scene can perhaps be described as a tender moment as the twins recall fond memories of Ammu. Nonetheless, the two still cannot talk about the tragedy that happened to them several years ago. Their sadness appears to be obstructed inside, unreleased. The only probable way for them to express their pain and loss is to reconnect with each other physically. This brings us to the narrator's description of the twins' 'hideous grief', which indicates that their sadness and unhappiness have turned into something ugly, even grotesque, due to the sexual undercurrents in the way they connect with each other.

CONCLUSION

The analysis in this chapter looked at representations of characters who choose to

remain silent in the four texts analysed. While silence is usually seen as the failure to say something or to communicate, and may sometimes be thought of as a weakness, this chapter aimed to show that silence has been utilised as a strategy by particular characters in the texts. The characters examined in this chapter have not entirely lost their communicative ability; indeed, there are instances where the authors depict them as uttering certain sounds and words. However, in many parts of the narrative, the characters appear to refuse to communicate, a situation which critics have referred to as voluntary silence or strategic silence. One of the main characters who displays a tendency to remain silent is Nazneen. She appears as a passive wife in front of her husband, Chanu, in order not to create problems at home. I specifically categorised Nazneen's character as the patient wife in this chapter as she has endured her husband's verbose words for many years. It is at the end when she finally succeeds as a businesswoman that he praises her and acknowledges her sacrifice for the family. Other key characters analysed in this chapter include Mala, the so-called madwoman in *Cereus Blooms*, Sita, Alice's mother who suffered a traumatic childbirth in *Brixton Beach* and Alice herself, and not forgetting Rahel and Estha, the child characters in *God of Small Things*. I decided to categorise these characters under a special heading as individuals traumatised into silence. The pain and suffering experienced by both Sita and Mala can be described as bringing harm to the two characters' mental faculties, causing them to become reticent or refuse to communicate using human language. In the case of Alice, Rahel and Estha, these children have also been silenced after witnessing violence occurring in their respective communities.

CHAPTER 5

WOMEN WHO ARE COMPLICIT IN SILENCING OTHER WOMEN

This chapter will look at female characters who are seen as being complicit in silencing other women in the selected novels, although they themselves have been victimised by certain patriarchal aspects in their own lives. From my analysis, a few female characters in my corpus tend to stand out due to their complicity in perpetuating patriarchy among their family members and neighbours, instead of liberating them from these barriers.

Patriarchy is defined by Walby as ‘a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women’ (20). Patriarchy is understood more widely (Sultana, 3) as ‘the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance’ over the female family members and also the younger family members and the perpetuation of male domination over women in society.

Additionally, Mann defines a patriarchal society as follows:

A patriarchal society is one in which power is held by male heads of households. There is also clear separation between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ spheres of life. In the ‘private’ sphere of the household, the patriarch enjoys arbitrary power over all junior males, all females and all children. In the ‘public’ sphere, power is shared between male patriarchy

according to whatever other principles of stratification operate. No female holds any formal public position of economic, ideological, military or political power. Indeed, females are not allowed into this 'public' realm of power. Whereas many, perhaps most, men expect to be patriarchs at some point in their life cycles, no women hold formal power. Within the household they may influence their male patriarch informally, but this is their only access to power. Contained within patriarchy are two fundamental nuclei of stratification: the household/family/lineage and the dominance of the male gender. These coexist in any real society with social classes and other stratification groups (137).

From the quotation above, we know that women may have some influence over their male relatives ; however, this could be the only area in which they can exercise their power. In general, women are not allowed or encouraged to hold power within a formal structure. This situation is certainly evident in Roy's narrative, where the author describes Pappachi as becoming very violent when Mammachi starts her pickle business :

He slouched about the compound in his immaculately tailored suits . . . watching Mammachi supervise the buying, the weighing, the salting and drying of limes and tender mangoes. Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren't new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place. (47)

The manner in which Pappachi constantly checks on his wife, as well as the violence that

he inflicts on her, indicate a certain displeasure and jealousy on his part. Perhaps he feels jealous as Mammachi has encroached on what he considers as his public 'realm' of power - her position as the manager or supervisor of the pickle business.

As put forward by Simone de Beauvoir :

Women lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit which can stand face to face with the correlative unit. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own, and they have no such solidarity of work and interest as that of the proletariat...They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, house work, economic condition, and social standing to certain men -fathers of husbands -more firmly than they are to other women (19)

In patriarchal societies, the women in the family are identified through their ties with their menfolk. If a woman attempts to break free from a male relation, she will often find herself identified by her relationship to another male relation. In Roy's narrative, as Ammu has suffered domestic abuse at the hands of Pappachi and her ex-husband, she shows her defiance by refusing to give a surname to her children: 'For the time being they had no surname because Ammu was considering reverting to her maiden name, though she said that choosing between her husband's name and her father's name didn't give a woman much of a choice' (36-37). Ammu's opinion as related by the narrator informs us of the futility of women trying to break away from certain patriarchal structures (like marriage and family) which tended to define the women's place in the society.

In classic patriarchy, subordination to men is offset by control which older women have over younger women (Kandiyoti,279). This means that some women also prescribe to patriarchy in the way they control younger females. In terms of male domination, some particular examples are present in the novels which I have analysed, for example, Pappachi's abuse of his wife and child, and also Chandin's abuse of his children. However, there are also examples in the corpus in which the female characters assert their power over other women, not least in the way older women control younger women. These characters tend to have an overbearing personality, as shown by their verbal utterances and actions of mocking and threatening other female characters, whether directly or indirectly. In particular, the dominant female characters in my corpus who appear to ridicule other women continuously are Mammachi and Baby Kochamma in Roy's *God of Small Things* .

