Abstract: Disability, Normalcy, and the Failures of the Nation: A Reading of Selected Fiction by Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Indra Sinha, and Firdaus Kanga

In this thesis, I argue that, in fiction by Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Indra Sinha, and Firdaus Kanga, disability often takes on positive symbolic value as it represents the potential for the postcolonial polis to survive and thrive, but that the ultimate death or medical normalisation of disabled characters in many of these narratives is tied to a loss of political optimism. While these texts in many instances disturb norms surrounding able-bodiedness and disability, they often ultimately narrate a pessimistic conformity to scripts of normalization, and in so doing, map the unjust triumph of a prescriptive national or international politics onto a prescriptive politics of the body. As disability is eliminated, so is the potential for resistance to latent colonial or hegemonic forms. On the other hand, those fictions that narrate a sustainable disabled presence suggest the potential for the community or nation to emerge from oppressive social structures unscathed.

I focus on applying literary disability scholarship to Indian novels which demand scrutiny through a disability studies lens, given their dependence upon the disabled body as a metaphoric object and the continuities in their disability representation and the representation of history. While the focus of my work is upon the nuances of disability representation as it is used to parallel the rise (and sometimes fall) of political optimism in these examples of Anglophone Indian literature, I also read toward an understanding of how the postcolonial perspective of these fictions may inflect and complicate disability representations, and investigate Western notions of normalcy as they are represented as intruding upon this literature and as disciplining the body in these texts. This disciplining is further explored through an ancillary reading of how medical apparatus and infrastructure, such as hospitals, ambulances, and especially doctors, are represented in this group of novels, as it is often in

conjunction with the medical establishment that disabled characters are subjected to (neo) colonial violence.

In the first chapter, which takes the form of a critical introduction, I discuss the terms of my argument within the development of disability studies, and position myself within the debates and concerns of literary disability studies in particular. I consider the antecedents and development of what is now called the cultural model of disability, and discuss how literary disability scholarship, which began its development with a focus on Western texts and contexts, has begun to extend its range of inquiry to become global in scope. I consider examples of the interplay of contemporary Indian history with biopolitical ideals and the paradigm of normalcy as it has been articulated by Lennard Davis and his intellectual predecessors including Canguillheim and Foucault.

In the second chapter, which is entitled "The Medical and the Monstrous: Disability in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*," I consider how the disabled body is created as an object of competition in an ideological agon between a violent, globalized modernity and a sometimes-idealized fictive past. While Rushdie often represents the disabled body in a very simplified and rather bigoted register, he also to some extent engages with the more complex potentialities of disability to represent the failure of the state. The normalizing perpetration of a Westernized medical apparatus against disabled people becomes the proof and of political disintegration and the dissolution of hope for the emergent nation, whether in Rushdie's fictional version of India or Pakistan.

In the third chapter, "Disability and the Realization of Metaphor in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*," I consider Rohinton Mistry's disability representations in relation to his engagement with the tradition of European realism. While Mistry attempts to re-locate the normal type articulated by the European novel, and subverts the conventions of European fiction even as he employs them, he still depends upon a largely

uncontested tradition of disability representation. While he re-locates the norm in many demographic respects, he does not fully manage to rescue disability from an ancillary and symbolic role in the fiction. Mistry uses disabled characters symbolically to imagine political upheaval from a disadvantaged and sometimes from a subaltern position, creating in disabled characters their symbolic correlates.

In my fourth chapter, "Collective Disability and the Dis-located Norm in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*," I consider the ways in which this novel effaces paradigms of normalcy by imagining an environment in which disability is the unifying commonality of community life. While Mistry and Rushdie ultimately write disability as narrative anomaly in the ways described by Mitchell and Snyder, Sinha inverts the paradigm of the anomalous body in his fictional representation of the Bhopal disaster. The failure of the Indian state to protect its citizenry results in collective disability identification, while those able-bodied individuals who might be treated as normal in another fiction become suspicious outsiders.

In my fifth chapter, "Unaccommodating Fictions: Disability, Authorship, and the Politics of Failure in Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow*," I consider the ways in which gay, disabled, Parsi writer Firdaus Kanga represents failure and dependency as character weakness. Kanga validates neoliberal competition by re-imagining the potential for economic and social attainment as properties of mind at the exclusion of the body, and, in so doing, inaugurates an adaption of paradigms of normalcy. Kanga's imaginary valorises the economically competitive individual, but simply removes the constraint of bodily normalcy from this ideal marketable man. For Kanga, economic freedom from parental, societal, or governmental intervention is edifying, as masculinity is achieved through uninhibited competition.

In my conclusion, “Good Doctors and Bad Doctors in Rushdie, Mistry, Sinha, and Kanga,” I consider the representation of the clinic and of physicians in addition to the representation of disabled people in the novels included in this thesis. Doctors and medical apparatus become symbolic correlates for different political impositions and political strategies, often representing the abuses and failures of government or of public policy. I will frame my discussion within Foucault’s concept of the clinic, and will consider the ways in which traditional and Western medicine take on symbolic meaning in these fictions of India.

Chapter 1: Introduction

At the dramatic climax of Indra Sinha's 2006 novel *Animal's People*, Animal, a 19-year-old man with severe disabilities, describes his desire to attack a legal representative from America. The lawyer, who represents foreign interests metaphorically as well as legally, becomes the embodiment of the multinational company that has poisoned the people of Khaufpur and refused to make ameliorative payments or clean up the toxins in the city. Animal says

> I want to rend the bastard Kampani in bits, if I could attack that buffalo lawyer I would bite his cancerous tongue out and squeeze his throat till greyhounds pop out his eyes and he feels maddened teeth tearing his heart (310).

A few pages later, Animal gets to enact his fantasies of retributive violence upon Fatlu Inspector, a corrupt Indian official. As Animal recounts, disabilities prove an advantage in the attack:

> Fatlu never sees his death approach, I've come running up behind, he's missed me because I'm so low to the ground, I've grabbed the swine round the legs and hauled him down. With a shout, Fatlu falls. Struggling he's to get back on his feet, but I've got him pinned. In vain he strikes at my head, I am stronger, far stronger than he. My shoulders and arms are powerful, muscled like a wrestler's, I've told you this, and now they will end this bastard's life (313).

Although neither Animal's wrestling of Fatlu, nor his desire to bite the lawyer, bring about the death of either party, Animal's violent resistance against powerful bodies takes on special resonance in the context of his having a disability, as he personifies a resilient, disabled-but-tough activist community that provides serious resistance to national and multinational corruption. While several levels of government have failed to provide justice to the people of Khaufpur, the persistence of activists despite their ill

health and disablement suggests the potential of the community to push back against political corruption.

Not all Anglophone Indian novelists are so optimistic in their depiction of social resistance to the state. Rohinton Mistry, in *Such a Long Journey* (1991) and in *A Fine Balance* (1995), uses the deaths of disabled characters, and the disablement of normal characters, to represent the triumph of political corruption over political resistance. In *A Fine Balance*, a novel which focuses upon the events surrounding the 1975 Emergency, Mistry represents the political corruption at work in the Family Planning Program through the literal corruption of one protagonist's body. At a sterilization camp, after a day of giving coercive surgeries in unhygienic conditions, a group of health professionals and police officers stop to greet the bureaucrat in charge of Family Planning:

> Darkness was falling, and doctors were down to their last few operations when Thakur Dharamsi arrived. The policemen and Family Planning workers flocked to bow before him, jostling to touch his feet. He spoke briefly to the recovery tents, waving to the patients, thanking them for their cooperation in making the sterilization camp a success (*A Fine Balance* 621).

The ostensible "success" of the sterilization camp becomes apparent when the protagonist Ishvar contracts gangrene:

> A week later Ishvar's legs were swollen like columns. His body burned with fever. From the groin to the knee the flesh had become black. They returned to the Family Planning Centre and peered timidly from the entrance (627).

Ishvar and his nephew Omprakash try to find a doctor who will diagnose and treat Ishvar's infection, but they are repeatedly refused diagnosis, as no doctor associated with Family Planning wants to admit the relationship between Ishvar's forced surgery and his illness. As a result of physicians' dissembling, Ishvar loses both legs. His double amputation ends his and Omprakash's attempts to resist poverty and the

limitations imposed upon them by corrupt politicos, and in effect marks the end of resistance for all of the characters in the novel.

Political corruption and medicine are similarly close affiliates in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). In *Midnight's Children*, it is prophesied of the child Saleem that "doctors will drain him" and "tyrants will fry him," and, indeed, his body is repeatedly perpetrated against by corrupt physician-officials (87). The role of government officials and bad doctors merge in the novel's final sequence, as Saleem and almost 500 other magical children are either given hysterectomies or castrated as a top-secret extension of Indira Gandhi's Family Planning Program. Their magical endowments are eliminated in an effort to prevent their having magical offspring, and they are simultaneously disabled (rendered impotent) and, conversely, normalised, in the sense of having lost their magical difference.

These specific examples point to a pattern across these novels, in which the disabled body is exploited for its symbolic potential to represent the failures of the nation. As David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder note in their book *Narrative Prosthesis*: *Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (2008), the contrast between disability and normalcy is often used to facilitate metaphorical articulations of political or national health. Mitchell and Snyder argue in relation to European literature that "one cannot narrate the story of a healthy body or national reform movement without the contrastive device of disability to bear out the symbolic potency of the message" (63-64). However, we find in these fictions a much more complex metaphorical relationship between the symbolically potent disabled body and politics, as hope for the Indian nation is at times expressed through the presence of disabled characters, and the validity

of emergent, anti-colonial national forms are expressed through affirmative symbolism of the disabled body.

In this thesis, I will argue that, in fiction by Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Indra Sinha, and Firdaus Kanga, disability often takes on positive symbolic value as it represents the potential for the postcolonial polis to survive and thrive, but also that the ultimate death or medical normalisation of disabled characters in many of these narratives is tied to a loss of political optimism. While these texts in many instances disturb norms surrounding able-bodiedness and disability, they often ultimately narrate a pessimistic conformity to scripts of normalization, and in so doing, map the unjust triumph of a prescriptive national or international politics onto a prescriptive politics of the body. As disability is eliminated, so is the potential for resistance to latent colonial or hegemonic forms. On the other hand, those fictions that narrate a sustainable disabled presence suggest the potential for the community to emerge from oppressive social structures unscathed.

I will focus on applying literary disability scholarship to Indian novels which demand scrutiny through a disability studies lens, given their dependence upon the disabled body as a metaphoric object and the continuities in the interplay of their disability representation and the representation of history. While the focus of my work is upon the nuances of disability representation as it is used to parallel the rise (and sometimes fall) of political optimism in this Indian literature, I also read toward an understanding of how the postcolonial perspective of these fictions may inflect and complicate disability representations, and investigate Western notions of normalcy as they are represented as intruding upon this literature and as disciplining the body in these texts. This discipline will be explored in part through an ancillary reading of how medical apparatus and infrastructure, such as hospitals, ambulances, and especially

doctors, are represented in this group of novels, as it is often in conjunction with the medical establishment that disabled characters are subjected to colonial and neo-colonial violence.

Terminology for Disability Analysis

Vocabulary has been and continues to be a rightfully thorny issue in disability scholarship. As sociologist Gareth Williams noted in the 1990s: "there is no neutral language with which to begin the process of discussing chronic illness and disability, and language itself is central to any discussion of how we approach the problem of dealing with 'disability'" (195). Williams goes on to note that "there is no language to talk about it that is untainted. It is a problem of representation in that the language and categories we use influence both the definition of the problem and the size of the problem as an epidemiological phenomenon" (195). As Williams's comments suggest, the vocabulary choices of disability scholarship have implications both in terms of historical and cultural positioning, and the limitations of which modes of embodiment are subject to inquiry. No terminological set is fully satisfactory or universally applicable, but at least an articulated consideration of the terms employed may unearth presuppositions and biases surrounding disability analysis and representation.

Thus, I feel I must discuss my vocabulary choices in the context of reading this specifically postcolonial fiction, both in terms of the implications of its postcoloniality and its fictiveness. Firstly, as regards the postcoloniality of this fiction, it may be argued that my interrogation of disability in this fiction of the sub-continent prioritizes Westernized constructions of the body over non-Westernized ones, as "disability" itself is a term derived from a Euro-American tradition. I am fortunate that this incidental focus actually serves my argument well, as it is indeed "disability" in this sense which is my concern; also, and as I argue at greater length later in this introduction, I think

these authors are indeed engageing primarily with familiar tropes of disability, albeit in a mode that is altered by the colonial inheritances of the concept of disability. Secondly, and perhaps more problematically, as I am often discussing disabilities which are not medically possible either in degree or kind, I must decide whether or not disability studies rubrics truly apply. In situations in which disabled people have magic powers or other unlikely precocious endowments alongside, or in association with, their disability, I have had to make decisions regarding whether or not to treat such characters as disabled per se, and how to address special potentialities within a disability studies context. Bodies in fiction, and in this fiction in particular, often do not adhere to the exigencies of medical probability, and are in many instances outright metaphysical. The question of how the disability scholar should approach the schizophrenic polymath (Animal), the epileptic werewolf (Sufiya Zenobia) or the telepath with the missing finger (Saleem Sinai) is one that I explore through my readings of the concerned authors.

In general, and despite this complicating factor, I have chosen to employ a conventional lexicon from what is made available through other disability criticism, using “the disabled” as well as “disabled” for the most part, and employing other terms only in so far as they are introduced by the texts included in my study. In instances in which I use the word “impairment,” I use it as a synonym for disability, except in my discussion of the social model of disability. I also take up as a point of discussion Clare Barker’s use of the word “exceptional” to describe literary disability, although I do not adopt this usage myself. I make use of Robert McRuer’s term “crip” as a direct invocation of his crip theory, and restrictedly in that context. Also, and perhaps self-evidently, I make use of impairment-specific terms as they are appropriate (i.e., blind, deaf).

Vocabulary choices surrounding disability are further complicated by their relationship with multiple scholarly models of disability, as well as the permutations of disability evident in literature. In the two sections that follow, I will build on the basic vocabulary considerations I have described in this section to consider the particularities of literary disability as it relates to disability and normalcy, and the multiple models that inform my analysis. While word choices like the ones I have described here are important, there is a further distinction to be made as regards the scholarly and historical precedents that may endow disability terminology with specialist meaning beyond its apparent vernacular sense. The thorny aspect of disability lexicon must be read within the demands of both literary scholarship and the precedents that inform cultural disability scholarship.

Literary Disability

In his 2006 book *Aesthetic Nervousness*, postcolonial critic Ato Quayson considers disability representation across a wide variety of literary contexts. In his introduction to the work, Quayson appears to state the obvious when he argues that "in literature, the disabled are fictional characters created out of language," but this note becomes rather more salient when he goes on to add that "this point is not made in order to sidestep the responsibility to acknowledge language's social efficaciousness" (*Aesthetic Nervousness* 27). As Quayson's comments suggest, literary disability studies diverges from other branches of disability studies in that it must negotiate the fact that disability in literature is neither equivalent nor reducible to the lived reality of the material body, or to disability in society; yet the literary critic cannot meaningfully approach disability in literature without an awareness or at least an acknowledgement of the complex ethical dimensions of representing disability. Disability in text is never hermeneutically sealed, as it cannot but engage with cultural discourses surrounding the body, whether it

rehearses or revises those scripts. Quayson argues that it may be this troublesome feature of disability representation that has made it so appealing to many authors:

> Disability returns to the aesthetic domain an active ethical core that serves to disrupt the surface of representation. Read from a perspective of disability studies, this active ethical core becomes manifest because disability representation is seen as having a direct effect on social views of people with disability in a way that representations of other literary details, tropes, and motifs do not offer. In other words, the representation of disability has an efficaciousness that ultimately transcends the literary domain and refuses to be assimilated to it.

Yet, as Quayson goes on to note, the literary critic cannot read disability representation instrumentally, as a mere accessory to the ethical:

> This does not mean that disability in literature can be read solely via an instrumentalist dimension of interpretation; an intervention that might be adduced for it is not inserted into an inert and stable disability 'reality' that lies out there. For, as we have noted, disability in the real world already incites interpretation in and of itself.

Quayson finally settles upon an articulation which keeps in mind both the ethical and the literary, and takes an interest in the impossibility of extricating the ethical from the literary:

> Nevertheless, an instrumentalist dimension cannot be easily suspended either. To put the matter somewhat formulaically: the representation of disability oscillates uneasily between the aesthetic and the ethical domains, in such a way as to force a reading of the aesthetic fields in which the disabled are represented as always having an ethical dimension that cannot be easily subsumed under the aesthetic structure (*Aesthetic Nervousness* 19).

Quayson's assertion that the "instrumentalist dimension cannot be easily suspended" in the service of a literary-critical argumentation is borne out in this thesis, which attempts to focus upon the literary dimensions of disability representation with a mind to the social and historical contexts that may influence that representation. Thus, I read the aesthetic or stylistic dimensions of Rushdie's grotesques, Mistry's realism, Sinha's

pyrotechnic narration and Kanga's black humour to engage with the ethically loaded disability representations that cohabitate with the aesthetic.

Quayson's observation that "disability in the real world already incites interpretation in and of itself" is especially pertinent to this project, which engages with the idea of normalcy as a satellite of disability representation. Lennard Davis, whose work has largely catalysed the absorption of the idea of normalcy into literary disability studies, offers an articulation of the normal which both separates the cultural idea of the norm from the material fact of the body, and then further isolates the norm of literature from the norm of culture. While I will not offer an extended introduction to normalcy until later in this introduction, I reproduce Davis's comments here to consider his distinctions between the material, cultural, and literary domains, which demonstrate a degree of entanglement, or the ethically-charged oscillation Quayson describes. Davis traces our contemporary concept of the normal to a specific nineteenth-century history, arguing that

> the very term that permeates our contemporary life -- the normal -- is a configuration that arises in a particular historical moment. It is part of a notion of progress, of industrialization, and of ideological consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie. The implications of the hegemony of normalcy are profound and extend into the very heart of cultural production. (*Enforcing Normalcy* 49).

He suggests the novel as both an inheritor and promulgator of this hegemony, but describes its absorption and adaption into the specifically literary dimensions of the novel. The notion of normalcy becomes implicated in generic features in a mode which exceeds a mimesis of cultural ideals:

> The novel form, that proliferator of ideology, is intricately connected with concepts of the norm. From the typicality of the central character, to the normalizing devices of plot to bring deviant characters back into the norms of society, to the normalizing coda of endings, the nineteenth- and twentieth -century novel promulgates and disburses notions of normalcy and by

> extension makes of physical differences ideological differences. Characters with disabilities are always marked with ideological meaning, as are moments of disease or accident that transform such characters (*Enforcing Normalcy* 49).

As Davis's comments suggest, the act of setting apart disabled characters for ideological representation or metaphoric service, and the frequent creation of them as adjuncts for normal characters, has ethical implications: that real disabled people have historically been marginalised, and that literary representation may affect their social status, is a necessary assumption for the undertaking of meaningful literary criticism in this vein. Yet more important to my argument will be the literary how and why disabled characters are used in this way, and how postcolonial literature expands a cultural imaginary surrounding disabled experience.

Mitchell and Snyder, two foundational cultural disability critics, have described the earmarking or setting apart of disabled characters as a prosthetic to narrative, and have in many ways consolidated the literary and the ethical dimensions of disability representations in their work. Like Davis, they have considered "how various historical periods influenced literature's appropriation of disability" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 5). They also identify a pattern across many literatures wherein "most basic to the identification of character through disability is the way in which physical and cognitive differences have been narrated as alien to the normal course of human affairs" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 5). The idea of narrative prosthesis has immense value because it demonstrates a "way of situating a discussion about disability within a literary domain while keeping watch on its social context" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 9). Mitchell and Snyder's praxis integrates literary analysis and the ethical implications of disability representation. More importantly, Mitchell and Snyder offer an articulation of how an ethical reading practice may also observe what is productive, progressive, and

disruptive in literature, to engage in what they refer to as a "productively parasitic" reading, which remains cognizant of "disciplinary systems that define disability in more deterministic ways" but also looks beyond these contexts (*Narrative Prosthesis* 2). In this mode of reading, Mitchell and Snyder make the observation that, "while literature does not always take up disability in order to salvage its routinely denigrating social definitions" many authors "deploy disability as an explicitly complicating feature of their representational universe" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 2).

As well as identifying the potential of literature to be ethically challenging and ethically productive, Mitchell and Snyder offer an important addendum to Davis's theory, which makes obvious what is the relationship between the study of normalcy and disability in culture, and which is useful to understanding the constellation of discursive relations which inform disability representation. They, like Quayson, make the observation that the disabled or nondisabled body in text is radically other from its material counterpart: "the body is first and foremost a linguistic relation which cannot be natural or average. The textual nature of language, be it oral or print, lacks the very physicality that it seeks to control or represent" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 7). They build upon this observation to consider how a paradigm of normalcy creates a false ideal that is often evident in text, and is realised specifically through the immaterial body of narrative:

> A normal body, as Lennard Davis has demonstrated, is a theoretical premise from which all bodies must, by definition, fall short. The body is up against an abstraction with which it cannot compete because the norm is an idealized quantitative and qualitative measure that is divorced from (rather than derived from) the observation of bodies, which are inherently variable. This false model of an ideal body also fails to consider the contingencies of bodies functioning within specific social and historical contexts. It is, in other words, a body divorced from time and space – a thoroughly artificial affair (*Narrative Prosthesis* 7).

They go on to note that "materiality is not a language, and language cannot be natural" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 7). Their observation retains an interest in "language's social efficaciousness" as identified by Quayson, and also challenges a reductively instrumental reading as inherently inadequate to approaching literary disability. While the real body always exceeds literature in its materiality and radical particularity, literature may expand or challenge the history of cultural representations of the body. The literary body is an abstraction, and that abstraction may thus be modified and re-imagined. Thus, it is at the site of an unstable, immaterial body, but a body which also retains a high degree of ethical potentiality because of what it represents, that the literary disability critic enters the conversation.

Precursors and Antecedents of the Cultural Model of Disability

"Disabled people," Tom Shakespeare writes, "are defined as that group of people whose bodies do not work; or look different or act differently; or who cannot do productive work" ("Disability, Identity, and Difference" 95). As this definition suggests, the ways in which disability are understood are almost exclusively in contradistinction to an imagined reference point, most often described by disability scholars as the norm or normal type: "the key elements of this analysis are performing and conforming" and therefore "raise the question of normality, because this approach assumes a certain standard from which disabled people deviate" ("Disability, Identity, and Difference" 95-96). As I suggested in the previous section, the normalising response to the disabled body in literature is informed, although not contained, by the response to the disabled body in multiple cultural milieu; it is thus that a general working definition of disability like this one articulated by Shakespeare is important to literary-critical work. While the corporeal body and the social body are never quite equivalent to the bodies of literature, the literary body is invocative of, and informed by, each of these.

As such, it is unsurprising that there is a substantive degree of overlap in the critical responses to different disabled bodies, and that different branches of disability criticism are highly indebted to one another. Foundational disability scholars often articulated different responses to disability in terms of "models," a term which belies important foundations of disability criticism in the social sciences; although many of these so-called models have been identified, the most important to the present thesis is what has been called the cultural model of disability. In this section, I will describe some of the precursors to the cultural model of disability, but will focus on those precursors which to some degree inform my critical approach, rather than attempting an exhaustive taxonomy of disability criticism. My goal is to identify points of relevant overlap between approaches to disability, as opposed to writing a comprehensive history of cross-disciplinary disability theory.

Although I depend upon the paradigms and ideas presented in cultural disability criticism, I retain a secondary interest in other approaches and models in this thesis. As Sherry notes in an essay on the interface between postcolonial and disability criticism, the social model still has a high degree of pertinence and usefulness, despite its shortcomings, and can be considered alongside other anti-oppression definitions of disability. As Sherry has argued, "adopting two definitions of disability may seem cumbersome and confusing, but it is important given the rise of identity politics associated with the disability movement" ("(Post)colonising" 22). Rather than analysing the presentation of disability in these texts via strictly delineated cultural, minority, or social models of disability, I engage with all of these discourses to some degree, and use them synchronously to approach positive and negative depictions of disability in this literature. Although Pushpa Parekh was referring to postcolonial, minority, and race criticism when she narrated the loosening of rigid divisions between critical paradigms,

I believe her narrative of how "the contestations among disciplinary fields and texts, as well as intra-warfares" between theorizations "led scholars to emphasize competing claims at first, and then to recognize overlapping concerns" as a potential site of productive engagement is very pertinent to the integration of disability concerns ("Gender, Disability and the Postcolonial Nexus" 176).

An engagement with multiple discourses of disability will aid me in conceiving of disability in a way that is less encumbered by the division between disabled and non-disabled, and thereby offers a more nuanced approach to the issue of disability and related discourses of embodiment. As Sherry has argued, "in the same way a black/white divide is theoretically inadequate for conceptualizing ethnicity, the disabled/non-disabled divide is also deeply problematic and conceptually limited" ("(Post)colonising" 26). Freeing my critical framework from any very restrictive models of disability is especially important as I approach literature which both includes forms that at times exceed the bounds of disability or ability. Also, issues of illness and hunger, while not disability per se, are informed by some of the same concerns and motifs that attach themselves to disability in these texts, and it can therefore be advantageous to consider some of these issues in tandem rather than trying to entirely isolate disability from other health effects.

Before providing a description of these models of disability, I will consider how feminism has been and remains important to the development of disability theory, and will briefly discuss the many junctures between critical feminism and disability scholarship that have been identified by specialists working in either, or both, fields. In addition to direct borrowings from feminists with regards to the medicalisation of the body, disability scholars have benefitted immensely from third wave feminists' critiques of the "elision of difference" from earlier feminist analysis: disabled women

are one of the sub-categories of woman which has been highly prone to erasure in feminist as well as minority analysis, and disability scholars found something of an invitation to discuss this fact in third wave feminist scholarship (Crenshaw 1242). Conversely, disability studies has not suffered from the same extent of essentializing of difference in comparison to other minority criticisms, and this has perhaps been the case because the interventions of intersectional feminist scholarship laid the groundwork for a disability scholarship which has most often been cognizant of the complications imposed by other identifications such as race and gender upon disability.

Probing the relationship between feminism and disability studies is important because this thesis approaches many depictions of disability which are complicated by gender, most notably in Rushdie's work. Disability criticism is also indebted to race and postcolonial criticism to a high degree, but these relationships are often rather more problematic; while the cross-pollination between feminism and disability studies has involved breaking down metaphors that equate being female and being disabled, the relationship between postcolonial and disability criticism has often involved a troublesome borrowing which I will discuss at length in reference to Mark Sherry's essay on the topic. A move away from the metaphorical comparison of the experience of being a postcolonial subject and the experience of being disabled has been key to the expansion of critical disability studies into a meaningful global intellectual movement, and this timely intervention will be a focus in the section that follows this one.

One of the scholars I lean upon most heavily in this overview is Shakespeare, and I must admit a great debt to his book *Disability Rights and Wrongs*, which provides a very insightful comprehensive overview of different branches of, and approaches to, disability studies. However, although I have make judicious use of Shakespeare's *Disability Rights and Wrongs* in the present section in establishing my

own orientation in disability studies, I have not reproduced his opinions on the titular "rights" and "wrongs" of disability studies, as his valuation differs greatly from my own. Specifically, his qualified charge that "the cultural version of disability studies, which also espouses political commitment, has become fatally contaminated by poststructuralist and post-modernist theory, and has failed to provide helpful analysis or evidence" is not in keeping with my own valuation of the strengths and weaknesses of disability criticism (1).

