Conversations with the Contemporary:

Studying Post-liberalisation India through First-person Narratives

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

SAYAN CHAUDHURI

Centre for English Studies

School of Language, Literature and Cultural Studies

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

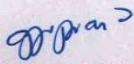**New Delhi-110067**

India

2015

Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067, India

Date: 27th July 2015

CERTIFICATE

This dissertation titled "**Conversations with the Contemporary: Studying Post-liberalisation India through First-person Narratives**" submitted by **Sayan Chaudhuri**, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

(GJV PRASAD)

SUPERVISOR

Prof. GJV PRASAD
Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067

(SAITYA BRATA DAS)

CHAIRPERSON

Chairperson
CES/SLL & CS
J.N.U., New Delhi-67

Date: 27th July, 2015

DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This dissertation titled "**Conversations with the Contemporary: Studying Post-liberalisation India through First-person Narratives**" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

Sayan Chaudhuri

Sayan Chaudhuri

M.Phil.

Centre for English Studies

School of Languages, Literature and Cultural Studies

Acknowledgements

This dissertation has been written in emotionally trying circumstances: my father was diagnosed with lung cancer six months into the M.Phil. program and passed away three months before I had to formally submit. This dissertation is dedicated to my father -- who, even in his final moments, reminded me to never doubt the power of utopian thinking.

I am tremendously grateful to my supervisor, Prof. GJV Prasad, for showing that supervision is not merely restricted to the confines of research, but also about sensitivity to the larger contexts making up our lives.

I would like to particularly thank Rhea, Samik, Shankar, and Sthira, for supporting me through the process of writing, through critical conversations, productive distractions, or just quiet company.

Contents

Introduction

    I.   Framing the topic: Contexts and Motivations

Discursive engagements with post-liberalisation India have spawned a variety of texts: from policy documents to anthropological enquiries to literary representations. It is difficult to identify definitive accounts, but there seems to be a polarised projection of what economic liberalisation is or has done. On the one hand, there are accounts emphasising the positive potential of economic growth, not necessarily in a reductive sense or by avoiding acknowledgement of existing contradictions; on the other hand, there are oppositional or negative accounts, emphasising the disparities and contradictions produced by liberalisation, either rejecting or nuancing existing modes of engagement with the economic order. The crucial difference between the two accounts lies in orientation -- either oriented towards legitimising or opposing the dominant economic order -- but not necessarily in terms of either the context of production (there are opposing strands within corporate media itself) or the disciplinary locus of engagement (economic and anthropological analysis can work both ways). It becomes important, then, to take a step back and ask: how does the very orientation towards economic change, the workings of institutional power, and the glaring contradictions produced therein emerge? What are the forms best suited to interrogate the biases and assumptions informing knowledge of the contemporary?

I will study three works of narrative nonfiction -- namely, *The Beautiful and the Damned* (2011) by Siddhartha Deb, *Capital* (2014) by Rana Dasgupta, and *India Becoming* (2012) by Akash Kapur -- as significant examples of first-person, dialogic, and complex responses to post-liberalisation India, presenting a wide-ranging view of contemporary social landscapes while simultaneously mediating with personal doubts, anxieties, and motivations. It might be inadequate to classify these narratives as merely anthropological or journalistic exercises -- these narratives are not necessarily delimited by pre-existing stylistic conventions, theoretical presuppositions, or a fixed locus of production and reception. Although these narratives are akin to what has been called 'autoethnography', or an "approach to research and writing that seeks to

describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience", the motivation to write these books as autoethnographies is not explicitly stated (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner). My inquiry, then, is to study the formal and aesthetic organisation of these narratives before attempting a classification; and correspondingly, study how such narratival forms aid the documentation of social processes in post-liberalisation India.

These three narratives are premised on similar motivations -- all the three writers return to India to question and confront the optimistic narrative of a culturally globalised, economically empowered India -- and are similarly oriented -- they are all broadly oppositional to the ravages of global capital. However, the differences in style allow for different goals to be pursued. My reason for choosing these three narratives is prompted by the nature of my inquiry, that is, a comparative evaluation of representational tactics, stylistic devices, and modes of storytelling -- to address the question of how narratives can be organised to mediate between self-enquiry and evaluation of a larger social process. The disciplinary status of these narratives is unclear -- although broadly classified as nonfiction on contemporary India, these narratives both deviate from and are in dialogue with media discourses, academic texts, and fictional accounts. The indeterminate, or rather, interdisciplinary status of these narratives allow for mediations between private encounters and public perceptions: to study the forms of narratival representation, it is equally important to study how such mediations are made possible.

The first chapter will study *The Beautiful and the Damned* (2011) by Siddhartha Deb as a systematically organised narrative, broken down into separate sections representing identifiable 'new' realities associated with post-liberalisation India. The chapter will interrogate the vantage-points assumed by the narrator and reflect on the problems of representing the 'new' or the contemporary. The second chapter will study *India Becoming* (2012) by Akash Kapur as an example of a more dialogic but also ambivalent documentation of contemporary India. Unlike Deb, there are no clear demarcations of contexts: Kapur is interested in continuities, between the lives of people, physical spaces, the past and the present. The third chapter will study *Capital* (2014) by Rana Dasgupta, as not just a sprawling study of the city of Delhi, but as a study of the logic of globalisation within contemporary India -- the representation of a city is backed up by theoretical claims about the logic and nature of urbanisation itself. The chapter will interrogate

the interplay of abstract presuppositions and concrete observations: how is it possible to generalise or theorise particular experiences? I should clarify that these texts should not be considered as representative of the general order of first-person narrative nonfiction: such a typology does not exist either in publishing circles or existing scholarship on nonfiction in India. Categories such as 'literary journalism' or 'creative nonfiction' might be loosely used in the reception of these texts, but the meaning of these terms is not self-evident as they might be where such categories are institutionalised or consciously deployed by authors themselves. To accept the validity of these terms is to enter into new debates altogether: the place of the 'literary' in nonfiction writing; the construction of the field of first-person narrative nonfiction prose; the stylistic and conceptual demarcations between travel, memoir, journalism, and ethnography as they operate within first-person nonfiction prose. It is not that these debates are unimportant, but the terms of these debates would be slippery and speculative given the lack of clearly articulated institutional frames or distinctions, either within English-language publishing, review cultures, or the self-positioning of authors. I will begin with certain general presuppositions thus: that the 'literary', as a way of both organising language as well as producing certain aesthetic effects, is inscribed within all forms of storytelling; that orientations towards globalisation, economic liberalisation, and the contemporary are influenced by narratives or specific forms of storytelling, including the first-person nonfiction narratives I wish to particularly study; and that the generically indeterminate status of such first-person nonfiction narratives opens up the possibility to study how these narratives position themselves vis-a-vis existing narratives and construct an understanding of post-liberalisation India. In the following two sections of the introduction, I will attempt to contextualise these conceptual premises.

II. Globalisation and its narratives

Cameron and Palan, in a critical overview of the narrative turn in studies of globalisation, ironically note: "although only rarely explicitly acknowledged, the relationship between representation and phenomena, between narrative and globalisation, is present, if only obliquely, in the majority of studies...but an analysis of this relationship is conducted often tacitly and

rarely in a systematic way" (Cameron and Palan 26). They thematise existing approaches towards studying and representing globalisation into five categories: the wave thesis, wherein globalisation is studied as a stage within a larger periodization of political economy, formally beginning from the 1980s; mainstream approaches, wherein globalisation is defined as "real" and as the "truth", and refers to "real, concrete phenomena which…will inevitably lead towards the creation of a world characterized by the dominance of political and economic systems constituted on a global scale"; Marxist approaches, which assume that there is a "clear functional relationship between representation, ideology, and *power*: power (generally equated with capital) instrumentally and cynically employing representations of globalization to legitimize itself" and thus consider globalization as false consciousness; Gramscian approaches, which focus on the constitution of political hegemonies informing global alliances and networks; and finally, culturalist approaches, which study globalisation as "a complex nexus of ideas, narratives, institutions, and processes, drawn together in a manner that attempts to encapsulate...the nature of contemporary social reality" (Cameron and Palan 26-42). Cameron and Palan argue that these approaches either risk reproducing an "unreflexive distance" between the methodological frame of the approach and the subject under consideration or descend into the "intellectual obscurantism of seeing everything as 'text'" (Cameron and Palan 43). How should a self-reflexive relation between "practice and narration" be framed then? (Cameron and Palan 43)

Cameron and Palan's approach is to look at the related themes of globalization and social exclusion not as "facts", but as "partial and contingent attempts to manage human society in unique historical circumstances" by drawing on a synthesis of "anthropology, historiography, cultural studies, literary criticism, and psychoanalysis" (Cameron and Palan 43).They draw their theoretical frame largely from Paul Ricoeur, whose work has tremendously influenced the foregrounding of the narrative and acts of narration as crucial to the writing of history. Cameron and Palan are particularly interested in the essay 'The Narrative Function', where Ricoeur shows the essential "structural unity between historical and fictional narratives" and "rejects the common pretence that the narrator stands wholly outside of the tale he or she tells, and in doing so identifies a new kind of narrator, the *histor*", who, unlike the traditional historian, draws authority from "the documents which he reads" rather than received traditions (Cameron and

Palan 47). The histor plots coherent narratives, through a selection of texts and empirical evidence, not necessarily determined by institutional frames. The implications of such a notion for the representation of social realities must not be understated: as Clare Colebrook elaborates, "the relationship between text and history cannot be given in a pre-formulated theory" and instead "the interaction between the text and the world, between the materiality of the text and its produced meaning and between art and history should be the object of investigation in each critical practice" (Colebrook 26). The recognition of society or history as mediated and constructed through texts, and by extension, as having plots, as organised through patterns of language is obviously not new, but it is worthwhile to ask what motivates such a reflexive, discursive turn, particularly in studies of globalisation. Cameron and Palan express dissatisfaction with existing unreflexive approaches and thus attempt a methodological redressal, but as Timothy Brennan points out, that's only half the story.

Brennan provocatively argues that the emerging field of globalization studies -- thematized by the conceptual categories of modernity, the west, space/place, cosmopolitanism, and neoliberalism -- have deliberately disavowed or obscured the categories of "national identification, forcible inclusion, and civilizational superiority", belonging to an older rhetoric of postcoloniality and decolonization, to avoid addressing the uncomfortable continuities between newer liberatory phenomena and older exploitative arrangements (Brennan 135-143). Brennan notes how "cultural theorists have moved past interrogations of methodology and epistemology" and instead "the globalization theorist him/herself has at last become part of the object of inquiry, placed in a field of interests and seen as functioning in a larger division of intellectual labor" (Brennan 144). The framing of the self, so to speak, is a response to the inevitable complicity with the hegemonic frame the theorist attempts to critique. Brennan finally notes that: "[in] the shift in academic fashions, which has driven many postcolonial theorists to retool themselves as globalization theorists, this "economics" of the cultural intellectual may be the most consequential future field of action" (Brennan 144). Brennan opens up a rather difficult problem: if the intellectual constantly navigates through a morass of predetermined hegemonic attitudes and orientations, if there is no vantage-point outside the frame which she attempts to

critique, what enables her to resist or oppose hegemonic frames? A lot, it seems, depend on the kind of agendas the intellectual works with.

Liberalisation in India, as Sudipta Kaviraj shows, is not merely reducible to economic policies initiated in 1991 -- opening out the Indian economy to foreign investment, deregulating the market, enhancing scope for privatization -- but a process through which economic *agendas* were translated through political discourse to "shape the horizons of popular imagination about what is regarded as desirable and possible" (Kaviraj 241). Kaviraj attributes four kinds of reasons guiding the advocacy of liberalisation in political discourse. Firstly, there was a burgeoning backlash from the professional middle-class and upper-class groups to the "slow, imperceptible recomposition of social classes, altering the balance of economic power in society" owing to a regime of subsidies favouring the "rise of new capitalist farmers" (Kaviraj 257). The loss of exclusive control of the political and economic field combined with exposure to the international economy made these elite professional groups much more receptive to opportunities for economic growth. Secondly, the changed structure of the global economy and the rise of East Asian economies through liberalised economic policies made "fears of neo-colonial control by ex-colonial powers unrealistic, and therefore policies meant to guard political sovereignty unnecessary" (Kaviraj 257). Thirdly, "the global collapse of communist systems seemed to undermine the philosophical legitimacy of socialist economic thinking in general" and resulted in a greater mistrust of forms of nationalism which relied on a socialist rhetoric (Kaviraj 257). Finally, following from the previous reasons, there was a "slow dispersal of the Nehruvian consensus in favour of import-substitution, state interference in the economy, and redistributive policies" and although initially there was no significant intelligentsia or political groups concertedly advocating for liberalisation, a new "economic common sense" began to take hold of political discourse (Kaviraj 257). The new economic common sense, as Satish Deshpande has pointed out, is crucially marked by a shift in emphasis from the "patriotic producer" to the "cosmopolitan consumer" (Deshpande 73). If the Nehruvian model reified the economic imagining of the nation through metaphors of production -- the interlinked production of both national goods as well as a composite national identity -- post-liberalisation rhetoric privileges acts of consumption to match up to global standards of living (Deshpande 69-73). As

Deshpande rather snarkily notes, "[we] are invited to take patriotic pride in the fact that, at long last, prosperous 'upper middle-class Indians' are able to consume exactly the same world-class products and brands that are available to privileged Western consumers"(Deshpande 73).

All the three texts I will study inevitably locate themselves within the locus of globalisation studies in general and the study of contemporary India in particular. But how is it possible to aesthetically distinguish these texts from, say, academic scholarship or policy manuals? All of these are first-person narratives, but to what end?

III. Narrating the Contemporary: Representation and Affect

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, in a survey of the new Indian novel in English in the three decades following the publication of *Midnight's Children* (1981), finds the contemporary surge of English-language nonfiction prose marking crucial stylistic shifts and changing assumptions about what constitutes the 'literary' (Rajan 204). The assumption that nonfiction prose is "prosaic, instrumental, communicative, everyday" is premised on fiction as the literary norm: anything that is not fictional prose is classified, or in Rajan's evaluation, "relegated", to a "vast and homogeneous alterity" (Rajan 205). Rajan considers new nonfiction as a "break rather than a change from fiction", not as directly influenced by a colonial genealogy as global formations, trends, and impulses (Rajan 206). Although it is instructive to identify differences in the contexts of production and consumption between fiction and nonfiction prose, it is difficult to claim any simple notion of a 'break': contemporary fiction, like nonfiction, is significantly produced within and responding to global impulses. Rajan goes on to divide nonfiction writing into four schematic divisions: academic nonfiction, mostly written in English, the medium of higher education in India; a "general category of serious nonfiction writing", which refers to books signifying a "diversity that is not susceptible to subject classification" and representing "topics not entirely ephemeral in nature"; literary nonfiction, marked by self-conscious, "highly wrought literary prose"; and finally, English-language journalism, drawing on "experience, observation, research, involvement, and investigation", employing the form of the essay to represent particular realities (Rajan 207-209). Apart from academic nonfiction, which is circulated within

specific institutional boundaries and expectations, the rest of the categories significantly overlap. It is not clear why Rajan proposes these specific divisions -- do they enable a specific understanding of the contours of nonfiction publishing in India or provide an interpretive template to read nonfiction prose? Her central argument is clear though: that significant "discursive shifts have occurred in English-language writing" owing to the surge of nonfiction prose (Rajan 210).

How does one begin to evaluate these discursive shifts? As I mentioned earlier, terms such as 'literary journalism' or 'creative nonfiction' might be informally used within publishing speak or book reviews, but there is neither any fixed publishing norm or a consensus on aesthetic criteria distinguishing one subgenre from another. The question, to me, seems more feasible within specific contexts of enquiry. If the question is directed towards enquiring into the motives anticipating and meanings produced by such discursive shifts, it becomes possible to address the larger question of how these shifts matter.

Robert Brown, in an essay prophetically titled 'India: A Billion Testimonies Now', emphasises the importance of narrative testimonies to confront and evaluate a globalising landscape -- using *Maximum City* (2004) by Suketu Mehta as an example, the essay emphasises the need for wide-ranging, complex, affective documentation of changing social landscapes (Brown 304-306). Brown emphasises the need for subjectivity and diversity in the documentation of contemporary India given how "[traditional] print journalism is plainly struggling to capture...the full enormity of the contemporary Indian experience and the captivating dramas being played out across the subcontinent" (Brown 306). Unlike Rajan, Brown attributes the motive to write new forms of reportage (mixing travelogue, memoir, journalism) to not just global impulses -- although he does note the influence of American narrative nonfiction in ushering new forms of journalism worldwide -- but as particularly responding to the "enormity of contemporary Indian experience" (Brown 306).

First-person narratives inevitably foreground experience: what is described is experienced. The foregrounding of experience can work in antithetical ways: on the one hand, it can classify the narrative as a particular subjective one, claiming a particular authenticity in terms of the author's subjectivity but not necessarily speaking to or interrupting the hegemonic

view of a social reality; on the other hand, it can claim an authenticity consolidating or disrupting existing narratives about particular social realities. A lot depends on how experience is produced, represented, and interpreted. Joan Scott, while noting the move towards foregrounding experience in the writing of history (particularly histories of social and political margins), confronts a paradox:

> Documenting the experience of others in this way has been at once a highly successful and limiting strategy for historians of difference. It has been successful because it remains so comfortably within the disciplinary framework of history, working according to rules that permit calling old narratives into question when new evidence is discovered…[on] the other hand, historians' rhetorical treatment of evidence and their use of it to falsify prevailing interpretations, depends on a referential notion of evidence which denies that it is anything but reflection of the real (Scott 776).

Using the "evidence of experience" to claim authenticity or legitimacy ironically "establishes a realm of reality outside of discourse and it authorizes the historians who has access to it" (Scott 790). Experience might not be self-evident and provoke questions about its very nature: "questions about discourse, difference, and subjectivity, as well as about what counts as experience and who gets to make that determination" which would enable the reader to "historicize experience, and to reflect critically on the history we write about it, rather than to premise our history on it" (Scott 790). A similar debate is confronted by practitioners of autoethnography, or what has been claimed to be "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (Ellys, Adams, and Bochner). Jackson and Mazzei have called into question the nature and consequences of self-representation in autoethnography : "in an attempt to engage the crises of representation by transgressively blurring genres and writing against the disembodied voice of objectivism, autoethnographers run the risk of simply replacing one privileged center with another, making similarly narrow claims to truth, authority, and authenticity as objectivism:

autoethnography has exchanged transcendency for transparency" (Mazzei and Jackson 299). The assumption that "autobiographical reflexivity" unsettles the hierarchy between researcher and researched is not inevitable and it is possible that the emphasis on the experience of the researcher might reinscribe the hierarchy (Mazzei and Jackson 301). Although the autoethnographer might acknowledge her experience as constructed and mediated, the knowledge of the experience is presented as coherent and stable; furthermore, to use someone else's experience to critically reflect on one's own involves recourse to a shared discourse, which might gloss over disjunctions and differences. Mazzei and Jackson instead recommend a deconstructive autoethnography, the kind which would acknowledge the "constraints to what can be known or reflected upon", decenter the "I" in the narrative, and attend to the processes of truth production (Mazzei and Jackson 304).