In classic patriarchy (Kandiyoti,279), older women have access to the only type of labour power they can control, and to old-age security, via their married sons. As sons can be considered a woman's most critical resource, it is imperative for the mother to ensure life-long loyalty from her male offspring. Such examples of favouritism towards the male heir can indeed be seen in Mammachi's indulgent way of sewing clothes and cooking food for the grown-up Chacko. In the case of Mrs Islam, which will be discussed later in the chapter, her sons are her main assistants and they each have their share of her money-lending business empire, something which the matriarch has planned to ensure their life-long loyalty.

Mammachi

The gender bias towards the male offspring is certainly apparent in Roy's narrative. In the case of Chacko, Mammachi tries to help him by pawning her jewellery despite his secret marriage to an English girl, and the fact that he sends money to England. However, the amount is never 'enough' (248). The family believes that it is their duty to help a male heir, by all means, but a female child is forced to fend for herself. For example, girls are denied an opportunity for further education, as indicated by Pappachi's insistence that a college education 'was an unnecessary expense for a girl' (38). Due to this old-fashioned view, Ammu has to stay at home and wait for marriage proposals.

As we have seen before, Mammachi is a victim of domestic violence (inflicted by Pappachi), but she herself condones certain patriarchal attitudes, which are evident in her favouritism towards Chacko. One such example of her favouritism can be ascertained in the description of her overbearing affection for Chacko :

The day that Chacko prevented Pappachi from beating her (and Pappachi had murdered his chair instead), Mammachi packed her wifely luggage and committed it to Chacko's care. From then onwards he became the repository of all her womanly feelings. Her man. Her only love. (168)

Indirectly, her favouritism towards her only son causes the family to dismiss Ammu as one of the workers, and not as one of the heirs to the pickle business. This is evident from Roy's description of the enterprise:

[...] Chacko had it registered as a partnership and informed Mammachi that she was the sleeping partner [...] Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as *my* factory, *my* pineapples, *my* pickles. Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property. (57)

From the above quotation, we get the impression that after the death of Pappachi, Mammachi seems to have transferred her whole trust to Chacko to the point that she lets him manage the company that she started with her own funds. However, at the same time, she appears to keep quiet about Ammu's share in the company, which indicates to us her double standards regarding her own children.

In the narrative, Mammachi is described as a serene, almost aristocratic old woman in a 'starched' sari with 'diamond' and 'ruby' rings who plays violin for her visitors (166). This description indicates a regal, upper-class personality for the matriarch. It might also be argued that the description also prepares the readers for a character who is class-conscious. Mammachi appears to be someone who thinks highly of herself and her family and she has a secret habit of ranking other people around her, usually putting them in a position much lower than her in the social hierarchy. Roy describes how Mammachi would boast about her family's credentials during weddings in Kottayam: 'The bride's maternal grandfather was my father's carpenter. Kunjukutty Eapen? His great grandmother's sister was just a midwife in Trivandrum. My husband's family used to own this whole hill' (168). Indirectly, Mammachi's boast about her family would put an end to other people's conversation, thereby silencing them and making them aware of

the family's credentials as well as the class difference between them.

Another example of this would be the case of Margaret Kochamma, her ex-daughter-in-law. Roy describes the matriarch as secretly thinking: 'Mammachi had never met Margaret Kochamma. But she despised her anyway. *Shopkeeper's daughter* was how Margaret Kochamma was filed away in Mammachi's mind' (167). The way Roy describes Mammachi's train of thought indicates her seemingly exalted position compared to Margaret's origin as the daughter of working-class parents.

This particular obsession with class differences is also emphasised with Mammachi's action of secretly providing money to Chacko's girlfriends: 'The arrangement suited Mammachi, because in her mind, a fee *clarified* things. Disjuncted sex from love. Needs from feelings' (169). In other words, the involvement of the village girls is perfectly valid in her mind as they seem to offer some sort of service which can be justified by monetary payments. This situation points towards a certain feudalistic thinking on Mammachi's part as the lower classes always had to work for a fee for their land owners or masters. Indirectly, such a payment could also be considered as a sort of bribe, to keep the village girls silent, as sexual relations between unmarried men and women are still generally frowned upon in Eastern communities.

Mammachi's preoccupation with class differences is further highlighted during Margaret Kochamma's visit. As the matriarch views Margaret as being of a much lower status than her family, she would slip money into Margaret's dresses in the laundry basket. This is due to the secret view in Mammachi's mind that Margaret is 'just another whore' like Chacko's other mistresses. Mammachi herself knows that Margaret is oblivious to the scheme but she nonetheless considers the latter's silence as an 'acceptance of

payment' for the sexual relationship with Chacko (169).

It is thus fitting when Binayak Roy comments on the matriarch: "Mammachi is another Big Woman who deifies her son Chacko and despises her daughter Ammu. When Chacko stops Pappachi's beating of Mammachi, his action has unexpected consequences: "From then onwards he became the repository of all [Mammachi's] womanly feelings. Her Man. Her only Love" (168). Roy also mentions that Ammu can sense with a womanly instinct "the undercurrent of sexual jealousy that emanated from Mammachi" (329) due to the presence of Chacko's British wife, Margaret.

Mammachi maintains a quiet and serene persona throughout her life, a role which requires her to appear dignified at all times, especially when appearing in public. However, towards the end, when the silence is broken and the secret is finally out, she seems to have lost 'control' and acts in unpredictable ways. This is most evident when Mammachi discovers the extent of the affair between Velutha and Ammu, a secret revealed by Vellya Paapen, Velutha's father. In a reversal of society's boundaries, in which 'an Untouchable was expecting not to be touched' (256), we can therefore imagine Mammachi's utter rage as the supposedly blind, old and frail woman, pushes Vellya Paapen with 'all her strength' causing him to fall in the wet mud. Not content with that, Mammachi starts to call him obscenities in the presence of Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria, the cook. Roy describes the scene in which Mammachi hurls her abuse on Vellya Paapen:

Baby Kochamma, walking past the kitchen, heard the commotion. She found Mammachi spitting into the rain, THOO! THOO! THOO! THOO! and Vellya Paapen

lying in the slush, wet, weeping, grovelling. Offering to kill his son. To tear him limb from limb. (256)

This particular scene shows to us the extent of Mammachi's behaviour as it reveals another side of her personality which has been unseen and unheard all these years. After finding out about the affair between Ammu and the 'filthy coolie' (257), her usual serene persona is like a mask waiting to be taken off as she starts to voice her anger and all sorts of obscenities. Mammachi's act of abusing Vellya Paapen to the point of calling him 'drunken Paravan liar' (256) could be described as a silencing act, and the abuse itself seems to reduce Vellya to something almost inhuman with his vow of killing his own son.