1. Feminism

A continuous backdrop to the formation of social and cultural models of disability has been feminist inquiry into the cultural ramifications of corrective medical apparatus, which has included the work of thinkers such as Susan Bordo, Susan Sontag, Julia Kristeva, Audre Lorde, Donna Haraway, and many others. While these very diverse feminist theorists do not always address disability as such, they have been very pertinent to disability criticism because they in their different ways brought to the fore the concept of a culturally-constructed medical system which interacts with minority identities and concerns. Sontag's studies *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) and *AIDS and its Metaphors* (1989) Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* (1980) as well as Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* (1980) have been important as points of departure for disability critics. One of the most important contributions of feminism to disability studies has been its interventions into Enlightenment inheritances surrounding the body. As Shildrick and Janet Price note in their *Vital Signs: Feminist Reconfigurations of the Biological Body*, for instance: "for women, however, and indeed in analogous ways for other others, the essentialist belief in the special immanence of the female body" has "worked to disallow the option of transcendence, with its prize of full personhood in the post-Enlightenment sense" (*Vital Signs* 5). The concern with the materiality of the

body, as it is contingent with discourses of full personhood, remains centrifugal to disability criticism. Shildrick and Price frame this increased interest in the body in terms of both feminism and poststructualism, and their comments shed light on the evolution of disability studies in the context of a broader intellectual movement:

> It is an academic truism that the body, after decades of perceived neglect, is once again at the forefront of academic discourse, not just in the humanities and social sciences, but more paradoxically in the medical sciences too, where a detached concern with the brute matter of blood, flesh and bones is increasingly challenged and superseded by a notion of constructed and differential embodiment. The renewed interest seems to have come from two apparently disparate, even incommensurate, sources, namely feminist and poststructuralist theories. Each has been credited with initiating a deconstruction of the conventional body both as biologically fixed and given, and at the same time absent, or at least irrelevant, to the concerns of the western logos (*Vital Signs* 1).

This larger philosophical backdrop has been important to articulating the role of medicine in creating differential bodies, and the idea of a constructed or conventional body which may impinge upon real bodies provides the underpinnings for many insights into how the apparent biological fixity of the disabled body is refracted through medical discourse. As feminist disability scholar Susan Wendell has observed, the "cognitive and social authority of medicine to describe our bodies affects how we experience our bodies and our selves, how society describes our experiences and validates/invalidates them," and "how society supports or fails to support our bodily sufferings and struggles" (*Rejected Body* 119). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that so many feminists have provided frameworks useful to disability scholarship: as feminist disability scholar Shildrick notes in *Embodying the Monster*, there has been such a "longstanding conflation of the feminine with disorder, in terms of both the irrational mind and the leaky body" that the overlap in discourses of femininity and monstrosity or disability should "come as no surprise" (30).

Feminists provided many of the underpinnings for the formulation of disability studies as well as for its later evolution and outgrowths, and set the precedent of considering the response to the supposedly aberrant body as a socially constructed and culturally relative rather than as an empirical phenomenon. As Wendell observes, in many respects the basis for the formulation of a social model of disability was the observation that "the *social* authority of doctors, researchers, and other medical professionals" extends "far beyond medical intuitions" (*Rejected Body* 117). Understanding the cultural contingency of the medical response to disability opened the door for a new scholarly interpretation of disability, and this interpretation removed the problem of impairment from bodies and figured it instead as a programmatic rationalizing away of difference by society, and as a product of other cultural conundrums.

Thus, when Shakespeare suggests that "the disability movement was following a well-established path of de-naturalising forms of social oppression, demonstrating that what was thought throughout history to be natural was actually a product of specific social relations and ways of thinking," it is no accident that his description invokes the legacy of feminism, with its diverse and evolving de-naturalizations, which have included a range of theory and activism (*Disability Rights and Wrongs* 12). The evolution of disability studies from what is usually called the social model of disability into new forms can be read along the lines of the progression feminist critic Elizabeth Grosz observes in relation to other struggles for minority equality. Grosz suggests that "the question of freedom for women, or for any oppressed social group, is never simply a question of expanding the range of available options" but must include "language, that is, systems of representation and value" (*Becoming Undone* 71). While the social model took as its mandate increasing the range of options available to disabled people,

cultural disability criticism has expanded its purview to the sort of freedom articulated by Grosz, which includes a more radical potential to disrupt sign systems.

2. The Medical Model

In many respects, the medical model of disability is the most important to my analysis of this fiction, albeit as a discourse that is explored within the texts as opposed to a framework for my own analysis. The medical model of disability is closely associated with the impulse to normalize, and creates in disability the sense of a problem that ought to be solved. As Williams notes: "the medical model that informs traditional approaches to disability takes the biological reality of impairment as its fundamental starting point," rather than emphasizing the dimensions of disability experience beyond the dysfunction of the body ("Representing Disability" 196). Within the medical model, disability is calibrated in terms of "functional limitations" which are located within the disabled mind and/or body, and the nature of interventions is thus action upon the body which ought to be normalized, if not completely, than at least to as great a degree as is possible ("Representing Disability" 196). As Quayson describes it, under the medical model social systems are "tasked with corrective, ameliorative, or reprimandive roles, reminding the person with disability to 'get a grip' and take charge of the process of his or her self-improvement and adjustment" (*Aesthetic Nervousness* 2)

The analysis of the medical model of disability by critical disability scholars, as well as the larger poststructuralist turn to the body, has leaned heavily upon the work of Michael Foucault as well as other French theorists. Foucault's archaeologies, and especially his *The Birth of the Clinic*, provided the impelling insight into the power of the authoritative and constitutive medical gaze which has gained trenchant power over the body. In a reading of Foucault's work, Shildrick and Price assert the importance of

medical science in the creation of a body that is "always-already mediated," suggesting that

> the discursive power of biomedicine does not simply direct choice among alternative models of the body, with the probable implication that some are more 'true' to life than others. It actively constructs the body as a focus of what Foucault calls power/knowledge (6).

It is this authoritarian constitution of the body, and especially the disabled body, that has compelled disability critics to attempt to provide alternative iterations of disability. I will return to Foucault in the chapters that follow and especially in the concluding chapter, and will pay particularly close attention to his articulation of the Clinic (*le Clinique*) as it is imagined by the authors in this study as an insidious disciplinary force that is often triumphant over or violent upon the disabled body.

3. The Social Model

The social model was in many respects inaugural to critical disability studies, as it provided both a premise and an impetus for the study of disability through deconstructive rather than the aforementioned medical rubrics. The social model defined itself against the medical model of disability, in which, as I have noted, disability was a problem to be addressed through medical intervention, and under which the elimination of disability is the self-evident objective of investigating disability. It is to some extent a misnomer to refer to 'the' social model, given the differences between the calibration of this approach used by different scholars working in different regions; Shakespeare describes the diverse manifestations of the "family of social contextual approaches" thus: "in North America, Australia, and other countries, activists and scholars talk of the social model, but generally as a looser social-contextual concept, often entwined with a minority group approach" (11). However, for the purposes of this

thesis, it is possible to offer a few broadly descriptive comments on this approach, albeit with a bias toward the genealogy of ideas in British disability studies.

As Shakespeare notes, although various formulations of the social model were already evident in critical disability discourse, Mike Oliver "coined the term 'social creationist' to describe the British social model approach, distinguishing it from both the biological determinism of the 'medical model' and the [other] less materialist approaches associated with social constructionism" (*Disability Rights and Wrongs* 12). Oliver in turn attributes the change in critics' perceptions of impairment and disability to the work of social scientists such as Talcott Parsons, Max Weber and Deborah Stone, as well as clinical psychologist Vic Finkelstein, all of whom drew connections between the development of a contemporary concept of disability with the evolution of industrial capitalism, Western bureaucratization, and the welfare state.

The social model posits that the obstacles faced by disabled people are a feature of the built environment, and, as disability critics Colin Barnes and Geoffrey Mercer note, "has stressed the identification and removal of the barriers to social inclusion as opposed to defining a disabled person" ("Understanding Impairment and Disability" 10). Disability is structural within the social model, whether this structure should be those physical structures which impede disabled people's lives, or more abstract structures of social oppression. The distinction between disability and impairment was the revolutionary articulation of the social model, in that it enabled a delineation between the material fact of the disabled body (which they refer to as impairment) from the social fact of disability. The purpose of this distinction was to turn the spotlight onto the cultural creation of disability, and to remove the focus from the material difference of the body.

The social model is best understood as a targeted response to the medical model as well as through its own positive attributes. While the medical model located disability in the impaired body, and assumed that the impairment of the body was constitutive of the experience of disability, the social model took up the rebellious supposition that disability might be located in social experience rather than the impaired body. As Williams suggests, within the social model "the relationship between the individual and society is much more clearly stated: disability and dependency are caused by society" (205). Although the radical or revolutionary possibilities of this re-location of the "problem" of disability might not be readily evident, the social model became the rallying point of a very important social emancipation movement: as Shakespeare notes, "the social model of disability has been called the 'big idea' of the disability movement," and, despite having been replaced by other models for many disability specialists, remains "the fundamental political principal that both first initiated and now sustains the disability rights challenge to mainstream society" (*Disability Rights and Wrongs* 11).

The salience of the social model of disability was in large part that it suggested that, as disability experience was constructed, it could be simultaneously deconstructed or re-constructed. In his book *The Social Construction of What,* Ian Hacking observes that social constructionist arguments have evident facility in struggles for liberation, and in particular help those marginalised persons already "on the way to being liberated" (2). To read a social constructionist history as a mere re-telling is to miss the undercurrent of the most effective constructionist arguments, which is the "unmasking" that may "liberate the oppressed" and "show how categories of knowledge are used in power relationships" (Hacking 58). "Construction stories are histories," Hacking notes, "but to insist on only that angle is to miss the point. Constructionists about X usually hold that

X need not have existed, or need not be at all like it is" (37). Shakespeare cites Hacking in identifying the potential over-application or over-invocation of a social constructionist approach, noting that "Hacking feels that 'social construction' language is both over-used and wrongly used. He cautions us to be much more disciplined about both the 'social' and the 'constructed' in 'socially constructed'" (69). This observation could be said to inform later approaches to disability that identified the limitations of the social model, and sought to move beyond the strict delineation of (socially constructed) disability and (material, embodied) impairment. Hacking's argument underscores both the value of the social model of disability, and the compelling reasons for a move away from it to other models and ideas. While I apply the cultural model of disability criticism, the social model remains in the background: in a project which deals with postcolonial contexts the social model remains pertinent if it is expanded beyond its usual purview to approach the implication of international social and economic systems in creating disability. Although the typical focus of the social model has been upon urban, Western contexts, an internationalist application of the insight that disability is partly created by the social environment is pertinent to the present thesis.

The texts I examine in this thesis are populated by characters who are or become disabled because of international capitalism, and whose impairment by the economic system leads to the experience of disability through or within a social space that is directly affected by immediate and international social circumstances. Thus, while my reading is most indebted to disability scholarship that has grown out of the cultural model, I retain an interest in the social model as an important rubric for interpreting disability, and am especially interested in the implications of the social model in my reading of *Animal's People*. While the sharp distinction between disability and

impairment has been rejected by cultural scholars, I am interested to consider the representation of disability as a social creation and as a community experience.

4. The Minority Model

In narrating the shift from the social model and toward the cultural model, it is very important to note that there is continued dissent among disability critics regarding the formulation of new models, and that both sustained adherence to the social model or an emphasis upon other theories of disability have been promoted by prominent scholars. The minority model, which emphasizes the role of anti-disability prejudice in society more strongly than the social model of disability, has been especially polarising within disability criticism. The minority model of disability proposes that disabled people ought to be understood as, or to organise themselves as, a minority group, and be encouraged to agitate against systemic disability oppression and build an identity around the shared experience of being stigmatised as disabled. Championed by disability scholar and activist Harlan Hahn and others, the minority model suggests that

> the minority group paradigm for research on disability is founded both on the sociopolitical definition and on three major postulates: (a) that the primary source of the major problems confronted by persons with disabilities can be traced to unfavourable attitudes; (b) that all aspects of the environment are fundamentally shaped by public policy; and (c) that policies tend to reflect pervasive social attitudes and values (Hahn 53).

Michael Oliver and Colin Barnes note that one shortcoming of the minority model is its undervaluation of "cultural representations and the possible transformation of the concept of disability," and its almost exclusive emphasis on "advocacy, self-help and civil rights struggles," which are most pertinent in a North American context (56). While the emphasis of the minority model may not be ideally calibrated to approach cultural representations, thinking of disabled people as a minority group may be a useful perspective in reading some representations of disability. When cultural

disability scholars such as Fiona Kumari Campbell observe that "unlike other minority groups, disabled people have had fewer opportunities to develop a collective conscious, identity, or culture" they successfully draw on the minority model without that model eclipsing other understandings of disability (22).

I consider the minority model as it informs my analysis, and in particular engage with the importance of identity politics and minority identifications as they are present in *Animal's People,* and absent in *A Fine Balance* and *Such a Long Journey*. I engage with identity politics and minority identifications as a possible response to disability, rather than assuming them as the best response, and thus respond to minority concerns within a thesis that dominantly engages with a cultural model of disability.

5. The Cultural Model

To address limitations of the social, minority, and other models, new alternatives, including the polymorphous cultural model of disability, have been introduced. The entry of cultural models into disability studies fits in with larger trends in the academic world, and in the humanities in particular: as Shakespeare has explained in rather plain terms:

> Cultural Disability Studies is a prime example of what has been called 'the cultural turn.' This refers to how academics in the social and cultural sciences turned to language in the 1970s and to discourse in the 1980's. The great benefit of the Cultural Disability Studies approaches is that they explore not just material social relations, but also cultural imagery. (*Disability Rights and Wrongs* 49)

He goes on the note that "the impact of this work is to show how disability is not simply about having a medical condition, but is about how medical conditions come freighted with meaning and symbolism and connotation" (50).

As Mitchell and Snyder note, rather than focusing on corrective responses to obstacles, the "formulation of a cultural model allows us to theorize a political act of

renaming that designates disability as a site of resistance" and to "rewrite" the definition of disability "in view of a damageing material and linguistic heritage" but without denying the material differences of the disabled body (*Cultural Locations* 10). Rather than focusing on the potential elimination of the experience of disability, the emphasis instead is upon how differences can be recognized as "productive agents" that need not be "consigned to the realm of the unnatural" (*Cultural Locations* 66). As regards the study of disability in literature, the cultural model has opened up lines of inquiry beyond the interrogation of stereotypic or derogatory representations of disabled people, to a wider consideration of the potential productivities of difference in text; as Stuart Murray has suggested with regards to Mitchell and Snyder's cultural disability studies work, and as pertains to cultural disability studies more broadly, cultural criticism offers "the idea that the imaginative or fictional narrative that represents disability often offers a revisionist version of more conventional accounts of the place of impairment or disability in society" (*Representing Autism* 3).

Although cultural scholars follow widely divergent approaches to the interrogation of disability representations, they have in common a degree of ethical engagement and an underlying set of assumptions about the desirability of emancipating disability from its stereotypes. Sara Hosey cites Mitchell and Snyder and Garland-Thompson when she makes the following remarks, but, like Murray, she could be read as commenting more broadly upon cultural disability studies when she argues that

> scholars critique representations of disability that rely on well-worn metaphorisations and stereotypes of helplessness, passivity, and isolation. Additionally, many critiques implicitly (and at times, explicitly) call for a more realistic, more sophisticated, and perhaps more ethical disability representation ("One of Us" 37).

This critiquing is undertaken not as a mere taxonomy of stereotypes and resistance to the negative, however: the cultural model differs from the social model in that it allows

that difference may be inherent, integral, and indelible, but also productive. Kumari Campbell has narrated the evolution of disability studies toward this cultural formulation in terms of two waves, and as in keeping with the oft-deployed comparisons between feminist criticism and disability studies: "the first-wave response to modernist discourses of medicalism is referred to as the *social model* of disability, making a theoretical distinction between disability and impairment in the same way that early feminist writing distinguished between gender and sex" while the emergence of the cultural model presents "a second wave challenging enlightenment discourses of scientism" (99). The later model has emerged within disability studies based on a range of poststructuralist methodologies that map out postmodern terrains of disablement, and this new mode provides "a frame which figures disability as a representational system and not a medical problem primed with tragedy" (99). As this quotation suggests, despite the shift in its critical assumptions and vocabulary, second wave disability studies retains its objective of resisting the medicalisation of disability; it simply does so in different terms and with an altered set of underlying critical assumptions.

Cultural models of disability, then, present a recalibration of the social model's concerns: while the social model focused on how cultures were implicated in the *creation* of disability, the cultural model focuses on the *articulations* of and responses to complex and embodied difference. As Davis puts it, "a newer generation" of critics which had "grown up with the libratory models well in place" sought to "redefine the struggle and subject of study" in disability criticism (*Dismodernism* 10). While most cultural theorists do not deny that disability is experienced in part through socially constructed obstacles, there has been a move away from the assertion that disability is utterly socially contingent, and the absolute distinction between impairment and disability has thus largely fallen from use in literary criticism. Nirmala Erevelles has

described how the social theory of disability "has been critiqued in recent years because of the accusation that the social model of disability continues to treat the disabled body as an object that is acted upon by the world, rather than as a subject that has ontological significance," going on to suggest that this significance is biological as well as social and historical (35). Cultural disability studies' rejection of the emphasis upon the disability and impairment split can be interpreted as rejecting the liberal politics sometimes implicit in the social model of disability: as Mitchell argues in a 2004 article, cultural disability scholars have sought an "alternative to normative regimes of inclusion," and have tried to push "through the envelope of impairment to explore how disability subjectivities create new forms of embodied knowledge and collective consciousness" rather than always arguing for the greater inclusion of disabled people in pre-existing hegemonic social forms, as the social model to some extent does ("Gay Pasts" 1-2).

As Wendell and others have argued, the primary contention of second wave disability criticism has been that "the distinction between the biological reality of disability and the social construction of disability cannot be made sharply, because the biological and the social are interactive in creating disability" (*Rejected Body* 35). Critics' concern was that the social model had become the new hegemony within disability criticism, and was imposing a new understanding on the body which, despite having emerged from a "teleological structure in which an underclass might emerge from oppression," was demonstrating the Foucauldian dictum that "every mode of resistance, in the process of gaining credibility and authority, becomes caught up in the cycle of power/knowledge" (*Dangerous Discourses* 42). As Mark Sherry has argued, "for all its political merit, the social model remains a grand narrative" which "does not sufficiently acknowledge disabled people's plurality of experience" (*Brain* 206).

In effect, as Tom Shakespeare indicates, the social model to some degree enshrined "a distinction between impairment and disability," and this imposed a limitation upon the range of inquiries open to critical disability scholars (*Disability Rights and Wrongs* 42). Shakespeare invokes Shildrick's argument in favour of a move away from overly rigid models and especially the social model, arguing that the new disability studies offers "emphasis on embodiment; awareness of cultural imaginary; deconstruction of binary thought in favour of the fluidity of all categories; and recognition of the importance of emotion and affect" (*Disability Rights and Wrongs* 48). Shakespeare makes an important distinction between the academy and the activist community with respect to disability, and suggests that it may be most appropriate for some segments of the disability movement to retain their focus on the social model: "Disability Studies may find poststructuralist theory useful, although the political demands of the disability movement may not allow space for seemingly irrelevant diversions" (110). Primarily, the move away from adherence to the social model represents a degree of severance of the ties to a specific activist moment that was foundational to disability studies, as a broadening of the critical vocabulary has corresponded to an increased critical purview.

With the move away from the binary model of disability and impairment, the door is open to using disability studies to probe issues surrounding ability and mortality, and to approach other concerns that grow out of the material and mutable nature of the body, as well as cultural responses to that mutability and materiality. More vigorous engagement with race and feminist minority criticism, as well as increased interaction with theories of embodiment which do not directly engage with disability concerns, are possible under a formulation which admits and engages with the materiality of embodiment, because critical attention centres on the exceptional body rather than a specific set of social structures surrounding it. As Shildrick has argued, within the new

disability scholarship "the aim is not to discover some universal theory of disability that will ameliorate the conditions in which it is lived" but rather to position disability as "a fundamental and irreducible challenge – on diverse levels – to the normative desire to establish a certain security and predictability about the nature of human being" (*Dangerous Discourses* 10). The entanglement of other minority identifications with disability identity is of greater interest within cultural disability studies rubrics, which have opened up an important line of enquiry into how, as Tobin Siebers puts it, "disability identity disqualified other identities defined by gender, race, class, and nationality" (*Disability Aesthetics* 24). In the next section, I will turn to the questions posed by both differences of race and nationality as they complicate the critical precursors and paradigms I have identified in this section.

Toward a Global Disability Studies

As I noted in my discussion of terminology earlier in this introduction, there is a degree of disjuncture between the vocabulary and precedent obviated by literary disability studies, and the exigencies presented in postcolonial contexts: it is perhaps the occasional incongruity of this thesis project and what has been a predominantly Western critical vocabulary which suggests the need for the present work. While there is a degree of continuity in disability oppression and representation throughout the world, there is also a high degree of difference and local particularity. Early disability scholarship in particular often engaged in one of two related oversights when figuring disability within global contexts, and these are: simply ignoring non-Western contexts and focusing solely on the concerns of Western cities; and generalizing from Western contexts to other areas, and especially to the global south. While many early disability studies texts include provisos such as Oliver and Barnes' note that "we have to remember that we cannot merely bracket off the broader economic and social changes

that are occurring throughout the world," such observations in practice tend to justify the dominant focus of criticism, rather than to indicate a need for a diversification or expansion of zones of inquiry (3). Fortunately, however, recent criticism has seen a turn away from a superficial concern to a serious commitment to globalizing disability studies. In this section, I will consider the foundations laid by those cultural scholars who have made substantive inroads into the questions surrounding disability in non-Western contexts.

I am not the first disability scholar to observe that the focus on European and American contexts has been disproportionate: as early as 1998, James Charlton noted that "while there is a growing body of literature on disability in Europe and the United States, little information is available about disability in other parts of the world" (4). While contemporaneous and subsequent disability scholarship gestured toward this gap in knowledge, and often made use of anecdotal examples to indicate the dearth of research on non-Western cultural responses to impairment, the first serious and sustained efforts to address the shortfall in research began somewhat more recently. In 2008, Parekh noted the increased importance of international perspectives in disability studies, saying that "Disability Studies in the global North as well as interventions from disability perspectives in the global South are steadily contributing to the current modes of interdisciplinary inquiry across the spectrum of identity categories and cultural locations" ("Gender, Disability and the Postcolonial Nexus" 174). New "multi-layered approaches" within disability studies correspond with new approaches to the conundrum of disability, and also offer a new perspective from which to "challenge the oppositional frameworks of colonial and postcolonial, as well as destabilize the normalizing and homogenizing impulses in imperialistic and nationalistic practices and discourses" ("Gender, Disability and the Postcolonial Nexus" 175).

Special issues of leading cultural and critical disability studies journals such as the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* and *Wagadu* reveal the increasing priority being given to opening disability scholarship to the non-Western world and the global south in particular. While these examples are all literary-critical in focus, they all engage with disability work in other disciplines, and interdisciplinary theorizations of disability. The dialogue surrounding the expansion of critical disability studies into critical *global* disability studies has been interdisciplinary from the outset, and this interdisciplinary focus may account for many of the strengths as well as the potential shortcomings of this geopolitical expansion of the critical conversation. The need for disability scholarship to adapt into new forms which are appropriate for international as well as diverse local contexts has been articulated in comparable terms by activists, social scientists, and literary scholars.

Helen Meekosha contends that disability scholarship must "be conscious about the lack of geopolitical specificity in disability studies and acknowledge the issues of access and exclusion inherent in the universalizing tendencies of the discipline" (678), arguing that "disability studies was constructed as a field of knowledge without reference to the theorists, or the social experience, of the global south," and that "there has been a one-way transfer of ideas and knowledge from the North to the South in this field" (668). In marked contrast to Parekh's more optimistic appraisal, in the *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, Dan Goodley and Rebecca Lawthom emphasize that we must be mindful of "the problems of imposing Global North ideas on Global South contexts" (103). Cultural disability scholars Clare Barker and Stuart Murray contend that the "over-rigid models and vocabularies through which Disability Studies can sometimes function" can be "undone by situated analysis," which is rooted in historically-informed and place-specific theories of disability representation, and

takes into account "cultural difference environments of disability, and representational practices" (220).

Charlton's pioneering effort at this sort of situated analysis presents an exaggerated example of the strengths and weaknesses that can be found in global disability literature. His book *Nothing About Us Without Us* draws on first-person experience of international disability activism to compare the continuities of disability oppression. The text is commendable for its ambitious scope and trenchant activism, but chronically reduces the issue of cultural difference to a discussion of poverty, which often overwhelms other aspects of his analysis. In articulating how "underdevelopment has produced misery for hundreds of millions of people with disabilities," he very often simplifies the complexities of disability oppression into dyads such as religious/progressive, rural/urban, and rich (white)/poor (non-white) (43). Charlton reveals a strongly anti-religious bent in his comments on faith in relation to violence and disability:

> half a million Indonesians died at the hands of the Suharto regime in the late 1960's, and the Moslems turned inward. Thousands starve each day in India, and the Hindu religion emphasizes individual contemplation. If one wants change, any kind of change, support cannot be found within traditional religious institutions (64).

This anti-religiosity becomes problematic when it is coupled with Charlton's generalizations about Asian society, which amount to gratuitous racism: Charlton claims that "many Asian cultures promote passivity. The streets of India are filled with people with and without disabilities – who are begging" and that "religion, the church (sic), and the passivity they foster are part and parcel of these social conditions" (65).

While subsequent disability theorists who speak to the issue of global disability or global bodies avoid Charlton's oversimplification in some respects, they quite often echo his preoccupation with disparity and poverty at the expense of a meaningful

consideration of other features of global difference. In *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*, Davis makes several comments and asides regarding disability outside America, which is otherwise the geopolitical focus of his writing. Davis suggests that dismodernism signals a "new kind of universalism and cosmopolitanism that is reacting to the localization of identity," and that this new mode will amount to "a new ethics of the body" (27). He goes on to note that "we must focus on the poor, since by all estimates the majority of people with disabilities are poor, unemployed, and undereducated" (28). He offers a few examples of the disabling conditions he observes "on an international level," noting that

> land mines create impairments on a daily basis, and this fact combined with other technologies of war and extremely poor working conditions in sweatshop environments creates a level of disability in so-called developing countries that requires attention and thought (29).

Davis continues his free association around the problem of global disability to argue that

> it can be said that the most oppressed person in the world is a disabled female, Third World, homosexual, woman of colour. In addition, the absence of adequate wheelchairs in poor countries along with inadequate street and public accommodation facilities create a virtually inaccessible world for people with mobility impairments. (29)

In these observations by Davis, the complications imposed by poverty are considered at the expense of any analysis of differences between nations which contain sweatshops and landmines. In his *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, Robert McRuer's approach is very similar to the one Davis uses in relation to international bodies, in that McRuer's epilogue offers observations about international disparity, as well as an encourageing but ultimately vague panegyric to cosmopolitanism, noting that "there is no guarantee that even the most foundational disability studies theses will function the same way when we talk about global bodies" (201). He describes several

incidents involving immigration and immigrants in the United States, and these observations illuminate his contention that disability might be complicated by factors such as race and economics, although he does not really go into extensive detail as to *how* this difference might be interpreted or articulated within a recalibrated disability studies framework. Like Davis, McRuer works from examples of economic marginality and oppression in a first world country to underscore the urgency of an internationalist intervention into critical disability studies.