Such a debate is directed towards informing the formal organisation of the narrative -- there are competing claims as to what is a more effective self-reflexive way of representing experience, especially encounters with difference. It is assumed that specific forms of organising language, or specific literary framings of the narrative, produce specific aesthetic effects -- as Hayden White argues, using the illustrative example of the representation of the French Revolution in the works of Burke, Michelet, and Tocqueville, that historical events seem to be plotted and narrated in such a way that the "Revolution" becomes a "a kind of drama that we can recognize as Satirical, Romantic, and Tragic respectively" (White 404). The missing link in such a line of argument seems to be the role of the reader: how does the reader identify and interpret the (promised) aesthetic effects of the narrative?

Forms of enquiry within literary studies, according to Rita Felski, have come to assume two extreme frames: the theological frame, which treats the reading of texts as entirely immanent, separate from historical and social moorings; and the ideological frame, which rationalises the text as ideology, obscuring the particularity of the text. In contrast, she offers a reconciliation between the two extremes, which orients the interpretation of the literary as both affective and ideological: literature consists of realising a "logic of *recognition*; that aesthetic experience has analogies with *enchantment* in a supposedly disenchanted age; that literature creates distinctive configurations of social *knowledge*; [and] that we may value the experience of

being *shocked* by what we read" (Felski 14). Felski reacts to cultures of scholarship which "surround texts with dense thickets of historical description and empirical detail, distancing them as firmly as possible from our own threateningly inchoate, or theoretically incorrect, desires and investments" and instead proposes an orientation which "blends historical and phenomenological perspectives, that respects the intricacy and complexity of consciousness without shelving sociopolitical reflection" (Felski 19). The first-person narratives I will study are exercises in exploring the narrator's own "desires and investments" in the study of contemporary India, but to choose to read and engage with them is to reflect on my own orientation: "the act of reading enacts an ethics and a politics in its own right, rather than being a displacement of something more essential that is taking place elsewhere" (Felski 20). Felski notes the evasiveness among literary critics to recognise the primacy of 'value' in how texts are chosen and interpreted: "critiques of canonicity and traditional value hierarchies", however important, "often lapse back into an antiquated and thoroughly discredited positivism in assuming that the problem of value can simply be eliminated" (Felski 20). This dissertation is, in part, a demonstration of why I find value in certain first-person narratives -- some of the reasons being the self-reflexive framing of complicity and resistance to the logic of economic liberalisation; the particularising of experience within larger social realities; and the literary framing of such narratives which produce both affective and ideological interpretations. These texts, as I will argue subsequently, speak back to the optimistic, objectively oriented constructions of post-liberalisation India, variously produced within business circles, mainstream media discourse, and even policy debates. Value, of course, is a tricky word and it would be useful to tease out the specific sense in which I am using it. All of these texts complicate the construction of the economic -- the easy conflation of economic aspiration with meaningful human activity is not necessarily self-evident or even desirable. Such a conflation, as these texts expose, is premised on the substitution of the more complicated categories of social, political, and aesthetic value with the monolith of economic value. My understanding of value is consistent with how these texts represent value: value as historically framed, comparatively understood, and recognised as a complex category.

It is difficult to identify a clearly defined genre of first-person nonfiction prose having broadly the same orientation as the texts I will study, but there are definitely clear precedents for

such work. Pankaj Mishra's *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India* (1995) is a sardonic take on how economic aspirations change traditional social relations in a host of small towns in India -- although designed as a travelogue, the book ends up providing a mix of political commentary and a scathing critique of liberalisation. P. Sainath's *Everybody Loves a Good Drought* (1996) combines journalistic reportage on the social realities in some of the poorest districts in India with anecdotal impressions; *Maximum City* (2004) by Suketu Mehta is a collection of stories about Mehta's discovery of glaring contradictions in Bombay; *A Free Man* (2012) by Aman Sethi is a first-person account of the lives of migrant workers in a slum in Delhi; and so on. A typology of such works is beyond the scope of the dissertation. My focus will be on how post-liberalisation India *can* be studied -- the three texts I will study provide striking templates for the same.

Chapter One: Studying 'New India' in *The Beautiful and the Damned* (2011) by Siddhartha Deb

    I.   'New India': Hype and Disappointment

'New India' has become a catchphrase for contemporary urban India, particularly in business and media circles, referring to the onset of new impulses driving significant shifts in lifestyle, cultural and economic expectations, and even the architectural reimagining of India. The new, as Anthony P. D'Costa incisively suggests, is as much fact as presumption: if there is a new India, it is presumed there is a new kind of citizen who "enjoys the fruits of a modern, industrial, dynamic India, neither bound by the past nor by provincial thinking" (D'Costa 1). Such a presumption is liberally aided by the use of the term in national and international presses -- the use of the term, of course, is hardly undeliberate. The "branding" of new India, as Kanishka Chowdhury argues, is "intended in large measure to assure foreign investors and financial organizers that India is "on the right track" and has jumped on the global corporate bandwagon" (Chowdhury 2). The branding does not merely involve showcasing economic achievements in national and international media, but displacing the burden of the old: the old, in a post-liberalisation context, "is characterized by any sign of a socialized economy, any sign of a substantial commitment to public expenditure or to the government regulation of business" (Chowdhury 2). The celebratory construction of the new, however, necessarily elides over the massive inequities produced by liberalisation.

The erasure of the old or different in favour of the new is, in part, a problem of modernity itself: as Connerton persuasively argues, "structural forgetting" is specific to the "culture of modernity" (Connerton 2). Forgetting is abetted by "processes that separate social life from locality and from human dimensions: superhuman speed, megacities that are so enormous as to be unmemorable, consumerism disconnected from the labour process, the short lifespan of urban architecture, the disappearance of walkable cities" (Connerton 5). The imagining of a new India serves as a powerful ruse to usher India into a global economy, using the very same tropes Connerton considers intrinsic to modernity: the speeding up of trade and transport, the emphasis

on consumerism, the relentless drive towards ever-renewing urbanity. Such an imagining is inevitably fraught with contestations and contradictions: liberalization, as is statistically evidenced, has resulted in "reduction of public subsidies, the forcible displacement of agrarian populations, the hiring of non-contract laborers" among other problems (Chowdhury 3). There is a grave mismatch between what the new India was expected to be and what has come about: how does one account for the mismatch, how does one recuperate the forgotten, marginalised, alternative narratives of contemporary India?

A substantial amount of scholarship on contemporary India has recognised the inequities lurking behind the construction of the 'new': the responses are, of course, inflected by the orientation and disciplinary location of the authors. A cursory glance through some of the recent scholarship provides an useful index for the common tropes of enquiry: the nature of the transition towards increasing urbanity; the shifts in notions of work and lifestyle influenced by the nexus of information technology and corporate capital; the influence of media discourse; and new contestations in terms of gender, caste, region, and labour[1]. The premise of much scholarship is the recognition of change itself: how does one begin to understand, classify, and theorise an emergent process? Arjun Appadurai attributes such a change to the "culture of the state":

> The divorce between the developmental state (of the 1950s and 1960s) and the global corporatist state of the 1990s...is the public expression of a deep transformation in the culture of the political classes in India. This divorce is not the same as the classic tension between industrial capitalism and the regulatory state. It is...a change within the culture of the state itself (Appadurai xii).

The 'culture of the state' is a revealing phrase: to understand the construction of New India, it is important to recognise the shifts in vocabulary, rituals, and aspirations constituting the sense of the new. Raymond Williams has persuasively argued that as governments frame power in terms

---

[1] See An *Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions* (2013) by Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze; *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India* (2012) by Aseem Shrivastava and Ashish Kothari; *Power and Contestation: India since 1989* (2007) by Nivedita Menon and Aditya Nigam

of economic activity, "older social purposes become vestigial" and the "maintenance of the economic system becomes the main factual purpose of all social activity" (Williams 188). Politics and culture both draw its "thinking" from the "economic market": in other words, the very process of inhabiting a subjectivity, both political and cultural, is mediated through acts of production and consumption. As Appadurai suggests, it is not that the unregulated market has substituted the regulatory state; instead, the state presents itself through the logic of the market, through notions of competition and consumption (Appadurai xii). Williams, however, notes that the paradox created by such a situation is that the discourse of social needs is compromised owing to the emphasis on individualistic acts of consumption: to articulate a complex range of needs, not reducible to self-serving individual pursuits, requires a questioning of the "autonomy of the economic system" itself (Williams 188). Such a questioning, as Chowdhury argues, cannot be carried out merely through an examination of juridical processes, but requires a closer examination of how new subjectivities are produced, performed, and negotiated -- the new "citizen-subject" is not merely a function of the economic system, but "constituted through social relations" and "comes into being through the public circulation of texts" (Chowdhury 6). Siddhartha Deb's intent, in *The Beautiful and the Damned* (2011), could be seen to be just that: the close examination of the gestating citizen-subjects of 'New India'.

The subtitle of *The Beautiful and the Damned* (2011) by Siddhartha Deb is curiously phrased 'Life in New India'. Life is a complex and tenuous term, suggesting a panoply of material determinations, affective registers, and communicative practices. Deb refers to something more precise and not entirely evident from the phrasing of the subtitle: the relation between identity constructions and changing conditions of living. Deb is more interested in emphasising the contexts -- social, cultural, regional -- which have a powerful, frequently determinate, bearing on the lives of people inhabiting those contexts. Deb's impulse to explore and represent 'life in New India' is born out of a combination of curiosity and suspicion. Working as a journalist and writer based out of New York, Deb finds the emerging narrative of new India both intriguing and suspect -- partly because he grew up in Shillong in India before justificatory narratives of liberalisation became prominent -- and finds himself drawn towards investigating the so-called 'new'. The narrative is divided into five chapters (the first one is

excised from the Indian edition), each chapter representing an identifiable context of new India: the emphasis on entrepreneurial drives; the boom in the Information Technology sector; the influence of the market economy on agricultural practice; the reorganisation of labour in factories; and the increased female workforce in cities. Each of these contexts produces specific identities -- Deb navigates through these contexts by studying (and occasionally stereotyping) these identities. The narrative is framed through a determining bias: Deb assumes a clear position against economic liberalisation right from the outset, almost entirely representing its repercussions, heavily criticising consumer cultures, the aggressive reshaping of identities, and the massive inequities produced between the rich and the poor . The narrative frequently appears to be didactic, with the details and conclusions of the particular stories leading towards predetermined conclusions, confirming the repercussions of the liberalised-privatised-globalised frame. The details are nonetheless fascinating and open up avenues for exploration.

The strong critique of the economic framing of contemporary India can perhaps be seen as a deliberate rebuttal of the optimistic projection of 'New India' for an Anglophile readership: this is particularly crucial since Deb is based out of New York. The term 'New India', in fact, has been extensively used in articles published in the *New York Times* to refer to the "country's stirring middle-class, its new-found wealth, changing consumption patterns that mimic Western lifestyles, and India's technological sophistication" (D'Costa 1). In such a scenario, Deb's scathing critique of 'New India' serves to counter or complicate existing narratives. Competing claims for authenticity, however, is not merely directed towards a Western readership. Vinay Dharwadker, tracing the history of Indian writing in English, claims that such a category of writing is always already a countertext, attempting to displace and resist colonial representations of India (Dharwadker 205). In a contemporary sense, such a generalisation is untenable: notions of Western modernity and neoliberalism, for instance, cannot be seen as outside the frame of contemporary India; instead, it is constitutive of the very discourse of contemporary India. Deb, then, is not just writing back to American neoliberal agendas, but also writing back to national hegemonies. 'New India' has found its own set of ideologues: from popular writers such as Chetan Bhagat to corporate hotshots such as Nandan Nilekani and Gurcharan Das.

Bhagat, for instance, has been terribly optimistic about the potential of the middle-class youth in the country -- his books have frequently promoted aspirations such as learning English to initiate oneself into a globalised economy, reforming corrupt public institutions especially educational ones, and honing individualistic entrepreneurial drives. One of the crucial tropes used by Bhagat is the movement of his protagonists from ignorance to illumination, to discover themselves as reformed, reinvented modern selves in a new globalised ethos -- Bhagat's role, as Subir Dhar suggests, is to don the "mantle of illuminator, instructor and guide to the seeker" (Dhar). The movement towards illumination is analogous with the movement towards the 'new' -- Bhagat's role is to initiate the youth into the 'new' ethos which Bhagat himself has entirely grasped. This comes across as a rather suspect position: how is Bhagat able to identify and affirm specific values and fixed identities for an ethos which is continually emergent and never entirely graspable? Anthony Giddens argues that the concept of modernity inherently contrasts itself to the concept of tradition, but these two concepts are so "tightly interlaced" in actual social settings, that any generalisable distinction is difficult to make -- this leads Giddens to look at modernity as marked by a fundamental reflexivity (Giddens 36). If modernity is framed to question traditional knowledge, the relation between knowledge and certainty changes: "[no] knowledge under conditions of modernity is knowledge in the "old" sense, where "to know" is to be certain" (Giddens 40). The drive towards the continually new reflexively generates "systematic self-knowledge" -- there is continual subjective alteration of the assumptions which justify the new (Giddens 56). The representation of changing values and identities, then, has to acknowledge the inconsistencies and incoherences marking the formation of the same. Deb's narrative represents the trope of self-invention as marking all of the contexts he identifies as symptomatic of New India, but unlike Bhagat's narratives, recognises the complex mediations through which such a trope plays out. It is unclear in the narrative whether such mediations create possibilities for resistance or opposition, but Deb is clear about what must be opposed: the nexus of liberalisation-privatisation-globalisation. The emphasis on the global, as Deb shows, diminishes attention towards the local , where contestations can be palpably experienced.

Deb's skepticism, occasionally verging on outright dismissal, of globalising impulses within contemporary India is, in part, an attempt to recuperate the local, shift attention towards

particular social realities. Arif Dirlik argues that the "local" in contexts increasingly mediated by global capitalism can be seen as a site of both "promise and predicament": on the one hand, the local, in opposition to the totalizing impulses of the global, can be a site of "resistance and liberation"; on the other hand, the emphasis on localism may mask existing structures of "oppression and parochialism" (Dirlik 22). The renewed emphasis on "local narratives" can be considered as a reaction to the failures of the "metanarrative of modernization", to explain or account for notions of difference, heterogeneity, and plurality in social processes (Dirlik 25). The construction of 'New India' as a metanarrative, as explaining away all potential contestations, inevitably involves a brutal sleight-of-hand: to make invisible alternate visions, marginal voices, non-urban realities. Deb's effort to find and represent stories grounded in local contexts reframes the story of 'New India': it is no longer about the promise of urban middle-class aspirations vis-a-vis global metropolitan impulses, but the predicament of those who are inadvertently pulled into and occasionally resist the logic of such aspirations. In the rest of this chapter, I will explore two crucial tropes of Deb's narrative: the trope of self-invention as intrinsic to the projection of 'New India'; and the trope of the local as mediating with, succumbing to, and resisting the impulse of the global.

II. Framing Identity

The Beautiful and the Damned (2011) was marked by a particularly ironic controversy before its publication in India: the first chapter of the book, a portrayal of the figure as well as the symbol of Arindam Chaudhuri, the face behind Indian Institute of Planning and Management (IIPM), had been excerpted in *The Caravan*, a Delhi-based magazine devoted to narrative journalism. Arindam Chaudhuri, unfortunately, took exception to the piece and filed a defamation suit seeking exorbitant damages: the essay, in keeping with legal formalities, was excised from the Indian publication. The controversy was ironic for the essay concerns itself with a certain trope of new India: image-making. The essay, titled 'Sweet Smell of Success', begins with a sentence which was granted further legitimacy following the controversy: "A phenomenally wealthy indian who excites hostility and suspicion is an unusual creature, a fish

that has managed to muddy the waters it swims in" (Deb, The Sweet Smell of Success)[2]. The essay does not defame Chaudhuri in any simple terms -- instead, it exposes the construction of Chaudhuri's fame, through his exaggerated emphasis on branding and a deliberate distancing from the elite symbolism of the Indian Institute of Management. The graphic image of Chaudhuri is central to the construction of his brand, to permanently inscribe his face into an institutional imaginary: "It was the face of the new India, in closeup. His hair was swept back in a ponytail, dark and gleaming against a pale, smooth face, his designer glasses accentuating his youthfulness (Deb, Sweet Smell of Success). Entrepreneurship, in Deb's vocabulary, is partly an exercise in self-invention: an exercise which inevitably obscures lineages, histories, and motivations. The controversy, inadvertently perhaps, drew attention to the book as a particular kind of narrative, as one critiquing the dominant construction of the country. Deb, in a note prefacing the Indian edition of the book, consciously introduces his narrative as marked by a oppositional thrust and a critical impartiality:

> There is a sad irony to the fact that a book about contemporary India, while available in full in most of the world, appears only in partial form for Indian readers. But that in itself says something about the state of affairs in India these days, where critiques of the powerful and wealthy, no matter how scrupulously researched, are subject so often to intimidation. It is easy enough to find, in the media, outrageous claims by corporations and celebrities as well as their demagogic doubles, whispering in the social media about conspiracies and backroom deals. What is missing, too often, is the kind of essay or article or book that tries to make sense of such phenomena without succumbing to their allure, and that tries, in its own way, to offer a semblance of truth. (Deb, Author's Note, The Beautiful and the Damned)

---

[2] The essay has been excised from the Indian edition of the book and removed from the website of *The Caravan* magazine, but has been informally republished in the following blog:
http://abhishekazad.blogspot.in/2011/06/truth-of-arindam-chaudhary-sweet-smell.html

The semblance of truth, in Deb's narrative, is represented within clear templates: self-invention is presented as a response to the demands of an increasingly globalised economy, a response which can be interpreted as both opportunism and a survival strategy. The representation of how characters assume identities is highly visual: Deb draws attention to how people present themselves; how they dress up and move and gesticulate. The image on the frontcover of the book -- a picture of a woman in a gaudy pink sari, wearing oversized sunglasses and carrying a glitzy white purse, defiantly looking at the camera -- is a highly apt one in the context of Deb's narrative. Firstly, the image provides a sense of contrast -- there is an attempt to synthesise local attire with identifiably modern Western accessories, suggesting the emergence of a seemingly incongruous yet flashily assertive aesthetic. Secondly, it could be implied that such an aesthetic is born out of consumption choices, suggesting the emergence of a new kind of marketplace, containing an assortment of goods, both locally and internationally produced. Thirdly, it seems as if the woman is confidently presenting herself to be photographed, to be noticed, to be made explicitly visible, perhaps suggesting the need for recognition. In the introduction preceding the first chapter -- or what was meant to be the first chapter -- Deb anticipates the trope of self-invention in starker, seamier terms. He provides a sense of his own emergence -- he grew up in Shillong, made a foray into journalism, settled in America, and came back to India with an assignment for *The Guardian*, to document a call-centre as an insider, by getting a job in one and reporting. The story he begins with, however, has to do with an experience in a passport office in 1998: after waiting in a line for a long time, he is shocked by how people behind him rush into the office as soon as the gate opens. The unfairness of the moment compels him to run into the office and fight for his place, as it were, when he is pulled out by a plainclothes policemen, who rhetorically asks him "Do you know who I am?" to which Deb's instinctive response is to take out his outdated press card and ask the same question:

> Yet even though we may not have intended it, when we shouted, 'Do you know
> who I am?' we were asking the question in a profoundly literal sense. Did I know
> who he was, a man trying to maintain order in the line - afraid that I was a tout
> with a knife in his back pocket — doing a hopeless job assigned him by his boss?