. While Mammachi may have kept silent about Chacko's dalliances with the village girls, dismissing the affairs as fulfilling 'Man's Needs', she is also the one who becomes obsessively livid with 'rage' when the secret is out about Velutha and Ammu. As Amitabh Roy argues: "It is a pity that she submits in the name of decency and honour to the very sexist, casteist and communal prejudices that have stood in her way and denied fulfilment to her" (62). Mammachi's actions of belittling and abusing other people due to class and caste differences are indeed contradictory with her background of experiencing domestic abuse herself.

After the separation of Estha and Rahel, we can see how Mammachi further strives to silence her own daughter rather than help the latter to build a new life. This is evident in the scene where Ammu comes to the family home for dinner. She herself has not been in good health after the tragedy that struck the family, and appears as a 'swollen with cortisone, moonfaced' (160) shadow of her old vivacious self:

[...] Ammu smiled at the silence around the table as she picked fried emperor fish off the bone. She said she felt like a road sign with birds shitting on her. She had an odd, feverish glitter in her eyes.

Mammachi asked if she'd been drinking and suggested that she visit Rahel as seldom as possible.

Ammu got up from the table and left without saying a word. Not even goodbye.

'Go and see her off,' Chacko said to Rahel. (161)

Ammu's action of leaving without saying goodbye to her own family probably indicates how Mammachi has succeeded in silencing her daughter into oblivion. Mammachi's warning for her to spend less time with Rahel shows the former's rejection of her own daughter. Things seem to get worse for Ammu, as emphasised by Roy a few sentences later. When Ammu dies of asthma, her death is described in terms that once again evoke silence: 'the faraway man who lived in her chest had stopped shouting' (162). Not only is Ammu marginalised during her lifetime; she is also marginalised after her death as the church refuses to bury her. Rahel and Chacko are forced to take her body to the crematorium, seemingly a place for 'People who died with nobody to lie at the back of them and talk to them' (162), symbolising a final act of silencing Ammu. Ammu's body, including her 'teeth' and 'bones', is cremated into 'ashes' (163), instead of being buried in the graveyard with other corpses; an act which symbolises her obliteration into nothingness.

Baby Kochamma

In her article ‘Power Relationships in *The God of Small Things*’, Navarro-Tejero points out that: “The first generation of women in the novel give extreme importance to patriarchal social norms, indeed they succumb to them” (105). The first generation in the family most probably refers to Mammachi and Baby Kochamma and we can see how the two of them seem to adhere fiercely to the old traditions and ways. In Mammachi’s case, this is evident from her actions towards Pappachi, and how she does not fight back despite being her husband’s punching-bag. As for Baby Kochamma, we can ascertain that she upholds particular social norms, although there are instances in the narrative which show her rebelling in small ways. Examples of this will be discussed below.

In the narrative, Baby Kochamma’s obsession with a Jesuit priest, Father Mulligan causes her to try various ways to attract his attention. When her efforts seem to be unfruitful, she then decides to become a Roman Catholic, an act which is described as defying ‘her father’s wishes’ (24). Her conversion to Catholicism shows that she is rejecting her family heritage as Syrian Christians, a unique branch of Christian faith. This action can be described as Baby Kochamma’s way of showing rebellion towards the patriarchal structure dominant in the community.

However, when she becomes unhappy during her time at the convent, she resorts to writing to her parents using a code name, so that certain people will not know about her problems. Roy depicts Baby Kochamma as feeling ‘glad’ (25) when her father finally arrives to escort her home. Nevertheless, the ex-nun seems adamant that she would not ‘reconvert’ to the Syrian Christian church (26). This probably can be described as her second act of rebellion. In such an insular community, Baby Kochamma’s ‘stubborn’ (24) decision to remain a Catholic means that she will probably be ‘left on the shelf’ due to her

‘difference’ from other Syrian Christians: ‘Reverend Ipe realised that his daughter had by now developed a ‘reputation’ and was unlikely to find a husband.’ (26). The subject of Baby Kochamma remaining a spinster is not discussed openly by her parents as it can be an embarrassing subject to the family. As a means to further cover up the embarrassment, Reverend Ipe decides to send his daughter to the United States to study.

Despite these two acts of rebellion by her (conversion to Roman Catholicism and refusal to reconvert), Baby Kochamma seems unfazed. She seems to think that her position as an ex-nun allows her a higher moral ground to make judgements on other people. This can be seen from Roy’s portrayal of her as someone who is always picking on other people’s mistakes, especially in the case of Ammu and the twins. Roy describes how Baby Kochamma appears ‘delighted’ (20) when Estha does not speak to Rahel in their first meeting after all those years:

‘I told you, didn’t I?’ she said to Rahel. ‘What did you expect? Special treatment? He’s lost his mind, I’m telling you! He doesn’t *recognise* people any more! What did you think?’

Rahel said nothing (21)

Baby Kochamma seems eager to equate Estha’s silence with madness, as we can ascertain from her excited tone of voice. This is because she has always been resentful of the happiness of Ammu and her children. In her view, Ammu is someone who has quarrelled with ‘fate’ by looking for a life partner, unlike herself, who, in her own opinion, has learnt to ‘graciously’ accept her ‘Man-less’ (45) fate. She also dislikes the twins as she considers

them ‘doomed, fatherless waifs’ (45). As such, we can see various instances in the text where Baby Kochamma appears to mock and ridicule the three, causing problems and further silencing them.