Michael Davidson's *Concerto for the Left Hand* offers, as Barker and Murray observe in their introduction to the 2010 issue of the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, a less nebulous inroad into the enormity of the problem of global poverty and the deficits in critical disability scholars' understanding of that context. In the seventh chapter of *Concerto for the Left Hand*, Davidson offers stories from Senegal, the Middle East, Cambodia, London, South Africa and other regions, and argues that "if disability were considered as a matter of global human rights" the Americans with Disabilities Act might be used as a "road map" for a global rather than a merely American social revolution. Davidson argues passionately on behalf of those who "are poor and live in an underdeveloped country" (172). His remarks recall those of Indian feminist and disability activist Anita Ghai, who stresses that

> the disability movement advances a few select agendas – mostly those that address the concerns of middle-class men. As I have argued elsewhere, 'the problem, however, arises when their fight for 'disability rights' subsumes agendas that are visible and significant only for the very privileged of the disabled. Concessions in air travel, hotels, and special parking facilities, though undeniably necessary, are meaningful only to a select population of the disabled. (53)

Ghai, like Davidson, draws attention to the "overwhelming correlation between disability and poverty" in a global context (*Concerto* 172). Ghai is more nuanced in these and other comments on the correlations of poverty and disability, and has been

deservedly praised by other scholars for pushing back against the "elitist and masculinist leadership of disability rights in India" ("Gender, Disability, and the Postcolonial" 189).

Ghai, Davidson, McRuer, Davis, and Charlton are quite right to draw attention to the issue of financial disparity on a global scale as it correlates with disability, and to take to task Western disability scholarship and activism for a sometimes exclusive emphasis upon the concerns of urban white people with disabilities, as they argue against the replication of this elite bias in international disability rights movements. In fact, these scholars could even be said to be invoking the social model of disability to good effect, as it was social disability theorists who have been most vigorous in arguing that "despite the fact that disability and uneven development are internally related to the capitalist world system" there has been a shortfall of scholarship of developing world contexts, as "materialist explanations of disability are rarely sought in the majority world" (Sheldon "One World" 118) While global poverty cannot be over emphasized, however, it is problematic that this seems in some scholars' work to be the exclusive impelling emphasis of a proposed global disability studies. Poverty and disparity are important factors in different cultural responses to disability, but they are by no means the only factor; and arguments that establish poverty as the primary focus of scholarship risk ignoring other facts about developing countries, and cultural differences beyond and beside the economic. It is important to note that elite and middle-class responses to disability in India and other postcolonial nations are not reducible to their similarity to (or mimicry of) disability movements in the global North, and that poverty is experienced very differently in different parts of the world.

Poverty must be emphatically articulated in terms of a complex of economic relationships, and not just as a fact (or the fact) of postcolonial life, or as the only

dividing line between the West and the rest. The sort of situatedness that so many disability scholars are calling for is best achieved through a reading of poverty which understands it in local was well as national and transnational terms. My focus with regards to poverty in this thesis is what economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has described as "the dividing line of 'haves' and 'have nots' in India," rather than the dividing line between "have nots" in India and "haves" in the West (*Uncertain Glory* 242). Sen's lifetime's work has been dedicated to raising awareness of poverty, and he has argued compellingly that it is "a mistake to be so 'anti-elitist' as to miss out on *[sic]* understanding of the role of the elite in the generation of science and knowledge that ultimately affects the lives of all – the subaltern as well as the elite" (*Interpreting India's Past* 32). By elite here, he means the Indian elite, who remain important to understanding the Indian poor. For the purposes of this thesis, it is noteworthy that poor and middle-class characters of the novels are often violently affected by the Westernized medical ideals of the elite and the establishment, as well as by non-medical forms of superstition and bigotry surrounding disability.

Complications introduced into the perception and experience of disability by social and economic class are in part premised upon the historical legacies of colonialism, and the later reality of neo-colonialism. The response to disability is determined in large part by the Westernization of medical knowledge through the elite classes. To perhaps oversimplify the case, it can be said that Western medical knowledge has a stronger ideological effect upon upper and middle-class characters, but is more likely to be enacted in the form of corporeal violence upon the struggling middle classes and the poor. Disabilities are thus both created and interpreted through a rubric which is complicated by colonial legacies, as well as by neo-colonialism and poverty as a mutually implicated pair.

Sherry, in a characteristically incisive commentary, has noted that "it is a truism to say that the historical legacy of colonialism is the poverty of the majority world, which has created large numbers of impairments," asserting that "such a recognition is insufficient for developing a complex understanding of the relationship between disability and postcolonialism" ("(Post) colonising" 28). His comments represent an important move toward situating disability, and a progression away from inquiries into global disability which fixates on the relationship between the West and the rest. Sherry argues that

> in order to understand the social construction of disability in a particular socio-cultural context, it is necessary to examine the specific economic, ideological, institutional, political, military, ethnic, gender and age-related dynamics in that society ("(Post)colonising" 30).

While it would be difficult (and perhaps impossible) to actually negotiate all of the factors Sherry mentions in this catalogue in a coherent study, his comments perhaps accomplish their ends through exaggeration, suggesting the extensive amount of work yet to be done in elucidating global disability. There are many factors related to disability experience that could be considered, individually or in dialogue with other factors. For the purposes of my argument here, I hope that by considering disability in terms of internal dynamics in a society, I may come to a perspective which engages with poverty as one of many complicating factors of a disability identity, rather than considering poverty as both the antecedent of impairment and the most important dimension of disability oppression. Interpreting poverty as the salient feature of developing world experience runs the risk of obscuring those features of disability which are locally or regionally specific and not merely economically contingent, and may oversimplify inquiries into how disability is refracted through the complexities of social class. As Sherry suggests, while "political struggles around disability need to be

based on a recognition of difference rather than imputed commonalities," this recognition must be calibrated within a "sensitivity to the power relationships which underpin difference" ("(Post)colonising" 206). As Sherry further argues, "postcolonial literature is also useful to disability studies because it emphasizes that identities are always enmeshed with gender, ethnicity, class, religion, and social factors" (9).

Barker's perspective on the relationship between global bodies and poverty seems to echo the assertions of Davis, McRuer, and others, but in fact supplies a criticism of their approach in line with Sherry's assertions. Her book, *Postcolonial Fiction and Disability: Exceptional Children, Metaphor and Materiality*, the study with perhaps the greatest relevance to this thesis, is a sustained literary disability study with a postcolonial focus, and one with the explicit objective to contribute to "the cultural diversification of disability criticism" (6). In the introduction to her book, Barker makes the connection between disability and poverty, but from the angle of connecting this poverty with its lurid depictions in the Western media, where postcolonial disability really is rendered quite homogenous. Barker notes that "there is no doubt that the frequent association of disabled children with 'Third World' countries or underprivileged ethnic minorities emerges from urgent material realities" and rehearses some of the usual statistics in relation to global poverty and disability, but frames these observations with a discussion of the racism of the Western media in which she does not naturalize or justify that media's obsession with disabled postcolonial children (10). Barker is not as a critic herself preoccupied with global poverty, but is examining Western media's fascination with the same; her argument in effect denaturalizes the idea that being a global or a postcolonial body is reducible to the experience of being poor. Sherry's use of the word "enmeshed" is very apt in relation to Barker's readings, as "enmeshed" so aptly describes the complexity of the global power relationships to

which he alludes. It is in the same spirit perhaps that Barker and Murray write in their introduction to the 2010 special issue entitled *Disabling Postcolonialism: Global Disability Cultures and Democratic Criticism* that

> the main intervention we intend this special issue to make is formulated as a call to move away from the 'modelling' established as the dominant mode of disability theorizing at present toward more nuanced understandings of disability in relation to cultural difference and situated experience (227).

They go on to note that

> instead of imposing a hegemonic model of disability, then, and assuming that disability will function in comparable ways across disparate cultural texts and contexts, contemporary materialist postcolonial criticism gives us the tools to take particular situated experiences as the starting point for disability analysis, enabling acts *emerging from and informed by* (rather than applied to) 'cultural locatedness' in the first instance. (228)

Although they do subsequently emphasize "chronic poverty" as an important context for a located criticism, this is not a point they return to ad nauseam or at the exclusion of other angles, and is not borne out as the uniting feature of the articles in the special issue. The edition demonstrates the ethos the editors describe here, in that it presents literary and cultural criticism which recalibrates disability studies approaches based upon cultural location, rather than having readings which are determined by pre-existing critical models.

Barker and Murray suggest that many of the disability theorists I have already mentioned in this introduction or will engage with in later chapters of this thesis, such as Siebers, Mitchell and Snyder, and McRuer, are "obviously sympathetic to non-American accounts of disability" they have a limited sense of "what this might entail" (226). Baker and Murray go on to suggest that

> most contemporary disability scholarship is, it appears, all in favour of a situated theory and method that can articulate the nature of global postcolonial disability, and is very much aware of the need for such work to complicate current models of how disability is experienced and represented,

> but it has no real idea of what these processes might actually look like (226).

The essay as a whole emphasizes that postcolonial criticism is more in need of an intervention from disability studies than the reverse; yet, it also articulates the limitations in disability studies in "its articulation of global dynamics" (219). They suggest the need to "develop strategies for postcolonial disability analysis" which will demonstrate critical parity with "the nuanced methods we find in much Euro-American disability criticism" (223). One of many examples they offer of what this nuanced reading might look like in practice is a one-paragraph analysis of a short story "Shishu" by Mahasweta Devi, which, they argue, challenges "standards of embodied normalcy" (230). Their reading perhaps encapsulates how a concern with poverty can be integrated with other locating factors, as the disparity explored in the story moves beyond through global to the local, to foreground "the local inflections that disable specific bodies in a historicized context of struggle" (230).

Their reading also emphasizes how my approach in this thesis fits in with the larger project of adding nuance to global approaches to literary disability studies. My aim is to augment, rather than to contradict, the scholarship that has sought to decolonize disability studies by forming a critical praxis based on local formulations of disability. I am engageing with Western discourses of disability, and specifically the idea of normalcy, as it has been imposed through colonialism and globalisation in postcolonial India. In my reading of this fiction, I mean to begin to tease out the implications of the undeniable presence of Western disability discourses in this postcolonial literature, and to consider how these discourses are being absorbed, altered, contested, and resisted in this group of texts. I agree wholeheartedly with Barker's assertion that medical diagnoses and "the cultural meanings ascribed to disabilities and norms, may vary greatly depending on local epistemologies, socioeconomic contexts

and the status of biomedical data in relation to other sources of knowledge" (*Postcolonial Fiction* 4). It is these Indian authors' engagement with the collision of biomedical data and global medical discourse with "other sources of knowledge" and a different national context that I have taken as my point of departure in reading normalcy in these texts. However, I, like Barker, admit a degree of fallacy in using Euro-American disability studies "frameworks that do not always travel well to postcolonial locations" in formulating my understanding of disability representation, even as I look to elucidate (other) Euro-American medical frameworks which have (historically) not always travelled well (*Postcolonial Fiction* 6).

The polyvalent concerns that arise out of inquiries into non-Western (postcolonial, indigenous, or global) disability ought to be appreciated for their complexity. As Danielle Cowley contends in relation to disability life-writing "cultural models are not necessarily right or wrong, but demonstrate how individuals hold multiple and differing perspectives and beliefs regarding various phenomena" (87). That is why I consciously bring to this project a different set of concerns to those disability scholars who have attempted to disentangle "what Western discourses call disability" from how other discourses approach the bodily condition of impairment (Kuppers 177). I look to how Western discourse, and specifically the idea of normalcy, is being marked or treated *as Western* in these texts, and how the articulation of disability is inscribed in this respect. The failure of Western science, and especially of medical science, to live up to its promises infuses the representation of disability and normalcy in these texts: as Sen has argued, "one of the central issues in contemporary politics in India is the relevance of science and technology" (*Interpreting India's Past* 28). The disabled body, in its many interactions with the Western clinic and the

global economy, often becomes a site for the working out of anxieties surrounding Western discourse in this fiction.

I read disability so as to elucidate the contours of a discourse that is complicated by colonialism and postcolonialism, and thus read disability with an awareness of the cultural as well as material effects of recent history. In my examination of the often dissonant representations of disability in these novels, I hope to undertake the sort of theoretical praxis described by Homi Bhabha, who argues that "the theoretical enterprise has to represent the adversarial authority (of power and/or knowledge) which, in a doubly inscribed move, it simultaneously seeks to subvert and replace," and that such criticism must be carried out "within the terms of negotiation (rather than a negation) of oppositional and antagonistic elements" (*Location of Culture* 33). The presence of Western ideas of normalcy and disability in these novels by no means precludes the presence of other possible responses to the disabled body, and it is the very negotiation for the meaning of the disabled body that makes these depictions worth careful examination. The "adversarial authority" that is at times exercised over disabled bodies is at times deeply subversive, and takes on special resonance in the context of recent historical events: as I will go on to detail in a later section of this introduction, there is a history of adversarial medical knowledges which are specific to modern India, and are taken up as a central thematic in this set of novels. The discursive "agonism" described by Bhabha, and the negotiation of a Western ideal of normalcy with other ways of understanding the body becomes a central concern as that understanding is set in competition with local discourses (*Location of Culture* 33). This thesis will take as a premise Bhabha's later contention that it is "the 'inter'" in international "that carries the burden of meaning," and will suggest that the inter-national has had an especially

powerful effect in the construction of the disabled body in these texts, as they suggest the interaction of ways of understanding the disabled body (56).

In moving the focus from disability discourse as it is at play in an encounter between different peoples, and casting it instead as an interaction between or constellation of different discourses, I hope to make good on political psychologist Ashis Nandy's suggestion in his *Intimate Enemy* that the scholar might "generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category" (xi). What Nandy describes is the internalization of the conflict between East and West in the postcolony, where colonialism remains a potent psychological influence despite the long absence of the colonisers or the threat of occupation. While Nandy is very apt in his assertion that "there is no reason why the conflict between the East and West should be seen as the central conflict in Indian life," this conflict remains important to understanding the meanings that accrue around disability in these texts (76). Rather than always reading the competition between Western and other discourses of disability as simply symbolic of competition between India and the West, I focus on the implications of these discourses' presence to the internal dynamics of the Indian state as it is represented in these texts. While the European origins of normalizing discourses remain important to my readings of these texts, my point of focus is the relationship between normalcy, disability, and an independent India's self-determination and negotiation of a colonial legacy, as opposed to the relationship between normalizing and the representation of the postcolony or postcolonial subject in the Western media or consciousness.

I have chosen to read a specific set of texts with strong internal resonances to underscore that I am not simply reading India as "non-West," or looking for the generalizable between postcolonial literatures, but have a very specific interest in how

concerns surrounding normalcy and disability are manifested in this literature (*Intimate Enemy* 73). Although, as evidenced by Barker's work, there are advantages to reading disability across postcolonial literatures, I have chosen instead to engage with works that circle around historical events (the Emergency, Thatcherism, the Bhopal Disaster) which, to a great extent, inform the disability discourses of the texts, creating both the causal antecedents and in many cases the symbolic contexts for an array of disabled bodies.

Although it lays beyond the purview of this thesis, I hope that the present work may also open the door for a re-calibration of the historical contexts of the concept of normalcy, as it has been articulated as integral but also perhaps exclusive to European modernity and Western ontology. As Nandy has argued, it may have been to a great extent the "experience of colonizing" which "openly sanctified – in the name of such values as competition, achievement, control and productivity – new forms of institutionalized violence and ruthless social Darwinism," and that "the needs of industrial capitalism" required "a slightly modified version of the colonial concept" (32). If it is true that the social Darwinist model applied within European society in many ways owes its generation to the colonial encounter, we may move beyond drawing simple linkages between the apparatuses of European ableism and European racism, to understand normalcy as a paradigm whose international manifestations are complicated by international inheritances as well as international manifestations.

Thus, critical readings of disability in postcolonial literature, history, and ethnography present difficulty to the scholar, who must decide how to negotiate or reconcile two separate critical vocabularies that can be at odds. Beyond the complication of overlapping cultural precontexts, there is further difficulty in deciding how to arbitrate different critical priorities. In the following section, I discuss

modulations which were available to me which I did not select, so as to articulate my critical position in both relation and contradistinction to the approaches of other disability critics who have considered postcolonial literature and contexts. I then discuss the relationship between the texts I have selected and my approach to them. I finally present a historical overview of the events related to my readings, and elucidate the relationships between this history and the fictive environment of the novels, and how disabled bodies are employed in representing this history.

Situating Disability in Political Fictions of the Subcontinent

A common tactic for reading disability in postcolonial contexts has been to consider or critique postcoloniality as a metaphor for disability, or disability as a metaphor for postcoloniality, as Sherry has aptly noted. Disability representation has been replete with explorer narratives (i.e. Oliver Sacks), and charitable discourses surrounding disability echo and overlap with those surrounding charitable efforts on behalf of underdeveloped nations. This metaphorisation of postcoloniality has been both examined as it is evident in texts, and employed as a critical praxis. Christian Flaugh, for instance, describes how in Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* "the colonial condition, understood as a pejorative one, is writ in an equally pejorative" disability rhetoric, and Flaugh problematizes this use of disability ("Of Colonized Mind and Matter" 298). In his article "Toward a Postcolonial Neurology," by contrast, Ralph Savarese argues that "it is worth conceiving of autism in postcolonial terms because it allows us to see the current struggle for self-determination being waged by autistics as a kind of neuro-nationalist uprising" (Savarese 274). With a mind to Sherry's intervention, I would align myself more closely with Flaugh's praxis than with Savarese's, in that I am interested in examining how disability is at times used to represent features of the postcolonial experience by the authors I am studying, as

opposed to establishing such a metaphorical framework for use myself as a literary critic.

Another related approach to the study of disability in postcolonial and indigenous literature is to consider how disability discourse is implicated in colonial discourse, and how the violence of the colonial encounter is enacted in the impairing of bodies, and discursively upon disabled bodies. An example of this sort of positioning is evident in a special issue of the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* which focuses on indigenous literatures: an emergent theme in articles by Barker, Mary Couzelis, Kuppers, Penelope Kelsey and Siobhan Senier is the deep enmeshment of settler colonialism and (white) discourses of (native) disability. This is not a surprising commonality, given the centrality of disease (tuberculosis, smallpox) and institutionalization, not to mention the more recent legacy of sterilization, and manifold other instances of medical abuse. Reading a different capitulation of violence in a contemporary postcolonial context, Denise Nepveux and Emily Beitiks argue that

> the concerns of postcolonial theory, Critical Development Studies, and Disability Studies are similar in the sense that we understand the dominant ways of thinking about disability, development, and North/South relations to be (potentially) violent and self-camouflageing discourses (252).

Nepveux and Beitiks go on to suggest that analysis of interventionist discourse and disability ought to be understood in mutual relation, and through the history of colonialism. They examine the racism in a film documentary, arguing that its message is essentially a mixture of the charitable and the neo-colonial: “North Americans have a broader vision and can set a better example, we must step in to rescue brown people with disabilities from brown families and communities” (244).

Whether it is used in relation to indigenous or postcolonial literatures, a formulation of disability which reads a colonial or racist disability rhetoric in terms of

its effect upon colonized bodies and as it is in conflict with indigenous ontologies of impairment has advantages as well as drawbacks. One strong advantage is that it may illuminate the confluence of ableism and racism, and, rather than trying to tease the two apart, might articulate the contiguities of colonial and medical interventionist discourse. On the other hand, one drawback of these readings may be that they emphasize the difference between indigenous and Western responses to disability, and in so doing obscure the ways in which Western disability discourse has, as I suggested in the previous section, become part of local understandings. In short, and to borrow Nepveux and Beitiks' idiom, brown people may step in to rescue other brown people from their communities, or may otherwise adopt "Western" disability discourse rather than combating it.

This possibility is very well articulated by Matthew Kohrman in his ethnographic study of disability in contemporary China, which revolves around a disability biography of Deng Pufang. Kohrman suggests that a Chinese term which is roughly equivalent to disability, *canji*, has been and continues to be distinct from the Western concept, yet is increasingly tied in to Western medical discourse. He by no means universalizes Western disability to the Chinese context, but argues against a "purely relativist agenda" (30) and proposes an examination of "how canji and its cognate terms have been framed, reframed, and made known over time" (62). His articulation of how this evolution is enmeshed with colonial history and globalisation is worth quoting at length:

> In the late nineteenth century, colonialism prompted a set of biologically informed methods for seeing and acting in the world – for example, biomedicine, public health, athletics, eugenics, socio-biology, epidemiology – to trickle into and help define the Chinese polity. In the intervening years, in fits and starts, and at different levels of intensity, these biologically informed methods became institutionalized within China in various forms.

And, Kohrman argues, these methods of seeing were gradually absorbed into Chinese cultures, and

> injected into the everyday lives of people across the country and varyingly placed alongside, incorporated into, and often taking precedence over other techniques for making sense of and responding to existence, otherness, and misfortune (e.g. humoral medicine, herbal treatments, accu-pressure/acupuncture therapies, spirit healing) (7).

Kohrman's study exemplifies the potential of a multifaceted approach which takes global politics and cultural legacies into consideration, but that does so from the vantage of a particular national context. While there are also advantages to readings of disability in terms of congruities across multiple cultural contexts, I have chosen to consider congruities across a set of texts which reveal continuities in their construction of disabled identity and in their use of the disabled body for symbolic purposes in part because of a highly congruous historical context, and to focus upon related refractions of intra-national and global power relationships. As Kohrman observes, albeit in a different context, colonial and neo-colonial influences are hugely important factors with regards to understandings of disability, but the particularities of that experience of globalisation are shaped by the uniqueness of a local imagination and history.

For instance, in Rushdie and Mistry's works, I find a high degree of continuity with regards to the representation of the Emergency of 1975–1977 in relation to the disabled body, and find that there is a mapping of the historical particularities of that event onto the bodies of disabled characters. The elimination of difference and disability becomes symbolically linked to the failure of a secular state in which many types of difference might thrive. Whether it is through the crushing of a Bombay crowd by an enormous cardboard Indira Gandhi in *A Fine Balance*, or the machinations of a physician-witch in *Midnight's Children*, the violence of oligarchy and the elimination of political freedom is expressed in the disablement of bodies, and the elimination of

disabled bodies. In *Animal's People*, which focuses upon a fictionalized version of the Bhopal disaster of 1984 and its aftermath, the potential success of disabled people represents the possibility of political recovery following the failure of the state to protect and respect the diverse bodies of its citizenry from neo-colonialism. While all of these fictions explore global discourses and international political pressures, and especially those surrounding international economic development and population control, the interaction of those discourses with pre-existing value systems and community consciousnesses are yoked to a very specific place and time. Mitchell and Snyder's observation that, in the context of Western modernity and in the legacy of eugenics, there has been an "explicit equation of hardy babies with national robustness" is refracted in multifarious ways through a recent postcolonial history of corrupt birth control practices, as well as sanctioned violence against the unborn in the form of persistent environmental toxicity (*Cultural Locations* 24).

In considering disability in literature that has grown out of very specific historical precedents and contexts, I hope to engage with Elizabeth Grosz's observation that concepts "have a history that seizes hold of them in inconsistent ways" and have the potential for "seizure and transformation" as they are refracted through a world of events (*Becoming Undone* 78). Western concepts surrounding disability are transmuted through a very specific historical context in these works, and the reading of the disabled body is enriched not only by the colonial precedents that are so often invoked in this fiction, but by the contemporaneous history which acts directly upon and is represented through disabled bodies. As Kohrman has observed how "biologically informed methods" were "injected into the everyday lives of people," these novelists observe how a colonial medical tradition is implicated in making sense, or capturing the nonsense, of political life (7). In the next section, I will consider how the idea of

normalcy articulated by Davis and other critics might be of particular use to representing contemporary politics.

Adapting and Expanding Lennard Davis's Concept of Normalcy

In the first part of this section, I will provide a précis of Davis' theory of normalcy as it relates to disability representation, which will be informed by a reading of one of the major precursors of Davis' work, Georges Canguilhem, with the aim of elucidating the very relevant relationship between Canguilhem's work and that of Foucault, which has in turn been very influential on Davis. I will also provide an introduction to Rosemarie Garland-Thompson's articulation of the normate, to define that term and elucidate the differences between Garland-Thompson's articulation and Davis' theory as they relate to this thesis. I will also return to the work of many of the theorists I discussed earlier, with the purpose of honing in on their use of Davis's concept of the normal. In the second portion of this section, I will provide a brief history of post-independence scientific optimism in India, with an emphasis upon Nehru's engagement with scientific utopianism. I will then discuss population control and the history of the Emergency in India in relation to the dissonant history of colonial medical abuse and scientific optimism. This schematic history will provide a precontext for reading all four of these authors' works, and I will conclude this section by articulating the overlay of disability representation with other concerns that are illuminated by an understanding of contemporary history. That this overlay hinges upon the idea of normalcy will become apparent as I read these authors' disability representation in light of their representation of history, and these tangencies will be further developed over the course of the thesis.

In presenting his concept of normalcy, Davis proceeds from an observation based in cultural history to an observation about modern literature. He argues that "when we think of bodies, in a society where the concept of the norm is operative,

then people with disabilities will be thought of as deviants. This, as we have seen, in contrast to societies with the concept of an ideal, in which all people have non-ideal status" (*Enforcing Normalcy* 29). This observation is used to formulate a theory of the novel which Davis will develop in relation to literary disability, but which he asserts has much broader implication for our reading of literature: Davis writes that "the very structures on which the novel rests tend to be normative, ideologically emphasizing the universal quality of the central character whose normativity encourages us to identify with him or her," going on to suggest that "this normativity in narrative will by definition create the abnormal, the Other, the disabled, the native, the colonized subject, and so on" (*Enforcing Normalcy* 40-41). As these comments suggest, normalcy is a paradigm with seismic implications. Davis takes up the issue of normalcy again in his book *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*. Davis briefly summarizes his theory of normalcy, arguing that the normal emerged "one hundred fifty years ago, coinciding with the birth of statistics and eugenics" (39). Davis argues that "before the nineteenth century in Western culture the concept of the "ideal" was the predominant paradigm in relation to bodies, and so all bodies were less than ideal" and that, as such, the concept of a norm effectively ushered in our contemporary concept of disability (39).

In articulating his theory of normalcy, Davis builds on classic studies of the history of statistics, such as Donald MacKenzie's *Statistics in Britain: The Social Construction of Scientific Knowledge*, and Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's (highly problematic) *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. Davis argues that the study of statistics, and the rise of the novel in the 1800s as the dominant mode of literary production, are both implicated in the emphasis on normalcy and abnormalcy in the novel. Perhaps the most important precursor of Davis' work is

the interventions of Foucault, who was in turn influenced by Georges Canguilhem. Foucault inherited much of his understanding of the norm from Canguilhem, and, as Shelly Tremain has noted, "was concerned to show the centrality of the "norm" to modern forms of governmentality, and to biopower in particular" ("Governmentality" 18). Davis is indeed reading history through the prism of Canguilhem's insights when Davis argues that "Quetelet's average man was a combination of *l'homme moyen physique* and *l'homme moyen morale*, both a physically average and a morally average construct" (*Enforcing Normalcy* 24).