And did he know who I was, breaking the line only after I had tried to follow the rules, wanting nothing more than the passport." (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 5-6)

The 'profoundly literal' question makes explicit both recognition and incomprehension: the policeman and Deb are identifiable to each other as certain types of people, but do not actually know each other. The description sets the tone for the rest of the book: a book concerned with the construction of identity, a process mediated by the aspiration for legitimacy within institutional frames of power and the disruptive force of encounters, ranging from the absurdly comic to the violent, shaping and undermining claims to stable identity. The book, divided into six chapters, responds to particular instances of 'life in the New India' -- instances Deb considers as both symptomatic and contested. Each chapter is marked by a logic of aspiration -- emerging entrepreneurial energies, the drive towards market productivity, the need for social mobility -- which Deb dramatises through individual portraits, individuals playing out competing claims to power and identity. As Amit Chaudhuri puts it, "[Deb's] India is not home to some miraculously resilient Indian identity, but a place of role-playing and performances...Deb is drawn to the idea of pretence, and to pretenders, of which he – writer, confidant, friend, provincial, global traveller – is one himself" (Chaudhuri).

The role-playing frequently consists of emulating certain character tropes -- Deb draws attention to how particular individuals are playing out a general type of a person. Deb is perhaps aware of the pitfalls of stereotyping, and at least, his stated intent is to "get inside the details of the stories of individuals" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 26). Deb consciously draws attention to how individuals begin to appear as types -- the movement from the particular to the general is presented as a logical discovery of a pattern. For instance, the second chapter begins with a particular reminiscence and a simultaneous realisation of the patterned nature of social processes:

A society does not usually change direction with a sudden jolt. It alters course in incremental amounts, running small, secret simulations of experiments that

achieve their full-scale elaboration only much later. Its project of transformation contains repeats and echoes, and it is always possible to trace earlier versions of an organization, a phenomenon, or even a person. That is what I began to think after my encounter with Arindam, when a niggling feeling of deja vu started to take over, as if I had met an earlier version of him somewhere, and whose source I finally traced back to my first job, in the early nineties, in Calcutta. (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 72)

The reference to the early nineties is striking for it foregrounds the processual nature of the shifts leading towards the construction of 'New India' in the twenty-first century. Deb describes his first employer, a man running a centre for computer training, as a "well-built, light-skinned megalomaniac who combined business management flair with a hustling instinct" -- a description which is revealing of Deb's representational choices for the rest of the narrative (Deb 73). A certain entrepreneurial type recurs in the narrative -- it is not that they do or say the same things -- but the type is identifiable from Deb's descriptions. In the third chapter, for instance, Deb describes Mahipal Reddy, a wealthy seed broker in Andhra Pradesh, as someone who spoke "almost airily, as he tried to show me how well his business was doing, his comments supported with enthusiastic exclamations from the surrounding crowd of yes men" and put on an exaggerated self-justifying tone as he was "addressing a political rally" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 158). A similar type emerges in the fourth chapter: Deb meets the manager of a steel factory, Venkatesh Rao, for whom "the story of the factory was analogous to the story of contemporary India, a narrative of vast improvements and modernization leading to ever greater profits" and glosses over the exploitation and surveillance that Deb unearths while navigating through the factory (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 199). These descriptions occasionally seem offhand and caricaturish, but the attempt is to describe someone with an inflated sense of self, money-minded and bossy, cashing in on aspirations for social mobility and greater consumptive power. Interestingly, Dasgupta does not necessarily describe the lives of the traditional elite, but a type which has emerged and found resonance after liberalisation.

The emergence of such a type is intrinsically linked to the aspiration for and desirability of such a type. Aspiration, as Appadurai argues, is discursively circulated and recognised through a vocabulary of "wants, preferences, choices, and calculations", which is almost entirely appropriated by the realm of economics (Appadurai 67). The study of aspiration, however, has to recognise that it is produced within specific cultural contexts: aspiration itself is a "cultural capacity" (Appadurai 67). Such a view is useful since it draws attention to the various asymmetries inflecting the relation between aspiration and cultural contexts: not everyone, particularly the poor and marginalised, has equal capacity to aspire. The narrative does not merely describe the entrepreneurial type, but highlights the web of aspirations making such a type identifiable and desirable -- aspirations, which in turn, are produced through inequality, contestation, and power.

The second chapter, provocatively titled 'Ghosts in the Machine: The Engineer's Burden' explores the world of engineers or professionals working in the burgeoning Information Technology industry in Bangalore. Deb confronts a peculiar paradox in the construction of the entrepreneurial engineer: on the one hand, the drive towards entrepreneurship and economic ambition is encouraged through a rhetoric of expansion, innovation, and productivity; on the other hand, the physical organisation of the engineer's life is self-enclosed and rigid. Deb introduces a character called Chak, short for Chakravarthy Prasad, an engineer in a senior position at an American semi-conductor company, as embodying a certain contrast:

> With his curly, dishevelled hair, greying moustache and rimless glasses, Chak had
> an almost professorial air about him. The rest of him, however, consisted of a
> corporate man in a hurry, from the BlackBerry winking against his small paunch
> to the giant Ford SUV in which he came bursting out of his office complex when I
> first went to meet him (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 82).

The professorial air evokes a sombre outlook inconsistent with his savvy image as an entrepreneurial type. Even Chak's workspace, Deb notices, is designed to be self-contained and demarcated from the outside world: Chak's office "stood behind high walls and a guard booth,

encased in silence and reserve, its bright blue logo when seen from the road suggesting some imperial palace glimpsed by a lone traveller…[this] feeling was enhanced by the court protocol of going inside to meet Chak, as I did a few days after our first encounter (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 85). The analogy with an imperial palace provides a sense of quiet magnitude and invites curiosity, but also, betrays a sense of isolation and inaccessibility: how is such a contrast to be understood? The contrast, or "dissonance" as Deb puts it, is partially provoked by the incongruous relation of the old and the new in the urban frame: "[there] might be professional opportunity in Bangalore, created by the technology hubs, and there might be an older city, genteel and spacious, but the two did not come together as a unified experience" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 83) The representation of the engineer, as a rather paradoxical figure, is not merely attributed to specific characteristics embodied by individual engineers, but is mediated through institutions and spaces -- the dissonance, so to speak, is produced by the very organisation of social reality. Deb's portrait of the engineer is particularly unique given how the engineer is frequently constructed as a desirable and consistent type: the engineer is frequently collapsed with the desirability of engineering itself. The ubiquitous desirability of engineering, particularly the Information Technology industry, as Ajit Balakrishnan points out, can be attributed to a variety of factors: "the mathematical heritage; an English-language higher-education system; the determination among the Indian elite that having "lost out" in the textile Industrial Revolution they could not afford to lose out in the Computer Revolution; the rise of teachable, standardized programming languages; a process view of work; the decline of Indian rupee versus the US dollar; and the advent of digitization that made services tradable over long distances" (Balakrishnan 6). Such a schematic listing of reasons does not clarify why the engineer is the locus of aspiration for many: the engineer is compelling not just because specific societal conditions made it possible to promote engineering in India, but in a more contemporary sense, owing to a certain entrepreneurial projection of the engineer. Deb's attempt is to put the image under crisis: drawing attention to the discordance of the frame within which the engineer is implicated, Deb invites an ethical evaluation of the same.

Deb takes a critical position against the engineer's supposed trajectory as one successfully seguing into entrepreneurship and an economically prosperous lifestyle. Chak

voluntarily shows Deb his unfinished, unbuilt house, estimated to value around one and a half million dollars once completed; Deb responds with a powerful ironic image: "as I stood in Chak's house, I could only see the energy that had gone into creating the turmoil visible through the rain-splattered windows: the rubble, the skeletal hulks of buildings and the mounds of earth on which workers clambered like yellow-helmeted ants" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned 92). Deb constantly draws attention to those who are crucially and ubiquitously present yet deliberately rendered anonymous in the discourse of development: the labourer, constituting the workforce of both old and new industries. Both the fourth and fifth chapters attempt to redress such a representational bias: in the fourth chapter, Deb explores the social organisation of a factory and in the fifth chapter, Deb follows the life of Esther, a Manipuri woman working as a waitress in a posh restaurant in Delhi. Refashioning identity, in such contexts, is more a matter of survival than anything else.

Deb's chronological ordering of the narrative provides a sense of incremental discovery, He begins by investigating the standard flag bearers of 'New India', individuals projecting and refashioning themselves as entrepreneurial leaders, endorsing a free market economy and emphasising the need for corporate investment in the development of the state. Deb begins to suspect the rhetorical confidence of such people as false bravado: the premise of development, he begins to notice, entails the creation of an ever-expanding consumer economy and the massive exploitation of workers, spread out all over the country. Such a realisation logically takes Deb to spaces outside cushy, glossed up office buildings in the city: villages, factories, and even the houses of those struggling to survive in the city. Deb visits Kothur, a village in Mahabubnagar district in Telangana: the entire village is surrounded by factories, employing migrant workers from all over the country. The locals of Mahabubnagar, however, look for work elsewhere. Such a logic seems counter-intuitive, but Deb observes how such an arrangement serves the interests of employers since it ensures "that the workers will be too insecure and uprooted to ever mount organized protests against their conditions and wages…[they] are from distant regions, of no interest to local politicians seeking votes, and they are alienated from the local people by differences in language and culture (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 170). Deb didactically frames his impression of the factory with a set of sociological observations

about how those who inhabit and seek employment in the "informal sector of the economy" live and work in "harsh conditions" as "migrant workers" and do not have any guarantee of "security or upward mobility" -- the didactic framing is perhaps adopted to strongly, and factually, speak back to the presumption that a liberalised economy benefits even the poorest of the poor (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 173). The choice of title for this chapter, 'The Factory: The Permanent World of Temporary Workers', draws attention to how the the exploitation of labour is structurally produced by an economic arrangement favouring the already socially and economically empowered and leaving those who are structurally disempowered even more vulnerable.

Deb's attempt to document the lives of people in a factory -- the one he chooses is a steel factory -- is initially met with resistance: "[in] spite of my telling them that I had the managing director's permission, they felt uncertain about my presence — afraid that I might be a government labour inspector come to see their living conditions — and were determined, in the way of migrant workers, to avoid any discussions that might imperil their jobs" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 176). The problem, as Deb realises quickly enough, is not merely suspicion of Deb's intent but also alienation from his presence: "I was so well fed and well rested in contrast to them that I might as well have come from another planet" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 177). Although it is important to draw attention to how the lives of factory workers are imperilled and precarious, a fact which might be obvious but still under-represented, Deb also prompts a more troubling question: how is it possible to address more intimate subjective questions, such as how workers imagine their lives, how they negotiate with their own material conditions? The ethnographic or journalistic approach is perhaps not the most fruitful one -- or rather, if it has to be fruitful, a different kind of approach might enable conversation, an approach that actively attempts to bridge the gap between the interviewer and interviewee. Deb does not seem to be inattentive to either the limitations or possibilities of different interviewing styles -- in the subsequent chapter, for instance, Deb closely engages with Esther over a series of meetings -- but it is clear that the spatial context severely delimits the kind of conversations that can take place. The factory is a surveilled space: there are security guards policing the movements of the factory workers, contributing to the general mood of precarity, but

also producing an interesting hierarchy between the security guards and the workers. Karthik, the security supervisor, occupies a relatively powerful position in the organisational hierarchy of the factory; he is called upon to assume a commanding demeanour, to instill a sense of discipline into the factory space. Karthik, however, considers his current job as a compromise, since he wanted to join the airforce. Deb captures a random yet revealing moment in the factory space, suggesting how characters fit into predetermined roles:

> Workers dressed in grease stained clothes signed off at the booth before going out, submitting first to a body check by the guards. Trucks idled behind them, sending clouds of diesel smoke rolling through the yard. A Bihari guard, striking-looking with his big eyes, carefully twirled moustache and gold earrings, came to ask Karthik for a break. Karthik's manner became reserved and officer-like as he listened, and it struck me that he was living a diluted version of the air force career he had wanted, wearing a uniform while supervising other men in uniforms. (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 184)

People working in the factories do not tell their stories in detail -- Deb is not able to engage in sustained conversations with any of the workers. Deb's representation relies on observations, impressions, and a few anecdotal admissions by the workers: what emerges is the sense of a social space, with its own hierarchies, rituals, and limitations. Deb punctuates his narrative with certain abrupt comical encounters too -- they serve to simultaneously foreground a sense of crisis the narrative builds up and deflate the tension through a sense of anticlimax. For instance, Deb describes an awkward experience during his time spent exploring the steel factory:

> One afternoon, as I made my way back from the steel factory through a series of puddles, I needed to take a piss. There was only one other person visible, a man walking in my direction but some distance away. I urinated against a brick wall, feeling slightly embarrassed. I heard the man come closer and expected him to walk on — a man pissing in the open is a common sight in India — but I could

feel him stop when he reached me. He was standing right behind me and at first I
was worried that he was the owner of the brick wall I was soaking in my piss. But
he stayed silent, and I began to grow puzzled and annoyed. When I finished, I
turned around and looked at him aggressively (Deb, The Beautiful and the
Damned, 181).

The sense of crisis is aggravated since Deb is in the process of relieving himself -- this moment,
too, comes right after Deb spent time documenting unpleasant conditions in the steel factory.
Walking back from the steel factory entails a suspension of Deb's role as the self-appointed
interlocutor/documenter of the social organisation of the factory, a role which Deb finds
particularly trying given the relative incommunicability of the factory workers: such a
suspension, also, inverts the relation between Deb and the social space he is documenting. As
long as Deb is in the steel factory, he is not accountable to anyone -- he controls the
representation of those around him. In this scene, Deb represents himself as vulnerable to the
judgment of someone else, and reacts with what seems to be a defensive aggression. The build
up to the scene is similar to the one in the introduction, where Deb speaks back to a plainclothes
policeman, anticipating the need to assert identities. In this case, something different happens:
the man, whose name turns out to be Amit Mishra, asks Deb a question:

'Sir,' he said politely, 'where are you coming from?'
'The steel factory,' I said irritably. 'What about you?'
'I'm looking for work,' he said, gesturing at his bag.
We stood there amid the puddles and the dirt, the man telling me about himself
against the sound of cars passing by high up on the highway. (Deb, The Beautiful
and the Damned, 181)

Mishra's polite question produces a sense of anticlimax -- Deb was anticipating a fight or at least
a rude encounter -- but also reiterates a crucial premise of the structural condition Deb is
documenting: people are looking for work, people are sometimes desperate for work, and end up

settling for work in exploitative conditions. After Deb and Mishra introduce themselves, Mishra asks Deb if he has read Amartya Sen: "'You remember what he said about famine, that it doesn't necessarily happen because there isn't enough food but because the powerful take food away from the powerless? It's still like that in India. Are you going to write that in your book?'" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 182). Deb deftly represents the shift from a moment of incomprehension and threat to a moment of profound agreement: Mishra is not Deb's antagonist by default in the competitive frame of 'New India'; instead, Mishra and Deb, although living in very different contexts, agree that the frame of 'New India' is marked by deep inequality. Such a moment, although marked by a sense of shared resignation and despair, produces a recognition of Deb's critique of the economically liberalised frame: such a recognition is crucial to the imagining of any form of resistance.

Studs Terkel, in an ethnographic study of how people relate to work in America in the 1970s, notes that such a study "being about work is, by its very nature, about violence -- to the spirit as well as to the body…[it] is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations…[to] survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us (Terkel xiii). Deb begins to note down the little details making up the lives of some of the workers -- for instance, Pradip's insistence on eating meat or fish once a week, to maintain his strength as a welder; Sarkar, who chooses to leave the "crooked path" for it is not more economically beneficial than working in the factory; Dibyajyoti, who ran away from home at the age of fifteen and has been flitting from one job to another. Deb's attempt is to not merely draw attention to the various hardships of the workers, but provoke an analysis of how workers come to inhabit a space like the factory, how they relate to their work. Working, although predetermined in terms of roles and functions, might entail a displacement of how the worker goes about constructing her life story: there are broad commonalities or patterns which begin to emerge -- social migration from agricultural contexts, the easy acceptance of contractualization and surveillance, the aspiration to incrementally rise up the economic ladder -- but there are distinct particularities too, which prompt the question of how workers find meaning and value in their struggle to survive.

In the fifth chapter, Deb tells Esther's story, a Manipuri girl working in a posh restaurant in Delhi. Deb's concerns are similar to the ones he had while documenting the factory space -- to explore the lives of workers, to understand how they fit into existing structures -- but the scope of Esther's story is far wider, partly owing to the opportunity to interview Esther extensively. Migration to the big city from the small town has been a crucial trope in 'New India' -- the urban metropolitan space has been framed as the dominant locus of aspiration. Esther is from Manipur, a state described by Deb as "a failed state" owing to deep neglect by the government at the centre and the imposition of an authoritarian law, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which "gives security forces the right to detain and to kill without having to answer to the local government" to counter local insurgencies (Deb 233). Esther's migration to Delhi can be seen as an attempt at social and economic mobility, but the recognition of the nature of such mobility shifts over the course of the narrative. When Deb initially meets Esther, she is "anxious to portray her life as a success...emphasizing how much it had given her and how it had allowed her to move away from the narrow life -- married and with two kids -- that she would have had if she had stayed in Imphal" but over a set of interviews, reveals a complex set of motivations and experiences. Esther moved out of Manipur to ensure employment, but her job as a waitress is framed within a hierarchy of labour: she has to work long hours for six days a week and receives a meagre salary in return. The restaurant where she works is owned by K.P Singh, one of the wealthiest people in the world and as Deb notes, "Esther's part in this wealth was a very tiny one, something like the role of a serving maid at a great imperial palace, one of history's unrecorded, unremembered millions (Deb 219). Deb's choice of metaphor evokes a striking comparison between the frame of capitalist accumulation and imperialism: in both cases, it becomes necessary to draw attention to the experience of those marginalised by the system yet integral to its reproduction, in order to expose the deeply inegalitarian logic of such systems. Furthermore, Deb draws attention to the historical nature of such a hierarchical logic: although Esther's aspiration is encouraged by the possibilities of the present, Esther cannot avoid determination within existing, historically produced hierarchies. Esther is simultaneously marginalised by social markers she carries on her body: her ethnic and gendered identity.

Deb's intrusion as the narrator or evaluative authority is minimal in this chapter, partly because the central biases of the narrative have been clearly established by the penultimate chapter and partly owing to Esther's remarkable self-reflexivity. Esther's narration of her story does not merely describe her situation, but constantly reflects on her motivations, expectations, and desires. For instance, her recognition of the discrimination faced by her owing to her ethnic identity is remarkably complex:

"We have small eyes", she said. They can tell we're from the north-east. Sometimes the way they think about us, the way they talk about us, makes me not think of myself as Indian. I want them to accept me the way I am, not the way they want me to be" (Deb 221)

The basis of discrimination, as Esther points out, is appearance; appearance that is framed within dominant perceptions of what constitutes the hegemonic citizen-subject. Furthermore, as a waitress, Esther occupies a marginal position in the labour economy, a position framed by how her employers and customers want to see her -- it is in their interests to determine Esther's identity to be able to subjugate her. How can Esther determine her own identity then? The irony, as Deb consistently draws attention to, is the inevitable complicity of the framing of aspiration with the neoliberal paradigm: although Esther wants people to accept her as she is, her choice to work in the Food and Beverages industry in Delhi fixes an identity for her. It is difficult, then, to tease out a clear distinction between how Esther imagines herself to be and how Esther is imagined by others: the framing of her her identity is constantly negotiated.