One particular instance occurs when Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma arrive from London at the airport. Earlier, the twins were reminded that they need to behave well for their cousin as ‘Ambassadors of India’ (139). However, the two get into a fight over a piece of curtain at the arrival hall and Ammu seems embarrassed by their behaviour. She scolds them, but Baby Kochamma is dissatisfied with the twins’ responses: ‘It’s useless [...] They are sly. They’re uncouth. Deceitful. They’re growing wild. You can’t manage them’ (149). Even when Ammu has finished disciplining the twins, Baby Kochamma still wants to cause problems for them with her comment: ‘What Ambassadors and a half you’ve been!’ (149). We can see that she belittles Ammu’s efforts at raising the children with her description of the twins as unmanageable and wild and she seems adamant that the children should receive a harsher punishment.

The ex-nun is very proud of her Catholic Convent upbringing, and seems keen to give an English-language education to the twins. The scene below, which occurs a few weeks before Sophie Mol’s arrival, shows her aggressive behaviour as she threatens to punish the children if they do not speak English:

That whole week Baby Kochamma eavesdropped relentlessly on the twins’ private conversations, and whenever she caught them speaking in Malayalam, she levied a small fine which was deducted at source. From their pocket money. She made them write lines – ‘impositions’ she called them – *I will always speak in*

English, I will always speak in English. A hundred times each. (36, author's italics)

Indirectly, this particular scene also informs us of the elite status of the English language at the expense of the subjugation of the vernacular tongue. The twins are not only punished by their grand aunt by having to pay a small fine for speaking in Malayalam, but they are also required to repeatedly write reminders to speak in English. The twins' use of the Malayalam language is looked down upon by their grand aunt and it is thus silenced in favour of the coloniser's language.

The ex-nun also harbours contempt for Velutha, the Untouchable coolie/handyman. This is evident after she is embarrassed by a group of Communists when the family car is stopped during the Communist Party march. Using Rahel's evidence of seeing Velutha earlier in the procession, Baby Kochamma tries to paint the handyman in a negative light for the benefit of Chacko, Velutha's employer: 'If he starts this union business in the factory...I've noticed some signs, some rudeness, some ingratitude...' (81). However, her warning falls on deaf ears as 'nobody' (81) seems to listen to her. It is after this incident that Baby Kochamma is depicted as slowly, stealthily building up her case against Velutha:

In the days that followed, Baby Kochamma focused all her fury at her public humiliation on Velutha. She sharpened it like a pencil. In her mind he grew to represent the march. And the man who had forced her to wave the Marxist Party flag. (82)

In Baby Kochamma's view, Velutha represents an easier and closer target for her anger due to his closeness to the twins and his position as a worker in the family business. She seems adamant that the handyman should know his place as a person from a much lower caste as compared to the high status held by the Ipe family. She warns Rahel in front of the family and their English visitors to stop being 'over-familiar' with Velutha (184). In Baby Kochamma's view, Velutha will one day prove to be the family's 'Nemesis' and the cause of their downfall. At the same time, she keeps on dropping hints to Mammachi about Velutha's alleged involvement in the Communist Party march.

When the ex-nun discovers the secret transgression between Velutha and Ammu as conveyed via Kochu Maria, who overhears it from Vellya Paapen, she quickly realises how she might exploit the situation:

She saw it as God's Way of punishing Ammu for her sins and simultaneously avenging her (Baby Kochamma's) humiliation at the hands of Velutha and the men in the march – the *Modalali Mariakutty* taunts, the forced flag-waving. She set sail at once. A ship of goodness ploughing through a sea of sin. (257, author's italics)

Baby Kochamma's self-righteous attitude and immense dislike for Ammu (for marrying outside her community and faith) and Velutha (for his brazen attitude, despite his Untouchable status) compel her to manipulate the issue into something more horrible. She attempts to pour fire on Mamachi's anger by her gesture of shuddering, as if she has

to swallow something horrible, and commenting on Ammu's illicit affair: '*How could she stand the smell? Haven't you noticed? They have a particular smell, these Paravans*' (257, author's italics). Baby Kochamma takes it upon herself to make a 'Plan' (258) to save the family reputation from being 'completely ruined' (257).

To free herself from the charge of making a false police report, the ex-nun decides to persuade the children to identify Velutha as their 'abductor' (315). Roy depicts Baby Kochamma as being fearful that her lie would be found out. In what appears to be a desperate moment, she relies on her self-righteous attitude in order to ensure that she does the correct thing, without bringing any harm on herself:

Baby Kochamma wiped her shining sweaty face. She stretched her neck, looking up at the ceiling in order to wipe the sweat from crevices between her rolls of neckfat with the end of her pallu. She kissed her crucifix.

Hail Mary, full of grace...

The words of the prayer deserted her. (315, author's italics)

This scene informs us that though she appears as a religious woman, she is actually a scheming, manipulative character. She uses the Lord's name in vain in her plan to further silence and obliterate Velutha.

Baby Kochamma warns the children that they and also Ammu will go to jail for their involvement in the boat accident, causing the death of Sophie Mol. However, she also offers them a solution to save their mother from the 'humiliation' and 'suffering' (319) that they have caused. The ex-nun suggests to the children that they could identify

Velutha as their abductor. The helpless children seem to have been silenced into submitting to Baby Kochamma's orders:

'The thing is [...] what's done is done. The Inspector says he's going to die anyway. So it won't really matter to him what the police think. What matters is whether you want to go to jail and make Ammu go to jail because of *you*. It's up to you to decide that.' (318, author's italics)

Baby Kochamma's scare tactic works on the twins as they are forced to make up their minds to save their mother. Estha is later chosen by his grand aunt to identify Velutha as the perpetrator in Sophie Mol's case. The badly injured Velutha is depicted as only waiting for his final moments:

One of the policemen prodded Velutha with his foot. There was no response. Inspector Thomas Mathew squatted on his haunches and raked his Jeep key across the sole of Velutha's foot. Swollen eyes opened. Wandered.