Canguillhem, in his *The Normal and the Pathological* (translated from *Le Normal et le pathologique*) describes the persistence of normalcy as an ideal across moral and medical contexts. He argues that

> to set a norm (*normer*), to normalize, is to impose a requirement on an existence, a given whose variety, disparity, with regard to the requirement, present themselves as a hostile, even more than an unknown, indeterminate. It is, in effect, a polemical concept which negatively qualifies (239).

He goes on to describe the mechanism of this negative qualification, the abnormal, which appears as a symptom of the normal, but is actually its precedent, suggesting that "the abnormal, as ab-normal, comes after the definition of the normal, it is its logical negation" but that the "abnormal, while logically second, is existentially first" (243).

This idea of negative qualification is very important to disability scholars such as Davis and Garland-Thompson, as well as scholars such as Kumari Campbell, who suggest the possibility of using disability to study the constitution of the normal type. In his excavation of the negative constitution of normalcy, Canguilhem notes that a norm or normal was at first a concept related to geometry, and retained some of this sense as it came to be applied to other valuations and measures: "the concept of right, depending on whether it is a matter of geometry, morality, or technology qualifies what offers

resistance to its application of twisted, crooked, or awkward" (Canguilhem 239). This defining of the norm against a "twisted, crooked or awkward" type reaffirms the inherent tautology of abnormalcy and normalcy, as, although a geometric norm may refer to some inherent use or advantage (i.e. as in weight-bearing angles in architecture), a moral or other norm "has no significance as a norm pure and simple" (240). "A norm," Canguilhem notes, "is in effect the possibility of a reference only when it has been established or chosen as the expression of a preference and as the instrument of a will to substitute a satisfying state of affairs for a disappointing one" (Canguilhem 240). Like Davis, Canguilhem suggests this configuration of the norm creates in differences of degree differences of kind, arguing that "norms," rather than recognizing a gradation of difference, "express discrimination of qualities in conformity with the polar opposition of a positive and a negative" (240).

Davis' theory is self-consciously monolithic; his articulation of a paradigm shift from ideals and grotesques and toward a preoccupation with normalcy attempts to raise a "disabilities studies consciousness" that will "alter the way we see not just novels that have main characters who are disabled but any novel" (*Enforcing Normalcy* 43). His theorizing can be grandiose and tends to generalize, especially in his later work, as in this observation in *Dismodernism*: "much of literature is part of a national project in which representative character types are emplotted into narrative situations" before going on to say that the national "types" represented in "much of literature" are either of a default normal type, or the disabled characters who are "placed in the narrative 'for' the nondisabled characters" (*Dismodernism* 44-45). Even though elsewhere in *Dismodernism* Davis does concede that "no one is suggesting a glib, monolithic view of the novel's history" and that "quick and dirty hegemonic meta-narratives" are neither adequate nor satisfactory, he does attract explicit and implicit criticism from other

disability scholars for formulations which risk universalizing based on a geographically situated history to a global literary form, the novel (101).

For instance, in *Concerto for the Left Hand*, Michael Davidson argues that "situated, historically specific understandings of phenomena" necessarily complicate "a dismodernist view that might collapse identities into some global category," strongly countering Davis's claims for an effacing of other differences by the commonality of disability (10). While Davis suggests in his articulation of dismodernism that "difference is what all of us have in common," the difference presented by disability will always be complicated by where, when, and who the disabled person is (26). Mitchell and Snyder have asserted that "disability culture is diffuse and orchestrates multiple perspectives as well as bodies, somatic systems, and minds," although referring to "disability culture" may suggest a degree of coherence within all that diversity (176). Shakespeare has emphasized a need to "research the lives of disabled people, research how 'disability' has been constructed at different times in different places" rather than focusing on unifying terminologies (*Disability Rights and Wrongs* 55). In all of these counterpoints to a universalizing theory of disability, a well-founded caution surrounds the generalizing of a reading of disability to global literature, and I agree that the idea of dismodernism presumes too much about a universalized experience of the different body. However, given the presence of normalcy in the novel, and the transmission of European medical and social ideals through global colonialism and capitalism, it would be difficult to imagine normalcy being entirely absent from postcolonial literature. What I find is that normalcy and disability, as an involved pair, pervade these novels, but are complicated by both an engagement with their Western origins and competing local discourses, be these local discourses extra-textually extant, or the product of the authors' imaginations. I look to normalcy not as the sole or

predominant glyph for reading disability in these novels, but as a discourse that vies against others and is challenged and disturbed, and which is very much tangled up in its colonial provenance. Thus, while I take up Davis's idea of normalcy as the centre of my discussion, I do not mean to in any respect retain the universalizing tendencies of some of his writing.

Both Shildrick and Garland-Thompson have commented on the idea of normalcy in ways that are useful to this reading of the fiction, and I would like to take Shildrick's intervention into the idea of normalcy as a starting point for my own engagement with the idea. Shildrick has argued of Davis that "despite the perspicuity of his exposure of binary thought around the concepts of normal and abnormal as fundamental to structures of post Enlightenment knowledge" it is probably most pertinent to narrate "that discourse as merely coming to dominance rather than as a sudden irruption associated with the moment of industrialization in Europe" (*Dangerous Discourses* 52). In articulating the relationship of globalisation and disability, Shildrick, rather than calling for a general and static global formulation of disability, looks toward its "significance as a constellation of material and imaginary, spatial and symbolic process that constantly intertwine" in the context of discourses that disturb expectations (149). I am reading normalcy in this sense, and, rather than seeking to taxonomically identify the responses to disability in this literature through normalizing discourses (of European provenance), look toward these postcolonial authors' productive engagement with those discourses (and awareness of, and engagement with, their colonial and neo-colonial provenance). Like Shildrick, I hope to unbind the concept of normalcy from a typifying historical narrative, so as to investigate the discourse as it is evident in this literature. I do not argue that normalcy and abnormalcy have come to dominance in this Indian context, as they have been

reasonably argued to have come to dominance in a European or Western context, but feel that the binary persists as a response to disability in this literature.

I must also invoke Garland-Thompson's concept of the normate as a corollary to my use of Davis's normal. Garland-Thompson has offered the idea of the "normate," which is the archetype of the body which, as the "prototypical figure of normalcy is not what we see everywhere but rather what we expect to see" (*Staring* 45). Garland-Thompson describes the normate as "the veiled subject position of cultural self, the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate's boundaries," suggesting that this normate "is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them (*Extraordinary Bodies* 8). This is an important formulation which informs my readings of an economically marginalised social context where the imagined normal may not have any relationship with a statistical norm. Garland-Thompson goes on to argue that while "actual normates are as scarce as hen's teeth," in essence suggesting that the normate is an unattainable ideal, "the illusion of the normal" is key to the self-concept and self-presentation of those who imagine themselves as able-bodied (*Staring* 45).

The normate is perhaps a more expansive concept than the normal, because, as it emphasizes the scarcity of the normate, it breaks down the potentially oversimplified binary of normal/disabled that may be evinced in Davis' theorization. As Garland Thompson argues in *Extraordinary Bodies*, it is useful to step away from "simple dichotomies of male/female, white/black, straight/gay, or ablebodied/disabled so that we can examine the subtle interrelations among social identities that are anchored to physical differences" (8). The normate shifts emphasis away from how disability threatens normal identity to how a normate identity challenges all other forms of

difference, and enables an approach to "the complex ways that disability intersects with other identities to produce the extraordinary and the ordinary figures who haunt us all" (*Extraordinary Bodies* 9). While both Davis and Garland-Thompson suggest the potential of normalcy as a glyph with which to interpret minority identities other than disabled minority identities, Garland-Thompson's articulation perhaps draws greater attention to the ephemeral and elusive nature of the normal, and further indicates the importance of representation in creating the normate, and, conversely, in creating the sense of its lack. As Garland-Thompson writes, "representation thus simultaneously buttresses an embodied version of normative identity and shapes a narrative of corporeal difference that excludes those whose bodies or behaviours do not conform" (*Extraordinary Bodies* 7).

Quayson's comments on the normate further illuminate how the concept may be useful in reading this group of novels, in which the disjuncture between imagined normate bodies, and the bodies actually presented, is constantly underscored. Quayson draws a strong connection between economic structures and the normate, creating perhaps more useful connections in this regard than Davis' observations regarding normalcy and the Industrial Revolution. Quayson notes that "corporeal difference is part of a structure of power, and its meanings are governed by the unmarked regularities of the normate," going on to assert that

> the frame within which the disabled are continually placed by the normate are ones in which a variety of concepts of wholeness, beauty, and economic competitiveness structure persons with disability and place them at the centre of a peculiar conjuncture of conceptions (*Aesthetic Nervousness* 17-18).

It is my contention that this frame may be transmitted to postcolonial environments where it has only a tangential relationship with any actual average body, and that this transposition is expressed primarily through and upon disabled bodies in these texts.

To better understand how and why the frame of the normate, or a concern with normalcy and normalization, is taken up as a preoccupation in these novels, it is worth considering the colonial and postcolonial history that is often the dominant thematic concern in these authors' work. The relationship between the literary and the ethical may be illuminated by an understanding of the history which has had a role in creating a strong dissonance around the medical establishment, or the clinic described by Foucault, which is so often both the site of compassion and the epitome of evil in these novels. It is my contention that disabled characters play a key role in the working out of tensions surrounding medicine and science, and that this metaphorisation of discursive concerns is enmeshed with struggles for power and autonomy in the postcolonial state.

Let us return to Barker's assertion that "medical diagnoses, let alone the cultural meanings ascribed to disabilities and norms, may vary greatly depending on local epistemologies, socioeconomic contexts and the status of biomedical data in relation to other sources of knowledge" (*Postcolonial* 4). The status of biomedical knowledge in India has been complicated by extremes of utopianism and disappointment which have been associated with science, and in particular with medical science, in the late-colonial and post-independence eras. The interplay of recent mass medical abuses with the more general legacies of science in India is complicated by the historical importance of science to creating optimism for an independent India. The project of re-casting science, including medical science, began long before independence. As historian of modern India Gyan Prakash notes in his *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*, this re-casting of the position of science in relation to India, and India in relation to science was a challenging undertaking, as

> to advance universal claims for a people stigmatized as metaphysical and out of touch with modernity was an act of enormous imagination and ambition. Precisely such a far-reaching project came into view in late-nineteenth-century British India as the Hindu intelligentsia began to identify

> a body of scientific knowledge in particular Indian texts and traditions. Denying that science was alien to India, they argued with remarkable ingenuity and deep cultural learning that the ancient Hindus had originated scientific knowledge and that this justified the modern existence of Indians as a people (86).

Although this certainly was an elite intellectual movement at first, the permeation of scientific thinking accelerated in the years before and after Indian secession from the Raj:

> By the early twentieth century, then, the authority of science had become widely dispersed. Fields ranging from social and religious reform to literary writings, and urban spaces ranging from major colonial cities to small district towns witnessed the permeation of science as a grammar of transformation (*Another Reason* 63).

This "grammar of transformation" was employed especially adeptly by Nehru, who posited that, even if science might be partially a Western creation, it was a distinctly Indian value set that would give it purpose and direction. Prakash summarizes Nehru's articulation of the failure of science in the absence of adequate spiritual anchor, arguing that in much of global modernity, "sterility, falling birth rates, and racial decadence had set in because modern industrialisation and capitalism had caused people to lose touch with the soil; they lacked a sense of purpose of life" (210). However, the effects of scientific progress would be different in India, where "the past was not dead but alive, open to the modern age and ready to give moral direction to science and technology" (213). As Prakash goes on to note, "the beauty of this formulation was that it located the nation as a space for the critique of Western modernity while internalizing the program of modernization" (213). Prakash goes as far as to tie pre- and post-Nehruvian rhetoric surrounding science to the entire project of nation-building:

> Introduced as a code of alien power and domesticated as an element of elite nationalism, science has always been asked to accomplish a great deal – to authorize an enormous leap into modernity, and anchor the entire edifice of modern culture, identity, politics, and economy. The very existence of India

> appears crucially dependent upon the stability of the apparatuses and practices it designates as rational – law, civil society, the nation-state, democratic institutions, capitalist economy, modern medicine, and scientific and technological projects to control and exploit human and non human resources (12).

Thus, the rational basis for absorbing and transforming science provided not just an echo but a trajectory for nation formation: "to the extent that the Indian values of collective good provided a basis for it, the modern nation-state was not a Western import" and the Indian spirit "contained principals of ethical conduct for the common good that the modern West sorely lacked" (*Another Reason* 212).

The dissonance surrounding science (and medical science in particular) that emerges in these authors' work, then, is perhaps linked not only to the atrocities committed under the aegis of science in recent history, but the optimism that preceded them. Further, it is no surprise that the failure of medical science to slough off its colonial history and be adapted to a uniquely Indian value system is often either directly or metaphorically connected to the failure of the nation to do other than to replicate colonial forms, or to perpetrate neo-colonial forms. The violence and corruption of the medical system is fantastic in Rushdie, grisly in Mistry, a source of black humour in Kanga, and the centre of agitation in *Animal's People*; and in all four writers, a failure of medicine signifies the failure of postcolonial modernity.

And it is here that we return to the issue of disability, and the resonances of disabled bodies in these novels. The disabled body often becomes a repository for anxieties surrounding the colonial provenance and abuses of science and modern medicine in these texts, and these anxieties are played out in terms of a failure of the "grammar of transformation" that science has represented in India since the Emergency (*Another Reason* 63). The disabled body becomes a symbol of the failure of science to enact the common weal in modern India, and alternately takes on connotations of the

archaic and the apocalyptic in this fiction. It is this symbolism that repeatedly links the fates of disabled characters with governmental population control in Rushdie and Sinha, and which to a lesser extent informs the representation of rebellion against neo-colonial discourses as they are explored in *Animal's People* and *Trying to Grow* (1989). These novels repeatedly explore national-level attempts to take a scientific approach to the problems or perceived problems of the nation, and represent the results of interventions including the mass sterilisation associated with the Emergency, the manufacturing of "miracle" pesticides to grow more food, and dogmatic economic interventions. That the practical and moral failure of these attempts is evidenced upon and by disabled characters may have to do with the imputed relationship between national fitness at a numerical level, and the pre-existing tradition of using disability to represent national non-fitness: as Davis has suggested, there has been the perception that "if individual citizens are not fit, if they do not fit into the nation, then the national body will not be fit" (*Enforcing Normalcy* 36). However, in these representations, rather than disabled characters threatening national fitness, they are exploited for their potential to confirm the failure of modern ideals.

One recurring source of failure in modern India has come in the form of attempts to normalize away poverty, and failed attempts at economic intervention are taken up as a focus of particular interest by several of the novels included in this study. Because these interventions, and particularly those of population control, are often explored through disabled figures in these novels, and because the discourse of population control has many surprising tangencies with disability discourse, I will spend the next few paragraphs considering the relationships between the impulse to normalise whole demographics, and the eugenic imaginary that informs understandings of disability and normalcy. While Davis suggests that "the central insight of statistics is

that a population can be normed" in the context of a nationalist desire to alter or eliminate "nonstandard subpopulations," we can see a revised version of this discourse operating on a global scale in these novels (*Enforcing Normalcy* 30). The preoccupation with growing populations, and the international politics of population explosion prevention, can be read as involved in the same statistical imaginary that has shaped notions of normalcy and disability. As Canguilhem has suggested,

> the definition of sanitary norms assumes that, from the political point of view, attention is paid to populations' health considered statistically, *to the healthiness of conditions of existence*, and to the uniform dissemination of preventative and curative treatments perfected by medicine" (245, emphasis mine).

That the conditions of existence can and should be normalised through the preventative treatment of excess fertility is an assumption indebted to many permutations of a statistical consciousness.

The family planning program undertaken during Indira Gandhi's tenure provides a very good example of the possible outcomes of a statistical imaginary. "The Emergency" is actually a shorthand to describe the second invocation of emergency powers in post-independence India. As historian Venkat Iyer notes, "the first occasion when a state of emergency was declared" was "following an incursion by Chinese troops into India's northern frontier" when Nehru was in power (103). The second "controversial use of Emergency powers" came during Indira Gandhi's tenure "between 1975-77," and it is this event that is commonly referred to as "the Emergency" (151). The proclamation of a state of Emergency was "followed by a plethora of laws, including constitutional amendments, and executive orders which had the effect of abridging fundamental rights and conferring extraordinary powers on the executive" (Iyer 151). Abuses under the Emergency included "arrests and detentions" (Iyer 178); "unlawful use of force" (Iyer 180); "censorship of news and other media" (Iyer 182);

"restrictions of freedom of association" (185); and "restrictions of freedom of judiciary" (185). The family planning program which is so focal for both *Midnight's Children* and *A Fine Balance* is thus only one of the many abuses of power associated with the Emergency, but emerges from these fictions as a clear focus of narrative interest beyond other rights violations. Numerous historical studies have been undertaken to explore the devolution of India's family planning strategy into a front for medical abuse, but a few salient facts that emerge across histories of this event and political moment will suffice as a backdrop for a reading of this literature. There was before and during the Emergency a substantial portion of Indians who "realised the necessity of family planning and acted on it" voluntarily; coerced and ill-informed sterilisation was far from ubiquitous, but neither was it uncommon (*Family Planning in India* 112). As B.N. Sarkar and B.K. Mukhopadhyay have noted, even those sterilisation participants who did ostensibly volunteer may have been influenced by "excessive propaganda and persuasion by motivators a few days prior to the operation" (40). Even Katherine Frank, a notably sympathetic biographer of Indira Gandhi, cedes that "some people were simply coerced – rather than motivated or bribed – to be sterilised" and that "during the Emergency, thousands were arrested for 'vagrancy' and taken off to sterilisation camps where they had no choice but to undergo vasectomies" (Frank 407).

In short, the family planning campaign was an act of mass bio-political control. In an essay on Foucault's work, Tremain offers an articulation of the idea of biopower that illuminates the interrelationships between disability discourse and population control. She describes Foucault's implication of biopower in understanding the desirable shape of a population: "this new technology of power – this biopower – that emerges in the second half of the eighteenth century takes as its object life itself, the life

of the human qua living being, that is, the life of the human in so far as it is a living being" (4) and goes on to note that

> biopolitics that begins to establish itself in the late eighteenth century, involves a set of measurements such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of production, and the fertility of a population. These processes, together with a whole set of related economic and political problems, become bio-politics' first objects of knowledge and the targets that it seeks to control (4).

Her comments are of course evocative of Davis, but her emphasis upon Foucault's idea of biopower underscores the common inheritances of disability discourse, and the statistical imaginary that motivates many approaches to population control.

As Elaine Scarry has noted, the act of population projection relies very much upon an imaginary that may give way to a fantasy of social collapse or decay: she suggests that "population numbers may be stable reflections of the people counted, or may instead give way to a speculative, futuristic arithmetic, severed from any material reality other than the 'actuarial terror' of the person doing the counting" (*Populations and Persons* ix). Both Scarry and Tremain's accounts of the politics of fertility depend upon a removing of agency from the heedless, reproducing masses, who are identified in terms of the "space-taking fact of the body" as mathematical projections create masses of imaginary people in a hypothetical future (Scarry ix). As in the instance of the eugenic imaginary, which projects the collapse of social structures through the unchecked reproduction of persons considered defective, population projections figure apocalyptic collapse in terms of unchecked reproduction. Importantly, these over-populating bodies are often imagined as belonging to lower social classes, as population control, like eugenics, often chooses out certain demographics for intervention.

It is unsurprising, given this overlapping of premises between population control and eugenics, that arguments surrounding economics and other forms of scarcity are so

often invoked in the service of anti-reproductive policies and discourses. As Frances Ferguson notes in her essay on Germaine Greer's theories,

> the argument about scarcity, that is, emerges not just as an attempt to fit numbers of persons to quantities of resources; it also, and more importantly, is a very satisfactory mode of pitting groups of persons against one another, indeed of pitting one idea of what a person is against others ("Malthus, Godwin" 108).

Ferguson goes on to cite Germaine Greer's parodic argument that ostensibly humanitarian population policy often hinges upon Western materialism, suggesting that interventions to ensure a so-called reasonable standard of living through control of the size of the world's population are both based in greed, and logically flawed:

> if we in the West think that only our kind of life is worth living, then clearly the numbers that the earth supports will have to be substantially reduced. The world could become a vast luxury hotel, complete with recreational space for us to hunt and ski and mountaineer in, but it must not be forgotten that our luxurious lifestyle demands the services of a huge number of helots, who cannot be paid so much that they can afford rooms in the hotel themselves (107).

If medical science has provided the means of population control, then, a capitalist discourse often provides the goals which motivate it, as well as a justification for its forceful implementation. It is little wonder that the medical and broader scientific heritage, which carries both the sense of optimism for the Indian nation and the taint of the reality coming up short of the optimism, is represented in an alternately good-and-evil medical establishment: what doctors do, for whom and to whom, becomes the correlate of problems of government. While I am not suggesting a literal or simplistic equation or co-relation between disability and population politics in these novels, I would suggest that there is a historically predicated authorial overlapping of discourses of population control and disability, as both are related to one another through the motif of the clinic. I would argue that this motif is especially pronounced in the

representations of the Emergency era in Rushdie and Mistry's novels, but that concerns with biopolitical interventions and the failures of a specifically biopolitically involved government also emerge in the other novels included in this thesis.

Overview of Chapters

In the second chapter, which is entitled "The Medical and the Monstrous: Disability in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*," I will consider how the disabled body is created as an object of competition in an ideological agon between a violent, globalized modernity and a sometimes-idealized fictive past. While Rushdie often represents the disabled body in a very simplified and rather bigoted register, he also to some extent engages with the more complex potentialities of disability to represent the failure of the nation. The normalizing perpetration of a Westernized medical apparatus against disabled people becomes the proof and at times the symbolic nexus of political disintegration and the dissolution of hope for the emergent nation, whether in Rushdie's fictional version of India or Pakistan.

In the third chapter, "Disability and the Realization of Metaphor in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*," I will consider Rohinton Mistry's disability representations in relation to his engagement with the tradition of European realism. While Mistry attempts to re-locate the normal type articulated by the European novel, and subverts the conventions of European fiction even as he employs them, he still depends upon a largely uncontested tradition of disability representation. While he re-locates the norm in many demographic respects, he does not fully manage to rescue disability from an ancillary and symbolic role in the fiction. Mistry uses disabled characters symbolically to imagine political upheaval from a disadvantaged and sometimes from a lower-class position, creating in disabled characters their symbolic correlates.

In my fourth chapter, "Collective Disability and the Dis-located Norm in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*," I will consider the ways in which this novel effaces paradigms of normalcy by imagining an environment in which disability is the unifying commonality of community life. While Mistry and Rushdie ultimately write disability as narrative anomaly in the ways represented by Mitchell and Snyder, Sinha inverts the paradigm of the anomalous body in his fictional representation of the Bhopal disaster. The failure of the Indian state to protect its citizenry results in collective disability identification, while those able-bodied individuals who might be treated as normal in another fiction become suspicious outsiders.

In my fifth chapter, "Unaccommodating Fictions: Disability, Authorship, and the Politics of Failure in Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow*," I will consider the ways in which gay, disabled, Parsi writer Firdaus Kanga represents failure and dependency as character weakness. Kanga validates neoliberal competition by re-imagining the potential for economic and social attainment as properties of mind at the exclusion of the body, and, in so doing, inaugurates an adaption of paradigms of normalcy. Kanga's imaginary valorises the economically competitive individual, but simply removes the constraint of bodily normalcy from this ideal marketable man. For Kanga, economic freedom from parental, societal, or governmental intervention is edifying, as masculinity is achieved through uninhibited competition.

In my conclusion, "Good Doctors and Bad Doctors in Rushdie, Mistry, Sinha, and Kanga," I will consider the representation of the clinic and of physicians in addition to the representation of disabled people in the novels included in this thesis. Doctors and medical apparatus become symbolic correlates for different political impositions and political strategies, often representing the abuses and failures of government or of public policy. I will frame my discussion within Foucault's concept of the clinic, and

will consider the ways in which traditional and Western medicine take on symbolic meaning in these fictions of India.

Chapter 2: "The Medical and the Monstrous: Disability in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*"

> In the 'early Moors' my hand was transformed into a series of miracles; often my body, too, was miraculously changed. In one picture – *Courtship* – I was Moor-as-peacock, spreading my many-eyed tail; she painted her own head on top of a dowdy pea-hen's body. In another (painted when I was twelve and looked twenty-four) Aurora reversed our relationship, painting herself as the young Eleanor Marx and me as her father Karl (*The Moor's Last Sigh* 224).

In this epigraph, Moraes, the narrator of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*, describes paintings by his mother Aurora. In her artwork, Aurora represents her disabled son in a wide variety of magical guises, and, while she returns obsessively to some motifs, generally tries to figure her son's body in as many different ways as possible. Here, we see Aurora imagining her son into both a magical scene from a mythic past as a peacock-figure, and then inscribing him into a historical representation as Karl Marx. Aurora's interest in moving the disabled body about in history, or in moving history about through the re-inscription of the disabled body, mirrors Rushdie's own interest in representing disability: both represent disability in contrapuntal time, reading it through the lens of superstition and magic as well as using it to represent very contemporary concerns.

In Salman Rushdie's novels *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, disabled characters occupy a dynamic representative space, and become the site of an admixture of discourses of disability, specifically setting clinical and metaphysical discourses in juxtaposition and dialogue. These three texts, and the various narrative

contexts presented therein, reflect the multiplicity of discourses of disability, and offer competing and contradictory constructions of the disabled body. In *Shame*, and also to a lesser extent in *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie creates a sense of doubled time, which facilitates the interlacing and contrasting of ostensibly pre-colonial and postcolonial conceptions of disability, and thereby creates in the presentation of the disabled body a symptom of the discursive influences which threaten emergent postcolonial societies. The ultimate destruction or normalisation of disabled bodies in these novels comes to represent the failure of a vision for India.

Disability and Narrative Authority

Midnight's Children, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh* may be said to represent a set of texts in terms of their treatment of postcolonial disability as a thematic concern, although *The Satanic Verses* (1988) comes between them in Rushdie's oeuvre and also takes an interest in disability as subject matter and centre of metaphor. Although there are pronounced tangencies between the approach to schizophrenia and other disabilities in *The Satanic Verses* and the other novels in this study, and especially between the approach to delirious transformations in *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*, I have chosen to focus upon the three novels which share their emphatic and self-reflexive yoking of disability to metaphor for the postcolonial city or nation. There is ample room for comparison between the treatment of disability in *The Satanic Verses* and the novels which precede and follow it, but these considerations lay beyond the scope of my argument in this chapter.