Rogers Brubaker argues how the conceptualisation of identity in the social sciences traverses murky territory, throwing up equally problematic "strong" and "weak" notions of identity: on the one hand, identity can be conceptualised as entailing sameness over time and collective self-categorisation which problematically assumes that identity (in terms of the ethnic or the national) is something that one either "ought to have" or "can have without being aware of it"; on the other hand, notions of identity which consciously break away from homogenous constructions and emphasise fluidity, fragmentation, and contingency, can merely become

"placeholders, gestures signaling a stance rather than words conveying a meaning" and might be "too weak to do useful theoretical work" (Brubaker 37-38). Instead, Brubaker suggests that the theoretical emphasis should on the process of "identification", which as "a processual, active term, derived from a verb...lacks the reifying connotations of "identity"; furthermore, "[it] invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying…[and] does not presuppose that such identifying (even by powerful agents, such as the state) will necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness, the bounded groupness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve" (Brubaker 41).

Deb's narrative draws attention to contexts of identification: part of the identification, of course, is done by Deb himself. The identification of individuals or collectives within the frame of contemporary India, as Deb persuasively shows, is highly dependant on the locus of such identification -- if Esther is identified as a certain kind of subject within a globalising urban economy, there might be alternate imaginings and identifications from different locations, resisting the hegemonic frame of 'New India' itself.

III. Local and the Global

Wilson and Dissanayake argue that the emphasis on the 'local' in the face of a globalizing logic -- a logic entailing the unification of ideas, commodities, and aspirations around the flow of capital -- draw attention to how specific social fragmentations stand in critical relation to the 'global': "it is a way of keeping alive the hidden totality of social relations that does not sublate the local into the global" (Wilson and Dissanayake 6). The hidden totality of social relations requires specific identification: to orient oneself to the local is to contextualise the particular processes through which social relations come into being and not take immediate recourse to hegemonic frames. Although it is fair to argue that the local and the global are frequently in mediation, especially in contexts where global capital begins to influence social processes and individual aspirations, it is critically important to be alert to how the relation between the two categories can be easily posited as a "master/slave opposition in which the "merely" local is undone, insignificant, or displaced" to rationalise dominant discourses of social

sciences or political economy (Wilson and Dissanayake 6). Conversely, to put the two categories in direct opposition can produce simplistic versions of globalism as merely progressive and modern and localism as absolutely rooted in place or culture (Wilson and Dissanayake 6). The relation between the two categories is in constant critical tension: perhaps the task of the critic is to tease out how these categories retain their distinctions while, for all practical purposes, mediating with each other.

In the introduction to the book, Deb presents two seemingly contrasting spaces: the call centre as an emergent phenomena reconfiguring the urban imaginary and the city of Bhopal as constantly retreating into the past owing to the Union Carbide tragedy. The call centre phenomena had assumed a celebratory narrative: the call centre was apparently creating a generation of 'empowered' youth, and as Deb parodies the exaggerated form of this rhetoric, the call centre was apparently "where men and women worked together late into the night and partied into the day, and who spent their money at the pubs, discotheques and shopping malls that had been brought to India by the same vigorous capitalism that had given them their jobs" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 8). However, Deb punctures the narrative by claiming that "it seemed to me that the sunrise industry was a rather fake world, dressing up its ordinary routine work in the tinsel of youthfulness" and that he "was not the only one there with a fake identity" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 9). Fakeness is not merely about appearance, ways of dressing up the ordinary, but follows from a shift in orientation towards work and identity: the emphasis on self-projection, aspiring to 'global' lifestyle standards. Deb turns to a character in Bhopal as a counterpoint: Abdul Jabbar, an activist running an organisation for widows rendered destitute by the Bhopal gas tragedy, having a local reputation for having done the most effective work after the tragedy despite not having any sort of social currency outside Bhopal. Jabbar's understated image is contrasted with Satinath Sarangi's branded one -- "a man whose name came up often as a reference point in Western articles and reports" -- running his organisation very differently from Jabbar, locating himself with the global NGO frame (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned 21). The difference in orientation, as Deb observes, results in a difference in engagement with the common problem both are responding to: "Sathyu had a terrific website where information and reports had been collated and organized neatly…[what]

he didn't have were the working-class women, slum-dwellers and toothless old men one encountered constantly in Jabbar's office." (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 21-22). The consequence of such a difference is strikingly brought out:

> In the slums of Bhopal too, in areas where the disaster has had the greatest fallout, I discovered an inverse relationship between international fame and local knowledge. No one in the slums knew Sathyu or his organization, but everyone knew Jabbar. You could have efficiency or popular support, international alliances or deep local roots, it seemed, but not both (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned 22).

Deb seems to be particularly interested in what it takes to engage with lived realities – is it possible for an outsider, or those locating themselves within a larger globalised frame, to access the local, not just in terms of information or data, but through experience, conversation, empathy? Furthermore, the encounter with Jabbar brings to light the limits of Deb's project itself:

> [a] writer visiting a new place and struggling with unfamiliar topics needs sources who are articulate, people who can point him to the key issues quickly and who can present the information in an organized way. And when the writer needs the stories of people's lives, those narratives that insert recognizable, human shapes into large but abstract conflicts, he or she depends on people who have a sense of their own trajectories and who are willing to impose form on the chaos of their experiences and memories. Neither Jabbar nor his organization seemed to possess such qualities (Deb 14)

Two strands of enquiry emerge from the introduction. Firstly, Deb encounters a set of contrasts inflecting both the social contexts he encounters – "visibility and invisibility, past and present, wealth and poverty, quietism and activism" -- which he finds both fascinating and perplexing. He decides to tease out such contrasts by looking at its constituent details: "I wanted

to write about the lives of individuals: the urban and the rural; the rich, the middle class and the poor; men and women; the technology-driven work that is seen as symptomatic of the new India as well as the exhausting manual labour that is considered irrelevant" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 26). Secondly, Deb is aware of how his personal biases inform his representational choices: "I haven't made anything up, but I am aware that I was the one who chose to pursue these characters and subjects and that my perspective may be as distorting as any, especially as I have chosen to tell only five stories from the countless stories available in a country of one billion people" (Deb 26). Deb's trajectory in the narrative, partly informed by the contrast between Jabbar and Sarangi, moves towards a greater investigation of local landscapes -- the local as standing in critical relation to global economic impulses; the local as opening up non-urban, non-metropolitan imaginings of India. The most striking example in this regard is the third chapter, where Deb documents the changing orientation of farming practice at Armoor in the Telangana region in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh (Telangana is a separate state now, of course) -- increasingly dependant on speculative economics rather than sustainable models -- and the political resistance to the same.

Deb begins the third chapter by admitting to being overwhelmed by the expansion of metropolitan cities, but recognises how the "emphasis on such urban expansion conceals what might be happening to Indian farmers, who are utterly absent from mainstream accounts of progress" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 121). The chapter titled 'Red Sorghum: Farmers in the Free Market', is centred around a specific controversy: "the story of the red sorghum and the turmoil it had caused in Armoor" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned, 127). Agricultural practice in Armoor followed a market logic: seed dealers would serve as middlemen between farmers and the market, dictate the farmers which crops to grow, and sell them off to buyers, However, in Armoor, such a logic backfires: a seed dealer called Mahipal Reddy dictated farmers to grow red sorghum, but when the crops were harvested, refused to buy them since the demand had diminished. The farmers began to protest -- partly mobilised by local political organisations -- and rallied to Reddy's house and set it on fire. Deb's representational choices are striking: the story is organised around a central event, an event which involved various characters -- the entrepreneurial seed dealer, the farmer vulnerable to the uncertainty of a free

market economy, and those who practise a form of politics resisting the logic of capitalism and struggling to enhance the rights of peasants. Deb follows the trajectories of the characters, describing their social contexts and behavioural tics -- a representational mode followed in all the chapters -- but he describes the particularity of the landscape too, a landscape prey to contested claims. Describing the influx of warehouses set up by seed dealers across the village landscape, Deb notes:

> The warehouses were new, painted in pleasant shades of orange and green, unusual in a region where houses and buildings had not much more than a coat of white-wash, and the paint made the warehouses seem alien structures, seemingly disconnected from the land (Deb 137)

The emphasis on aesthetic incongruity can easily slip into a form of provincialism, evoking a nostalgic view of a pristine rural space, setting up simplistic binaries of the authentic and the inauthentic, the natural and the artificial, the indigenous and the foreign -- which, as William Mazzarella suggests, misleads one to believe such binaries are static and not in a state of mediation (Mazzarella 305). However, Deb's choice of words are contextually relevant: to call the warehouses alien and disconnected from the land draws attention to the imposition of an economic model too, changing the logic of production itself. The warehouse represents a certain restructuring of the 'local' landscape, opening it up to an economic vision beyond its control -- the farmers cannot choose to not respond to the demands of the globalised market. However, the moment of failure and backlash leads to the imagining of resistance, an imagining which has a particular history in the context of the villages Deb travels to. Deb notes how a certain trajectory of left politics, particularly the offshoots of Naxalite politics, centred on the emancipation of peasants, still finds resonance at such moments of crisis among farmers. Deb's encounters with political activists, such as Prabhakar and Yadhagiri, tirelessly working to mobilise farmers against systematic exploitation, evokes a combination of admiration and nostalgia in him -- in the midst of a conversation with Yadhagiri, Deb experiences a profound moment of nostalgia:

> The simplicity of the surrounding as well as the idealism it evoked seemed
> intensely familiar, until it brought to me, in a sudden, unbearable wave of
> nostalgia, my childhood and and a time in India when many middle-class
> households had been like this, animated by literature, art, and politics, and where
> people still lived in a community and believed in social justice (Deb, The
> Beautiful and the Damned 142)

Such a realisation betrays a sense of pessimism: Deb, even after his exposure to pockets of resistance, finds that the contemporary frame is not as amenable to an ethos of social justice. The problem, as Deb shows, is with the dominant acceptance of the liberalised frame and the subsequent primacy of the entrepreneurial class -- but it seems that Deb is searching for tangible counterpoints to the liberalised frame, and through the stories of Jabbar and political activists in Armoor, Deb evokes possibilities for resistance. Deb presents such possibilities through moments of surprise -- for instance, on noticing how the area in which political activists lived and had their union office was remarkably "clean and tree-lined", Deb finds out from Prabhakar, one of the activists, how they managed to transform the area:

> "It was a dump, this land. It belonged to the government. We seized the land
> because all the comrades needed a place to stay. We were working for the party
> and none of us had much money. There were police beatings, we held protests,
> but eventually the government allowed us to stay on. We made it what is now"
> (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned 142).

Deb notes how this is a story of "social mobility, but a rather unexpected one" (Deb, The Beautiful and the Damned 142). The narrative, through contrasting claims to how the local can be imagined, produces two senses of the local itself: to use Dirlik's vocabulary, the local as a site of "manipulation" and the local as a site of "resistance" (Dirlik 35). Dirlik argues how the local is imagined from the perspective of global capitalism as "a site the inhabitants of which must be liberated from themselves (stripped of their identity) to be homogenized into the global culture of

capital (their identities reconstituted accordingly)" and to assume that the local can remain outside the ambit of global capital ironically renders it more "vulnerable to manipulation at the hands of global capital which of necessity commands a more comprehensive vision of global totality" (Dirlik 35). Global capitalism, however, produces a peculiar conundrum: in the attempt to subsume differences of the local within a vision of totality, it inadvertently draws attention to the legitimacy of such differences -- the fight for legitimacy of such differences or alternative visions, in turn, result in the imagining of the local as a site of resistance (Dirlik 35). Deb's attempt, in part, is to show how alternative visions are not merely responses to global capitalism, but evoke utopian imaginings to reorient dominant framings of the state, citizenship, and belonging -- it is perhaps disappointing that Deb, while noting such a possibility, does not analyse the larger pessimism marking his description of 'New India'.

The next two chapters will study narratives diagnosing the framing of post-liberalisation India in similar terms -- as marked by contradictions of wealth, power, and identity -- but are either more ambivalent, confused, or disorganised accounts. Deb's narrative is neat: even his self-reflexive analysis of the problems of representation are neatly placed in the narrative, never jarring with the described set of events. Deb's style is lucid and occasionally didactic and frequently reiterates the central biases of the narrative. The few moments of surprise and comic incongruity in the narrative, however, suggest the limitations of the narrator, Deb, as the one capable of providing an authoritative account of 'New India' -- Deb, too, has to navigate through a web of contestations.

Chapter Two: Exploring Ambivalence in Akash Kapur's *India Becoming* (2012)

I.   Becoming What?

India Becoming (2012) by Akash Kapur announces its central conceit in its very title: the metaphor of becoming. Becoming invites a dual interpretation: on the one hand, it is synonymous with economic metaphors such as 'emerging' and 'developing', frequently used to rationalise the logic of economic growth: on the other hand, it has metaphysical import, suggesting processual shifts in subjective imaginings of India. The book stands among a host of others with India in its title: *Imagining India* (2009) by Nandan Nilekani, *Emerging India* (2013) by Bimal Jalan, *India Calling* (2011) by Anand Giridharadas to name a few. Such titles suggest an expansive scale of inquiry, claiming to study, analyse, document, and evaluate the very frame of the nation. The methodological frame and vantage-points might vary, ranging from policy and quantified data to subjective realities and anecdotal details. Apart from obviously being texts studying contemporary India, or in some cases, texts attempting to provide authoritative narratives on India for a primarily Western audience, these are also personal claims on the idea of India -- Kapur's claim, as I will show, is a fascinatingly ambivalent one.

Akash Kapur returns to India in 2003, after spending more than a decade in America, as he is drawn towards the "awakening" of India, the reconfiguration of social hierarchies, the increase in opportunities for those traditionally less privileged (Kapur 7). However, Kapur begins to find such an awakening ridden with contradictions:

> I began to question aspects of the great awakening. The unrelenting optimism
> started to seem often delusional, a blinkered faith that ignored the many problems
> -- the poverty, the inequality, the lawlessness, the environmental depredation --
> still facing the nation. I began to see the self-confidence as a kind of blindness, an
> almost messianic conviction in the country's future (Kapur 7)

The 'confidence' and 'conviction', as Kapur begins to observe, is not without its own contradictions: for every story of progress, there is a story of loss, abandonment, and destruction. Like Deb, Kapur's intent is to unpeel the gloss, explore the contestations shaping contemporary India; unlike Deb, however, Kapur does not have a clear bias informing his judgments. Kapur lays out the central problem driving his narrative right at the outset: "I began to wonder if the country wasn't being engulfed in its encounter with capitalism, swallowed by a great wave of consumerism and materialism that threatened to corrode the famous Indian soul" (Kapur 8). The choice of metaphors are particularly curious: the idea of an economic juggernaut swallowing a country whole; the idea of modern aspirations corroding a reified, sacred notion of Indian identity. These metaphors find resonance in debates between notions of tradition and modernity in India -- as Partha Chatterjee has pointed out, such metaphors have been formative in shaping imaginings of the nation. Chatterjee provides an useful template to understand how conflicting claims are held together and rationalised: nationalist discourse, in the attempt to fashion a "modern national culture that is nevertheless not Western", deviates from existing colonial distinctions of the public/private to create an entirely new set of distinctions between the spiritual and the material, the inner and the outer, the essential and the inessential (Chatterjee 27-32). While the outer 'material' domain allowed for the rational-bureaucratic organisation of polity borrowing heavily from the colonial apparatus, the inner spiritual domain helped retain the notion of an essential Indian identity as opposed to Western identity. The locus of such a spiritual imagining was the family, particularly through constructions of the 'new' woman: "the new woman was to be modern, but she would also have to display the signs of national tradition and therefore would be essentially different from the 'Western' woman" (Chatterjee 31).

Kapur locates the same kind of tensions in the twenty-first century -- a large section of his narrative is devoted to exploring how constructions of gender inform aspiration and identity, but more crucially, how they relate to the frame of the nation itself -- what determines the 'modern' or the 'new' in India? The narrative, like Deb's, is a collection of stories of people, the exploration of India through those experiencing, embracing, and rejecting transition -- but it is distinct from Deb's narrative in two crucial ways. If Deb's narrative isolates identifiable instances of 'new' India, separated into chapters, cumulatively providing a sense of a whole,

Kapur's narrative is an attempt to navigate through particular details-- presented as metonymies for larger impulses within India -- by returning to them, reflecting on them, having conversations with the same people across time and space. The idea of 'return' is crucial to Kapur's narrative: the narrative is, in part, a story of his "homecoming" after "never quite belonging in America"; furthermore, Kapur constantly returns to the characters he encounters in his narrative, to provide a sense of the subtleties of transition (Kapur 9). The contemporary, as Kapur shows, is in flux. Secondly, the goals of the book -- although never explicitly stated -- seem to be distinct from Deb's demonstration of the ravages of capitalism.. Kapur is sensitive to the problems with the predominant emphasis on economic prosperity, but his introductory stance is far more ambivalent: "This book is in part a story of...how I embraced and found myself revitalized in the new India, of how I rejoiced in the nation's economic progress; and then of how, after a few years, I started to see the many edges, more than a few jagged, of that strange phenomenon called development" (Kapur 9).

The narrative could be seen as an interplay between the past and present in Kapur's own experience of India: the initial excitement followed by critical appraisal, resulting in a mixture of disappointment and hope. Kapur does not move towards a rejection of the frame of development prompted by economic liberalisation: does that constitute a compromised position vis-a-vis Deb? A way to address this problem is to look at the narrative as not just a description of a general condition, but as an engagement with particular lives -- engagement not through an instrumental lens, to merely rationalise how the particulars add up to the whole, but through a complex, dialogic orientation, exploring the nuances of each particular instance. Kapur extensively engages with each of the characters, and as he admits, many of them became "friends" (Kapur 9). Kapur's ambivalence, then, is channeled through the characters he encounters -- a greater investment in the lives of the characters complicates any simple generalisation about their contexts. This chapter will study the central tropes of Kapur's narrative, as has been anticipated already: the use of interviews or conversations; metaphors of becoming and transition; the emphasis on particular lives over general descriptions. Kapur seems to be interested in three broad contexts in his representation of contemporary India: the contested values of urbanisation; negotiations between notions of community/family and individualism; and the ecological

consequences of consumerism. I will attempt to illustrate how he addresses these contexts through particular stories, affective encounters, and descriptions of landscape. Kapur grew up in and returns to settle in Auroville, near Pondicherry, in Tamil Nadu; most of his stories and observations are concentrated in and around the southern part of India. Kapur does not tease out particular regional and linguistic distinctions -- his focus is largely on metropolitan cities such as Chennai and Bangalore, which possibly enable him to hold up particular stories as symptomatic of larger impulses across urban India. Perhaps it is an important lacuna -- it is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate such a problem -- but Kapur's version of 'India', for what it is worth, throws up a fascinating picture of both what contemporary 'India' is and how it could be studied.