[...] The inspector asked his questions. Estha's mouth said Yes.

Childhood tiptoed out.

Silence slid in like a bolt.

Someone switched off the light and Velutha disappeared. (320)

The only voice heard in this scene is Estha's short affirmative reply. There is no chance for Velutha to voice his protest. A deadly silence seems to signal that his end is near. With

a flick of a switch, he seems to be obliterated into nothingness. Everything seems to be quick and abrupt, suggesting that Velutha has been silenced and disposed of without much thought and care from the authorities.

However, the ex-nun becomes ‘terrified’ (321) when she discovers that Ammu has gone to the police station to rectify the situation. Ammu’s action indicates that she is not ashamed to ‘publicly admit’ (321) to her relationship with Velutha, something Baby Kochamma has never thought would happen. The latter realises that she could be sitting on shaky ground, and this feeling is compounded by her fear that the case would be ‘reopened’ or that Velutha’s Communist Party members would incite the family factory workers to stop coming to work. She realises that Ammu needs to be silenced before much worse things happen:

She gnawed like a rat into the godown of Chacko’s grief. Within its walls she planted an easy, accessible target for his insane anger. It wasn’t hard for her to portray Ammu as the person actually responsible for Sophie Mol’s death. Ammu and her two-egg twins. (322)

Roy uses the simile ‘like a rat’ to describe how Baby Kochamma uses her dirty and ruthless manipulative skills to paint Ammu as the guilty party in front of Chacko. The ex-nun uses Chacko’s anger and makes an appeal via his power as the patriarch of the family to make Ammu ‘pack her bags and leave’ and Estha ‘Returned’ to his father (322). As a punishment, Ammu is forced to spend her final days away from her children and later dies alone in a cheap hotel. By subverting the truth, Baby Kochamma has fulfilled

her role as moral police by making Ammu pay for her past and present sins. As for Ammu's lover Velutha, he is forced to pay for his transgression by death at the hands of the police. Ammu and Velutha are not only marginalised during their lifetime, but also in their final days. Via Baby Kochamma's intervention, Ammu and Velutha's voices and existence appear to be silenced and obliterated.

The actions and reactions of Mammachi and Baby Kochamma in the narrative provide us with different views of women's collusion with patriarchy. As mentioned by Needham (390), "Roy does not present subordination as a stable, unproblematic condition from which resistance, necessarily, proceeds. Instead, in mapping varying degrees of rebellion and defiance against, and collusion with the dominant." We have observed in the narrative how certain patriarchal structures have been so deeply ingrained in Mammachi's mind that she silently allows her son Chacko to get away with a few wrongdoings, some of which would cause a furore in the community. One particular case would be his sexual exploits with the village girls. Baby Kochamma does not seem pleased with this issue and when she mentions this to Mammachi, the latter appears 'tense' and 'tight-lipped'. This informs us that the matriarch knows that Chacko's dalliances would cause distress to the family if the secret was revealed. On the other hand, she also seems to be supportive of the affairs, as indicated by her reply: 'He can't help having a Man's needs' (168). Roy later describes how Baby Kochamma seems to agree with 'the explanation', which rather contradicts her convent upbringing. Not only that, Mammachi has planned a separate entrance for Chacko's room so that the village girls can enter silently without going through the main house. All these point towards some female characters' tendency to collude with patriarchy when it benefits certain aspects of

their lives.

Mrs Islam

Another example of a female character who silences other females is Mrs Islam, the matriarch and moneylender in Ali's *Brick Lane*. Nazneen's first meeting with Mrs Islam perhaps can be described as the young lady's introduction into the Bangladeshi ladies' gossip circle. Mrs Islam is characterised as someone who is anxious to tell stories about other people, as she barges straight into the flat: 'No one is saying it to his face [...] but everyone is saying it behind his back. I don't like that kind of gossip' (26). We can sense the irony in Mrs Islam's words as she pretends as if she is not interested in what people say about that person; in reality, however, she seems eager to describe her story of what actually occurred. While the other ladies seem to speculate about what is happening in the community, Mrs Islam appears to be telling stories about other people confidently, with words dropping from her mouth 'like bullets'(29). Her word is the ultimate law as everyone seems to agree with what she says:

'And at sixteen floors up, if you decide to jump, then there's the end to it.' Mrs Islam extracted a handkerchief and wiped away a little sweat from her hairline. Just looking at her made Nazneen unbearably hot.

'There's no chance of ending up a vegetable, if you jump from that high,' agreed Razia. (27)

In the scene above, Mrs Islam can be considered as having the last word about the latest gossip, while the other ladies seem to be silenced. In particular, Mrs Islam has very strong views about conforming to societal norms. This can be seen in the old lady's comment about another Bangladeshi lady, Jorina. Mrs Islam views Jorina as someone who has gone against certain norms, with the latter's act of going outside the house to find a job : 'The husband is working but still she cannot fill her stomach' (16). Her comment indicates her disgust with Jorina's decision to work. Jorina's career at the factory is also viewed by the matriarch as something which would bring disastrous effects to the Bangladeshi culture: 'Mixing with all sorts: Turkish, English, Jewish [...] But if you mix with all these people, even if they are good people, you have to give up your culture to accept theirs'(29). The tomboyish Razia, Nazneen's friend, can only manage to mutter 'Poor Jorina', seemingly in agreement with the matriarch's view.