Midnight's Children and *The Moor's Last Sigh* treat Indian history directly as well as metaphorically, and *Shame* does much the same for Pakistan. *Midnight's Children* is the first-person narrative of a Bombay Muslim, Saleem Sinai, who

interprets contemporary national history as series of stigma enacted upon his body, as well as reading pre- and post-colonial history as having a direct, metaphoric effect upon his family members. *Shame* is a third-person narrative which focuses on the doctor Omar Khayyam Shakil as well as his eventual spouse, Sufiya Zenobia Hyder, and, while it primarily expresses national moral culpability rather than historical events as metaphor, is still comparable to *Midnight's Children* in its use of a family history and a stigmatized body to represent a nation. *The Moor's Last Sigh*, a first-person narrative largely set in Bombay (which is on the cusp of becoming Mumbai), is less emphatic about the metaphoric tangencies between the family and the nation than either *Shame* and *Midnight's Children*, wherein it is the central conceit[1]. However, as Moraes, the titular Moor, notes:

> Please understand that I am not claiming to have been a prodigy of any kind. I had no early genius for chess or mathematics of the sitar. Yet I have always been, if only in my uncontrollable increases, prodigious. Like the city itself, Bombay of my joys and sorrows, I mushroomed into a huge urbane sprawl of a fellow, I expanded without time for proper planning, without any pauses to learn from my experiences or my mistakes or my contemporaries, without time for reflection. How then could I have turned out to be anything but a mess? (161-162).

Moraes is aware of a metonymic connection between himself and his city, even if this is less pronounced a metaphorical relationship than that of Saleem, Sufiya Zenobia, and their respective nations. All three share in common their treatment of the disabled body. All three have disabled characters in a very central role, and in the case of *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Midnight's Children*, as the narrator. All blur the distinction between real-life disabilities and supernatural afflictions of the body, as, in keeping with the novels' overall magical realism, the recognizable pathologies of disabled characters are

[1] In 1995 Bombay was officially renamed Mumbai as part of a pro-Marathi program instituted by the ruling Shiv Sena party. This thesis maintains consistency by referring to the city as Bombay throughout.

augmented by a dimension of magical causation of disability, and medically impossible or supernatural manifestations of the same. Further, all three novels exploit both possible and impossible dimensions of disablement for their symbolic potential. In *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Midnight's Children*, accelerated growth or ageing represents too-rapid change in the Indian nation, and severed fingers and fused limbs stand in for collective violence. In *Shame*, Sufiya Zenobia's passivity, which is attributed to her mental disablement, and her sporadic Werewolf-like transformations, represent the polarities of innocence and violence in a theocratic state.

In *Salman Rushdie: Fictions of Postcolonial Modernity*, Stephen Morton identifies continuities in the representation of political failures in India in *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Midnight's Children*. Morton suggests that

> if the holocaust signifies the failure of European modernity, and its liberal principals of freedom, equality and tolerance, Rushdie in *The Moor's Last Sigh* suggests that events such as the Emergency and the destruction of the Babri mosque by Hindu groups signals the failure of Nehru's liberal vision of postcolonial modernity, particularly his promise to recognise the equal rights of all religious communities within India (94).

It is noteworthy that, while Morton suggests that Moraes's "Jewish and Catholic background" is significant in representing "the experience of the minority in a postcolonial nation state," he does not identify either Moraes or Saleem's modes of embodiment as suggesting a minority status, although one could argue their disabilities represent another major minority identity for both of these narrators (94). The absence of disability from Morton's list of minority identifications is not merely an oversight, however, because disability in these fictions does not function in the same way as other minority identifications: the disabled character represents *the nation itself* rather than a special interest group within the nation.

Why the disabled body should prove such a versatile object to represent the nation, and the implications of coupling medically possible and impossible versions of the body, are part of my concern in this chapter, and I mean to approach these questions through a disability studies reading of these works. Rushdie's employment of disability is closely connected to his almost obsessive return to doctors, nurses, hospitals, and other representatives of a medical system which is almost always figured as corrupt, sadistic, or otherwise manifestly evil, a motif which I will examine in much closer detail in my conclusion. The disabled body, which more often than not experiences its metaphoricity as violence, is tortured by this medical apparatus, which takes on its own metaphorical loading as it enacts violence upon disabled bodies.

Of the many critics who have written about Rushdie's corpus, the most substantive investigation of Rushdie's use of disability is Clare Barker's discussion of *Midnight's Children* in her *Postcolonial Fiction and Disability: Exceptional Children, Metaphor and Materiality*. Barker argues persuasively that a disability studies reading of *Midnight's Children* may be productive because Rushdie makes "extensive use of the body and biopolitics to represent the tensions between difference and homogenization, diversity and regulation" (127). Nevertheless, I will qualify her observation that "*Midnight's Children* gives a joyful, exuberant account of the myriad emancipatory possibilities opened up, in theory, by such a tolerant, inclusive paradigm for national identity" which is "tempered by the difficulties of achieving inclusivity" and finally destroyed by the Indian Emergency, "the definitive closing down of the vision" (127). Barker is correct to say that the dream of inclusivity is destroyed by the Emergency, but I would suggest that this inclusivity is tenuous from the start, and that this tenuousness is manifest in Saleem's pained relationship with disability from boyhood. Barker

provides a summation of Saleem's stigmas and disabilities, and one which is strongly invocative of the centrality of disability to his metaphoric experience of history:

> Saleem is born with various impairments of function and appearance (no sense of smell, birthmarks and an unusually shaped face and nose) and is disabled further as the text progresses, often in tandem with 'disabling' national events. He develops bandy legs and loses the hearing in one ear, a finger, and a significant amount of hair as a child. Surgery to drain Saleem's inflamed sinuses leaves him with an exceptionally keen sense of smell but deprives him of his midnight-given supernatural ability. He loses his memory for a number of years and, as an adult, is castrated (128).

Saleem's purported bodily differences are perhaps the most outlandish of any of Rushdie's narrators, but he shares with other characters both having and acquiring unusual disabilities. While his *Offspring Fictions: Salman Rushdie's Family Novels* does not address disability per se, Matt Kimmich does draw a corporeal comparison between Moraes and Saleem, arguing that "both he and Saleem share their freakishness" and are "outsiders, not least due to their grotesque physical features" (Kimmich 232). However, and as Kimmich has argued, Moraes is unlike Saleem in his relationship with his freakish or disabled body, in that Moraes's body is not part of his metaphorical-active: Moraes disability is instead interpreted by his mother Aurora, who "inscribes him into a discourse of her own making" through her fantastical paintings of her son (193). While Moraes is a reluctant or unwitting participant in the story he tells, "Aurora can be read as a counterpoint to her son" because "where he is passive, she is active" as she "embraces her time and place as an artist takes on the mantle of creator" (Kimmich 235). Kimmich goes on to argue that "while Saleem and the Moor appear to be similar narrator figures on the surface, the narrator/protagonist of *Midnight's Children* shares more qualities with the Moor's mother" (236).

This creates a degree of difference in the relationship each of these narrators has with his disabilities. While in both novels national events at times map (or are mapped

by the narrator) in a literalized form onto the bodies of the protagonists, and both are self-narratives of a sympathetic aberrant, Moraes does not aggressively yoke metaphor to his body. John Clement Ball notes that Moraes is "an allegorical embodiment of India" in that he is a "pluralistic, hybrid, gentle giant," suggesting that this is evidenced in "the novel and in Aurora's 'Moor' paintings," but Moraes's allegorical involvement is at best passive, and at worst involves a degree of complicity in national failure (161). When Moraes goes to work for the gangster Mainduck, for instance, he enacts violence similar to that which is enacted upon Saleem in *Midnight's Children*. Also, while Saleem's body is co-opted either by the magic of metaphor or Saleem's own imagination, Moraes is chronically co-opted by others such as Mainduck and Aurora, and the metaphoricity of his body is not one of his own making, but one that is facilitated by many authors of his embodiment.

Sufiya Zenobia's position in *Shame* is even more disadvantaged than that of Moraes, as has been noted by critics of that novel. Catherine Cundy is one of the most direct when she says that "the blend of fairy-tale and hard-hitting social realism" which characterizes others of Rushdie's works is "handled less deftly in *Shame*" (44). The inferiority of that text to either *Midnight's Children* or *The Moor's Last Sigh* is related to the failure of Sufiya Zenobia's realization as a character, and the accretion of tropes of disability around her character is tied to a lack of the inventiveness demonstrated by either of the other two texts. Perhaps the failed "blend" to which Cundy refers is enacted quite literally in the binary character of Sufiya Zenobia, who is has only two diametrically opposed permutations. Kimmich suggests that "Sufiya Zenobia Hyder only has power as the dehumanized, destructive Beast" (248). This powerful self is poorly integrated with her powerless self, much as the two genres that underpin the novel fairy tale and social realism are not well integrated with one another.

On the other hand, *Shame* presents a challenging case study in terms of disability representation, despite its reliance upon disability and gender tropes. Sufiya Zenobia is in some regards a predictable character, and may be said to be overdetermined by both her gender and disability, as either one of these could account for her overwhelming passivity, her destructive and self-destructive desire for love and attention, her (ultimately murderous) jealousy, and the preoccupation with her virginity demonstrated by both the narrator and principal actors in *Shame*. However, Sufiya Zenobia becomes interesting when one considers her violation of these tropes, even if this violation may in effect affirm gender stereotypes. Also, the magical aspect of Sufiya Zenobia's character, and her concomitant expressions of violence, further complicate the more predictable aspects of her female, disabled character. Although she is instrumentalized and is more passive than either Saleem or even Moraes, she could be argued to exercise greater agency at the level of plot. And, although she will be a martyr to metaphor much like Moraes and Saleem, her martyrdom, however problematically, represents a willing act of murder-suicide rather than the passive death of either Saleem or Moraes, who both mirror the wilting death of national ideals.

The differences between these deaths forces attention onto a second meaning of normalcy which I must negotiate in my discussion of these three works, and which is most prominently at evidence in *Shame*, and which is the idea of moral normalcy or norms. While Davis's original articulation of the evolution of the norm emphasizes its mathematical and empirical dimension, his articulation does retain this second sense of the term, using the words "bad" and "rebellious" to characterize the ways in which the disabled body is received by bourgeois culture, suggesting the mistaking of corporeal for moral "decorum" (*Enforcing Normalcy* 5). While the normalization that I identify in these novels is normalization in the sense of enforcing physical normalcy, there is also

an entangled sense of violation and maintenance of moral norms. In *Shame*, the titular idea is that there is a range of moral behaviours and responses which ought to be expected. As Ball suggests, "the idea of 'Shame' becomes the moral touchstone for Rushdie's indictment of the Pakistani ruling class," which, "as a norm" provides the compelling logic of the novel (139). It is this moral aberration that is corrected at the end of the novel, and which is also somewhat conflated with physical difference in the person of Sufiya Zenobia.

Whether it be read as morally bad or socially unsuitable, the destruction of the body in all three of these novels is premised upon what Barker has identified as a "hegemonic regime of normalcy" in *Midnight's Children*, and I would extend her observation with regards to Saleem to Moraes and Sufiya Zenobia as well (*Postcolonial Fictions* 139). Barker writes that as Saleem's "body is subjected to, and damaged by, familial and social pressures, its legitimacy as the foundation of a politics of difference is ultimately invalidated" (*Postcolonial Fictions* 139). However, while it is true that Saleem's difference is ultimately invalidated, I disagree with Barker regarding the extent to which his different body was held as legitimate by him in the first instance. Barker is, however, correct when she suggests that: "by participating in the aesthetic enfreakment of the children as cultural 'monsters,' and then overtly analysing this mode of representation through Saleem's metafictional commentary, Rushdie stabilizes hegemonic notions of embodiment" (*Postcolonial Fictions* 131). Even *Midnight's Children*, the most optimistic and resistant text of these three, ultimately affirms hegemonic notions of embodiment to a greater extent than it resists them, and this affirmation is not only demonstrated in the final third of the book, but throughout.

Barker draws important connections between disability and the narrative of the nation, or perhaps between the narrative of the nation and disability, in her comments on *Midnight's Children*. She argues that

> while Saleem's progressive impairment reflects the collapse of the Nehruvian ideal, there is much more to Rushdie's deployment of the disabled body than a straightforward prosthetic allegory. Rushdie's aesthetic strategies align themselves with a mode of political engagement in which disabled embodiment has a constitutive and active role (129).

While I agree that there is "more to Rushdie's deployment of the disabled body than a straightforward prosthetic allegory," I have serious reservations about Barker's claim for the "constitutive and active role" given disability. Barker herself suggests that there is a thread of anti-disability politics at play in the novel, noting that *Midnight's Children* is "suffused with fantastical and exoticised disability imagery that, at times, complies with the disabling effects of narrative prosthesis," citing the characterization of the mentally disabled girl Toxy and the metaphors used in describing the city of Karachi as examples (*Postcolonial Fictions* 131). While she notes these as exceptions to the dominant trend in the novel, I find these examples more difficult to acknowledge and then pass by. My tendency to dwell on these representations is perhaps informed by the other two novels I am considering in this chapter, as it becomes more difficult to overlook as minor aberrations these disability depictions when Toxy becomes a precursor to the degraded and humiliated Sufiya Zenobia, or the Karachi of *Midnight's Children* becomes a precursor to the fictional cities of *Shame*. While these two examples may indeed be read as minor in the closed context of *Midnight's Children*, they may be magnified when read through other of Rushdie's works.

However, aside from this perhaps circumstantial difference, I also have a second point of disagreement with Barker. She amalgamates, or, rather, describes the amalgamation of, recognizable disabilities and magical differences under the aegis "the

deliberate enfreakment of the children" (130). Like Sanjeev Kumor Uprety, who equates Saleem's "telepathic powers" with being "disabled and different," she combines disability and medically impossible, supernatural difference ("Disability and Postcoloniality" 374). I think this amalgamation may not best reflect the body politics at evidence in *Midnight's Children*, and may more generally not set a useful precedent for readings of disability in magic realist texts. While Barker is absolutely correct in her observations of how Rushdie uses grotesque imagery to celebrate the counter-hegemonic potential of the children, I think it is difficult to extend a reading of magical difference to disabilities (131). Disability and magical powers are not very much alike, and we do find that Saleem treats disability and magical abilities very differently. As the character of Shiva illustrates, being one of the Midnight's Children is not inextricable from an elitist politics of the body. Shiva, after all, uses his magical ability to terrorize and hunt down those weaker than him. Even Saleem characterizes those of the children who have lost their magical abilities to disabilities as being somewhat excluded from the group, like "poor relations at a feast" (228).

The third and last issue I would take with Barker's argument is that there is a relationship between disability and unreliable narration which makes uncertain the degree, nature, and extent of Saleem's disabilities. In *Midnight's Children*, the persona of the mentally ill, compelling, and unreliable narrator is introduced in the person of Tai, who is a favourite of Aadam and others not despite, but perhaps because, "his brain fell out with his teeth" (14). The community's assessment of Tai's mental instability is "an impression fostered by his chatter, which was fantastic, grandiloquent and ceaseless, and as often as not addressed only to himself" (15). This, of course, is all but a portrait of Saleem as narrator, who shares Tai's weakness for verbiage and also has an audience (Padma) who may not be able to understand or believe all of what he says.

Saleem himself directly attributes his narrative unreliability to a decline in health, saying that "as my decay accelerates, the risk of unreliability grows" (270).

Saleem uses the fact of his increasing physical disability to draw attention to his own unreliability, yet, somewhat paradoxically, his unreliability also calls into question whether or not his physical disability is, or has ever been, as bad as he claims. In one of very few episodes that occurs in the Padma-timeline of the novel, Saleem has a visit from a doctor who simultaneously calls into question the actualities of Saleem's corporeal state, and also presents the strongest indicator that Saleem is not mentally competent to represent reality. Saleem's comments about the doctor, in which he questions the physician's sanity and calls him a "quack" effectively casts commensurate doubt upon Saleem:

> I issue (in the strongest possible terms) the following general medical alert: 'A certain Doctor N. Q. Baligga,' I wish to proclaim from the rooftops! Through the loudhailers of minarets! – 'is a quack. Ought to be locked up, struck off, defenestrated. Or worse: subjected to his own quackery, brought out in leprous boils by a mis-prescribed pill. Damn fool,' I underline my point, 'can't see what's under his nose! (65)

Following these accusations of medical incompetence, Saleem expands upon his accusation that the doctor cannot see what is "right under his nose," circling around issues of the authority to witness and describe:

> the charlatan, whom I will not deign to glorify with a description, came to call. I, in all innocence and for Padma's sake, permitted him to examine me. I should have feared the worst; the worst is what he did. Believe this if you can: the fraud has pronounced me whole. 'I see no cracks,' he intoned mournfully, differing from Nelson at Copenhagen in that he possessed no good eye, his blindness not only the choice of stubborn genius but the inevitable curse of his folly! Blindly, he impugned my state of mind, cast doubt on my reliability as a witness, and Godknowswhatelse: 'I see no cracks.' (65)

Finally Saleem invokes his grandfather, and expands his indictment of contemporary doctors: "but good God! Has the medical profession – the calling of Aadam Aziz – sunk

so low? To this cess-pool of Baliggas? In the end, if this is true, everyone will do without doctors" (65). Of course, it is the authority of this doctor Baligga that forces the question upon the reader of *Midnight's Children* as to whether or not Saleem is to be believed. Rather than the simple factual incongruities or the general unlikelihood that suggest Saleem's narration is unreliable throughout most of *Midnight's Children*, in this instance the narrative presents not strong hints of unreliability, but a veritable fork in the road: either Saleem or the doctor is telling the truth. Saleem is not merely murky on details or failing to get his facts straight here, but is very directly contradicted. The ruse of Saleem's fury against the doctor provides Rushdie with the most effective signal of Saleem's unreliability in the novel, and brings to the fore the difficulty in trusting this particular narrator.

It is key to notice that, here and elsewhere, Saleem's reliability as a narrator is brought into doubt in relation to his body. And this is the crux of my last point of contention with Barker's argument regarding disability in this novel: her comments for the most part assume that Saleem is able to accurately describe his own body, despite manifold signals to the contrary. In light of Saleem's encounter with Dr Baligga, many of his self-representations later in the novel invite doubt. Consider his comments upon the first Midnight's Children Conference, in which Saleem realizes that the self he telepathically projects presents a greatly exaggerated version of his actual physical difference:

> It took me a little while to realise that my picture of myself was heavily distorted by my own self-consciousness about my appearance; so that the portrait I sent across the thought-waves of the nation, grinning like a Cheshire cat, was about as hideous as a portrait could be, featuring a wondrously enlarged nose, a completely non-existent chin and giant stains on each temple (219).

Given that Saleem's childhood memory of being an unreliable witness to his own physical appearance is being recounted by an unreliable narrator, this description offers no certainty about what the child actually looked like. However, regardless of what he currently or has ever actually looked like, Saleem does reliably communicate his sentiments regarding differential embodiment: he thinks his physical difference will prevent people from loving him. Whether or not Saleem is as physically different as he thinks is beside the point in this respect; as he describes himself as living in "a country where any physical or mental peculiarity in a child is a source of deep family shame," his disablement or imaginary disablement is concomitant with the feelings of worthlessness and dejection that often punctuate this grandiose narrative of the self (169). The remembered child Saleem is so terrified of being different that he cannot reliably visualize the extent to which he actually stands out from other children. More generally, his adult descriptions of his ungainly boyhood may actually reveal more about his feelings about his body than they reveal about his appearance or the extent to which he is disabled.

While Saleem's horror surrounding the body becomes less pronounced in his adult, narrating self, it remains impossible to completely square what he says about his body with a revolutionary politics of difference. Although Saleem adores the baby Aadam's "ears which flapped so high and wide" (420) he is critical of his own appearance even when he looks back at his baby photos:

> I was not a beautiful baby. Baby snaps reveal that my large moon-face was too large; too perfectly round. Something lacking in the region of the chin. Fair skin curved across my features – but birthmarks disfigured it; dark stains spread down across my Western hairline, a dark patch coloured my eastern ear. And my temples: too prominent" (124).

Even as Saleem creates in his face a map of the newly independent nation, he communicates a critical awareness of his own ugliness. While Saleem loves his

difference in so far as it is invisible magical endowment, he consistently denigrates (what may be real or imagined) disabilities. Consider this passage from near the end of *Midnight's Children*, in which Saleem describes the results of three decades of allegorical battering:

> In those days the afflictions cured by Parvati-the-Witch had all (in the aftermath of drainage) returned to plague me; nine-fingered, horn-templed, monk's-tonsured. Stain-faced, bow-legged, cucumber-nosed, castrated, and now prematurely aged, I saw in the mirror of humility a human being to whom history could do no more, a grotesque creature who had been released from the pre-ordained destiny which had battered him until he was half-senseless; with one good ear and one bad ear I heard the soft footfalls of the Black Angel of Death. The young-old face of the dwarf in the mirror wore an expression of profound relief (447).

Despite Barker's argument for a celebration of difference, this is an image of resignation which is rooted in the difference of the body. He is relieved that the course of his disintegration is reaching an end. His magic is gone, and only his disabled body remains; considering himself hideous, he embraces death.

Neil ten Kortenaar offers observations regarding the relationship between Rushdie's body and his reliability in his *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children*. Ten Kortenaar discusses the celebration of the grotesque in *Midnight's Children* with an awareness of the "seeming contradiction" at the heart of Saleem's allegorical fervour, and he argues that Saleem is "someone who revels in his own grotesqueness yet remains terrified of losing his precious self" as that self is intruded upon by metaphor (227). While Saleem at times celebrates the congruities between his changing body and the changing nation, he has also "internalized the judgement of others who see only his grotesque, outsized, and ever-running nose and his misshapen face stained with birthmarks" from childhood (73). Further, the premise by which Saleem finds pride in his body, namely its allegorical significance, is

repeatedly undermined by Rushdie, while Saleem's disability denigration is not. In this respect ten Kortenaar reminds us that Saleem is "a schizophrenic suffering delusions of greatness," and tells us that this schizophrenic "thinks differently from the way Rushdie does or wants his readers to think" (9). Mental disability is imagined as the antecedent of Saleem's unreliability, and physical disability or a lack of it is often used to prove that he is unreliable.

Saleem's unreliability, and the evident divergence between what he thinks and what Rushdie implies to his readership, complicate any reading of *Midnight's Children*, which would locate in it an affirmative anti-normative body politics. While Barker is absolutely correct to suggest that there is a celebration of the grotesque or non-normative body in these texts, it is one-sided to identify them with an affirmative politics, or to suggest that *Midnight's Children* only superficially lapses into tropes of disability. Saleem often expresses hate for the body he represents as disabled, and Rushdie batters Saleem and other disabled bodies relentlessly.

Beyond the issues of Saleem's unreliability and the self-hate that punctures his self-aggrandizement, there is the broader issue of whether the celebration of the grotesque or carnivalesque really does fit in with a disability-affirming politics or at least one that upholds difference, or whether it actually has the effect of affirming a fundamental difference between disabled and normal characters, an 'us' and 'them'. In his *Satire & the Postcolonial Novel: V. S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie*, Ball compellingly argues that "critical disagreements over the effect of grotesque imagery are premised on different views of the stability of subject-object and mind-body splits" (121). Ball goes on to suggest that the grotesque body may actually have the effect of affirming the coherence and correctness of a bourgeois self, which seems

to echo the normal ideal described by Davis. Ball suggests that disagreements about the "rhetorical effect of grotesque imagery"

> can be formulated as a question: do representations of the grotesque body offer a subversive challenge to the bourgeois individual's self-image of rationality and containment by demanding its identification with that body and the world, or do they shore up the individual's sense of separateness and privileged subjectivity by offering images of radical "otherness?" This is a version of the long-standing question of whether satire is ameliorative or punitive – offering a humbling critique or the pleasures of superiority (121).

I would argue that Rushdie is certainly engageing with the latter of Ball's twin suggestions, namely, the punitive and the pleasures of superiority. From the interruption of Doctor Baligga early in the text, Saleem cannot be other than a speaker in doubt: the bourgeois reader is invited to join Doctor Baligga in observing that there are no cracks, and that there is a speaker with a radically other body, mind, or both. Whether it is mental or physical difference, or both, that sets Saleem apart from his audience, he is not only set apart, but apart and below. As Ball argues: "Saleem's body in its grotesque aspect – an irregular body" becomes "the primary site on which a normative Menippean ethos is overwhelmed by a bitter, angry, satire of negation and despair" (127). Saleem's is a body that is marked as different and inferior by both Saleem and Rushdie in different ways from the beginning of the narrative. This is a device that Rushdie will return to in *Shame* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, in which we also find the variant body as "a primary site on which human morality and political-historical approbation and disapprobation are inscribed" (137). In the next section, I will investigate the nuances of pejorative depictions of disability in these texts, and will consider the resonances of these depictions in terms of their metaphorical correspondence with national politics.

Disability as Duplicitous Pejorative

While there is more to Rushdie's representations of disability than tropes and stereotypes, many of the more complex patterns observable in the fiction to begin in predictable capitulations of disability. This elementary level of disability stereotyping has been observed by scholars who were not considering disability in the text as such; Ball's comments on the "irregular body" are perhaps one example of unconscious disability critique; and, when ten Kortenaar writes that *Midnight's Children* is "a compendium of every English-language idiom referring to the body that Rushdie can think of," he certainly points toward disability clichés that abound in *Midnight's Children*, as well as *Shame* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (86). The joyous and affirmative account of many types of difference that dominates these texts is at times undercut by a less affirmative account of the disabled body.

Midnight's Children, with its emphasis on numerous minor disabled characters rather than a sole focal disabled character, exhibits the greatest range of disability discourse, and frequently prefigures Rushdie's starker representations of disability in the later two novels. The many tropes and clichés alluded to by ten Kortenaar and Ball conform to established stereotypes of disability to the point that there is a sense of predetermination surrounding disabled characters: disability tropes or tropes of the body could be one of the restrictions of possibility that Saleem complains of when he opines "how many things people notions we bring with us into the world, how many possibilities and restrictions of possibility!" (108). For Saleem, disabled bodies have enormous signifying potentiality, but a potentiality that is premised upon pre-existing notions of the body: preconceptions limit the range of possible discursive refraction while also facilitating that refraction. While Saleem and Rushdie are lavish in harnessing the symbolic potentials of disabled bodies as well as bodies more generally,

this lavishness depends on taxonomical thoroughness in mining every "English-language idiom referring to the body" rather than inventing significances anew.

Rushdie often cloaks stereotypical elements in linguistic or descriptive cleverness. Take as an example the many tropes of blindness which are in *Midnight's Children*, and which may not stand out as tropes because they are embedded in Saleem's dynamic vocabulary and wild imaginary. When Saleem and Picture Singh go to Bombay's Midnight Confidential Club, they are escorted by blind hostesses who have eyes tattooed onto their eyelids (454), recalling the deaf escorts from Rider Haggard's 1887 colonial adventure novel *She*, or perhaps any other of a vast array of popular spy films. Later in the novel, Rushdie draws on alternative tropes of blindness when he equates it with folly, both ironically in the person of Ghani, who pretends to appreciate European paintings (21), and in general reference to ignorance (65). Ocular disfigurement is applied as a punishment to one of Mian Abdullah's assassins, whose eye "cracked and fell out of its socket" (48). In all of these examples, there is a relation between blindness and corruption or folly.