II. Speaking back and forth: Negotiating difference

The purpose of history-writing till the 20th century, Paul Thompson notes, has been predominantly political: "a documentation of the struggle for power, in which the lives of ordinary people, or the workings of the economy or religion, were given little attention except in times of crisis" (Thompson 22). But even as the scope of history widened through the 21st century, with the institutionalisation of archives, the political or administrative focus was not significantly diminished: "where ordinary people have been brought in, it has been generally as statistical aggregates derived from some earlier administrative investigation" (Thompson 23). Economic histories, then, revolve around sources such as "aggregate rates of wages, prices, and unemployment; national and international political interventions into the economy...and studies of particular trades and industries"; labour history involves "studies....of the relationship between the working classes and the state in general" and "institutional accounts of trade unions and working-class political organizations"; and social histories have remained concerned with "aggregate data such as population size, birth rates, age at marriage, household and family structure" (Thompson 23). What has been left out is the personal touch: details of the local, the particular, the individual. Oral history, Thompson suggests, enriches the writing of history: to use the "life experience" of people as evidence allows for a "realistic reconstruction", in keeping

with a view of reality that is "complex and many-sided" (Thompson 24). Oral histories and ethnographies and journalistic work crucially depend on the use of the interview, which might resist being reduced to a determinate set of techniques, but frequently involves "preparation, the importance of establishing a rapport and intimacy, of listening and of asking open-ended questions, not interrupting, allowing for pauses and silences, avoiding jargon, probing" (Perks 101). Perks notes, however, that there has been a "gradual awareness that the interviewing relationship is both significantly more complex and culturally specific" and results in different kinds of interviews, ranging from "family-tree interviewing, single-issue testimony, diary interviewing, focus groups and community interviews" (Perks 101). Interviews, as Slim and Thompson suggest, can be "dangerously intimate encounters" (Slim and Thompson 114).

India Becoming (2012) begins with a conversation with Sathy, a Brahmin landlord living in Molasur, a village near Pondicherry -- Sathy is reminiscing about the rituals of village life while introducing Kapur to the physical landscape of Molasur. Within the first few lines, Sathy reveals the process of change the village (and concomitantly, Sathy's social milieu) is undergoing: the central reservoir of water drying up owing to neglect, his own diminishing status as a Brahmin landlord, his troubled attempts at maintaining composure in the face of the uncontrollable, occasionally violent pace of transition (Kapur 13-14). Sathy's composure is shaken by an inability to understand the value of change and crucially linked to a nostalgic imagining of the past. Reacting to how nobody cares about the reservoir drying up, Sathy despairs: "'People don't care any more…[before], there was respect, there was decency. Now all that's gone? Who knows what people believe in anymore?'" (Kapur 14). Even though Kapur shares Sathy's concern about environmental depredation -- this is brought out clearly later in the narrative -- he subtly distances himself at moments when Sathy laments about the loss of social order. Instead, Kapur presents two characters as providing contrasts to Sathy's imagining of an idyllic social order: Banu, Sathy's wife and Ramadas, a Dalit cow broker at a shandy, or cow market, near Sathy's village.

Banu is presented as a "frank, inquisitive" woman, working and living with her children in Bangalore, candidly admitting how it would have been impossible for her to adjust to village life: "What would I do?...I'm not the kind of woman who sits in the kitchen all day. I need to do

something. I can't even work in the fields because of his zamindar status. It would be looked down upon, it would be considered beneath me" (Kapur 68). Banu's disagreement is with the village as a certain kind of social space, as the repository of certain values which prevent her from fulfilling her aspirations --- aspirations she is allowed to encourage within the urban space: "'I don't belong here', she told me...It's beautiful, no doubt. It's peaceful. But I can't have my own life here. In Bangalore, I feel like I am a person" (Kapur 70). Kapur presents a rather difficult problem: how is it possible to harbour romantic imaginings of an agrarian society while simultaneously critiquing its feudal, patriarchal, and casteist social landscape? It is not that the urban space is a less contested space -- Kapur is careful to qualify the construction of the urban as simply liberating.

The idea of the urban that emerges in Kapur's narrative reveals points of dissonance between notions of the liberal, non-traditional, and modern on the one hand and notions of economic growth and consumption on the other: the urban space is not immune to the same biases Banu wishes to distance herself from. Kapur responds to the problem through an engaged -- and occasionally troubled -- conversation with Sathy. There is a powerful moment in the narrative when a kind of solidarity -- albeit negatively framed -- is achieved between Sathy and Kapur. They go to a garbage landfill, Kapur is appalled by the kind of pollution garbage dumps are producing, and asks Sathy: "Why should I subject them [my kids] to this poison? What am I doing to them by living in this country?" (Kapur 203). Sathy initially does not reply but after a little prodding by Kapur, opens up: "'I feel,' he said....[he] looked at me as if from a distance. 'I feel like shit'" (Kapur 203). Kapur, however critical of the economic and environmental depredations brought about by the drive towards urbanisation, does not empathise with Sathy's confidence in the vitality of a traditional social order: as he himself writes in the introduction to the book, his initial response to the rapid urbanisation of India was optimistic. However, there is a subtle negotiation transpiring between Kapur and Sathy, an increased engagement with difference and newness -- and by the end of the narrative, Sathy admits: "[when] I see everything that's happening, part of me wants to start a new life also" (Kapur 251). It is difficult to construe such a statement as a positive resolution -- the new holds both conservative and radical possibilities and it is not clear what Sathy means -- but Sathy is not reduced to a caricature of the

traditional or the conservative; Sathy is allowed to emerge as ambivalent, increasingly doubtful of his certainties, navigating through a complex social field as everyone else.

Ramadas is presented as a feisty Dalit, a legend at the business of buying and selling cows, an atheist by choice. His outlook has been shaped by the teachings of Periyar, who has powerfully argued that religion is an instrument of power, preserving upper-caste dominance. Ramadas's personal notion of empowerment, however, is not outside the trappings of the logic of economic growth. Kapur presents one of the most complex moments in the narrative through Ramadas: Ramadas, facing difficulties in the cow brokering business, decides to join a real estate business, since the developer had convinced him that he needed someone like Ramadas, "men with energy and knowhow, who knew how to swing a deal" (Kapur 249). When Kapur asks him if he would regret leaving his business, Ramadas unsentimentally suggests that the motive for working at all is making money: "'Maybe if a prostitute quits prostitution, or if an arrack seller stops selling arrack, they might have regrets. They don't know how to do anything else. But I have so many skills. I can make money so many other ways'" (Kapur 249). It is interesting to notice Sathy's response to the situation vis-a-vis Kapur's:

> To me, Ramadas was a victim—of difficult economic times, maybe, but even more, of changing times...I saw him as yet another casualty of India's development. Sathy said he saw it a little differently…[for] him, it was exciting that Ramadas had found a new line of work. Yes, times were changing, and Ramadas was being forced to move on (Kapur 250).

Sathy, although shown to be more explicitly critical of the loss of a traditional social order, seems to be sensitive to the implications of Ramadas's choice: the choice to economically empower himself is a form of achieving social mobility. Nivedita Menon and Aditya Nigam note the peculiar problem of interpretation faced by the "upper-caste elite" in recognising Dalit experience: "[the] only terms in which the upper-caste elite, even of the radical/liberal, secular kind, can deal with the Dalit experience is in terms of pain, oppression, poverty, and violence on the one hand and anger and resistance, on the other" (Menon and Nigam 101-102). Drawing

attention to a particular brand of Dalit assertion, the celebration of consumption, entrepreneurship, and capitalism, Menon and Nigam argue that the resistance to such a model of assertion is implicated in "politics that privilege renunciation and austerity, best symbolized in Gandhian politics" (Menon and Nigam 102). It is important to recognise that notions of empowerment vis-a-vis globalisation is not uniform among Dalit commentators: if, on the one hand, Chandrabhan Prasad welcomes economic liberalisation owing to the potential democratizing effects of capital, empowering Dalits to own property and have a stake in commerce and industry; Kancha Ilaiah, on the other hand, argues for the liberatory effects of cultural globalisation, enabling access to diverse cultural resources and diluting Brahminic notions of purity, but warns against inequalities created by mere economic globalisation (Menon and Nigam 100-102). Kapur is not immediately able to grasp the complexity of Ramadas's orientation, but gradually begins to recognise the implications of the duality Ramadas presents: "Ramadas's story was a quintessentially Indian story—a story of loss and renewal, of ruin and reinvention. This duality, this delicate dance between destruction and creativity, between tearing down and building up, was what defined the Indian condition at the start of the twenty-first century" (Kapur 253). The recognition is disabling in one sense: if economic liberalisation -- perhaps a less corrupt, more regulated variety -- is one mode of fighting caste and gender prejudices, how is it possible to sustain a strong critique of liberalisation as producing such rampant inequality and environmental degradation? It is important to recognise complexity, but what does one do with it, how does one take a position on it? By the end of the narrative, it is not clear whether Kapur is hopeful or skeptical about the inevitable changes confronting the entire country: "something remarkable -- something inchoate, something full of promise yet still, in many ways, frighteningly undefined -- was being built" (Kapur 256). Perhaps he is both. It should not be understated that Kapur suggests a powerful device to negotiate such change, to be able to work towards a position: to talk and engage with people, to return to contexts one learns from and allow them to mould one's position.

It is unfair to claim that Kapur inadvertently practises a politics of austerity and renunciation -- he is critical of the consequences of excessive consumerism, particularly the effects on the environment, but he is simultaneously engaging with how the drive towards

consumerism is tied with forms of assertion, particularly for the traditionally disempowered. A large part of the narrative explores the everyday negotiation carried out by individuals with their families -- the resistance to and complicity with transition is played out in private dramas, confused conversations with one's family. Kapur shows the the 'inner' and 'outer' spheres, to use Chatterjee's template, inadvertently collide with each other: unlike the nationalist project, there is no clear consensus about what constitutes national identity, even among political and economic stakeholders.

III. Family Trouble: Agency and Desire in Urban India

The family, Tulsi Patel notes, often seems to resist critical consideration given its commonplace status -- but it is not always clear how the family operates as both a "private and a visibly public institution" (Patel 19). Although the family has been seen as a nurturing institution in terms of providing healthcare and education, reproducing human capital across generation, and even as economic cooperatives, there have been strong critiques of the masculinist organisation of and structural exploitation produced by families (Patel 29-32). A.M. Shah notes that there is frequent semantic confusion about what family means: on the one hand, family may "refer...to genealogical models, without any definite indication of the activities and functions of the persons comprising the model (as in 'nuclear family' and 'extended family')" and on the other hand "to social groups having certain activities and functions, without any indication of the persons composing the group (as in 'family' in the sense of 'household' and 'joint family' in the sense of 'property-holding group')" (Shah 3). A popular index of urban transition has been the shift from joint to nuclear families, but what does it reveal about assumed shifts from communitarian expectations to individualist drives? Shah shows that the commonsensical conflation of nuclear family with individualism is not inevitable -- instead, there is a constant mediation between the idea of the 'joint' and 'nuclear' family, between social expectations and individual desires (Shah 4-5). Kapur's narrative poignantly captures such mediations through the stories of Hari, Selvi, and Veena.

Kapur meets T.Harikumar or Hari, twenty-seven years old, full of entrepreneurial energy, working in the Information Technology sector in Chennai, constantly looking for new jobs with higher salaries. Kapur is pleasantly surprised by Hari's enthusiasm, but skeptical too: "Hari's ambition was large, but I felt it was vague, undirected. It seemed motivated less by his specific circumstances than by a general mood in the country -- a mood that exalted...the enterpreneur's lifestyle, that venerated...wealth accumulation in the same way India had once venerated public service or spiritual renunciation" (Kapur 45). Hari's self-construction is, in part, premised on his difference from his family, settled in a small market town. When his parents come to visit him in the city, Hari decides to impress them by taking them to an expensive meal in a car. The situation turns out to be anticlimactic, slightly comical, but also strangely endearing:

> After dinner, in the car home, his parents complained about the evening. His mother said the food lacked taste, it wasn't spicy or salty enough. His father said it was too expensive, a waste of money. But, Hari said, even while his mother was complaining, she gave him a look that was full of happiness. She said something to him; he wouldn't tell me what it was, but he knew his mother was overjoyed that her son had taken her out to a nice dinner (Kapur 44).

The difference in orientation does not result in a clear contradiction: Hari's parents, although uncomfortable with his attention to lifestyle, are proud of his economic success. Hari's sexual orientation, however, becomes a matter of acute discomfort: Hari evasively admits to Kapur that he is sexually interested in men but cannot openly share his orientation.

The narrative follows Hari's rather tumultuous trajectory: he is sent for a project to London but subsequently loses his job, he runs up huge credit card bills which he cannot afford to pay and begins to hide from the credit card companies, he is anxious about confidently revealing his sexual orientation given how he cannot imagine his parents accepting or understanding it. By the end of the narrative, Hari manages to resolve some of his problems -- he finds a new job, he is able to share his sexual orientation with his sister -- but the contexts for the problem remains. Kapur identifies the problem with the entrepreneurial frame: the excess of

aspiration created by the sense of economic possibility, which, in Hari's story, ends up partially backfiring. As Kapur notes:

> Hari wasn't the only one having a hard time. Across the country, I heard stories like his—stories about frustrated job hunts, about layoffs and slowdowns, and projects that had to be shelved or put on hold. India's trademark optimism—its enthusiasm for capitalism, its faith in the future—was still evident…[but] accompanying the unabated (perhaps willful) cheeriness, I did sense a new wariness, and maybe even sobriety (Kapur 226).

The faith in the future, so to speak, is premised on the freedom to desire the future: desire, as is shown through Hari, is not merely for a consumptive lifestyle but also a liberal milieu. The assertion of sexuality in particular, as Menon and Nigam argue, produces an ambivalent interpretation: on the one hand, it is crucial to feminist and queer movements in India, to foreground the agency of those considered non-normative; on the other hand, the mainstream media discourse on sexual desire is often "sensationalistic and voyeuristic" and brings it up precisely to brand it as "illegitimate" (Menon and Nigam 94-95). Hari finds an emerging space for the acceptance of non-normative sexualities in the city, but his surprising reticence on the topic follows from awareness of how there is hardly a consensus on the need for such acceptance.

Kapur explores similar tensions with a couple of female characters: Selvi and Veena. He does not directly present them as offering different viewpoints and notions of agency, but as the narrative progresses, their stories begin to speak to each other -- at one point, Kapur even makes Veena respond to Selvi's story. Selvi is introduced as an opinionated person working in a call-centre in a suburb near Chennai -- interestingly, she is defensive about how she will not get "spoiled" in the city as her family constantly fears (Kapur 49). The construction of the city as a space allowing for transgressive liberties is not embraced by Selvi; she wishes to remain true to the values she grew up with and not make herself vulnerable to the advances of men, not tempt herself with the hedonistic possibilities of city life as her colleagues at work would. As she tells

Kapur, "I'm not a city girl. My background is different...I wasn't brought up to stay out and late and do those kinds of things" (Kapur 51). Kapur seems to be slightly disconcerted by her determination to remain the kind of person her parents expect her to be: "She had sharp, direct manner that often made me feel like I was saying or doing the wrong thing. She was schoolmarmish. I thought...there was something determined, even ferocious about Selvi" (Kapur 51). Selvi's story assumes a darker, troubled tone as the narrative progresses. One of her flatmates, Sudha, drowns to death; she had been out with a man without informing anyone. The repercussions are immediate: Selvi becomes more hesitant about meeting Kapur, she is warned by her parents to be careful and not talk to men, even the people living around her apartment express concern over interaction with men. Kapur's last encounter with Selvi is a troubled yet moving one: she keeps reiterating how her parents are right about how she should not mix with men, how she should not become ambitious about work and return to her hometown and get married. She confesses to Kapur:

> 'None of this would have bothered me before. I always thought: 'I am young, I will come to the city, I will have a job, a good career.' I always thought about my future that way. But now I think: 'Selvi, what are you doing? You know where you come from. Just finish your work here in the city and get married and go back home. Get married and go back to where you belong. The city isn't for people like you. (Kapur 139).

Selvi gets increasingly distressed as she thinks about how people might badmouth her if she is associated with a man -- she indirectly refers to Kapur -- and breaks down: "Selvi started to cry; tears ran down her bony face. She said—her voice weak, breaking—that there was one thing she had learned from this whole experience: she knew now that you can never trust anyone" (Kapur 140).

When Kapur mentions Selvi's story to Veena -- a marketing professional working in Bangalore -- she rebukes Selvi's dependance on her parents and asserts that nobody, whether parents or husbands, is entitled to dictate the terms of Selvi's life. Kapur deliberately places the

two stories adjacent to each other at different points in the book -- as the narrative progresses along with their individual stories, there is an emergence of contrasting notions of agency. Veena, like Selvi, introduces herself as invested in her own career, but does not have the same sense of moral or physical constraint. Reflecting on the value of the economic success and the concomitant "power" it affords her, she says:

> 'Power is good," she said, laughing. "I grew up with this very Indian concept that a woman doesn't do a lot of things. I grew up thinking that a woman was essentially less than her husband. So of course the power gives me a kind of high—knowing that I'm doing equally well or better than all these men, and knowing that they have to listen to me' (Kapur 106).

Veena claims to have navigated through the contexts Selvi feels cloistered within: it is not that Veena is structurally empowered, but her sense of independence -- which, as Kapur notes, is intertwined with the logic of economic liberalisation -- is far stronger. Veena's story, however, takes a few unexpected twists and turns: she gets married to her partner she was living in with, she leaves a lucrative job after facing sexual harassment, she get diagnosed with colon cancer and has to undergo a surgery, and begins to question her confidence in the value of economic ambition. Veena's struggle with her illness changes her expectations from the future; the future is no longer full of promises, but induces a terrifying uncertainty. Her admission of uncertainty, however, is still inflected with hope: "'[Every] time I've had a serious issue or illness in my life, it has taken me to a better thing. Every time I've had a tough period, it has been followed by a better period. It is my belief that I can come out of this thing better and stronger. It's like a rebirth.'" (Kapur 243).

All the three stories throw up complicated notions of agency and empowerment. Aradhana Sharma, in her work on grassroots women's empowerment in an economically liberalized paradigm, finds that articulations of empowerment are frequently murky and paradoxical: "empowerment is a risky and deeply political act whose results cannot be known in advance" (Sharma xx). On the one hand, the neoliberal frame renders notions of empowerment

"depoliticized" and prey to a logic of corporate managerialism; on the other hand, it "makes possible political activism and transformation" (Sharma xx). How does one evaluate such a paradox? Sharma suggests the study of the very process of articulation and performance of empowerment, to investigate how "subjects and identities are made, political agency enacted, and the meaning of development debated in in the context of everyday developmental encounters" (Sharma xxiii). Kapur's description of the complex, occasionally confused articulations of how different characters in the narrative recognise empowerment throws up a difficult and important problem: that any critique of the post-liberalisation frame has to take into account how liberalisation might have both aided and impeded specific forms of political empowerment.