Mrs Islam's rather forceful nature can be exemplified in her frequent visits to Nazneen's flat and how the latter is beginning to 'dread' the matriarch's visit and her advice on how to care for the baby (85). In particular, Nazneen's action of bringing her baby into the kitchen while she attempts to make tea for Mrs Islam shows us her defiant attitude in not wanting her child to spend any more time with the visitor. When Mrs Islam offers to take the baby to her flat so Nazneen could do some housework, the latter does not give in and keeps to her decision: 'He's staying here' (88). At this point Ali describes Nazneen as trembling inside, showing that she is not used to acting in a defiant manner towards other people. At this point, Ali portrays how Mrs Islam casts a look towards Nazneen, as well as how the matriarch's eyebrows seem a little closer together after she hears Nazneen's cold response. The matriarch probably does not expect Nazneen to

behave in such a defiant way, as she makes a comment before departing from the flat:

‘The white people [...] they do all they want. It’s nobody’s business [...] If a child is screaming because it is being beaten, they just close the door and the windows. They might make a complaint about noise. But the child is not their business, even if it is being beaten to death. They do what they want [...] It is a private matter. Everything is a private matter. That is how the white people live.’ (89)

While Mrs Islam’s comment may appear as a general observation regarding how English people prefer to mind their own business, it also serves to show us the different tensions existing in a multi-cultural society. The English way of life can be seen as a threat and also an opportunity to different people. In Mrs Islam’s view, the English tend to keep to themselves and value their own and other people’s privacy (and silence). Mrs Islam uses the example of a child being beaten to appeal to Nazneen’s motherly instincts. When she says that the English do not care if the child is ‘being beaten to death’, she is using the worst-case scenario to frighten Nazneen and, thus, justify her busybody attitude in the community. She seems to silence Nazneen into believing that there are advantages in giving advice or interfering in other people’s affairs in the community, instead of keeping silent and guarding one’s privacy which is perceived as alien ‘English’ behaviour.

When Razia informs Nazneen that Mrs Islam and her sons have been offering high-interest loans to people in the community and threatening those who cannot pay, Nazneen looks a little ‘scandalised’ and unable to speak (129). Razia further reiterates that some people in the community already know about Mrs Islam’s dealings, but they remain ‘hypocrites’: ‘That is the thing about our community. All *sinking, sinking,*

drinking water' (129). Razia's use of the expression in italics indicates that the people in the community are afraid to reveal the truth about Mrs Islam, even though some of them would be 'sinking' in the end due to the matriarch's consistent demands for payment. Later, Nazneen tries to relay the information about Mrs Islam to Chanu; instead of sounding surprised, Chanu's response sounds very much like Razia's: '*Sinking, sinking, drinking water* [...] Some things have to stop' (132). This indicates that Chanu, like others in the community knows that Mrs Islam's shady activities should be stopped. However, instead of breaking the silence about Mrs Islam, the community members do not attempt to challenge her, as it appears that opposing views cannot be expressed openly in the community.

When Mrs Islam drops in to see Nazneen at her new sewing enterprise, she appears as a sickly lady who has given up on worldly goods:

'My sons tell me to go on a hip replacement, but I say no. Do not waste a good new hip. I do not want to be buried with a new hip, God does not love a wasteful woman. Save the good hips for those who can use them. Give the money to the mosque and give me a little for the Heat Spray. That's all I ask.' (198)

Mrs Islam then instructs Nazneen to 'put the money' in her bag but the latter does not understand as she does not know that her husband has also borrowed money from the loan shark. Thinking that the old lady wants her to find something, she rummages through the bag but is later shocked when Mrs Islam accuses her of 'trying to rob' her grave.

When Mrs Islam suddenly realises that Nazneen does not know about the debt, she

seems to turn back into her sick old self: 'I understand. Forgive a sick and anxious old woman. This arrangement is between friends. Pay when you can' (199). She seems to be 'struggling' to stand up, but still manages to spray some perfume and Ralgex mist before she heads out of the door. Her manner shows her hypocrisy of acting in a particular way to make people feel sorry for her, when she is actually capable of causing problems for others.

Her parting words to Nazneen are reminiscent of other characters like Baby Kochamma, who misuse religion for their own benefit: 'You will find a way [...] God always gives a way. You just have to find it. And I will bring my sons next time. They would like to see your husband again' (199). The irony is that usury is one of the biggest sins in Islam, but Mrs Islam seems to see nothing wrong with it, and is willing to use her sons to scare, and later silence Chanu and Nazneen into paying their debts.

On another occasion, as her business begins to pick up Nazneen finds herself being accosted by Mrs Islam in the butcher shop. While the latter seems brazen enough to disturb her in public, Nazneen also seems to realise that Mrs Islam is 'lacking somehow in substance' (420). This might indicate that Nazneen is no longer as scared of the matriarch as previously. In fact, when Mrs Islam harasses her about some 'tickets', she has the courage to say directly 'I don't know what you're talking about' and remove the matriarch's hands from her face. However, this does not put off Mrs Islam from launching another verbal assault:

'You don't? Of course such an innocent creature such as Mrs Ahmad hardly knows a thing. You don't know that your husband went crying to Dr Azad and Dr Azad

gave him the money to make his escape?’ (420)

From the above quotation, we can ascertain that for the sake of her money-lending business, Mrs Islam sees nothing wrong in embarrassing people in public, as well as telling wives about the loans that their husbands have taken from others. She does not seem to care if the families are wiped off the face of the earth, as long as they have paid the money owed to her.

Despite her talk of giving alms to the mosque, she is actually a cold-hearted, calculating person who will not allow anyone to get away without paying off debts :

[...] ‘I would let you go, child, give you my money and my blessing — but how would it look to all others ? Let one slip through and they all slip through. I have my sons to think about. Just give what you owe.’ (420)

When Nazneen protests and complains that whatever they pay is never enough to cover the debts, Mrs Islam resorts to using God’s name to coerce Nazneen to keep on paying: ‘God always provides a way [...] You just have to find it’ (421). By using God’s name, Mrs Islam probably hopes that Nazneen will be scared and silenced into thinking that her action is acceptable.

Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter specifically examined female characters who can be described as being complicit in silencing other women in the narratives analysed. These

characters victimise other women using particular methods of control, although they themselves have been victimised due to certain patriarchal structures in their communities. From the analysis, a few female characters in the corpus tend to stand out as they appear to collude in the perpetuation of patriarchy among their family and community members. Specifically, the narratives show that the older female characters appear to have more power and control over younger female characters. Baby Kochamma and Mrs Islam are two examples of older women with an overbearing personality, as shown from their verbal utterances and actions of mocking and threatening the younger female characters, either in public or in private. As for Mammachi, she seems to portray a quiet and serene personality compared to the Baby Kochamma and Mrs Islam ; however, her regal appearance later proves to be deceptive as she can also be vindictive and physically violent towards other people.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have examined the representation of female characters in novels written by women writers from South Asian countries or who are South Asian in origin. The primary aim of this thesis has been to discuss the concept of female silence in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Roma Tearne's *Brixton Beach*. The novels which have been selected for this study portray Asian women or women of Asian origin who cannot express their miserable and helpless situation to the world. These women can be described as voiceless or powerless individuals, an argument (in)famously made by Spivak in her essay about the subaltern. Spivak is pessimistic about the possibility of the subaltern or marginalised person ever having a chance to tell her story. However, this thesis is not about proving or disproving Spivak's argument as there are different types of silence employed in the narratives by the authors, which I have attempted to illustrate via other chapters in this thesis.

In Chapter 1 which lays out the framework of the thesis, I outlined the issue of female silence in the light of theories related to postcolonial, diasporic and feminist studies. In particular, I looked at Tillie Olsen's view of silence in literature. In her book, she focuses on 'unnatural silences' ,a circumstance which prevents certain voices (especially from those who are female and of a particular ethnic race) from being heard. Olsen also lists what she calls *hidden* silences (author's italics), censorship silences and 'silences where the lives never came to writing'; the latter is a type of silence which she

attributes to people who are struggling for their 'existence', whom she considers as coming from a low education background, and also from women. In this chapter, I also discussed Elaine Showalter's view of silence in literature. Through her paper 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', using anthropological evidence, she attempts to show that women in particular cultures have devised a private language among themselves as a type of resistance from the so-called silence imposed upon them (1981: 192). Her argument is not that there is insufficient language to enable women to express their consciousness; instead, she considers that women have not been given access to the 'full resources of language'. In her view, this has led the women to retreat into silence or forced to use euphemism or circumlocution. Cheung's view of 'Articulate Silences' is also included in this chapter. Additionally, I also looked at Spivak's view of the subaltern as discussed by other postcolonial critics such as Loomba, Bhabha, Parry and Moore-Gilbert.

It is my intention in this thesis to exemplify that the novels can also be used to suggest the ambivalences of speaking/not-speaking via the narrative representations of silence. The word 'ambivalence' can be defined as a state of having simultaneous and contradictory attitudes or feelings (as attraction and repulsion) toward an object. In Chapter 2, I looked at the role of authorial silence in my corpus, whereby an element of the narrative is purposely silenced by the author. This differs from the silence of the characters in the narrative, that is, instances where the narrator may describe them as not participating or speaking. The author's silence signals that she is not intruding directly in the text or to put it simply, he does not speak directly to the reader. Through the analysis of the novels, we can identify instances where the authors have purposely refrained from commenting directly in the narratives. However, this does not mean that the authors have

completely relinquished their control of the narrative. Instead of commenting directly, the author utilises patterns of imagery and symbol, pace and timing and manipulation of dramatised points of view to reveal judgement and to mould responses from the readers. As such, the authors' silence or lack of participation actually speaks volumes, as certain elements in the narratives are suggested indirectly to the reader. Definitions and examples of authorial silence as put forward by notable critics were included in this chapter, as well as an insight into how JM Coetzee utilised silence in his novel *Foe*. Later, I attempted to provide examples of authorial silence in the four texts which I have analysed. The analysis revealed that there are more examples of authorial silence in Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms* and Roy's *God of Small Things* than the other two novels, mainly due to the non-linear narrative structure and the theme of dark secrets which will be gradually revealed to the reader, without too much dependence on authorial voice. As for Ali's *Brick Lane*, authorial silence is projected via the use of realism, stereotypes and defamiliarisation. In *Brixton Beach*, the present-tense narration and the unnamed characters can be considered devices that illustrate the significance of authorial silence in the text.

In Chapter 3, the analysis of the novels in Chapter 3 shows silence's connection to the aspects of shame, secrets and gossip. Shame can be defined as a feeling of great embarrassment which is experienced by certain characters if they have crossed certain boundaries usually involving the opposite sex. This is exemplified in the four narratives via the themes of sexual abuse and inter-racial/ inter-community marriage. When a person is ashamed, he or she will often choose to remain silent, refuse to speak about that matter directly, or resort to using other words. For instance, Hasina is very much ashamed about

her sexual abuse that she cannot use the exact word for 'rape' in her letter to inform her sister. In the case of Ammu, Pappachi's silence about her being beaten by her Bengali ex-husband probably signals the family's shame and embarrassment as they now have to shelter a divorced daughter from an inter-community marriage.

As for the silence surrounding certain secrets being kept by particular characters in the narrative, the analysis shows that the secrets mainly involved issues which are not widely accepted in some societies, such as bisexual, homosexual, incestuous and extra-marital relationships. This is especially evident in Pohpoh's discovery of her mother's affair with Lavinia. Pohpoh is too shocked to discover the secret that she has 'no words to describe' (56) it. In this example, Pohpoh is rendered speechless or not-speaking as her young mind is probably not ready for such things. In *Brick Lane*, Ali describes how Nazneen appears to have a secret, entirely wordless system of letting her lover Kareem know whether her husband is at home or not, by using hand signals and gestures at the window (299). In this example, Nazneen is portrayed as not-speaking, preferring to use signals instead, as she probably fears that anyone can hear her voice. She has to do all she can to keep the affair a secret as she and Kareem would be probably be punished by their community if anyone knows about it.