Take as another example Rushdie's use of deafness in the second book of *Midnight's Children*. When Saleem and his three co-soldiers are in the Sundarbans, all but Saleem lose their hearing when they stuff their ears with parasitic mud to block out the "taunting voices" of the jungle (368). Their descent into fevered deafness mirrors a descent into insanity and anarchy, as the men take to "all talking at once" without hearing one another, and exhibit disturbed tics and gestures, such as grabbing at their faces and eating ants (369), and "staring glassily" at new sights they encounter (371). Deafness becomes a route to barbarism and chaos, as Rushdie projects the larger depredation of the war onto these disabled bodies. As in the blinding of Mian Abdullah's assassins, political forces which degrade the nation as a whole are expressed

through symbolic disablement and metaphors which are developed in or upon disabled bodies.

As ten Kortenaar notes, Rushdie's use of the body is often lexical, and body images are often used in passing to describe characters, or used in reference to non-human objects. It would be too simple to reduce Rushdie's body vocabulary to a disability lexicon, as he often uses images of the ugly but not disabled body, although disability is in these linguistic instances perhaps not differentiated from other types of undesirable embodiment. This non-differentiation has implications, but these lie beyond the scope of my argument here. However, many of Rushdie's body metaphors do specifically refer to disability as such, and in a way that differentiates them from simple images of ugliness: take for instance the depiction of the city of Karachi in *Midnight's Children*, which "had acquired the misshapen lumpiness of a gigantic dwarf" (307) and "was full of deformed houses, the stunted hunchback children of deficient lifelines, houses growing mysteriously blind, with no visible windows, houses" which "fell over with monotonous regularity, like drunks" (309). The personification of the urban construct as a crowd of cripples and alcoholics dehumanizes that imagined crowd, and, once again, turns disability into an analogue for social degeneracy, disorder, and chaos.

Saleem repeatedly uses metaphors of amnesia and clinical mental disease to illustrate the political and social problems of Pakistan and Emergency-era India. He speaks of the "insidious clouds of amnesia" (385) and "the amnesiac nation" (460), and comes to embody these comparisons himself through his own memory loss, which, he ironically claims, allows him to become "a citizen of Pakistan" and join the war against his mother nation (350). He compares both his society and his self to an amnesiac and a schizophrenic in one passage (356), echoing an oddly incongruous set of corporeal and mental metaphors he establishes in a digression on the Pakistani national ethos:

> I suggest that at the deep foundation of their unease lay the fear of schizophrenia, of splitting, that was buried like an umbilical cord in every Pakistani heart. Religion was the glue of Pakistan, holding the halves together; just as consciousness, the awareness of oneself as a homogenous entity in time, a blend of past and present, is the glue of personality, holding together our then and now (309).

Rushdie, whose voice perhaps violates Saleem's in this passage, goes on to describe the nation as "abandoning consciousness" (309). The grab-bag set of psychological metaphors creates a degree of dissonance or incongruity, but can perhaps be read as indicating that the mental integrity of the Pakistani nation is threatened simultaneously in multiple respects, by schizophrenia or double-consciousness, unconsciousness, and the historical forgetting represented by amnesia. While he employs the language of a contemporary discourse which understands mental insanity and disability in terms of a variety of medically explicable disorders, Rushdie's apparent philosophical or aesthetic grounding in this passage, as well as in the aforementioned Sundarbans narration, is a pre-diagnostic concept of insanity, in which interchangeable mental afflictions serve as synonyms for a generalized state of madness and regression into atavistic urges. The "diseased imagination" is effectively constituted as demon-possessed as well as sick in the modern sense (341). This double discourse of mental illness, wherein biology and demon-possession are combined and conflated, prefigures the representations of Sufiya Zenobia's illness in *Shame*.

Feminist readings of the character of Sufiya Zenobia would benefit from a recalibration through Rosemarie Garland-Thompson's discussion of the entanglements between being female and being disabled, which shows how disability and feminist scholarship can be combined to denaturalize "so-called normalcy" and "challenge appearance hierarchies" (*Extraordinary Bodies* 23). Unfortunately, the discussion surrounding this character has not benefited from a disability studies intervention: even

the terminology employed by scholars to describe Sufiya Zenobia's mental disability is outmoded and offensive. In 2007 Stephen Morton writes, "on one level, Sufiya's violence is a symptom of her family's repressive and abusive treatment on the grounds that she is mentally retarded" (55). Catherine Cundy describes Zenobia as "an idiot" (57), "mentally retarded," and, in a less squarely ableist phrase, as "literally part monster" (64). In Aijaz Ahmad's 1992 *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, Zenobia is "the demented child" (145) and, again, as "retarded" (145) while her husband Omar is referred to as a "moral cripple" (149). For Ahmad, the problem of reading Sufiya Zenobia's disability goes beyond outdated nomenclature, as ableist reasoning forms an important part of his argument. He argues that

> the problem with this metaphor of mental illness is that the pressures and processes of gendering – which are social and historical in character, and impose upon a great many women the possibility of deformation and incapacity, but are open to resistance and reversal by women's own actions – are given to us in the form of a physiological insufficiency on her part (145).

While Ahmad does not specifically state that disabled people are all naturally inferior, his comments do intimate a degree of that assumption, which is exacerbated by his vocabulary choices. It becomes difficult to reconcile the feminist criticisms of *Shame* offered by Morton, Cundy and Ahmad, given that all three to various degrees entertain the possibility that part of the gender affront contained in Zenobia's character is in the fact that she is mentally disabled. Likewise, David Punter's summary of the plot on *Shame* in his *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order* effectively becomes a medical biography of Sufiya Zenobia. After introducing the "badly retarded girl from a politically powerful family," Punter describes how her "ascension to monstrosity comes up upon her gradually" (111), offering it as a synopsis of the book:

> What indeed does happen? In *Shame*, all of these unfelt feelings collect inside Sufiya Zenobia, and they turn her into a monster. They turn her into a

> frustrated, violent automaton, a murderer first of chickens and later worse. They turn her also, interestingly, into the victim of a disease that eats away at her own immune system. She becomes the protégé, later the wife, of an immunologist, Omar Khayyam Shakil, who finds in her the ultimate metaphor for political and social contamination: in her body emerge all the crimes and violences of her society, but they have no way out, they are isolated in her, they add up to her own force of self-destruction (112)

As Punter indicates, the corporeal connection between Zenobia and her society is absolutely clear. Unlike in the ambiguous case of Saleem's metaphoric disabled body (which may or may not be entirely the product of a metaphor-making disabled mind) the narrative voice of *Shame* leaves no room to doubt the authority of its descriptions of Zenobia's or other's bodies. This is a strange difference when one considers that the narrator of *Shame* presents his story as a fable, and Saleem frames his narrative as veritable truth. While the first-person Saleem may or may not be imagining his body as being cracked by metaphor, Zenobia is most definitely to be interpreted as really being beaten up by history. In both novels, disability is figurative, but in *Shame* it is understood that the figuration is realised in the body.

Differences between these first- and third-person narrators and their relationship with a metaphorical disabled body may account for the discrepancies in tone between descriptions of the disabled body in *Shame* and *Midnight's Children*, which persist even when the disabled people being described are similar in multiple respects. I have already noted the congruity between the figure of Toxy Catrack and Sufiya Zenobia, yet would also like to consider how the two characters are posited very differently. Mentally disabled Toxy Catrack is physically described only once, as having an "outsize head and dribbling mouth" and spends one cameo in *Midnight's Children* "standing at a barred top-floor window, stark naked, masturbating with motions of consummate self-disgust" (130). In the immediate instance, Toxy's external stigmas and behaviours provide parallels for those young Saleem already has or will develop: he

is also heir to a large head, and a dribbling orifice, albeit a nose rather than a mouth, and Toxy's self-disgusted masturbation prefigures Saleem's later adventures in Pakistan's brothels. However, Toxy, as a mentally disabled woman who is both sympathetic and sexualized, can also be read as a proto-Sufiya. Like Zenobia, Toxy is used to demonize her co-religionists, as her behaviour is seen to reflect a self-enclosed, inbred society. Both Sufiya Zenobia and Toxy are credited with supernatural ability: while Zenobia's transformations into a beast are the turning points in *Shame*, Toxy is given credit with "nudging open the door which would later let in the children of midnight" for Saleem (405).

The strongest contrast between Sufiya and Toxy, however, is in the rhetoric of death and mourning that accrue around their two characters. When Evie Burns summarizes the eugenic reaction to children like Toxy, saying that "oughta be put down like rats," Saleem does not concur, despite his childish love for Evie (183). It is a sad moment in *Midnight's Children* when Toxy "vanished forever" to an uncertain fate with her fearsome nurse Bi Appah (265). By contrast, Sufiya Zenobia's violent death at the end of *Shame* is presented as a moment of revenge and perhaps glory, as the Beast Sufiya Zenobia is able to eliminate all of the moral degeneracy that has embarrassed her over her short life, purifying her family as well as herself through immolation. The foreign, male, distanced narrator of *Shame*, however, imagines a self-willed and violent death in a blaze of glory for his disabled protagonist, as she asserts moral normalcy through murder-suicide.

The final destruction of both Saleem and Sufiya Zenobia is in keeping with the overall tenor of those books as regards disability; both novels present disability in combination with magical difference with a sort of exoticism that is accomplished largely through violence. That said, Sufiya Zenobia's character also becomes

sentimental at turns: when she is not revenging herself upon turkeys or young boys, she is depicted as an undeserving, uncomprehending victim of pervasive maternal abuse, and this becomes the primary source of sympathy for her character. There is an important difference between the self-narrating Saleem and Sufiya Zenobia in this regard, as Saleem's ability to narrate his own experience of parental rejection nuances the emotional cadence of that rejection away from the nakedly sentimental. When Saleem remembers his father's increasing distance following the loss of his finger, for instance, Saleem's own absorption of anti-disability sentiment creates a degree of nuance in the emotions he elicits: "my father," Saleem writes, "seemed to want nothing more to do with me, an attitude of mind which I found hurtful but (considering my mutilated body) entirely understandable" (252).

Moraes works to reject both exotic and sentimental constructions of his body, and actively curbs the tendency to endow himself with special importance to compensate for his deformity or doubled ageing: as I have already noted, he asserts that "I am not claiming to be a prodigy of any kind," he writes, "I had no early genius for chess or mathematics or the sitar" (161). Rather than magical potentiality, he actively limits the significance of his fused hand, rejecting the cultural "sleight of hand that conceals our natures from ourselves," asserting that "my hand, gentle reader, lacked sleight, but it knew what manner of thing it was" (365). On the other hand, even as Moraes rejects reading into his disability his personal specialness, he also disavows the impulse to go to the other extreme and overlook his difference, and is as concerned with "how easily the human mind normalises the abnormal" as the human impulse to make the abnormal mythic (339). Moraes embraces an individualistic construction of the body through which that body may adjust to its own reality. He argues (with a degree of irony) that the collective idea of the norm is "bizarre," implying that diversity of

physicality is just another facet of the diversity of experience that marks each member of a society (206). Unlike Saleem, Moraes is happy for his disability to have no signification, and for his particularity to be symptomatic of the diversity of his society.

Moraes' insights are hard won, as he is subject to many years of projection and manipulation by those who would exploit the many potential readings of his body, or who would fight one possible interpretation with another. Garland-Thompson has argued that popular images of disability include "the valorous, the sentimental, the exotic, and the realistic" (65), and that the exotic depiction is often deployed to upset the sentimental "earnest, asexual, vulnerable, courageous image of disability that charity rhetoric has so firmly implanted" ("Politics of Staring" 66). Aurora, Moraes' mother, exoticises and eroticizes her son's body and actively works against the asexuality or non-virility that might be projected upon her family's sole male heir. In her early 'Moor' paintings, in which Moraes serves as a model, the fused hand becomes an amorphous symbol of sexual and creative power, alternatively a flower, paintbrush, and sword (217). His body is also transformed in some of these paintings, which depict the Moor-figure as a peacock ("mour" in Hindi), a symbol of male beauty and potency (217). While the doctors Moraes meets articulate his disability as an "illness" or a "condition," Aurora presses him to reject these descriptions in favour of seeing his difference as a magical gift, telling him that he "must not think of himself as the victim of some incurable premature ageing disorder, but as a magic child, a time-traveller" (219). By encourageing him to reject a construction which would attribute agency to the disease, and by endorsing the other extreme of potential characterizations of his body, she tries to imagine his disability in a way which will enable and even heighten his potentiality as a virile, masculine agent.

Aurora's exoticization of Moraes's disability is prefigured in her reaction to the marine sailor who loses his leg to the wheel of her Buick (133). Aurora feels guilt not only for severing the man's leg, but also for making it impossible for him to reassume his able-bodied identity as a sailor; while she cannot replace the leg, she does provide a new identity for the man, naming him Lambajan Chandiwala and casting him as her protector ex-pirate, complete with a parrot to carry on his shoulder and a peg-leg prosthesis. There is a sinister edge to her imaginative charity, because, in assuming the identity Aurora has fabricated, Lambajan becomes a prosthetic addition to her own identity, perhaps in the same way the young Moraes is very much absorbed into his mother's self-fashioning. Lambajan falls in love with Aurora following her conscription of his disabled identity, anticipating Moraes' incestuous feelings toward the mother who, in her well-meaning way, subjugates him. Moraes's later love for Uma stems partly from her comparable ability to cast him in a hyper-masculinised, exoticised role, which again emphasizes the hand as a central feature: when Moraes and Uma first meet, her flirtation begins with praise of the hand, as she says it "could smash down whatever stood in its way" and claims "I would feel very safe near a hand like this" (245). She goes on to tell him that she finds his rapid ageing very alluring as well. While Moraes's sexual affair with Dilly Hormuz occurs in part because she is able to overlook his disabilities, his affair with Uma has exoticised disability at its centre. Uma constantly wants to caress the "twisted right hand" (274) and, when Moraes spends time apart from Uma, it is his "broken hand" which he can feel "her phantom-body move under" (271).

Uma is able to exploit Moraes's self-consciousness of his disability, because, although his mother has worked to re-inscribe his physicality, he remains acutely aware of the social perception of his body and the practical implications of that perception

throughout his youth. While the older, narrating Moraes has become circumspect and has developed his own intellectual framework for approaching his disability, the younger Moraes has not had the benefit of misadventure to learn a utilitarian way to think about himself. The narrator Moraes remembers of his youth that "what was hardest of all was the sense of being an embarrassment, a shame" to his family (153), and especially recalls the frustration of bearing a "handicap" in the "handicap free" marriage market (241). He is susceptible to Uma's manipulation of his identity as it recollects his mother's, and as it provides a foil to his self-hate.

Disability as Contrapuntal Time

In considering the ways in which Rushdie employs disability in these novels, we approach from a fresh perspective a broader issue which has been the subject of much Rushdie criticism: his representation of the nation, be it India or Pakistan. The competing discourses of these novels, which is to say, a double imaginary in which pre-clinical and medical responses to the body perceived to be aberrant are involved, enable Rushdie's twin-barrelled metaphorical critique of the nation in which he employs both the medical and the monstrous body in tandem to indict historic abuses of power in India and Pakistan. As Barker has noted, "coexisting temporalities – the 'modernity' of doctors and the 'older world' of the bonesetter's makeshift surgery – conflates alternative modalities for understanding the non-normative body" in Rushdie's work (*Postcolonial Fictions* 134). These co-existing temporalities are key to establishing the political critiques that are embedded in his fiction.

In the context of an oeuvre that draws upon divergent antecedents for representing the body, the Rushdie criticism reflects a diverse set of corporeal discourses in articulating the relationship between the metaphoric body and the

powerful nation. Consider these comments by Punter in comparison to observations made by Morton:

> For *power*, again very obviously, is all about the ability to include and to exclude; it is about taking on the authority to decide who belongs and who does not belong to the social, the cultural, the *national order*. It would therefore be the case that one way of tracing the operations of *power* in a particular culture would be by looking precisely at the ways in which monsters are created. For what do monsters represent? Not, perhaps, total exclusion; that would be too simple an analysis, too inarticulable a possibility [emphasis in the original] (Punter 111).

While Punter refers to power in the nation in terms of monstrous exclusion, for Morton the question of power is biopolitical:

> For Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*, this false universality of national independence is nowhere more pronounced than in Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Emergency suspension of civil law in 1975. The so-called Indian Emergency of 1975 can be seen to exemplify the *sovereign power of the state* and its techniques of biopolitical control (48).

Both Punter and Morton are talking about power, the nation, and the body. Further, both are talking about how exclusion, or perhaps, how the failure of inclusion, is represented in the body. But, where one scholar employs a vocabulary that draws upon Foucault's archaeologies of biopolitical control, the other employs a language of magical monstrosity. These two lexicons do not conflict, but are rather mutually necessary for a well-rounded discussion of what is going on in this fiction. Ball has described *Midnight's Children* as "polyphonic," and I would suggest that one of the best exemplars of this polyphony is the accumulation of different discourse around the body (135). This polyphony goes beyond a simple diversity of vocabulary, and is rather implicated in a duplicitous imaginary which sees the failed national ethos in two ways. The disabled body becomes an especially volatile discursive object as it is used to represent state failure two ways over, and is subjected to both magical and medical abuse.

To say that these medical and magical discourses are double, however, is not to argue that they are discrete: rather, in these three novels, the medical and the magical interact with one another and compete upon or within the same bodies. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai interprets both his own corporeal stigma and the disabilities of those around him as the magical action of history upon the body; scientific and normalising authorities work against the actively supernatural by regulating or eliminating the magical body. Throughout *Shame*, supernatural and scientific interpretations compete for the body of Sufiya Zenobia in a highly moralized agon, with the magical interpretation ultimately and violently coming to the fore. *The Moor's Last Sigh* presents a narrator who responds to both magical and medical understandings of his accelerated ageing and deformed hand, finding occasional reassurance in magical interpretations, and only painful truths in science. For all their differences, all three novels pit a normalising paradigm against a supernatural one, and allow ideas and history to arbitrate the disabled body. While magic roughly corresponds with the possibility of diversity in the nation, medicine and science function as homogenising, or rather normalising, forces.

Rushdie projects regional or cultural significance onto the different versions of the body. While, as I have argued in my introduction, it is too simple to suggest that in actual historical fact a normalising paradigm of the body is purely and simply a European import, in these texts it is certainly imagined as an imported feature of culture with strong ties to India's colonial heritage. By contrast, while the supernatural version of the body in these texts combines elements from Western and the Eastern traditions, it is figured as by Rushdie as more Eastern than the medical version of the body, or as having something to do with an older and indigenous legacy or tradition. This coding works in conjunction with another observed by Barker, who suggests that there is a

doubling of temporalities expressed through medical approaches in *Midnight's Children*, noting that "coexisting temporalities – the 'modernity' of doctors and the 'older world' of the bonesetter's makeshift surgery – conflates alternative modalities for understanding the non-normative body" (*Postcolonial Fictions* 134). These alternative modalities refer to an elusive or threatened pre-colonial past and postcolonial present, and are strongly resonant in the ways disability is described and imagined in conjunction with health and medicine.

The Moor's Last Sigh perhaps presents the least simplified version of this artificial binary presented by Rushdie, but also in many ways illustrates the discursive juxtapositions of *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. *The Moor's Last Sigh* to some extent evidences the combination of ideas about disability described by Ato Quayson in his *Aesthetic Nervousness*. Quayson argues that

> the West's continuing contact with the rest of the world through the colonial adventure and the attendant flows of people across borders serves to problematize and disrupt any straightforward trajectory of attitudes toward disability that might be advanced in looking solely at the West itself (12).

Quayson goes on to note that notions of disability are compounded, combined and set in competition through a process of "residuality and emergence" through which "'new' and 'old' ideas are sometimes reconstituted to produce new perspectives and realities" (13). While what Quayson describes is a horizontal, multi-directional transfer of ideas, what Rushdie offers is a rather simpler version of cultural transfer. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Moraes describes the incessant dissemination of Western ideas and the westernization of the Indian elite, as he describes the conversations at his mother's soirees in Bombay:

> The endless talk about the *West as problematic* and the *myth of authenticity* and the *logic of dream* and the *languid contours* of Sher-Gil's figuration and the presence in the work of B.B Mukherjee of both *exaltation* and *dissent*

> and the derivative *progressivism* of Souza and the *centrality of the magical image* and the *proverb* and the relationship between *gesture* and *revealed motifs*, to say nothing of rivalrous discussions [emphasis in the original] (312).

Moraes goes on to note that these "rivalrous discussions" focus mainly upon "*New York* and *London*" (312). Moraes' sardonic tone in this and the surrounding passage undercuts the erudite vocabulary used by the guests, and implies that their conceptual discussions are derivative cosmopolitan affectations, rather than, to borrow a phrase from Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri, evidence of "rich vernacular as well as imported traditions" or the "extravagantly multilingual and polyglot" (*The Indian Postcolonial* 277). This lack of enrichment despite cultural exchange is reiterated in Moraes's personal experience of disability, because, as I have already noted, he is tortured by doctors and unsatisfied by his mother's attempts at reading magic into his disability. He is ultimately satisfied neither with the reductive, clinical formulation under which Sufiya Zenobia is oppressed, nor the supernatural metaphoric determination that would subordinate him to Aurora's aestheticization in the manner that Saleem imagines disabled bodies as partaking of his bountiful identity.

Although she is speechless and often disempowered, Sufiya Zenobia is perhaps like Moraes in that she ultimately expresses a rejection of her family's and her society's responses to her disability. A pervasive sense of embarrassment grows out of Moraes' self-hate into a rejection of his family's internal disintegration: as his father's overt disappointment and his mother's veiled shame, he ultimately comes to turn their embarrassment over him back outward, and writes of his mother and father's soap-operatic relations "what sort of family is this? Is this normal? Is this what we are like?" (40). Likewise, Sufiya Zenobia, who has been the primary source of her family's *Shame* because of her disability, also increasingly becomes a repository for the shame they

ought to feel, in what becomes the central metaphoric conceit of the text. Her ultimate expression of shame is in the form of magically-assisted violence, and, rather than having her express dissatisfaction as narrator as Moraes does, she kills everybody she knows. That her final violent act is magical in nature has implications for the East and West binary that is imagined by Rushdie in this text, as, although both Pakistani tradition and westernization are indicted, it is ultimately the tradition that is subject to the most pervasive and severe indictment. That said, there is clearly a double reckoning enacted in the last pages of *Shame*, as Sufiya Zenobia's violent act destroys not only the Hyder family, with its hypocritical adherence to traditional values in name and appearance only, but also a colonial mansion and the Western-educated and unscrupulous Omar.

Sufiya Zenobia's final lashing out at both her husband-clinician and her family makes sense, given the two-sided aspect to the disability abuse she endures throughout the novel. Sufiya Zenobia is forcibly sedated by Omar in his role as doctor. She is forced into an unequal marriage with him, following an unequal courtship that largely consists in his observing her unconscious body in a fit. She has had her hair cropped close to the root by her mother in a punitive measure following the murder of the two hundred chickens (139), and the haircut sets Sufiya Zenobia in strong contrast to her sister Naveed, who is admired largely on the basis of her long hair (136). She is also subjected to countless insults by her mother throughout the novel. The pervasive theme in the offences against Sufiya Zenobia is that she is humiliated not only because of, but by, her family and her husband, and their hypocrisy is readily evident in their abuse of her. Bilquis, the unfaithful wife who has demonstrated uncontrollable rage in her home, is the one to call Zenobia "loose" and "crazy," and to complain of her "cheapness" (139) when Bilquis herself was wooed through the gift of clothing stolen from a corpse

(67). Omar, the sexual deviant, is obsessed with Sufiya Zenobia's innocence, which contrasts with his own sexual exploitativeness.

Repression and hypocrisy are recurrent themes in *Shame*. It is no small wonder, then, that Sufiya Zenobia's magical rebellion consists in validating all of the epithets and criticisms that have been levied at her earlier in her life, in a sense turning hypocritical lies into truth, as she turns repression into a fiendish expression. Bilquis's accusations of promiscuity and insanity become accurate later, when the demon within Sufiya Zenobia causes her to perform fantastic feats of violence which are directly linked with sexual expression. Further, Sufiya Zenobia's attacks mimic her husband Omar's childhood rape of Farah Zoroaster, as his hypnosis of the Parsi girl is echoed in her magical cobra-like mesmerism (260). Sufiya Zenobia becomes the hypnotizing, beheading murder-rapist of four adolescent village boys and later of many others, with the Beast using her for sexual and sadistic gratification. While the blushing saint Sufiya Zenobia, who has been slandered and incarcerated by those entrusted to be her protectors, has been made to wholly internalise her sexuality and her desire for love and revenge, the beastly Sufiya Zenobia demonstrates a commensurate appetite for both.

However, it is too simple to cleanly delineate Sufiya Zenobia's behaviour between a real and a demon-possessed self, as the novel provides the provocative possibility of this being a blurred boundary. Omar Khayyam briefly entertains the idea that Sufiya Zenobia is not simply subject to an invading spiritual beast, but that her transformation might have been self-willed (244). Raza Hyder also implicitly endorses this possibility when he blames himself for not being an adequate parent to Sufiya Zenobia, guessing that she might not have succumbed to demon-possession if she had received more parental love (244). These quasi-medical explanations do not preclude the magical aspect of Sufiya Zenobia's enchantment, but rather fuse psychosocial and

supernatural ideas, suggesting that a psychologically damaged and traumatized Sufiya Zenobia might have contracted her demonic disease willingly. Hence, Rushdie maintains two interrelated but distinct explanations for her volatility: the psychological and diagnostic notion of repression, and the culturally constructed notion of *sharam* (38). This doubleness of diagnosis is partially attributable to the Rushdie-like narrator, who seems to combine identities and concerns: while he offers some observations that apparently speak to a deep understanding of Pakistani culture (for instance, when he refers to the function of repression in Pakistani society, calling it "a seamless garment" that "crushes women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety") he also cites events from the British news, assuming the stance of a Western-educated migrant rather than a place-rooted Pakistani (173).

In conjunction with the narrator's migrant identity is a modern identity. While the modernity of the central consciousness is very pronounced in *Shame*, it is certainly latent in *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Midnight's Children*. The obsessive reaching back into history, and framing of the past as magical, mythic, or monolithic, demonstrates what ten Kortenaar has described as "the division of the world into the modern and the traditional" which "is in itself modern" (28). While these novels demonstrate an apparent obsession with the past, this obsession is really a preoccupation with the significance of the present, or the present understood as a contrast to an imaginary past. This is certainly not a new observation with regards to Rushdie's early novels, in which the relationship between an imaginary Eastern past with a Western or postcolonial present has been interrogated quite thoroughly. Ten Kortenaar has gone so far as to describe this dialectic as "the common reading of *Midnight's Children,* which regards the magic in magic realism as Eastern," and sets up a contrast between "Indian spirituality and European worldliness" (17). Whether modernity is rejected, embraced,

or accepted equivocally, the imagining of modernity as an entity that is somehow fundamentally different from an archetypical past is a modern contrivance.

This contrivance is often acted out in the way the body, and specifically the disabled body, is imagined. The preoccupation with normalcy, even when it is rejected as a paradigm of evaluation, is a key ingredient in writing the past against the present. This preoccupation fits in with a larger system of imagining or imagining away scientific understandings of the body, and it is noteworthy that the central metaphoric conceit of *Midnight's Children* would fall apart if not for a circumventing of one of the most important medical concepts of the last century: Saleem's national allegory demands a non-scientific, non-genetic mode of inheritance, as he imagines the nation he represents to be not made by direct progenitors, but constituted by multiple fathers. In a muted echo of this, the magical components of Sufiya Zenobia's disability and the arguably fantastic features of Moraes' disability, namely her werewolf transformations and his accelerated ageing, enjoin a pre-genetic understanding of the body, and do so in symbolic conjunction with the persistence of a pre-scientific past. In all three cases, this pre-modern imaginary is punctured, undermined, and destroyed along with the vestigial idyllic or ignorant past. While the death of all three of these disabled characters suggests the triumph of a normalizing modernity which is marked as pernicious, it also suggests, to varying import, the failure of an old way of being in the world.