III. The Ecological Question

Kapur's description of physical landscapes is constantly sensitive to ecological problems; he shows how the expansion and development of metropolitan cities involves a fair amount of environmental damage. Kapur, in a description of Bangalore, draws attention to how such a situation had begun to affect quality of life itself:

> Bangalore was a victim of its own success. It had grown too fast, and the government hadn't managed to keep up. The air quality was abominable; families with young children worried about an epidemic of respiratory illnesses. The infrastructure was creaking, in some cases virtually nonexistent. It was always astounding—and more than a little depressing—to get stuck in one of Bangalore's blackouts or on its potholed back roads. Bangalore was the showcase for India's new economy; its woes kind of made you question the solidity of that economy. (Kapur 117-118)

Kapur's realisation of the problem literally comes home, when smoke, produced from the burning of plastics, foam, and assorted dry waste from a landfill near his house, begins to blow

into his house: "But now the calamity had crept up on me, blown into my bedroom late one night, and into my children's lungs" (Kapur 198). Kapur describes this experience with a combination of outrage and despair; he generalises the problem in seething language: "India was burning—and, in a similar way, it was eroding, melting, drying, silting up, suffocating. Across the country, rivers and lakes and glaciers were disappearing, underground aquifers being depleted, air quality declining, beaches being swept away" (Kapur 197). The distress caused by this particular experience influences Kapur to try to prevent such activity at the landfill. He confronts squatters at the landfill, reliant on the waste for sustenance, and begins to realise the complexity of the problem: as a squatter named Raghu scathingly tells Kapur, "[health] is secondary for us, living is the most important" (Kapur 204). The choice, Kapur realises, "isn't between a job and clean air", it is "between a model of growth built on the backs of the poor and the ruins of the environment….and a model that is economically inclusive and environmentally sustainable" (Kapur 207).

Aseem Shrivastava and Ashish Kothari, in their critique of unfettered neoliberal policies in India, note the paradox that although 'sustainable development' has been the official buzzword for government policy on the environment, ecological crisis has heavily intensified (Shrivastava and Kothari 161). The problem, as they point out, is that policy addressed towards countering environmental damage is premised on the generation of financial resources through economic liberalisation: the irony is that "[if] environmental problems are created faster than the rate at which additional resources to tackle them are generated, if they just cannot be solved by pouring money in or if they are irreversible (e.g. the destruction of rainforests), the problem in the end is worse than when one started" (Shrivastava and Kothari 161). The alternative, for them, has to be developed outside the model of economic growth, through civil society mobilisation, localisation of resource use, greater public awareness of environmental damage, more astute financial regulation, paying attention to community well-being over narrow indicators such as economic growth: they call such an alternative Radical Ecological Democracy (Shrivastava and Kothari 393-406). The imagining of such an alternative, however radical and necessary, still has to confront the magnitude of the problem: how does one stop the ever-expansive influence of consumerism? Kapur articulates the frustration induced by the situation: "I blamed consumerism,

I blamed capitalism, I blamed the blindness of the middle classes and the callousness of the government. I was strident, worked up, maybe a little shrill. But I felt so helpless and frustrated" (Kapur 207). Outrage and frustration cannot be easily brushed away; the disquiet caused by such a situation, Kapur seems to suggest, has to be confronted.

Kapur does not claim to be a policy analyst nor does he attempt to provide solutions to the problems he describes, explores, and nuances. The positive reception of the book, by ideologically and disciplinarily diverse public intellectuals such as Amartya Sen, Gurcharan Das, William Dalrymple, Pankaj Mishra, and Ramachandra Guha, to name a few, immediately catapults the book to the status of a critical text on contemporary India -- and perhaps as representative of the kind of book that captures the driving impulses about increasingly urbanising post-liberalisation India. The value of the book, for me, is in its engagement with small details: the small details making up people's thoughts and desires and aspirations; the small details interrupting grand narratives, provoking difficult questions. Kapur feeds off the peculiar mixture of hope and despair every character in the narrative displays -- by the end of the narrative, he holds on to a "cautious optimism", a cautious optimism that the "nation's great self-confidence will prove prophetic rather than merely boastful, that the tremendous wealth of a few presages a prosperity of many, and that the great churning that is modern India will eventually settle into some kind of equilibrium" (Kapur 259).

Chapter Three: Representing the Urban in Rana Dasgupta's *Capital* (2014)

    I.   Theorising the City

       Capital (2014) by Rana Dasgupta follows a rich line of writing on the city in India. Vinay Lal, in the introduction to the two-volume *Oxford Anthology of the Modern Indian City* (2013), notes that although "the city in India is emerging as the site of great ferment, certainly agitating the minds of the country's novelists, filmmakers, entrepreneurs, and policy planners, it is well to recall that the city in India is as old as Indian civilisation" (Lal xv). Lal's anthology collects writing from across disciplines and contexts, providing a sense of the varied imaginings of the urban. Lal's attempt is to put together writings on the modern Indian city which focus on the city "as a site of imagination, as a nodal point for contestations over modernity, and as a location of specific cultural phenomena" -- writings formally traversing fiction, nonfiction, and poetry (Lal xlvi). To begin to study the city as a crucial trope in post-liberalisation India requires both an acknowledgment of the primacy of the city in the historical imagining of India itself as well as an an acknowledgment of the diversity of aesthetic forms which have continually imagined the city. The city in the present inevitably borrows its energies and anxieties from the city in the past.

       Gyan Prakash looks at how the city emerges as a crucial symbol for modernity in nationalist imagination: although Gandhi's reclamation of the village as preserving the essential identity of India as opposed to the city as a symbol of corrupt Western modernity found resonance in nationalist discourse, it was eventually forsaken for Nehru's emphasis on the city as the beacon of the future (Prakash 3). Prakash argues that such a binary is more complicated than it seems: both Gandhi and Nehru were, in some sense, influenced by the "refashioning" logic of modernity and produced "cross-hatched" conceptions of the city and the village (Prakash 4). If Gandhi argued that the ideal village would foster independence of spirit and not be a backward place where people lived in "dirt and darkness", Nehru argued that urbanising villages does not imply luring people away to towns and cities (Prakash 4-5). The village and the city were posited as different stages of development in the planning of the nation-state, but if history is any indication, the idea of stages does not merely consist of spatial and technological divisions, but is

refracted through "power" (Prakash 5). The narrative of the city, if seen only through the lens of modernization, reductively foregrounds merely the "theme of development, of transition from tradition to modernity, as a stage in historical evolution" -- how does one articulate the "experience of the city" within such a template? (Prakash 5). Instead, the city, according to Prakash, has to be seen through its "practices, memories, and desires", through its manifold stagings and articulations, "to bring into view spaces of power and difference suppressed by the historicist discourse of the nation" (Prakash 6). This, in part, involves a revised orientation to the frame of modernity itself.

Narratives of modernity, William Mazzarella argues, frequently lapse into narratives of disenchantment, inevitably prompting:

a kind of return of the repressed, whether in the form of a grand revolutionary reversal or a more inconclusive, but no less subversive, 'haunting' of the deathly abstractions of modern knowledge by the vitally embodied energies they both require and deny…[the] ideological discourse of modernity not only represses and demonizes the affective but also romantically fetishizes it - particularly insofar as it can be located at the receding horizon of a savage disappearing world, an anthropological other in the classic sense (Mazzarella 295)

Mazzarella proposes that the study of modernity should be reoriented towards the thinking of affect -- a terrain which is "presubjective without being presocial" -- as it will lead towards a "way of apprehending social life that does not start with the bounded, intentional subject while at the same time foregrounding embodiment and sensuous life" (Mazzarella 292). Modernity is constantly mediated by affect: if, on the other hand, affect is considered as merely produced through immediacies, as preceding mediation, narratives of modernity inevitably create a hierarchy between a rationalised, modern, disenchanted order as the inevitable logic of the future and the ethnic, primitive, rural order as preceding modernity and thus relegated to the status of an anthropological relic. The processes through which subjective responses to rational constructions of the urban are formed involve mediations which are affective and embodied, and cannot be

entirely determined by the logic of planning and development. As Mazzarella states, the category of the local (such as ethnic identity) and the non-local (such as citizenship) are distinguishable in discourse, but "politics in practice always involves...a mediation between, on the one hand, claims to local and finite identification and, on the other, an aspiration to universal relevance" (Mazzarella 305).

The city in post-liberalisation India emerges as a crucial index for development and growth: the tropes of "consumption" and "modernity" have been synonymous with the urban (Lal xxxv). Such tropes, as Nandy argues, invent and imagine the city through certain metaphors: the city as allowing for an expansion of the self, the city as the alternative to the village, the city as haunted by its own contestations (Nandy 298-301). These metaphors contain both spatial and temporal dimensions: the city as temporally superseding the rustic, the traditional, the old; the city as extending and organising and developing space. The articulation of such metaphors, as Jonathan Charley argues, is not merely to describe the urban, but also to imagine the potential of the urban. Such a task is perhaps the writer's prerogative:

> The architect, if he or she is to escape the prison of representation, is faced with the task of trying to mend, ameliorate, or transcend the contradictions of the capitalist city. Whereas the writer, unencumbered by the practical tasks of physically altering material reality, is free to depict, represent and play with the contradictions thrown up the instrumental acts of architect, urban designer, developer, and politician. The dialectic has produced at times quite extraordinary urban and anti-urban visions. (Charley 12)

A fair amount of contemporary English-language nonfiction has taken on the task of imagining the city, a task inevitably fraught with the author's personal motivations and biases. The autobiographical emphasis in recent texts such as *Maximum City* (2004) by Suketu Mehta, *Calcutta* (2013) by Amit Chaudhuri, and the series on short biographies of cities brought out by Aleph Book Company[3], perhaps attempt to self-reflexively foreground the problem: the

---

[3] Aleph Book Company has brought out short biographies of Calcutta, Delhi, Chennai, and Bombay.

evaluation of a city is, in part, an evaluation of the author's own anxieties, aspirations, and desire to locate herself within the city. Dasgupta's narrative of Delhi is distinct in its focus on the the transformation of the city within the frame of economic liberalisation -- the focus, however, broadens to looking at Delhi as produced within global systems of power. Capital, as a title, is explicitly revealing of the focus of the book. Delhi, as the political capital of India, serves as an index for larger impulses transforming India; Delhi, at the same time, is transforming within the logic of global capitalism. It would be clarifying to distinguish Dasgupta's narrative from both Siddhartha Deb's and Akash Kapur's. Deb finds different instances of contemporary India as justifying an existing construction of global capitalism -- globalization as producing an increased emphasis on consumption and urbanization, as producing massive asymmetries in wealth, power, and culture -- while Kapur attempts to describe the ambivalent, sometimes contradictory subjective responses produced by globalization. Dasgupta's diagnosis is somewhere in between: he studies Delhi as both produced within a globalizing logic yet having its own particular idiosyncrasies. Such an approach, however, produces a rather disorienting narrative.

Dasgupta's narrative constantly veers from the particular to the general: most chapters, for instance, begin with details of encounters and interviews, but gradually move towards theoretical claims attempting to rationalise the details. Unlike Deb's precise and organised arrangement of details, however, Dasgupta's descriptions are imbued with a sense of excess; the narrative is sprawling and disorganised. Dasgupta, unlike Kapur, is also not making a case for an ambivalent understanding of urban impulses vis-a-vis economic liberalisation -- by the end of the narrative, Dasgupta articulates a clearly pessimistic position. The interviews, although distinguishable by content, are represented in a similar register: earnestly self-justifying, desperately insistent, and slightly unhinged. Dasgupta is hardly present in the interviews, it is unclear how he encourages conversation: the interviewees appear surprisingly effusive as a consequence. The distinctions between specific contexts is offered by the interpretive frames punctuating the narrative: it is implied that the content of the interviews have meanings determined by metanarratives of partition, patriarchy, and of course, global capitalism. This leads to a peculiar incongruity: the details of the narrative appear richly effusive, suggesting subjective meanings beyond specific determinations, but the narrative is held together with a set of

determinate conclusions about Delhi as a globalising city. Dasgupta's narrative presents complicated relations between the particular and the general, the personal and the impersonal – how are these relations to be understood? It might not be too far-fetched to consider the narrative as a physical embodiment of the city as Dasgupta experiences it: in other words, any representation of Delhi in the twenty-first century has to be layered, disturbed, spilling over the edges. The subtitle of the book -- "[a] portrait of twenty-first century Delhi" -- gives a sense of the aesthetic orientation of the narrative: the description of appearances, the layering of spatial and temporal dimensions of the urban, the eventual framing into a whole. In this chapter, I will look at two crucial aspects of Dasgupta's narrative: the interviews, filled with details and digressions, evoking a sense of the energies and anxieties of those who lay claim to the city in various ways; and the historical contexts Dasgupta finds lurking behind the idiosyncrasies of the present.

II. Wealth, Ambition, and Risk

Rana Dasgupta, who grew up in England, arrives in Delhi a decade after economic liberalisation and in his own estimate, "that decade before [his] arrival had been devoted mainly to what you could call changes to its 'software', while its 'hardware' remained relatively untouched" (Dasgupta 36-37). Dasgupta uses such a metaphor precisely to contrast the past with what was to happen in the subsequent decade: "the furious tearing-down of all that hardware in the pursuit of globalism" (Dasgupta 37). By hardware, Dasgupta seems to refer to not just the architecture of the city, but the structuring of experience and aspiration in the city. The narrative is, in part, an exploration of what makes Delhi vulnerable to such a rapid dismantling of older forms of living -- the fragility, the traumas, the heedlessness. Dasgupta finds Delhi intensely promising on arrival: he finds artists and intellectuals furiously exploring the potential of the newness Delhi was being ushered into. There were rich critical debates on how a cosmopolitan public was to to be imagined, how global capitalism was to be translated and adapted in Delhi's context to prevent irresponsible consumption of public resources, how art and literature were to creatively articulate the possibilities of the city. The gestating potential, according to Dasgupta,

is not just left unrealised, but is "taken over by more dismal energies" a decade later: "[money] ruled this place as it did not even the 'materialistic' West, and the new lifestyle that we saw emerging around us was a spiritless, degraded copy of what Western societies had developed...office blocks, apartment blocks, shopping malls and, all around, the millions who never entered any of them except, perhaps, to sweep the floors" (Dasgupta 43). Such an evaluation sounds harsh and absolute, but it provides Dasgupta an origin for his narrative: what did people have to do with these changes, how was the city imagined by those living through the reshaping of the city? As Dasgupta writes, "I resolved to start with them, with the torrent of Delhi's inner life, and to seek there the rhythm, the history, the mesh, from which a city's lineaments might emerge" (Dasgupta 45).

The city's lineaments emerges through particular encounters, desires, and traumas; but Dasgupta also begins to discover that the city is not merely produced through those it contains, but is mediated through "global systems": "indeed, the book I began to write felt like a report from the global future: for it seemed to be in those 'emerging' centres like this, which missed out on international capitalism's mid-twentieth-century – its moment of greatest inclusiveness and hope – that one could best observe the most recent layer of global time" (Dasgupta 45-46). Globalisation, as Cameron and Palan argue, is "explicitly a story of temporal change": the idea that the "world is becoming more global" is a ruse to rationalise specific policies aimed towards accelerating capitalist expansion, spatial reorganisation of the city, and consumerist frames (Cameron and Palan 57). Delhi, Dasgupta begins to discover, is prey to a determining logic -- its impulses are not entirely its own. The global city, as Saskia Sassen has theorised, are cities which function as "highly concentrated command points in the organization of the world economy", "as key locations for finance and for specialized service firms, which have replaced manufacturing as the leading economic sectors", "as sites of production, including the production of innovations, in these leading industries; and finally, "as markets for the products and innovations produced" (Sassken 3-4). Such cities, Sassken notes, are cropping up across asymmetric national frames, across both the first-world and the third-world, thus consolidating the logic of global systems. Dasgupta throws up a curious problem: Delhi's story could be told as a particular account of global capitalism, but such an account would contain its own

idiosyncrasies, its own anomalies. Dasgupta finds that Delhi, "with its broken public space, with its densely packed poor living to the most sweeping, most sparsely populated areas...with its aspiring classes desperately trying to lift themselves out of the pathetic condition of the city into a more dependable and self-sufficient world of private electricity supplies and private security" is not the template of the global city that was either desired or expected (Dasgupta 439). To make sense of such a situation, Dasgupta suggests, is perhaps to confront a devastating conclusion: that Delhi does not represent "some backward stage of world history…[instead it] is the world's future" (Dasgupta 439). How does Dasgupta begin to make sense of the troubled mediations between global impulses and particular idiosyncrasies?

Aihwa Ong argues that the emphasis on "globalization" to rationalise urban impulses across contexts and histories might gloss over particular variations. The schematic perspective that "there is a single system of capitalist domination, and a set of unified effects of regular causal factors that can foment nearly identical problems and responses in different global sites" might fail to "enrich our understanding of particular challenges and solutions on the ground" (Ong 6-7). Ong, instead, uses the concept of "worldling" -- a set of "projects and practices that instantiate the world in formation" -- to emphasise emergence, uncertainty, and experimentation (Ong 11). Although Dasgupta begins his narratives with metaphors of emergence, with a hopeful anticipation of Delhi's potential resistance to the repercussions of globalisation, his conclusions are far more fatalistic. His conclusions, it seems, follows from the kind of evidence he gathers, the people he interviews: the rich, the ambitious, the power brokers of the city.

The narrative begins with Rakesh, a businessman owning multiple manufacturing organisations, belonging to a family of traders. Dasgupta's representational choices are striking. Rakesh is introduced through a highly suggestive description of his house: "The building is like two space stations, one glass and one stone, crossing over each other. One of them floats free of the earth, a shining bridge to nowhere, its underside glinting with landing beacons" (Dasgupta 1). Dasgupta does not merely evoke a sense of magnitude, but the metaphor of a house as a space station suggests the symbolic separation of such a building from what is considered worldly and mundane. Such a separation, however, does not seem to produce a meaningful identity: the "shining bridge to nowhere" paradoxically evokes a sense of a prominent yet vacuous enterprise.

Rakesh earnestly speaks of his economic ambition, his sense of responsibility, and draws attention to the magnitude of his business: there is the simultaneous evocation of work as spectacle and work as vocation. Rakesh finally ends his self-narration with a seemingly ironic admission: "I'm nice. I'm not ruthless, frankly, I'm not ruthless. That's probably a drawback I have. I should be ruthless" (Dasgupta 16). The drive to have a ruthless disposition is prompted by Rakesh's ambition to accumulate wealth, control proceedings -- the drive, however, has to counteract values of 'kindness' and 'humility', intrinsic to Rakesh's familial identity. It is unclear what prompts Rakesh to speak with such confidence -- Dasgupta is neither visible as a speaker in the sequence nor does he describe his observations while listening to Rakesh. Dasgupta seems to be setting up a template for how the young rich in the city express themselves -- the subsequent interviews in the narrative follow a remarkably similar pattern.