The analysis also shows that gossip surrounds female characters in the texts who have transgressed certain boundaries set by the society. In the case of some Bangladeshi women described in Ali's narrative, they are being gossiped by some community

members for venturing outside their homes on their own, or to go to work in the factories. As for Ammu in *God of Small Things*, she has to face gossip after her return to Ayemenem as a divorcee from an inter-caste marriage. In *Brixton Beach*, Sita also faces the same situation of being talked about negatively by some community members after eloping with someone from another ethnic group. These three examples show that gossip is a means of social control to prevent the women from further transgressing certain boundaries. The gossip-mongers spread the gossip around, but the women involved are forced to remain silent or not-speaking regarding the rumours and negative comments. This does not mean that they are entirely powerless, or that they will not fight back. As we have seen in some of the narratives, the women have their own ways of resisting the restrictions set upon them.

In Chapter 4, the analysis examined representations of characters who choose to remain silent in the four texts. While the conventional view of silence is usually understood as the failure to say something or to communicate, or it can also sometimes be considered a weakness, the primary aim in this chapter sought to show that silence has been utilised as a strategy by particular characters in the texts. Certain characters are portrayed as not speaking but they are portrayed in that particular way by the author due to certain limitations and circumstances. The analysis revealed that the characters studied have not entirely lost their ability to speak; there are particular situations in the texts where the authors portray them as uttering certain sounds and words. In general, however, some characters appear to refuse to communicate in many parts of the narrative. Critics have referred to this phenomenon as voluntary silence or strategic silence.

Nazneen in *Brick Lane* can be described as a character who displays a tendency to remain silent. In order not to create problems for her family, she appears as a passive wife in front of her husband, Chanu. I decided to categorise Nazneen's character as the patient wife in this analysis as she appears to have patiently endured her husband's meaningless rantings for many years. It is at the end when she finally succeeds as a businesswoman that he praises her and acknowledges her sacrifice for the family. Ali seems to portray Nazneen as someone who only speaks in certain situations. Nazneen also seem to avoid confrontation with her adversaries, preferring to let her actions rather than her words make a difference.

Other characters examined in this chapter include Mala, the village's mad woman in *Cereus Blooms*, Sita and Alice of *Brixton Beach* and the twins Rahel and Estha in *God of Small Things*. For these characters, I decided to categorise them under a special heading as individuals traumatised into silence. The pain and suffering experienced by both Sita and Mala can be described as causing harm to their mental faculties, resulting in a certain reticence or a refusal to communicate using human language. However, this does not mean that Sita and Mala are not-speaking completely ; there are instances in both narratives where the two characters communicate with others using limited responses. As for Alice, Rahel and Estha, these children are also portrayed as not-speaking after witnessing violence occurring in their respective communities. In Alice's case, she refuses to speak about her problems ; instead, she uses art as a medium of expression. She pours out her frustration and despair into her artwork. As for the twins, they are portrayed as not-speaking after being separated from their mother and each other.

The grown-up Estha can be described as being not-speaking completely ; he does not say a word in the present-day narrative. The trauma of his sexual abuse experience and his unwilling involvement in Velutha's death could have rendered him silent. As for Rahel, she exhibits a slightly decreased reticence and this is evident in her lack of verbal responses towards Baby Kochamma and other people in the community.

In Chapter 5, I specifically looked at female characters who can be described as being complicit in silencing other women in the narratives analysed. Although these characters have been victimised due to certain patriarchal beliefs existing in their communities, they themselves victimise other women using particular methods of control. From my analysis, a few female characters in my corpus tend to stand out due to their complicity in perpetuating patriarchy among their family and community members. Most notably, the older female characters assert their power over younger female characters in the narratives. In the case of Baby Kochamma and Mrs Islam, the two can be described as having an overbearing personality, which is evident from their verbal utterances and actions of mocking and threatening the younger female characters, either in public or in private. They have a tendency to use speech to show their power over other people. In *God of Small Things*, Baby Kochamma appears as an annoying grand aunt who is always looking for the twins' mistakes, and reprimands them loudly whenever she can. As for Mrs Islam in *Brick Lane*, she can be defined as someone who likes to gossip about other people. She also appears as a person who likes to harass people who borrow money from her in public places. For both characters, their power of speech causes other people to become silenced and rendered not-speaking. Mammachi, on the other hand, seems to

have a quiet and serene personality compared to the Baby Kochamma and Mrs Islam. She is portrayed as not-speaking most of the time and her inner thoughts are mainly conveyed via the narrator to the reader. This does not mean she is incapable of being vindictive towards other people. The infamous scene in which she pushes the untouchable Vellya Paapen with 'all her strength' and starts to call him 'paravan liar' and 'dog' (256) after the discovery of the affair certainly comes to mind. Despite her apparent lack of speech, she can indeed silence other people, specifically her daughter Ammu, who is banished from home and has no means to speak out about the injustice involving her lover Velutha.

From the analysis, we can exemplify that the novels can also be used to suggest the ambivalences of speaking/not-speaking via the narrative representations of silence. Authorial silence involves the author's deliberate refusal to speak directly in the text ; instead, the author utilises several literary devices to convey something indirectly to the reader. Silence is also linked to concepts such as shame, secrets and gossip. One is likely to refrain from speaking if he or she is ashamed, secretive or is the topic of gossip in one's community. There are also some female characters who are portrayed as not-speaking, or choosing to remain silent so as not to cause problems for the family. A few other characters have been portrayed as refusing to speak out as they have been traumatised into silence. Lastly, women can also be complicit in holding on to patriarchal structures and in the process, attempt to speak out in order to to silence or to cause problems to other women.

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