However, as regards disability representation, the doubling of magical and clinical paradigms of the body actually has the effect of doubling what is often severe metaphoric abuse of the disabled body, as opposed to undermining the discourses which are used to figure disability in a negative light. In essence, these characters are battered twice: once by magic, and once by medicine. When the discursive focus is turned upon magical disablement rather than causality or genetics, the stigma of disability is often

actually amplified rather than reduced, as serendipitous causes of disability are replaced with an intentionality or moral contingency, in which the flaws and failures of an entire nation are assimilated into the disabled body. While the disabled body is punished through medicine as well as magic, its origin story remains metaphoric, as disability becomes an expression of society rather than a product of happenstance.

Conclusion

In Salman Rushdie's novels *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, disabled characters occupy a dynamic representative space, and become the site of an admixture of discourses of disability, specifically setting clinical and superstitious discourses in juxtaposition and dialogue. These three texts, and the various narrative contexts presented therein, reflect the multiplicity of discourses of disability, and offer competing and contradictory constructions of the disabled body. Through these dissonant constructions, Rushdie creates a temporally duplicitous space, which facilitates the interlacing and contrasting of ostensibly pre-colonial and postcolonial conceptions of disability, and thereby creates in the presentation of the disabled body a symptom of the discursive incursions which threaten the stability and modernity of the postcolonial state. The ultimate destruction or normalisation of disabled bodies in these novels comes to represent the failures of post-colonial India.

Chapter 3: Disability and the Realization of Metaphor in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*

> We may understand that disability in narrative is inherently correctable and thus in need of fixing – the end of the abnormal is always located in its restitution within the field of the normal. From this critical angle, narrative approaches disability as a wound in need of dressing, and thus the narrative act is completed only to the extent that the breach is healed and a disruptive anomaly is concealed beneath a more modest covering (*Narrative Prosthesis* 164).

> Shankar's body lay on a fresh bamboo bier [...] Beggarmaster explained that the face was not left uncovered for the mourners to see because the sight was unbearable. A sheet concealed the mutilated corpse, and over the sheet, a blanket of fresh flowers; roses and lilies (*A Fine Balance* 584).

The second epigraph above is taken from Rohinton Mistry's novel *A Fine Balance*, and describes the funeral preparations for the disabled character Shankar. Shankar has been killed in an automobile accident, in which the wheeled platform he used for locomotion rolled into traffic. His death and funeral effectively begin the end of *A Fine Balance*, providing a prelude to the systemic violence that will engulf the more central characters in the narrative. While Shankar dons a "more modest covering" on the bier, his death also presents a modest beginning of violence in the novel, as increasingly central characters are brutalized in increasingly brutal detail.

In the first epigraph, disability scholars Mitchell and Snyder use the metaphor of providing a covering for disability to describe the impulse to solve or correct disability in narrative, whether this is through the death of the disabled character, or through subtler narrative interventions. The countervailing resolutions to disability that

accumulate in Mistry's fiction could not be much better represented than in this funeral procession, which has, on the one hand, the result of bringing throngs of disabled mourners into view as they join Shankar's funeral procession, and, on the other hand, uses a disabled character instrumentally to indicate a tone shift in the novel, to set the stage for the "real" ending, which focuses on the harming of normal characters. While the Beggarmaster's act of covering over is one of respect, Mistry's covering over of disability in the sense that Mitchell and Snyder have described becomes indicative of human priorities in his fiction. Even as Mistry takes a keen interest in the welfare and the lives of disabled people in these two novels, he also often approaches the disabled body as a device or a symbol, making the disabled body less a body or at least less a body of flesh in his writing. Mistry's simultaneous concern with postcolonial and postmodern social realities, and his generic affiliations which are indebted to the European novel's realist tradition, are readily apparent in this tendency. As an outgrowth of his combined generic and thematic concerns, *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* provides evidence to support both assertions that Mitchell and Snyder make in their suggestion that

> the 'sense of an ending' that Kermode and Davis warn against can indeed result in oppressive characterizations of disability; however, many fictions, particularly modernist and postmodernist antinarratives, seek out means for disrupting disability expectations that accrue around normalcy narratives (164).

This observation may illuminate why Mistry, who demonstrates a strong concern with creating a disabled presence, ultimately depends upon the subordination and peripheralisation of disabled characters to create metaphors, and especially to do the metaphorical and work of finishing his stories. As Mistry takes up many postmodern concerns but rejects antinarrative in favour of a conventionally realist mode of telling a

story, he often resorts to depictions of disability which make the disabled body less keenly felt and materially realised than other sympathetic bodies.

In this chapter, I will argue that, while metaphor may at times take an authoritarian ownership of any body in *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*, including those bodies marked out by Mistry as normal, disabled bodies are more persistently and pervasively dominated by their metaphorical function. In these two works, it is most often the normal body that is realised as a body, as it is made visceral, material, and sympathetic on the intimate level of text as well as in its positioning in the plot of the fiction. In his realist mode, Mistry treats the normal body toward the end of realising it as an organism, as it is endowed with hunger, pain, desire, and the capacity to care about and plan for the future, and the normal body is through these and other aspects realised as a material body. The disabled body, by contrast, becomes immaterial through the absence of the very contrivances that make the normal body multidimensional and sympathetic.

Disability and the Verge of the Magical in Mistry's Realism

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* represent his evolution into a novelist, following a strong success as a short story writer. As in his short fiction collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, the novel *Such a Long Journey* focuses on the day-to-day life of Parsis in Bombay. The focal character, Gustad, is a middle-class Parsi man who has a falling out with his eldest son while also becoming involved in a friend's political activities, and both of these plots are further complicated by the presence of Gustad's disabled neighbour, Tehmul. *A Fine Balance* tells the story of two Parsis and two low-caste Hindus who try to make a life for themselves in Bombay, and is set within the backdrop of the Emergency. Disabled characters, most notably the

disabled character Shankar and to a lesser extent his biological mother Nosey, complicate and compel the actions of the central protagonists.

Although there are readily evident differences between the representations of disability in Rushdie's oeuvre and in Mistry's corpus, there are surprising continuities between the two writers which may be illuminated through a reading of Mitchell and Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis*. Mitchell and Snyder assert that literature often disrupts other systems of knowing about bodies, and, while this is very obviously true of Rushdie's magically endowed disabled bodies, I will argue in this chapter that Mistry is deeply disruptive of the empirical body as well (*Narrative Prosthesis* 2). Mitchell and Snyder argue that the literary misappropriation of disability can provide a challenge to other knowledge systems, providing as it does commentaries on "the status of disability in other disciplines such as philosophy, medicine, and ethics" and that "imaginative literature takes up its narrative project as a counter to scientific or truth-telling discourses" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 1). In the previous chapter's discussion of how Rushdie presents dissonant supernatural and normative paradigms of embodiment, one finds the disruption of scientific discourses readily apparent, as his magic realist aesthetic is built around a conscious lack of authorial veracity or empirical reportage. In short, Mistry displays a favouritism to the mundane over the miraculous.

In this section, I will develop an argument around an identifiable feature or trait associated with realism, which is a narrative plausibility which includes the fortuitous but excludes the supernatural. Using the array of Mistry criticism which identifies him as a realist and discusses his realist tendencies, I will consider how Mistry's disability depictions and his realism relate to one another. This framing of genre and disability in Mistry's work will provide an important context for the discussion of Mistry's covering over of disability throughout the rest of the chapter. More importantly, a discussion of

genre will allow me to identify what Mistry is doing within the confines of genre to bring other marginal lives to the fore, and what, by contrast, he does not do with disabled characters, a discussion which will focus upon the idea of the defamiliar body articulated by Davidson.

The epigraphs which mark the outset of both novels provide a self-reflexive frame which not only suggests the generic mode Mistry will employ, but can be read for their implication that Mistry has chosen to write realism rather than magical realism, as the accusation of "wild exaggeration and flights of fancy" that he refutes in relation to his own work could easily be levelled at Rushdie and other postcolonial contemporaries working in the more fashionable mode in the 1980s and 1990s (xii). Mistry's accusation through Balzac's *Le Pere Goriot* that the reader will not be amused by this heart-wrenching narrative of India, and will therefore call the author's credibility into question, suggests both an awareness of the risk of not applying the hegemonic model for Anglophone Indian writing after 1981, and simultaneously suggests reasons for doing so. Mistry does not slip into generic anachronism, but makes an informed decision to draw on the European realist tradition while foregrounding reasons for this choice.

Christopher Warnes's writing on magic realism may illuminate the slippage between magic realism and realism in a way that may aid in moving between observations of the body in Mistry's fiction and that of Rushdie. Warnes notes that he means to re-insert "the realism of some works of magic realism" and that he seeks to "redress" an overemphasis on the magical features of magic realism (16). In essence, Warnes suggests that, in magic realism, the generic convention is not only that "supernatural" things happen, but also that plausible things do. In trying to address the paradigms that inform the realistic side of magic realism, he draws upon the work of

anthropologist Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah to describe the features of causality as a measure for the plausible or the realistic. “Some of the concepts and characteristics that Tambiah attaches to causality are,” as Warnes tells us:

> Ego against the world. Egocentricity. Atomistic individualism. The language of distancing and neutrality of action and reaction. The paradigm of evolution in space and time. Instrumental action that changes matter and the causal efficacy of technical acts. The successive fragmentation of phenomena, and their atomization, in the construction of scientific knowledge (Tambiah qtd. in Warnes 10).

While Warnes goes on to distance his argument from many of the particularities of this definition and its dichotomizing tendency, Tambiah’s description is a useful illustration of the causal paradigm that for the most part governs the body in Mistry’s fiction. However, as I have already suggested, there is a second authority set up in relation to the body, and that is metaphor: while metaphor is often enacted in riotous defiance of the plausible in a magic realist mode, in Mistry’s fiction we find that the negation of causality in favour of the significant is played out in more subtle ways. Mistry’s assertion that he is not representing “wild flights of fancy” is for the most part true, as the bodies of *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* do most often obey the recognizable laws of biology and physics. They do not, for instance, fly. But one finds that sometimes natural laws are not the dominant force, but rather that metaphor or symbolism is dominant.

As regards metaphor and disability, Davidson has noted that

> a common recent criticism among disability scholars is that metaphoric treatments of impairment seldom confront the material conditions of actual disabled persons, permitting dominant social norms to be written on the body of a person who is politely asked to step offstage once the metaphoric exchange is made (1).

I would extend Davidson’s comments with regards to the metaphoric to include the symbolic use of disabled characters as well. One of many symbolic exchanges like the

one Davidson identifies occurs in *Such a Long Journey* when the mentally disabled adult Tehmul stumbles upon Gustad at an inconvenient moment, as Gustad is unwrapping a vast sum of money which a friend has vouchsafed him. Gustad, who has thus far proved one of the mentally disabled adult's few kind and gentle friends, turns quite vicious when he realizes that Tehmul might tell others in his neighbourhood about the money: Gustad threatens Tehmul with a penknife, which he moves "across Tehmul's throat from ear to ear," while "keeping the blade safely covered with his index finger" (118). This scene very clearly symbolizes the beginning of honest, upright Gustad's journey through a world of shady dealings and betrayal. After catalysing this scene, Tehmul turns and leaves. As Mistry writes, "Gustad watched him go, sorry that he had to frighten the poor fellow. But it was the only way, nothing remained in Tehmul's mind except fear. He forgot for a moment that the real problem sat inside, on black plastic, upon his desk" (118). After this brief symbolic interlude, then, the narrative returns to its "real" focus: Gustad's difficulties.

Likewise, two disabled characters, Shankar and Nosey, are also frequently brought into the narrative to signify and then ushered offstage in *A Fine Balance*. We learn that Nosey (a beggar who has no nose) is the mother of the recurrent character Shankar toward the end of the novel, as the man who runs their begging guild, Beggarmaster, explains "that Shankar was his father's son and his own half-brother" (531). This revelation inspires a crisis of the heart in Beggarmaster, who starts to question the moral validity of his profiting from the guild. Mistry describes a picture that the Beggarmaster has drawn to express his feelings, which

> consisted of three figures. The first was seated on a platform with tiny wheels. He had no legs or fingers, and the thigh stumps jutted like hollow bamboo. The second was an emaciated woman without a nose, the face with a gaping hole at its centre. But the third figure was the most grotesque. A man with a briefcase chained to his wrist was standing on four spidery legs. His four feet were

> splayed toward the four points of the compass, as though in permanent dispute about which was the right direction. His two hands each had ten fingers, useless bananas sprouting from the palms. And on his face were two noses, adjacent yet bizarrely turned away, as though neither could bear the smell of the other (535).

The purpose of Beggarmaster's storytelling, and of this sketch, has been to reveal something of himself. The disabled characters in the oral story and in the image have a symbolic meaning in relation to him. When the Beggarmaster is finished telling his story, Mistry writes, "he shut his sketchbook and returned it to the briefcase with a certain snappiness, indicating that his saga of unhappiness and misery and doubt and discovery was over, the human emotions were being packed away, and now it was back to business" (535). While Shankar and Nosey are obviously objects of pity in Beggarmaster's story, their emotional conveyance has less to do with "the material conditions of actual disabled persons" then it has to do with the self-stylizations of able-bodied ones (Davidson 1).

What Davidson offers as an alternative to the mode of disability representation we see here is "a critical disability aesthetics" which might defamiliarize the body in such a way that it draws it into clearer focus (xvii). Davidson suggests that the defamiliar body would offer "not simply a more humanized perspective on suffering but a way of translating the materiality of the artwork, both as form and practice, into the materiality of the different body" (xvii). In arguing for such an aesthetics, Davidson adapts "the Russian formalist idea that works of art defamiliarize routinized patterns of thought and usage and speak of the ways that disability challenges ingrained attitudes about embodiment" (xvi). What is interesting to note in Mistry is that, while his disability depictions do not defamiliarize and rarely move beyond creating what is "simply a more humanized perspective on suffering," this is quite exactly what he accomplishes in relation to his able-bodied but poor characters, whose suffering bodies

are made material in ways which I will discuss throughout this chapter. At the risk of appropriating Davidson's terms, I would suggest that Mistry's depiction of the tailors Omprakash and Ishvar in *A Fine Balance* can be read as a strong riposte to the division of "lives worth living and those that are not," as Mistry largely recovers these suffering bodies from the sort of familiarity that would make them invisible (Davidson xvii). Mistry accomplishes a great deal in terms of bringing those lives which are often hidden from view to the fore, and does so through his innovative realist aesthetics. However, he often does not realize disabled characters in the same way or to the same extent, as they often slip into the role of assisting in the revelatory depiction of other lives.

That Mistry relies heavily on metaphor in his realist fiction is unsurprising. Eli Sorensen, Kumkum Sangari, and other scholars of literary realism have built on the early work of György Lukács, who established a more nuanced premise than a simple equation of the genre with empiricism. Lukács argued that "if literature is a particular form by which objective reality is reflected" that reflection will necessarily go beyond "reproducing whatever manifests itself immediately and on the surface" (1037). Sorensen notes that Lukács offers an "alternative notion of literary realism as a modality that maintains a formal balance between reflexiveness and representivity, while preventing either of these two dimensions becoming autonomous discourses" (Sorensen 57). He thus defines realism not as an earnest attempt by the literary author to represent the world as in an empirical survey, but as an arbitration between the imagined witnessed world and ideologically inflected representation. The constraint of plausibility that the realist author places on his or her imagined world creates criteria for symbolism and metaphor, without annexing them from the text. Rather than relying on empiricism, the realist novel thrives in the tension between the symbolizing consciousness and the reliable witnessing eye.

This reliable eye and the artifice of realism has been attacked by some postmodern and postcolonial critics, who often note the historic role of the realist novel in enshrining and exporting one version of reality. Kumkum Sangari has characterized the critical problematic surrounding European realism as attacking a "coherent bourgeois self grounded in a realist ontology" which obscures the multiplicity of experience (22). However, Sangari goes on to provide a counter-argument in defence of literary realism, suggesting that it is a potentially potent genre for postcolonial writers for precisely the same reasons it has been potent to the Europeans. Although the witnessing consciousness of realism tends to create a privileged centre, this privilege may be assigned subversively. Nandini Bhautoo-Dewnarain notes that in many postcolonial realist novels "social marginality becomes centralized and the middle class world" may actually be observed to "retreat to the periphery" (56). In this sense, postcolonial realism can provide an opportunity to endow a typically marginal subjectivity with narrative authority and the unique perceptive potency, and the defamiliarization, that realism affords. Peter Morey quotes Elleke Boehmer in considering how this is manifest in Mistry's work: while "class and gender exclusions dictate that not all colonised bodies get the chance to represent themselves" and that "certain dominant recuperative selves stand in place of others," Mistry often works against these exclusions by giving a different subjectivity centre stage (*Fictions* 179-180).

Thus, a genre-based line of inquiry is complicated not only by the generic slippage and literary self-consciousness Mistry demonstrates, but by the postcolonial subjectivity central to Mistry's work. One cannot reasonably compare Mistry to the European realists without acknowledging his debt to more contemporary literatures, even if this debt is expressed as generic rebellion against "flights of fancy" on his part.

An analysis of Mistry's realism must be undertaken advisedly, as "to argue for the importance of the formal dimension of a literary work has" very legitimately "been accused of constituting a smokescreen for ideological positions reinforcing Eurocentric notions" (Sorensen 4). Mistry, however, very obviously turns the problem of Eurocentrism into a source of productive engagement in his novels, and has been as candid as his critics in identifying his work with the European realist tradition as well as with other European writers: he includes explicit and implicit references to Shakespeare and T.S. Eliot, as well as many European realists, in fiction that otherwise excludes white and European characters. Rather than a smokescreen, Mistry's realism is marked as an informed authorial decision to rigorously focus on a non-European subjectivity in a localised space.

This subversion of realism in Mistry has been observed by literary critics. Bhautoo-Dewnarain asserts that Mistry "transforms the implicit cultural subtext of the traditional realist novel," and that the moral centre of Mistry's work is not the stable, bourgeois self of the nineteenth century, but the disenfranchised citizen of the twentieth (40). Morey notes that Mistry grafts a postcolonial aesthetic onto a realist tradition, rather than merely perpetuating nineteenth-century realism. Beyond the geographic aspects of this relocation, narratalogical choices by Mistry, including patterns of "recurrence and cyclicality" and postmodern "metafictional elements" reveal an engagement with later literature (*Fictions* 183). Thus, Mistry must be observed to partake of postcolonial symbolic systems and thematic concerns, even as he foregrounds the influence of a European literary mode.

It is perhaps Mistry's success in marrying his narratives of modern Indian life to a realist mode that has led so many critics to approbate Mistry's work within the context of the realist tradition. Pramod Nayar's comments on *Such a Long Journey* are

a good example of this praise: he claims that "the realist mode serves Mistry well here, and his attention to detail means the reader is provided with a truly spectacular examination of ordinary lives" (vii). Of particular interest for the present thesis, many of these scholars specifically identify Mistry's representations of disabled characters as case-studies in realist achievement. Santvana Haldar claims that we see Mistry's "realism and his prowess as a writer" especially in his depictions of disabled characters, and that these pitiable figures are a proof of Mistry's social realist inclinations (207). Peter Morey accedes in this praise, comparing Mistry to great realists of the nineteenth century, including "Balzac, whose attention to the quasi-scientific recording of the effects of the environment on character Mistry shares; Dickens, whose power of good storytelling and eye for *quirky character traits* he replicates; and the Russians," Morey tells us, "whose breadth of social vision and expansive sympathies he replicates in his epics of Bombay life" (17, *Rohinton Mistry*, emphasis added).

The close observation of "quirky character traits" surely includes Mistry's seeming exactitude in describing disabilities and disfigurements. Morey, for instance, compares the character Tehmul to Mishkin from Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, and notes that Temhul "functions as a kind of divine idiot or fool figure" (82). While scholars of Mistry's work are quite apt in their observation of Mistry's transformational relocation of realism to a contemporary Indian setting, they misidentify his disability depictions as a democratizing innovation, perhaps praising too highly the sort of "humanized perspective on suffering" denied attention by Davidson (*Concerto* xvii). Unlike his sloughing off of a European bourgeoisie centre of perception in favour of a lower-middle-class or even subaltern centre of consciousness, Mistry's disability depictions do not reflect a high degree of innovation in relation to the realist canon. The same critics who approbate his innovation within a realist paradigm with respect to social

identity praise his disability depictions through direct comparisons with the European canon: within Mistry's innovation, there is fidelity to a representative tradition of realism as regards disabled characters.

Again, this, is not to suggest that Mistry does not sometimes create meaningful disabled characters, or that he (and the European writers the aforementioned critics compare him to) provides only stymied and stereotypical portraits. It is rather to suggest that the unequivocal praise for his portrayals by many of his critics needs to be recalibrated through the disability studies lens. As it stands, even the language used by some scholars to describe what Mistry does with disability suggests a lack of awareness of literary disability scholarship. Nila Shah, for instance, praises the apparent democratization of *Such a Long Journey*, because "even a simpleton like Tehmul has a role to play" (105). Paromita Chakrabarti and Swati Ganguly express admiration for Mistry's inclusion of "the deranged innocent of the Khodadad building" who "displays an infantile simplicity in his dealings with a world he barely understands" (63). The disabled beggars of *A Fine Balance* have been admired on the grounds that they invite sympathy, and allow the reader to be "transported into the world of children whose limbs have been deliberately maimed to make them better objects of pity" (Nilufer 159). Apparently the disabled characters in *A Fine Balance* invite the same valuation in the street beggary market represented in the fiction, as in the literary-critical field outside it: that is, a valuation based on their potential to awaken charitable feelings passers-by, or in Mistry's readership.

While I will not approach this pity-mongering of disabled bodies, especially given that it is actually more pronounced in criticism of *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* than in either novel itself, the fact of disabled characters being employed for sympathetic ends is a backdrop to their conscription for metaphor. In discussing the

conscription of disabled characters to do the metaphorical and symbolic work of these two texts, I take into account the connotation as well as the denotation of the symbols created, as the pity that accrues around disabled characters informs the tenor of their signification. In my later discussion of the symbolic deaths of disabled characters, I will consider the fact that their deaths are sad but not tragic, which has important implications for the way their deaths are read as an extension of other characters' experience. The prosthetic role of disabled characters in this fiction depends upon their emotional as well as their metaphorical facility, or their concomitant metaphorical and emotional facility, as Mistry's project of representing the life of lower-class characters in Bombay requires.

In the next section, I will consider how disabled characters are removed from the impositions of materiality in favour of the impositions of metaphoricity, and will provide a theoretical framework through the work of literary disability critic Tobin Siebers to guide my closer analysis of what mode of bodily materiality is accomplished or passed over in these two novels. While Mistry writes in a realist mode which rejects the supernatural as a narrative device, and which demonstrates a trenchant commitment to realizing the materiality of the body, he does endow some bodies with less materiality than others, or makes some bodies material in a more meaningful way, while other bodies are maintained at a signifying register that can verge on the magical or the unreal. This is not to suggest that Mistry is not like the European realists he identifies and has been identified with, but rather that his chosen literary inheritance is perhaps most apparent in the way he narrates the disabled body. While the role of disability in *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* is often not realistic, it is prototypically realist in that the "truly spectacular examination of ordinary lives" of

nondisabled character is accomplished in part through the metaphoric and affective correlation of disabled characters to a normal ones (Nayar vii).

Reading the Discursive Material Body via Tobin Siebers

In his ground-breaking treatise, *Disability Theory*, Tobin Siebers offers a chapter-long critique of body theory which, though directed at creating a space or revealing the omission of the disabled body in post-Foucauldian scholarship, may help us approach the fictively material body of Mistry's fiction. Siebers's comments are primarily directed at closing the gap between the emphasis on pleasure in theoretical discourses, and the actual primacy of pain in the experience of real bodies. Siebers is rightly critical of the strong constructionist argument that would suggest that "the human subject has no body, nor does the subject exist, prior to its subjection as representation" and which would reduce real bodies to mere "linguistic effects" (55). He goes on to suggest that the body in pain represents a limit to strong constructionism (55).

Yet, in the context of a fictive literary reality, the materiality of the body can indeed be reduced to whatever linguistic effect the author chooses. What we find in Mistry's realism, however, is a frequent attempt to honour the unruly materiality of the body, and especially the body in pain, in a representation that honours the limits imposed by biology, and takes these limits up as an object of narrative fascination. Siebers argues that "the body is, first and foremost, a biological agent teeming with vital and often unruly forces" which is never "inert matter subject to easy manipulation by social representations" because it has a "material existence as an organism which must exceed its identity as a social construct" (68). In reading Mistry, this observation must be revised to the effect that Mistry's social representations depend upon manipulating some bodies more than others, as, in his relocation of the normal, he

indicates his centres of focus through fidelity to the irreducible details of bodily experience. In other words, key characters are realised as organisms through the details of their bodies and the ways in which these details are incorporated into the text.

Two examples of the material realization of the bodies of characters in text are those of Gustad's youngest child Roshan in *Such a Long Journey* and the young tailor Omprakash (before his disablement) in *A Fine Balance*. Roshan has gastrointestinal illness that worries her father and mother and has serious economic implications for her family, and Omprakash's frail physique, especially as it is coupled with an aggressive personality, concerns both Dina and Ishvar, who ultimately discover he has been left malnourished by an intestinal parasite, described as "a small snake" (551). While these two illnesses are used instrumentally as plot devices, they are for the most part a way of accessing the material reality of the body. In Omprakash's case, the gruesome details of his passing of the large worm that is robbing him of nutrients helps to balance his enjoyment of his own healthy sex drive against the fragility of his body. Although the child Roshan's illness is described in less detail, she, too, is developed as a character along the lines of pleasure and pain: her joy and anticipation over winning a large doll in a school raffle are balanced against an illness over many chapters.

What is of pivotal importance here, however, is that the balance of pleasure and pain that Siebers suggests to avoid eliding the disabled body from view is being used by Mistry in his fiction to bring realistic bodies into clearer focus. While the examples of Roshan and Omprakash are examples of characters that are sick if not disabled, across the two novels we find that normal bodies are endowed with the materiality that is achieved through depictions of the intimately sordid and the painful. I would suggest that many of Siebers's criticisms of the elisions from body theory that Siebers suggests have the effect of obscuring the disabled body could also be argued to obscure the poor

body as well, or, indeed, even to mute the subjectivity of characters from third-world locations who have attained middle-class status. It is thus that we find the materiality of the poor, postcolonial body realised in Mistry's fiction in a way that effectively emphasizes these modes of existence. One way in which the body becomes material is through depictions of its suffering at an intimate proximity. However, this intimate proximity is not achieved in relation to disabled characters.