Firstly, these characters construct the past in a certain way -- rooted in family histories, older business cultures – which emphasise their sense of lineage but also demonstrate the superiority of the present. The past has to be necessarily acknowledged but provides a redundant vision for the world – the present, instead, constantly verges towards the future, the modern, the infinitely possible. Secondly, these characters display remarkable self-confidence: they do not hesitate to stake their claims on a futuristic vision of the city, glossing over existing social contradictions. And thirdly, and perhaps most interestingly, they attempt to distance themselves from potential caricatures of themselves as ruthless and heartless – money, for them, produces possibilities for social change. These interviews present themselves as rambling monologues more often than not, owing to Dasgupta's palpable absence as the interlocutor – Dasgupta is present, of course, as the one transcribing and representing the interview, as the one wielding narrative authority and scrutinising the interviews through larger theoretical templates. However, his lack of conversational presence imbues the interviews with a strange irony: it seems as if the speakers are oblivious to Dasgupta as they are speaking to him, it is as if they are speaking to themselves instead.

A striking example of such a character type in the narrative is Rahul, an inheritor of a large family business, who emphatically justifies his need to make money using a rather curious argument:

"Look at the businessmen around you. Here. They build obscene houses. They have all these obese children who will eat themselves into an empty grave. Then there will be endless property disputes. And then what?....What is their vision of life? You make money, then you die. You just accumulate a big fortune...and you never do anything else. I mean how much money do I need? Once I have my apartment in New York and I fly everywhere first class, how much money do I really need? I'm going to change the world with my money. Which is why I need to make so much" (Dasgupta 223)

Rahul projects himself as moving beyond self-interest: money is not merely meant for personal accumulation, but a way to invest in the world, to stake a claim in the future. Dasgupta frames Rahul's interview with a tremendous amount of irony; although Rahul speaks with apparent uninterrupted gusto, Dasgupta subtly inserts a couple of observational comments to orient the reader. Rahul, at one point, notes with deliberate self-deprecation how he feels he is rapidly ageing owing to his immense ambition. Dasgupta's subsequent observation is both comical and incisive: "It is as if Rahul feels he has made a Faustian bargain with his family firm…[it] will suck out all his youth...[but]... it will give him enormous productive power" (Dasgupta 222). To pursue the metaphor further, the Faustian bargain is, of course, with the frame of endless capitalist accumulation. Dasgupta hints at the perplexity of the problem: why does Rahul want to enter this bargain to begin with? The interview ends with a sense of contrast. Rahul clarifies that his ambition to change the world is not necessarily a charitable one, directed towards benefitting those less privileged than himself, and distinguishes between his personal and professional ethics: "I did go to a liberal American college, and that's what I am in my heart. But when I'm running the company, I'm the stereotypically evil capitalist. I'm like a character from *Hard Times*. I order people about" (Dasgupta 223). Dasgupta mentions that his meeting with Rahul was preceded by a rather bleak experience: he visited a camp set up for labourers working on the infrastructure for the Commonwealth Games and found that the labourers and their families are

being forced to survive in unhealthy, dehumanizing conditions of living[4]. Dasgupta powerfully describes the situation:

> Workers and their families sleep in windowless corrugated iron shacks, and there are ten toilets for about 3000 people. With the monsoon rains, the whole place is under water: wandering children have fallen into unseen holes in the ground and drowned: mosquitoes have reproduced exorbitantly and spread malaria throughout the camp. I have spent the afternoon talking to those too sick to be out at work. They are not paid for the days they do not work, and cannot visit a doctor.They wonder if they will ever make it back to their far-off homes (224)

In a rare display of conversational intervention, Dasgupta mentions this experience to Rahul, who responds with a rather peculiar conviction: "I'm sure if I were to see that I would feel the same…[but] if I saw those people, I am sure I would also feel contempt"(Dasgupta 224). The narrative shows how Rahul's consistency of capitalist zeal and sense of entitlement ironically results in a profound inconsistency: his vision of the future and his grand plans for developing society never move beyond the ambit of self-interest.

The discourse of development in contemporary India, as Aditya Nigam provocatively argues, is dominantly framed in terms of the desire to consume: desire in need of constant replenishment, desire which will run into crisis if not reproduced (Nigam 2-3). The desire to consume is perpetuated through an "elaborate network of systems, processes, apparatuses and relations that keep working in order to produce the individual as consumer" (Nigam 3). Economies do not produce for definable human needs as much as abstract monoliths such as the 'Gross Domestic Product' or 'Sensex' -- the ambition to produce, develop, and innovate is measured in terms of quantitative data, which are strangely reified despite not being commonly understood or translated (Nigam 3). Characters such as Rakesh and Rahul are represented, in their own words, as having a sense of disproportionate agency to desire, own, and control the development of the city. However, they paradoxically appear to be automatons within an already

---

[4] The Commonwealth Games held in Delhi in 2010 was a heavily contested affair, beset with financial scams, massive exploitation of labour, forceful redevelopment of city infrastructure.

created discourse, merely repeating what is assumed to be self-evident: the desirability of development. Development in twenty-first century urban India, as Nigam puts it, "is a story of the production of the 'consumer' so that something called 'the economy' can flourish -- which, incidentally, has very little to do with people being fed and clothed" (Nigam 5). Dasgupta's subtle ironic observations do not interrupt the strong assertion of such a position by the characters interviewed, but attempt to draw attention to the cracks in the position: what does the relentless pursuit of making money do to the emotional, social, familial lives of such people?

Towards the end of the narrative, Dasgupta interviews Anurag, who puts on an air of self-importance as he discusses his economic ambitions but is, in fact, partially living off his father since his own business collapsed. Anurag takes Dasgupta to a park instead of a restaurant and shares an odd, intimate moment, displaying a sense of vulnerability:

> "I'm not so crazy about restaurants….I'm more comfortable out here. There's a
> beautiful dog here who comes to see me. Black and white. I don't know where he
> is tonight. Back when I used to have money, I used to come every night and feed
> him chicken. It used to make me feel better when I had too many problems.
> Family, money, girlfriend" (Dasgupta 408)

Anurag comes across as alternately stoic and desperate, speculating on the numerous economic investments he can possibly benefit from yet never certain whether such acts are meaningful to begin with. His ambition to earn money is expectedly justified in terms of value to his immediate society -- in his own words, "I want to change things. I want to show people how to live. That's why I need 1000 crores"" (Dasgupta 412). Such a seemingly oxymoronic admission -- the desire to improve or reform a money-minded world through more money -- appears commonsensical to Anurag and the rest of the young businessmen Dasgupta interviews. Dasgupta, although initially perplexed by this position unanimously held by young entrepreneurs, finally arrives at an evaluation: "*Delhi is obsessed with money, it is the only language it understands, and to buy myself out of its vulgarity and its money-mindedness, I need lots of money*. It is a strange, self-defeating logic which obviously universalises the escalation of that which it hates"

(Dasgupta 412). It is unclear why such a self-defeating logic continues to systematically influence the preferences and choices of even those who are undermined by it -- not all enterprising young businessmen have an equally successful trajectory after all. One of the characters Dasgupta interviews, Puneet, admits to losing out on the economic possibilities offered by the liberalised frame: he begins to trade different commodities and make money rapidly, following which his business is clamped down by the police owing to another businessman conspiratorially reporting against him, and in the process, his romantic partner leaves him for the son of a cabinet minister with greater economic and political leverage (Dasgupta 382-83). Although Puneet seems to lament the loss of his economic wealth while explaining why he could not integrate himself within the power elite of the city, he admits to finding a spiritual turn in his thinking about aspiration, which strangely makes him attractive to his colleagues. He describes the shift in his temperament:

> "My ego has been broken down. I'm celibate. My rich friends come to me to find
> peace. They admire me, because part of them wants to be living the spiritual life
> like I am, dude. People with money are so attracted to me. Sometimes they have
> problems in their business lives -- they make massive money off two deals and
> then nothing else happens -- and I find a quote or a lesson that will unblock them"
> (Dasgupta 389)

Puneet, in fact, frequently visits a "guru" or a spiritual leader to purify himself from the corruptions of a modern ego-driven world -- but, on being prodded by Dasgupta on what he would do if he managed to reclaim his wealth, unabashedly asserts,

> "I just want to get laid, man. Just leave all this behind. Spent too much time being
> a hermit. Do you think I don't want the things other people want? I still like the
> idea of living in a luxurious house and driving a big car. I like nice women with
> nice asses. I like the concept of having a family and children and all that. I've put

in ten years to cleaning up my spiritual account and my money still hasn't come

back to me. It's tiring" (Dasgupta 390-391)

Puneet seems to be oblivious to the contradictory nature of his assertions -- but perhaps, as Dasgupta hints, Puneet's statements should not be seen as a contradiction. The quest for the spiritual, in Puneet's case, is not antithetical to the quest for the material: both are interpreted as modes of acquiring control over one's immediate surroundings. The quest for control is, in part, a reaction to the ubiquity of risk marking the economic framing of the city. Stories of both success and failure, in the estimation of the characters themselves, are measured in terms of investment and returns: there is never any certainty about what really pays off. There is always risk, potentially destructive.

Ulrich Beck argues that "[in] advanced modernity the social production of wealth is systematically accompanied by the social production of risk" owing to the emphatic surge towards greater production and consumption of resources, unleashing all kinds of fatal hazards and threats, capable of wiping off the human race itself (Beck 19). Such a fatalist logic, however, is kept at bay by the simultaneous emphasis on the management of risk through various institutional modes (Beck 19). Risk is both produced and contained within the frame of global capitalism: Dasgupta's narrative presents a set of examples of those who are beneficiaries of risky ventures, resulting in no less than massive consumption of natural resources and the displacement and exploitation of non-propertied, socially and economically marginalised peoples -- but, much to their dismay, are never immune to risk themselves. The primacy of risk in the context of Delhi, however, is not merely attributable to the frame of global capitalism and the constant need to produce wealth, but also local histories. Delhi has its own peculiar idiosyncrasies, which Dasgupta begins to unearth in the course of the narrative.

III. Histories and Traumas

The chapterization of the narrative does not follow any identifiable temporal or thematic logic: the chapters are abruptly divided, moving from one set of experiences and observations to

another set, giving the sense of an unwieldy, sprawling narrative. As I have suggested before, the formal organisation of the narrative is perhaps reflective of the difficulty of representing the subject matter: Dasgupta's choice to not neatly divide contexts, but instead layer different contexts and histories over each other, evokes a sense of Delhi as a city with no clear edges. Dasgupta, unlike Deb and Kapur, does not announce his intent to represent specific contexts or deliberately at the beginning of each chapter: it is doubtful, in fact, to ascertain whether Dasgupta has a clear purpose in mind while navigating through different social spaces. It is as if he chances upon them, discovers them in a rather revealing state -- each context explicitly reveals itself as Dasgupta wanders around the city and the reader is left to speculate what kinds of investigation or preparation preceded the discovery of each context . Even in the evocation of history, Dasgupta does not offer any systematic account of history: for instance, in the second chapter titled 1991, referring to the year the economy began to be liberalised, is almost entirely about Nehruvian socialism and how it both gained and lost popularity over a few decades. Dasgupta's framing of the chapter, however, is through an epigraph quoting "Indira, a jewellery designer":

> "I'm very proud to be an Indian. When I was a kid and people would ask me where I was from I would be embarrassed to say I was from India. But something changed in the nineties. Now I'm very proud to say I'm from here. In those days there was nothing, you know, and the place was so dirty. Now we have BMWs on the streets. By the time I'm fifty it will really have arrived. My kids' generation will really see it. Everything is happening. It's all happening here" (Dasgupta 49)

The emphasis on the modern and the contemporary produces a certain simplistic version of the past, where it is relegated to being embarrassing or undesirable, deliberately glossing over what the past specifically contained. Dasgupta notes how the Nehruvian vision of economy, despite its failures, "continued to enjoy an almost theological prestige" for a large part of the four decades following independence, owing to its "lofty, Brahminical conception, which disdained money-making and worldly vanity" and instead constructed the nation itself as the "proper object

of aspiration" (Dasgupta 55). The shift from such a framing of the nation to the contemporary, although rationalised through shifts in social and political perceptions, is not as clean a shift as it is made out to be: history lurks behind the contemporary, springing up despite systematic attempts to repress it. History, as Dasgupta shows, also has to be excavated and analysed for it to make sense in the contemporary.

The eighth chapter, for instance, is entirely devoted to the rumination of Delhi as a city in ruins through history: from the Mughal period to the times of British colonialism to post-independence India. There have been many shifts of regime in Delhi, dismantling and renewing Delhi, which produces a peculiar experience of "living in the aftermath" of an older order -- and Dasgupta shows how such a perception persists despite the contemporary construction of Delhi as the index of a "fast-growing and dizzyingly populous nation" (Dasgupta 154). Delhi's writers, Dasgupta notes, have consistently presented a portrait of desolation -- Delhi has been described as a "city of ruins"-- and have "directed their creativity to expressing that particular spiritual emancipation that comes from being cut off from one's past". This is a particularly ironic statement in the context of the narrative. Being cut off can have very different resonances, as Deb suggests: on the one hand, one's location within a transforming landscape can provoke an intense imagining of the past, frequently expressed as powerful nostalgia; on the other hand, the inevitable logic of development might cut one off from the very possibility of imagining the past. Mirza Ghalib, who was writing both before and after the siege of Delhi by the British in 1857, particularly lamented the attack on cultural institutions, the ransacking of libraries and the physical destruction of books -- Urdu literature was at stake, and by extension, a mode of imagining and representing the world was threatened. Dasgupta does not consciously locate himself within a tradition of writing responding to loss and desolation, but the analogy is obvious: even in a single decade of living in Delhi, he experiences a drastic movement from cultural possibility ro the complete closure of possibility. Although the trajectory of Dasgupta's narrative follows the same logic as he ascribes to the historical representation of Delhi, he is alert to the particularity of his time: the representation of the contemporary in the twenty-first century, Dasgupta implies, is unable to access even the imagining of the past. The access to the past is

partially through language, and Delhi's cultural memory was heavily reliant on the Urdu language: as Sadia Dehlvi, a character in Dasgupta's narrative mourns,

"How can you expect Delhi to care about its own history when no one can read the languages it is written in? Its entire history is written in Urdu and Persian. The government deliberately killed Urdu after 1947 because they treated it as a Muslim language. But Urdu had nothing to do with religion: it was the language of Delhi, of everyone in Delhi…I mourn the loss of language…[when] you want to destroy a people, you take away their language" (Dasgupta 160)

Sadia Dehlvi, whose family used to run a publishing house, publishing magazines in Urdu and Hindi, admits to the impossibility of reviving an older literary ethos and instead chooses to focus on her spiritual goals: "I am not interested in trying to revive the family business. That era has gone….I am happy to focus on what is inside me and to write on spirituality, Ours is a wonderful city, a modern city: I don't want to be negative. But our soul is affected. Something has snapped. I can't identify it" (Dasgupta 160). The metaphor of spiritual emancipation is ironic in the contemporary: emancipation is mediated by loss of meaning and value, but more enigmatically, by the inability to identify the nature of such a loss. The contexts of Dehlvi and young aspirational young entrepreneurs are clearly distinct -- the former inhabits a context strongly mediated by the past and the latter is strongly driven towards the future -- but a rather tenuous, enigmatic similarity emerges: the experience of a visceral loss. Dasgupta's narrative attempts a contextualisation of such a loss -- whether it is the imagining of a state premised on socialist ideals, or a cultural ethos exploring value and meaning in human enterprise, or the imagining of society as cosmopolitan -- but as various characters draw attention to the difficulty of identifying the exact nature of such a loss, it seems that a crucial problem is with the absence of a vocabulary to articulate the sense of a loss. Dasgupta, in the course of the narrative, does not explore the differences in linguistic idioms through which Delhi might be imagined: his choice to translate and represent characters across contexts in the same register -- a prosaic, earnest, self-justifying one -- serves to homogenise the characters within a general

idiom. This obviously helps Dasgupta move towards a general conclusion: that Delhi's reimagining through global capitalism produces an idiom marked by not just the rhetoric of economic ambition, but a simultaneous self-renewal and forgetting. The sense of enigmatic loss, perhaps, suggests a structural disconnect from the material bases of the past: how does one remember the past in a constantly self-justifying present? This problem is terribly complex, of course, and Dasgupta's attempt to find a categorical conclusion is complicated by the imprecise responses of those he interviews. Even if global capitalism is the general frame within which a kind of collective forgetting takes place, Dasgupta draws attention to how there is a particular historical and psychological condition abetting such a process: the negotiation with trauma.

The tenth chapter, pointing out the centrality of the experience of partition in the post-independent imagining of India, begins with an offhand observation, which assumes metaphoric potential as the chapter proceeds:

> The car honks merrily as it approaches the main intersection, as if there were only
> ten other cars on the streets, as if such signals were not entirely drowned in the
> hubbub. Having broadcast its alert, it then drives serenely, and without looking,
> into the furious path of 16 million people and their traffic. (Dasgupta 186)

The car serves as a metaphor for a kind of casual yet devastating presumption: that one can drive towards one's ambition without taking notice of the plethora of competing interests scattered across one's path, inviting collisions one is simply not prepared for. Such collisions might breed violence -- violence which is not as much consciously planned as spontaneously produced. The partition of British sub-continental territory into two separate nation-states, India and Pakistan, did not just produce massive communal violence -- "Muslims in what became India, and Hindus and Sikhs in what became Pakistan, were cut down in their houses and in the streets" -- but also resulted in a logic of segregation influencing the habitation of the cityspace (Dasgupta 189). Dasgupta notes how it is difficult to find satisfying reasons to explain the magnitude of such violence -- even though there have always been tensions between religious communities, partially fuelled by ruling powers, the "overwhelming memory of pre-Partition culture in North

India is not one of enmity…[but] rather of inter-religious respect and harmony" (Dasgupta 190-91). The violence of partition, analogous to civil wars and genocides in other parts of the world, can be seen as a fantasy for the annihilation of communities with unequal claims to the newly constructed nation-state -- the structure of such violence is not just targeted against a community, but also "against its reproductive potential: not only indiscriminate slaughter but also the repeated exposure of unborn foetuses, the ceremonial display of castrated penises...and rape on a colossal scale, whose purpose was genetic subjugation" (Dasgupta 190). Dasgupta compares such a process to a ritual of infinite purification to mould oneself to narrow identitarian claims of citizenship and belonging -- infinite because its "true theatre was not external but in the self" (Dasgupta 191). The loss of an older, shared culture is implicit in this process: when Hindus killed Muslims, they killed the influence of Islam in their notion of cultural identity, the "Islam they carried within themselves" (Dasgupta 191). Dasgupta suggests that the sense of intangible, psychic loss experienced by people across contemporary contexts is perhaps an inheritance of a post-Partition consciousness, one marked by the emphasis on survival and the necessary sacrifice of a love directed towards other communities, a "love which had become, in the modern world, forbidden" (Dasgupta 191).

It is perhaps contentious to make general claims about a massive transformative event such as Partition and it is unclear what kind of ethnographic evidence Dasgupta relies on. His representational style, however, has tremendous affective resonance: he clearly draws attention to how the murky admission of loss is partially a problem of belonging to a society. For all the confidence people have in the primacy of the contemporary or the modern, there are always unacknowledged anxieties about a past that has been supplanted or hastily overtaken. The problem is located in the contemporary through the interviews -- not in any straightforward way, but through moments of indecision and uncertainty puncturing fairly consistent self-justificatory assertions -- and the problem is historicised through a psychological account of how the transition to a modern state is mired in a violence directed towards not just those who have to be excluded or forgotten or annihilated, but towards one's self. Dasgupta argues that "Partition, more than anything else, marks the birth of what can be recognised as contemporary Delhi culture" and that "[even] those who were born long after Partition, even those, such as myself,

who arrived in Delhi from other places and histories, find themselves, before long, taking on the post-traumatic tics which are so prominent in the city's behaviour" (Dasgupta 193). Such a claim is difficult to empirically demonstrate, but Dasgupta's narrative judges and expresses the post-traumatic tics in the behaviour of those who inhabit the city: the narrative suggests that the loss of a sense of history frequently manifests as the loss of self and language.

To return to the metaphor of the car "serenely" driving into the "furious path of 16 million people", it is perhaps a terribly apt metaphor for both the logic of historical conquest and laying hegemonic claim to demarcated spaces (the city and the nation-state) as well as the capitalist impulses driving the contemporary. Dasgupta notes how cars frequently carry the signatures of their users, as words or messages posted on the back windows of cars, to perhaps resist the "anonymity of the vehicular ocean": the signatures range from the personable ("Sunita and Rakesh") to the confrontational ("I drive like this to PISS YOU OFF!) to the symbolic (swords suggesting Sikh martial valour) (Dasgupta 196). Cars turn into projections of one's assumed personas or identities, to distinguish oneself from an unclear and perhaps anonymous sense of community. The car, in its own way, also lays claim to the city. The car, or the private automobile, as Aditya Nigam argues, can be seen as a powerful index for the change in the "grammar" of experience, power, and "being in the city":

> The private automobile transformed the grammar of power so much that soon all of 'Development' began to revolve around its needs: its speed, its unrestricted flow and its 'rest'. From multilevel, air-conditioned car parks in the midst of acute electricity shortage to endless flyovers, freeways, privately maintained expressways and roads that had to endlessly expand sideways for more and more lanes-everything was now subject to the demands of this new creature that had entered our lives (Nigam 11).

The private automobile provided the user with a "mobile, but private space" and a "sense of control" and rapidly began to transform into "an instrument of domination": "[sitting] behind the steering wheel brought out a part of the self that we did not quite know ourselves. The car did

not merely become the symbol of status and power at home, in the areas of residence; it became an instrument of domination on the roads" (Nigam 8-9). As the need for the automobile begins to appear "natural", the consequences get displaced from mainstream narratives of the city: the ruthless destruction of settlements for the urban poor, the massive environmental degradation, the physical congestion of the streets. Dasgupta shows how such distortions of narrative are particularly ironic given how the experience of the city is drastically different: the recuperation of history and alternative claims to the city is dependant on the recuperation of experience itself. The narrative, as has been mentioned before, moves towards rather fatalistic conclusions; but, despite its own intentions to provide a kind of closure, it prompts an important question: what does such a recuperation do?

IV. Resistance: Possibilities and Limitations

One of the recurrent motifs in the narrative is the need for control within an economic juggernaut that seems to be perpetually spilling out of control: such a need, as has been suggested, is tied up with narrow constructions of identity. The violent assertion and desperate protection of identity is frequently a reaction to threat: the need to constantly amass wealth in a risky economic terrain, the need to displace ethnic, sexual, and religious minorities from visible bastions of power in an increasingly competitive social and political terrain. The most visible threat to existing structures of power, in Dasgupta's narrative, emerges from his interviews of women: women from different ends of the economic spectrum. Dasgupta draws attention to how the "capital was defined, increasingly, by a hyper-aggressive masculinity, which seemed to lose all constraint in the years after 1991" manifesting in an exaggerated sense of one's sense of entitlement:

Who are you to tell me what to do? was what a man shouted as he hit another in the face: because with this age of global markets came to an end all limits on behaviour, and now no one, least of all a stranger, could tell you what to do.

>People used the world 'slave' a lot to describe the history that was no more: "We
>have been slaves for too long; now no one can order us around" (Dasgupta 203).

The sense of entitlement, although aggravated by global capitalism, emerges from older structures of domination, particularly patriarchy. In such a context, the stories of characters such as Sukhvinder, who leaves her husband after years of abuse and policing, and Meenakshi, who tirelessly works towards improving the conditions of working-class people living in Bhalswa colony, a slum settlement, provide important counterpoints to the masculinist bias inflecting everyday encounters in the city. Sukhvinder, who works in her father's business, had liberal expectations from her husband, Dhruv -- she wanted to smoke, drink, and have a social life -- and although he initially accepted her terms, both Dhruv and his mother restricted her mobility, constantly policed her activities, did not allow her to have possessions which were arbitrarily considered inauspicious in a Hindu Brahmin house (for instance, an amulet given to Sukhvinder by her Muslim friend) and even physically abused her. As Sukhvinder herself suggests, her initial resilience to survive the marriage implied an acceptance of the the abusive terms of the marriage -- abuse which is not merely physical in nature, but regularly experienced through the lack of even basic care:

>"You know the moment at which I really lost respect for him? When I knew it
>was over? It was not when he was hitting me, strangely enough. It was something
>else...I always liked to have the windows open but his family would keep them
>completely shut. I used to suffocate in there. And I have asthma, so sometimes it
>got really bad. One night I woke up, and I couldn't breathe and I was panicking. I
>shook Dhruv awake and asked him to pass me my inhaler, which was on his side
>of the bed. But he refused to get it, and I passed out. After that there was no going
>back" (Dasgupta 131-132)

Dasgupta does not attempt to rhetorically portray Sukhvinder in either sympathetic or glorifying terms -- he represents her story through her words and more importantly, her evaluations.

Sukhvinder, after leaving her husband, chooses to forgive him and not slap a legal case against him -- the symbolism of such a gesture is troubled and ambivalent, and Dasgupta's suspension of judgment invites the reader to interpret the gesture. The chapter containing Sukhvinder's story abruptly begins with a brief anecdote about how a man told Dasgupta about how he suspected his wife to be having an affair because she suspected him of the same -- Dasgupta notes how he is entitled to think in such terms as a "form of revenge" (Dasgupta 115). Sukhvinder's story responds to this anecdote, to the presumption that how Sukhvinder, as someone's wife, thinks and behaves, is already framed within the idiom of male entitlement.

Meenakshi's story stands out in the narrative as a distinct alternative to the imagining of the urban by those who easily or even resignedly accept the liberalised frame: Meenakshi tirelessly works to mobilise working-class people in Bhalswa colony, a slum in Delhi. Meenakshi finds pride in the fact that even the women in Bhalswa colony have fought the police; she earnestly asserts the need to constantly question and struggle against societal boundaries and hierarchies; she is certain about how she doesn't "want to be in a capitalist world, simply earning money and looking at my life like a bank balance" (Dasgupta 256). Dasgupta is moved by Meenakshi, but his admiration for her energy and labour is beset with a slight cynicism: "It refreshes me to hear her talk…[she] reminds me of what I love in the friends I have here: a fierce intelligence searching for a better arrangement of the world…[this] too is Delhi culture, but is what you would call the city's minor culture. It rarely rises to the surface" (Dasgupta 255). It seems Dasgupta does not find enough radical or transformative possibility in the city's minor culture -- it is clear there are practical impediments given the sheer force of capitalist development, but it remains to be asked whether it is possible to encourage alternative voices to thrive, bring them to the surface, let them challenge dominant presumptions of what is desirable or acceptable. Dasgupta's narrative, it seems, frequently slips into a tone of defeatism: this is rather disappointing since the narrative throws up possibilities for critiquing the presumptions of global capitalism. Perhaps the problem is with Dasgupta's vantage-point: although he represents the various characters laying claim to the city, it is not clear what kinds of material contexts Dasgupta himself inhabits. There is no pure neutral vantage-point from which one can disinterestedly ruminate about the character of Delhi -- or can one?

Dasgupta's narrative, interestingly enough, ends with an image of possibility: the possibility to see beyond narrow material confines,. If, on the one hand, the narrative critiques the logic of economic expansion and exposes the self-indulgent, hierarchical, and ultimately narrow scope of such a vision; on the other hand, the narrative throws up the possibility for a different vision of expansion, an expansion of cosmopolitan community, equality, and the struggle against hegemonic power. The latter has an aesthetic and utopian dimension quite contrary to the first kind: it involves the ability to see beyond one's sense of material limitation. Towards the end of the narrative, Dasgupta meets Anupam, who is described as one of the few people who can remain "entirely unconstrained by how a particular problem has been dealt with before, who can imagine a myriad of ways in which the world might be differently organised" and can "transcend the general self-involvement and see immediately, in the adjacent and particular, the planetary extension" (Dasgupta 421-22). Anupam takes Dasgupta across stretches of the Yamuna bank, showing how older efficient water systems have been corrupted by modern urban planning, and finally takes him to a spot where the river is surprisingly "clear and fecund" (Dasgupta 447). Dasgupta experiences a profound moment of aesthetic reappraisal:

> The horizon is open, and it is a relief. I realise how consumed my being has become by the internal drama of my dense adopted city. I have forgotten expansiveness. This megapolis, where everything is vast, somehow offers little opportunity to see further than across the street. Everything is blocked off. Your eyes forget how to focus on the infinite (Dasgupta 448)

The narrative, it seems, ends with an acknowledgement that the imagining of alternatives and resistance requires a crucial shift in vantage-point: a shift which involves a simultaneous aesthetic and political reconsideration, but a shift difficult to identify or experience within the dominant framing of the city. Dasgupta does not know how such a shift might transpire, so it is perhaps fitting that Anupam has the final word in the narrative: "I'm glad you could see this…[now] you realise why Delhi is here. It is one of the beautiful places of the earth" (Dasgupta 448).

Conclusion

I have attempted to show how specific first-person narratives contribute to the discursive framing of post-liberalisation India. It would be useful, at this point, to draw attention to what I think are the limitations of such an attempt. Firstly, the three narratives I have chosen are part of a wider field of narratives, both in English and vernacular languages, which cumulatively contribute to the discursive framing of post-liberalisation India. The oppositional, or at the very least, skeptical attitudes towards the benefits of economic liberalisation in these three narratives broadly align these works with literature critiquing globalisation -- both academic and nonacademic, fiction and nonfiction. My choice of these three in particular, as I mentioned before, is premised on a couple of commonalities: that these narratives investigate subjective details in relation to hegemonic, objectively articulated framings of the nation and end up complicating such framings; and that the narrators, initially working abroad, return to India to critically explore the lived realities making up contemporary India. These narratives do not follow any specific generic conventions -- they are broadly classified as nonfiction, but (with some publishing sleight-of-hand) can even pass off as travelogue, memoir, or narrative journalism. The authors I have chosen have published other works too: Siddhartha Deb and Rana Dasgupta, for instance, have written works of fiction. Instead of doing a larger survey of nonfiction on contemporary India or locate these texts in relation to other works by the authors, I chose to closely read the three texts -- my intent has been to demonstrate the particularity of the given texts, to emphasise and compare the representational choices made by these texts. To address the question of how economic imaginaries can be critically represented and narrated, I found it useful to explore and evaluate the representational strategies of individual narratives, to read them as constructing distinct narratives of post-liberalisation India. Such an approach, however, limits any holistic theorisation: it is difficult to claim how the entire field of narrative nonfiction contributes to the discourse of contemporary India. My intent, at most, has been to draw attention to the importance of such first-person narrative nonfiction, as self-reflexive critiques of the optimistic construction of post-liberalisation India.

Secondly, the categories chosen by the authors to rationalise subjective encounters and details are frequently predetermined categories -- although the common premise of the texts is to complicate such categories, it is perhaps difficult to entirely supplant them. The emphasis on lived realities promises the emergence of new categories -- the narratives let the characters inhabiting particular contexts articulate how they imagine the nation-state, how they imagine both individual and collective futures. However, it is not evident if new categories emerge from the individual stories, owing to the authorial recourse to existing critiques of globalisation. The positions articulated by all the three narratives do not entirely emerge from the experiences recounted in the narratives: the evaluation of experience, then, is mediated through existing categories. All the texts throw up moments of dissonance -- the relation between the particular and the general are frequently complicated by the individual stories or moments of authorial self-reflexivity. These moments are not consistently pursued in the narratives and do not end up displacing the primacy of existing categories. I have attempted to show how existing categories informing critiques of globalisation are nuanced in these narratives, but it would perhaps be a worthy project to find first-person narratives or attempt a form of reading which throw up entirely new categories for the study of liberalisation of India in particular and globalisation in general.

Finally, following from the previous point, it is necessary to acknowledge the limits of representation itself -- how is it possible to authentically represent the lives of others? As I have mentioned before, the terms of authenticity are perhaps framed in relation to representational agendas. In a context where the dominant construction of economic liberalisation is objectively oriented and glosses over important contestations, first-person accounts of contestations besetting the frame of liberalisation are not just symbolically important, but also changes the terms of authenticity: the authentic is what is observed, experienced, recorded. Every experience and encounter with contestation, however, is also translated and organised through the authorial voice: there is a homogenising logic at work. How is it possible to represent the variety of lived experiences in their own vocabularies? I suggest how all the three narratives describe encounters through specific strategies of storytelling, producing different kinds of affective interpretations. The narratives draw attention to difference inflecting encounters with specific lived realities, but

simultaneously translate them through the responses and observations of the narrator: difference is recognised, but not formally pursued. What would it mean to show difference in its difference, so to speak? Perhaps a different imagining of form is required: one without overdetermined agendas, allowing a plurality of voices to collide with each other, yet uncompromisingly critical. These three narratives, through their formal intentions and confusions, throw up the possibility for the imagining of such a form.

Works Cited

Appadurai, Arjun. "Introduction". *India's World: The Politics of Creativity in a Globalized Society*. Ed. Arjun Appadurai and Arien Mack. New Delhi: Rain Tree, 2012. Print.

Appadurai, Arjun. "The Capacity to Aspire". *Culture and Public Action*. Ed. Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004. Print.

Balakrishnan, Ajit. "India's IT Industry: The End of the Beginning". *India's World: The Politics of Creativity in a Globalized Society*. Ed. Arjun Appadurai and Arien Mack. New Delhi: Rain Tree, 2012. Print.

Beck, Ulrich. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. Tr. Mark Ritter. London: SAGE, 1992. Print.

Brennan, Timothy. *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. Print.

Brown, Robert. "India: A Billion Testimonies Now". *21st Century Journalism in India*. Ed. Nalini Rajan. New Delhi: SAGE, 2007.

Brubaker, Rogers. *Ethnicity Without Groups*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2004. Print.

Cameron, Angus, and Ronen Palan. *The Imagined Economies of Globalization*. New Delhi: SAGE, 2004. Print.

Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams & Arthur P. Bochner. *"Autoethnography: An Overview". Forum: Qualitative Social Research 12.1 (2012)*. Print.

Chaudhuri, Amit. "The Beautiful and the Damned: Life in the New India by Siddhartha Deb -- review". *The Guardian*. The Guardian, 5 June 2011. Web. 16 July 2015.

Charley, Jonathan. "Time, space, and narrative: reflections of architecture, literature and modernity". *Writing the Modern City: Literature, architecture, modernity*. Ed. Edwards, Sarah and Jonathan Charley. Oxon OX: Routledge, 2012. Print.

Chatterjee, Partha. "Whose Imagined Community?". *Empire and Nation: Selected Writings*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.Print.

Chowdhury, Kanishka. *The New India: Citizenship, Subjectivity, and Economic Liberalization*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.

Colebrook, Clare. *New Literary Histories: New Historicism and Contemporary Criticism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997. Print.

Connerton, Paul. *How Modernity Forgets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Print.

D'Costa, Anthony P. "What is this 'New India'? An Introduction". *A New India?: Critical Reflections in the Long Twentieth Century*. Ed. Anthony P. D'Costa. London: Anthem Press, 2012. Print.

Dasgupta, Rana. *Capital*. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2013. Print.

Deb, Siddhartha. *The Beautiful and the Damned*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2011. Print.

Deshpande, Satish. *Contemporary India: A Sociological Perspective*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2003. Print.

Dhar, Subir. "Inspiring India: The Fiction of Chetan Bhagat and the Discourse of Motivation". *Writing India Anew : Indian-English Fiction 2000-2010.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Web. 26 June 2015.

Dharwadker, Vinay. "The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature". *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia.* California: University of California Press, 2003. Print.

Dirlik, Arif. "The Global in the Local". *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*. Ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996. Print.

Felski, Rita. *Uses of Literature*. Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell, 2008. Print.

Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. Print.

Jackson, Alecia Y. and Lisa A. Mazzei. "Experience and "I" in Autoethnography: A Deconstruction". *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 1.3 (2008). Print.

Kapur, Akash. *India Becoming*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2012. Print.

Lal, Vinay. "Introduction: Modern India and the Claims of the City". *The Oxford Anthology of the Modern Indian City: The City in its Plenitude*. Ed. Vinay Lal. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013. Delhi: Routledge, 2009. Print.

Mazzarella, William. "Affect: What is it Good for?". *Enchantments of Modernity*. Ed. Saurabh Dube. New Delhi: Routledge, 2009. Print.

Mehta, Suketu. *Maximum City*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004. Print.

Menon, Nivedita and Aditya Nigam. *Power and Contestation: India since 1989*. London: Zed Books, 2007. Print.

Mishra, Pankaj. *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2013. Print.

Nandy, Ashish. "The City of the Mind: The Darkness and the Shadows". *The Oxford Anthology of the Modern Indian City: The City in its Plenitude*. Ed. Vinay Lal. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013. Print.

Nigam, Aditya. *Desire named development*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2011. Print.

Ong, Aihwa. Introduction: "Worldling Cities, or the Art of Being Global". *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*. Ed. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Print.

Patel, Tulsi. "Introduction". *The Family in India: Structure and Practice*. Ed. Tulsi Patel. New Delhi: SAGE, 2005. Print.

Perks, Robert. "Interviewing: Introduction". *The Oral History Reader*. Ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.

Prakash, Gyan. "The Urban Turn". *Sarai Reader 02: The Cities of Everyday Life*. New Delhi: Centre for the Studies of Developing Societies, 2002. Print.

Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder. "After Midnight's Children: Some Notes on the New Indian Novel in English". I*ndia's World: The Politics of Creativity in a Globalized Society*. Ed. Arjun Appadurai and Arien Mack. New Delhi: Rain Tree, 2012. Print.

Sainath, P. *Everybody Loves a Good Drought*. Delhi: Penguin, 1996.

Sen, Amartya and Jean Dreze. *An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2013. Print.

Sethi, Aman. *A Free Man*. Noida: Random House India, 2011. Print.

Shah, A.M. "Introduction". *The Family in India: Critical Essays*. Ed. A.M. Shah. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1998. Print.

Sharma, Aradhana. *Paradoxes of Empowerment*. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2010. Print.

Shrivastava, Aseem and Ashish Kothari. *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2012. Print.

Slim, Hugo and Paul Thompson. "Ways of listening". *The Oral History Reader*. Ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.

Terkel, Studs. *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1985. Print.

Thompson, Paul. "The voice of the past: oral history". *The Oral History Reader*. Ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.

White, Hayden. "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact". *Critical Theory since 1965*. Ed. Haard Adams and Leroy Searle. Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986. Print.

Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Materialism.* London: Verso, 1980. Print.

Wilson, Rob and Wimal Dissanayake. "Introduction: Tracking the Global/Local". *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*. Ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996. Print.