The first-world focus of Siebers' *Disability Theory* may be the reason for the note of warning he offers in his criticism of the body theorists. While the emphasis of the chapter is upon critiquing the body that "feels good and looks good" and is perpetually "on the brink of discovering new kinds of pleasure, new uses for itself, and more and more power" he is also wary of a turn in literary realism or modernism that tends to capitalize too aggressively on pain at the exclusion of pleasure (59). Siebers writes

> restoring a sense of the realism of the disabled body, however, does have some risks. One worth stressing is the temptation to view disability and pain as more real than their opposites. The perception already exists that broken bodies and things are more real than anything else. The discourse of literary realism began in the nineteenth century to privilege representations of trash, fragments, and imperfect bodies, while modern art turned to the representation of human difference and defect, changing the sense of aesthetic beauty into a rawer conception. These discourses soon penetrated society at large. Somehow, today, a photograph of a daisy in a garden seems less real than a photograph of garbage blowing down a dirty alley (67).

Siebers's observations of modernity and realism, which he qualifies to some extent in this book as well as in *Disability Aesthetics*, could be levied against Mistry's fiction, which is, indeed, better characterized by the aforementioned "garbage blowing down a dirty alley" than by daises. However, I think what is more important here is the fact that in articulating this counterpoint to his own argument, Siebers likens the overemphasis on the pain of the disabled body to a thing, noting indeed how "the discourse of literary

realism began in the nineteenth century to privilege representations of trash, fragments, and imperfect bodies." The disabled bodies of Mistry's fiction are objectified in this sense, in that their pain is primarily used to indicate sordidness, rather than realized as a full-fledged body, as disability becomes a feature of a squalid, dirty reality rather than disabled characters being affected by squalid, dirty reality.

In each of the sections that follow, I will consider how the normal body that experiences pain is made central, and how the disabled body is relegated to an ancillary function. It is in the minutiae of *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* that intimacy is established with some bodies, and that a degree of distance is established with others. I will examine the ways in which the relationship of the disabled body to metaphor in the context of Mistry's realism is largely tautological, since, as the disabled body is set apart to perform a metaphorical function, it becomes less a body, and therefore more readily an object of metaphor. The disabled body becomes what Siebers has called a "linguistic effect," which is to say that its materiality is not realized through the many levels of narrative intimacy that create the sense of the material body of normal characters (55).

Focalization and Agency

One of the most important devices for establishing the centrality of some characters in Mistry's novels is focalization. While characters of diverse social and gender positions have roles or at least make cameos in these two texts, the third person narrator very obviously takes a keener interest in some characters than others. In *Such a Long Journey*, Gustad is very obviously the centre of interest, with the narrator following his character closely for the duration of the text. The only instances of the narrator moving away from a focus on Gustad are the moments when Dilnavaz is the centre of interest:

she enacts a sub-plot which provides muted comic relief in a novel which otherwise focuses on the dire and the dour in the life of a Parsi man. *A Fine Balance* is more complex than *Such a Long Journey* in this regard, as it not only sustains multiple human foci, but also treats them with nearly equal interest. Dina and Maneck are each given a very strong voice, and, while Omprakash and Ishvar to some extent function as one rather than two characters, their togetherness is an integral part of their identity. Whether there are three or four central characters in *A Fine Balance*, all are provided with an extensive and meaningful personal history, and all are given sustained focal attention by the narrator.

Other characters in these two novels are developed in relation to these central foci, and are elaborated primarily along the lines of their effect upon the central characters, although they are psychologically developed to some extent. In *Such a Long Journey*, Sohrab and Jimmy Balmoria are examples of characters who matter a lot to Gustad, and who are developed by the narrator primarily along the lines of this satellite relationship to his character arc. Likewise, *A Fine Balance* includes a whole host of secondary characters who are given a high degree of individual attention and development in the narrative, but who are ultimately positioned in the orbit of Dina, Maneck, or the tailors. Examples include Nusswan, Rustom Dalal, Farokh Kohlah, Thakur Dharamsi, and others. Minor characters are presented in a similar way, wherein they are introduced and developed through the eyes of Gustad, Dina, Maneck, or the tailors.

Disabled characters conform to this organisation of the narrative, but with one difference to normal secondary and minor characters: while many characters affect the central characters through their actions or accidents, disabled characters effect the central characters by their identities. Nusswan and Rustom, for instance, could not be

more strongly contrasted to one another in terms of the effect they have upon Dina, but share that they have this effect because of what they do: Nusswan's abuse of Dina, and Rustom's romantic intervention in her life, are consequences of actions taken and decisions made: both men are figured as agents. The contrast between their influence on Dina and Shankar's influence upon the tailors is that Shankar influences them just by being the disabled person he is. While Shankar does actively decide to help the tailors escape the labour camp, he for the most part compels them to act ethically just because he is disabled.

A more pronounced version of this is the character Tehmul in *Such a Long Journey*, whose disabilities rather than any self-conscious action on his part constitute his role in Gustad's life. Unlike the malevolent interference of Nusswan in Dina's life, Tehmul interferes with Gustad unknowingly. Tehmul does what he is: his mental disability has endowed him with filthy fingernails, body odour, a rushed speech pattern, and a groin-manipulating habit, all of which presents a general assault on Gustad's tolerance and patience. Tehmul stumbles upon Gustad's illicit fortune because he is wandering aimlessly, and steals and soils Roshan's doll because he lacks self-control, and all of these hapless accidents born in Tehmul's mental disability complicate Gustad's life in the midst of other difficulties. Further, Tehmul provides a more subtle challenge to Gustad in that Tehmul's own serious paralysis reminds Gustad of his own much less serious limp; Tehmul becomes the un-self-conscious spectre of Gustad's self-consciousness. His role is as a challenging presence in Gustad's life as opposed to a problematic decision maker like Sohrab or Jimmy Balmoria.

The mention of Gustad's limp, however, brings to light several possible exceptions to the dominant arrangement in these two novels, in which disabled characters are denied proximity to the dominant narrating consciousness. Gustad has a

limp, which we are told is barely visible, but which does affect him occasionally. Ishvar has a facial paralysis which has resulted in his "forever frozen" half-smile (119). Maneck's father Farokh is blind in one eye following an accident with his cola bottling machine. Thus, I would suggest that the relationship between focalization and disability is a tendency as opposed to a stringent delineation, as there are characters with minor disabilities who do act as focalizing consciousnesses, or who actively engage with those who do. However, for the most severely disabled characters in these novels, the primary way they engage with the focal consciousnesses is not as subjects but as objects, whose disability takes the place of other modes of engagement.

Eating, Locomotion, and the Practicalities of the Material Body

As Mistry delves into the consciousnesses of characters in *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*, one of the preoccupations that emerges is the problem of the practical concerns imposed by the body. One of the ways that the body is realised materially in both of these texts is through a perpetual return to the compelling necessity of the body. The illnesses of Omprakash and Roshan provide a good example of how the problem of the body in effect constitutes that body: Gustad and Dilnavaz have competing concerns with both Roshan's lack of weight gain and the cost of medical bills, while Ishvar and Dina are concerned about the implications of Omprakash's low weight for his marriageability. Other examples of the body being realised as a problem, or the needs or the desires of the body being the centre of its realisation, abound. Some of these include the tailor's struggle to find a place to sleep when they first arrive in Bombay, and Maneck's yearning for the fresh air and open spaces of his Darjeeling home.

By contrast, the disabled body is often not constituted through its needs or even its wants to the same degree. For example, disabled men and women in these two

novels do not seem to need to eat, and interact with food for reasons of figurative significance rather than material hunger. Shankar demonstrates his kind-heartedness by distributing "dinner balanced upon his stumps" at the irrigation labour camp, but does not consume any himself, and in fact refuses to eat in deference to the tailors (406). Tehmul takes the "very tasty" juice offered by Dilnavaz, but relates to this consumption through pleasure seeking rather than real thirst, and his consumption is primarily part of Dilnavaz's magic project rather than indicative of biological need (111). Hunger, and the acquisition of food, are pervasive manifestations of the body in these texts, and are especially important for poorer characters. The absence of this appetite in disabled characters increases the sense of ephemerality that surrounds their bodies.

A second prominent example of a difference of the problem of the body between normal and disabled characters is that, while the difficulties of transportation and motion through a harried social space perpetually confront nondisabled characters, Tehmul and Shankar are never seen to confront the same problem. They are simultaneously immobile and hyper mobile, as, while both have a disability that impedes locomotion, they also seem to appear wherever they are needed to be encountered by the protagonists. Tehmul emerges at the brothel and at the riot without ever being evidently in transit, and Shankar is serendipitously abducted for the work crew along with the tailors, and placed at a begging station at the Vishram Hotel which they frequent for tea. By contrast, Mistry displays a pronounced interest in how Gustad and all of the major protagonists in *A Fine Balance* get from one place to another, as the difficulties associated with commuting through the crowded city, and the poverty witnessed during that commute, are key to the intertwining of the story of individual protagonists with the story of the city. The nondisabled need to move through a

physically and socially complex space, while disabled figures are one of the features of that space.

Disabled bodies, then, are somewhat excluded from the "leitmotif of journeying which is central to diasporic writing," and which Mistry uses to create the view from below that is so important to these two novels (Nilufer 119). In his representations of urban poverty, Mistry depicts urban crowds "from the point of view of the subaltern, of the dispossessed, of the human beings who actually form part of that crowd," but generally omits disabled characters from the moving crowd (Srivastava 101). This omission reinforces the sense that disabled characters are somehow singular in the community-organized worlds of the two novels, because crowds are where Mistry's narrators' "idea of imagined community emerges more explicitly" (Srivastava 98). It is during a walk, for instance, that Gustad and Dinshawji commiserate over "the name changes" in Bombay street names, and thus separate a middle-class Parsi 'us' from a Hindu nationalist 'them' (74). It is through travel to and through the slum that Maneck and later Dina breach the boundary that has existed between herself and the tailors, creating a new family-like group. The lack of recording of the movement of disabled characters removes them from this sort of bonding, and the formation of group identity, which I will discuss at greater length in a subsequent section.

Overall, the exclusion from the eating and the moving that are so important to the development of nondisabled characters in these two novels has the effect of reducing the materiality of the disabled body, and of enabling its exclusion from other concerns that govern the lives of nondisabled characters. In the next section, I will address how economics work differently for disabled and nondisabled characters. The economic exclusion of disabled characters depends upon an ignoring of appetite, as disabled characters for the most part do not need to work to eat, or to travel across the

city to get to work. In a fiction in which subsistence and economics are so closely related, in fact, it can be difficult to disentangle a concern with money from a concern with the basic needs of the body.

Global and Domestic Economics

It would be an understatement to suggest that Mistry demonstrates an interest in economics, and in particular with global capitalism, in these two novels. Gustad urges Sohrab to study at the Indian Institute of Technology so that he will have skills that are transferable in the international marketplace; Maneck is forced to study refrigeration for the same reason Sohrab is pressured to go to IIT; international soda companies ruin the economic balance in Maneck's mountain town; Dina and the tailors find themselves working slavishly for Au Revoir Exports. Both the larger plot arcs and the minutiae of these novels are organized around financial concerns, as characters obsessively budget, weigh costs against risks, worry about financing care for their children, and so on. Global economics come to bear directly upon domestic finance, and, in turn, upon the bodies of characters who struggle to pay for things they need.

Characters' relationship with money is very important to their morality and likability in Mistry's fiction. Many antagonistic characters in *A Fine Balance,* including Mrs Gupta and Nusswan, are beneficiaries of this globalized economy, and the most villainous are economically powerful characters like Indira Gandhi and Thakur Dharamsi all but personify power-grabbing that is linked to manic acquisitiveness. They establish a strong contrast to the protagonists of the novel, who are money obsessed because they must be, as much of the plot is taken up with the desperate acquisitiveness of the characters who struggle to obtain food, medicine, and shelter, and are threatened with (and often suffer) a ruinous loss of class status. In a second contrast, however,

disabled characters in both novels are neither acquisitive nor desperate, as they are granted provision by paternal authorities who provide for them with subsistence, and find this provision satisfactory. While socially advantaged characters demonstrate aberrant greed, disabled beggars all but relinquish worldly goods. Nondisabled characters who primarily need but also want material things are figured as a mean between these two extremes.

In *Such a Long Journey*, being of the middle class is established as normal in Gustad as he is set in contrast with Jimmy Balmoria and Tehmul, who represent opposite extremes of economic empowerment. Balmoria is a powerful conspirator with secret allies and access to vast amounts of money; he is also a bachelor, and is therefore free of the contingencies of the heterosexual family unit. Tehmul also has no constraining family relationships, other than the relationship with the absentee brother who looks "after his needs" (30). Tehmul's domestic economy consists in killing rats to get money with which he can pursue prostitutes. His little burlesque presents a strong contrast to Gustad's financial struggles, which centre on his family's needs in the present, and their potential for survival in the future.

In *A Fine Balance*, to an even greater extent, the division between disabled and normal is in large part an economic one, as disabled characters are employed in showcasing their disability, rather than through typical work. In fact, if the disabled community has any coherence, this coherence is created through alternative economical organisation. As Morey suggests, disabled characters'"place in the warped economy of beggary is determined by the security of their mutilation" rather than through trade in skills or products (*Fictions* 181). Disabled beggars do not participate in the same economy as the other slum dwellers, who "attempt to forge good and also rational social relations with their neighbours, through an informal economy and the complex

system of exchange of favours" (Srivastava 20). Rather, the beggars are ruled by a thug, and appeal for clemency in a mafia-style economic organisation led by Beggarmaster.

The beggars' alternative economic organisation seems to spawn alternative family organisation, both figuratively and literally, as the Beggarmaster functions as a paternal authority to the entire guild, and is also Shankar's biological half-brother. Nosey has begotten Shankar through an affair with the previous Beggarmaster, and Shankar is removed from her for his disablement as an infant, so that he can also become a beggar in the guild. The sanctimonious, elevated standards surrounding community and family that motivate normal characters are altered along with the bodies of disabled characters, as naturalised economic dependence removes disabled characters from these contexts, and family relationships that would be soap-operatic if they involved normal bodies become a mundane fact of street life. Thus, while the material demands of family, such as rent payments, grocery bills, and school fees, enmesh ablebodied men and women in the strictures of their local economy and also make them vulnerable to fluctuations at the global level, and in diverse ways prescribe parameters for their day-to-day lives, disabled figures have fewer money problems despite being economically adrift.

Disabled characters in *A Fine Balance* are thus extra-familial because they are outside normal economics, and extra-economic in large part because they are beyond the jurisdiction of family. For normal characters, by contrast, money and family are tragically concomitant. Maneck's world ends when his community is altered by a road which also runs roughshod over his family and its livelihood; the tailors' multigenerational attempt at economic and social advancement ends in a severing of the family line. For all of these aspiring males, the greatest losses involve a loss of family along with family-based industry, as personal disaster takes some form of the economy

becoming estranged from the household. The beggars of the guild, by contrast, originate in an outdoor economy and an unorthodox family structure, and demonstrate no compulsion to exit this structure.

This economic difference contributes to the fleeting presence of disabled characters, who lack the emotive family attachments that are key to the contingent material and economic development of the body in the novel. In both *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*, the body's materiality is established through the context of family care, as the needs of one body are developed in terms of their economic implications for the whole unit, and, conversely, the body is mapped in terms of its capacity to make money for the family. As Bhautoo-Dewnarain has observed, the necessities of daily life reassert their hold over various members of the family," so that the physical damage of one family member has implications for the entire family unit (76). Omprakash's castration is more palpable than Nosey's disfigurement because other normal characters in the novel have an investment in Omprakash's marriageability, and Roshan's gastronomical illness is more keenly felt than Tehmul's many parasitic afflictions because, while Tehmul's body is rendered in very graphic detail, Roshan's is rendered in financial detail. While the afflictions of the disabled shock, the afflictions of the non-disabled have practical ramifications in terms of a family. Nondisabled bodies matter through financial relationships with other bodies, rather than on a merely affective register.

The economic difference between disabled and nondisabled bodies in *A Fine Balance* is underscored by Ishvar and Omprakash's transformation from struggling capitalists to satisfied beggars at the conclusion of the novel, as their bodies and their economic character change as one. Erving Goffman describes how a person "can be seen as processing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of

persons available for him to be," resulting in his or her "being reduced in our minds from a whole, usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (3). Ishvar and Omprakash are discounted in a monetary sense when each takes on an attribute that apparently exempts them from the monetary concerns of normal characters. Their economic end is further emphasized through the placement of Dina's quilt under Ishvar's disabled body. Deborah Weagel, in her feminist reading of the quilt metaphor in *A Fine Balance*, notes that Ishvar "uses the quilt to cushion his torso, and day by day, it becomes more tattered and worn" and suggests that "the stains, dirt, and wear all contribute to the history of the quilt" (110). However, in another potential interpretation, the quilt, which has symbolized the hopes of the alternative family organised around sewing in Dina's flat, has been left to tatter and unravel under the body that ended their domestic economy. The completed quilt that might have marked Omprakash's wedding and the fruits of his family's labour is instead the incomplete quilt that represents the end of the tailors' failed attempts to sew their way out of poverty. Although both men still have their hands, they seem to have given up on tailoring.

The tailors' aspiration to sew draws attention to another concern which complicates the relationship of the family to the economy in *A Fine Balance*, and that is the complication of clan and community. In *A Fine Balance*, economic status is further complicated by the contingencies of ethnicity, and particularly so for the tailors, whose religious, community, and economic identities all compete with and complicate one another. All of the Parsis and Hindus in *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* contend with both an externally imposed and an internalised sense of community membership which complicates their role in the world of the text, as well as their symbolic role in Mistry's fiction. In the next section, I will consider how various concerns around community and group identity are developed around characters who

represent social sets or groups, with the notable exception of disabled characters, who for the most part function as satellites of these concerns. A disabled minority identity is largely effaced in what amounts to a stripping away of family and larger group affiliation.

Group Identity

The economic attempts of the characters in *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* have not only immediate implications for their families, but also take on broader importance as being representative of the struggles of whole demographics. Gustad's fixation upon financial instability and his domestic financial struggles are all set within repeated references to the activities of Hindu nationalists: Gustad's nostalgia for "the shelves of his father's bookstore" can be read not only as a private nostalgia, but as more broadly Parsi expression of longing for a time when their ethnicity was associated with secure financial lives, in the context of an inherited social entitlement that is being crowded out by other special interest groups (4). In *A Fine Balance*, the financial struggles of the tailors can be read not only to represent the difficulties of their caste, but perhaps even the postcolonial under-classes more generally. These characters' symbolism of entire segments of society has the effect of making their struggles more keenly felt, rather than estrangedly metaphoric: their difficulties matter more because they are the difficulties of many more.

Disabled characters, however, are very much the ethno-economic "nonce players" of the sort described by Ato Quayson, as their disabled identity seems to efface all other minority identifications, and to remove them from ethnic economies. Tehmul apparently loses his surname in his disabling fall, and is given the suffix Lungraa in reference to his limp. Shankar is known as Worm, and also apparently lacks a surname.

Although Tehmul is apparently a Parsi and Shankar is buried in an attempted Hindu funeral ceremony, the ethnic identity of these characters is muted relative to their nondisabled counterparts. As their names imply, disabled characters are reduced to the brute facticity of their bodies, rather than being given placement through a historically rooted ethnic identity, like the proud, embattled Parsis and revolutionary Hindus that otherwise dominate the two novels. Even very minor nondisabled characters, such as the Sikh cab driver who appears at the end of *A Fine Balance*, are granted a portion of a collective identity by way of ethnic affiliation. Ethnic identities provide normal characters with social imperatives, as Parsis, Hindus and others either fetishize or reject their community's history. Disabled characters are left without the binding to others conferred by ethnic identifications.

Furthermore, although disabled characters, and especially those in *A Fine Balance*, to a limited extent replace ethnic identification with membership in a disabled minority or collective, they are for the most part singular and isolated from their potential alternative minority affiliation. Tehmul is never amongst other disabled characters, and is never given an alternative to his outsider role within the normal community. His outsider status is underscored by his recurrent physical appearance at Gustad's window, which places him in relation to, but separate from, the Parsi family unit inside the apartment. Shankar is separated from his disabled mother at birth, and, like Tehmul, is presented at the periphery of normal groups rather than at the centre of a disabled minority. Shankar sits on the edge of the sidewalk in much the same manner as Tehmul appears at Gustad's window, and is placed on the outskirts of normal communities rather than within an alternative community. Although disabled identity supersedes other minority identification, it is most often not constituted as a collective category, but rather as an attribute that precludes ethnic collective identification.

Of the many disabled characters in *A Fine Balance*, it is Shankar who comes the closest to having a body that in some way invokes others, as he is to some extent representative of others who are purposely disabled to beg. However, he is still for the most part an accessory to the stories of dissimilar groups rather than a personification of his own minority, in large part because of his lack of self-interpretation. Given his disadvantages in life, Shankar presents an interesting contrast to the political awareness represented by comparably disadvantaged characters like Narayan and his son Omprakash, who are willing to risk their lives to oppose oppressive social structures. The tailors, as well as Gustad, Maneck, and others, all understand their individual life-struggles in terms of the struggle of entire demographics, and are freed from the restrictive potential of their metaphorical function through their critical faculties. Omprakash identifies himself as a representative of his entire caste when he says that he wants "no more untouchability" so that he and those like him can "drink from the village well, worship in the temple, walk where I like" (165). By contrast, Shankar demonstrates no critical awareness of the social systems that oppress others like him, but accepts his place within a coercive economic structure unquestioningly. Shankar is wholeheartedly grateful and loyal to Beggarmaster, who offers him only protection and subsistence care while profiting from his disablement. Shankar describes Beggarmaster as "such a kind man" and is concerned that Beggarmaster will doubt his loyalty when Shankar is abducted by the Beautification police; Shankar's reaction is one of childish fear at being separated from his paternal authority, rather than comprehending anger over systemic coercion (380). He expects to work for free, and does not manifest political anger at the appropriation of his labour, or that of other disabled beggars. His struggles and ultimate work-related death are thus not mapped onto the plight of others like him.

In a distillation of Fredric Jameson's notorious pronouncement, Morey argues that "in third-world literary production, the fate of the individual is always inextricably linked to the fate of his or her collective," and that there is a typifying relationship between the individual and the minority group (*Fictions* 161). However, one finds that this observation does not apply to disabled characters in Mistry's fiction, as the disabled body becomes a symbolic wild card in the metaphorical schema of the novels. Through their lack of a political self-conscious, disabled characters become a figurative object upon which collective suffering is projected, rather than a symbolic correlate for their own collective. They metonymically represent sundry identities without quite belonging to any one identity group. While Mistry's urban Bombay Parsis represent urban Bombay Parsis, and low-caste rural Hindus represent others like them, a disabled character tends not to stand in for a disability minority, let alone a refined disability minority that preserves the contingencies of race and social class alongside the fact of disablement. Any group or individual who needs symbolizing can be symbolized in and through the disabled body, which is free of the metaphorical claims of its own minority grouping. For Tehmul, this often means being used to symbolize the "fragile, endangered" Parsis, or just Gustad's immediate family, while Shankar comes to represent all slum dwellers, becoming a figure of pathos and a sort of ur-vulnerability (Nilufer 125).

These two characters' function as metonyms becomes most readily apparent in the scenes of their deaths, and in their service as death-reminders for nondisabled characters in both novels. In the next section, I will develop the idea that disabled characters embody a construct in some ways comparable to that of Yorick's skull in Hamlet, as the ephemeral disabled body provides the text with a reminder of mortality and impending doom. This role is facilitated through disabled characters' exclusion

from the identities and relationships that make nondisabled bodies matter to other bodies, as well as the lack of self-awareness that is evident in nondisabled characters. Mistry creates in disability and death, or disability-as-death, a sort of memento mori upon which other characters may project their singular and collective mortal fear.

Disability as Death Mask

In Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*, there is a degree of redundancy between the function of the recurring characters of Hamlet's father's ghost, and the appearance of Yorick's skull in the famous grave digging scene: both appearances suggest Hamlet's impending fate. However, while Hamlet's father is a reminder of what Hamlet is and must do, Yorick's skull is a much more passive object, upon which Hamlet can project his fears and fixations under the guise of mourning a dead friend; Hamlet's "alas, poor Yorick," is very much an anticipatory "alas, poor Hamlet." The skull serves a symbolic function that Hamlet's father cannot, because, while the ghost is loquacious in impressing upon Hamlet the many levels of familial and political dysfunction that surround his assassination, the skull is speeechless. Furthermore, Hamlet's recollections reveal that Yorick, even in life, did not assert his own importance: "I knew him once, Horatio: a fellow/Of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: he hath/ Borne me on his back a thousand times" (5.1). Hamlet goes on to question the skull directly: "Where be your gibes now? Your/gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment,/ that once were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one/ now, to mock your own grinning?" (5.1). Hamlet's remembrance of the fool Yorick is fond but not compelling, and the skull provides a memento mori for Hamlet rather than a memorial for Yorick.

Beyond overt references to Shakespeare, Mistry includes in his novels what might be described as a Shakespearean body count. However, and in keeping with his

realism, Mistry excludes the melodramatic from death, turning it instead to a lowly, silent affair. Dinshawji, Jimmy Balmoria, and Maneck all die quietly without an opportunity to elaborate their feelings, as they are isolated at the moment of death, and leave neither notes nor ghosts. Yet, no matter how innocuous or inglorious death might be in Mistry's fiction, it is never in short supply: the character death tally is at least three in *Such a Long Journey*, and well over a dozen in *A Fine Balance*. Furthermore, death is pervasive in the psychological fabric of the novels, as central characters have near-death accidents, narrowly avoid caste murder, attend funerals, tend their dangerously ill children, lose their best friends to government conspiracies, and so on. Beyond the omnipresent threat of death, mortal vulnerability is underscored in these novels in the form of disabled characters who perform a textual function something like that of Yorick's skull. Characters such as Tehmul and Shankar, whom, as I have already discussed at some length, have been identified by critics as "divine idiot or fool" figures do not anticipate or interpret their own deaths, but remind nondisabled characters that they must die (*Rohinton Mistry* 82). Yorick's grin is worn by Shankar, Tehmul, Nosey, and other disabled characters, who, in their lack of realized self-awareness, become props for the projection of mortal fear.

In Tehmul's case, this means he is the perfect catalyst for Gustad's moral transformation. It is not Dinshawji or Jimmy Balmoria's death that motivates Gustad to humble himself and reconcile with his son, although both men's untimely deaths cause Gustad grief. Jimmy Balmoria and Dinshawji are self-aware, and their understanding of life and death gives them mature ownership of the end of their lives. They interpret their deaths for themselves, and, while they are invocators of vulnerability and mutability, cannot be reduced to the death mask. Tehmul, however, comes to death unknowingly after a directionless life, because he cannot apprehend his own mortality. Gustad's

grudge against his son represents an overlooking of his own mortality, as he wilfully forgets what Tehmul cannot understand: Tehmul's death reminds Gustad that he will die, and thereby catalyses a family reconciliation. It is noteworthy that, at the moment of Tehmul's death, Gustad is described as lifting him as if his body were "nought but a child's"; the image suggests Gustad's strength, but also communicates the insubstantiality of Tehmul's character, as he is in a sense overpowered as well as supported by Gustad (335).

Likewise, in a repetition of Tehmul's surprise death being presented as a contrast to the self-comprehending deaths of Dinshawji and Jimmy Balmoria, Shankar's death stands out amongst those in *A Fine Balance* in that it is the only death in the novel that happens as a result of accident rather than the contrivance of social forces. While characters such as Narayan, Rustom, and Avinash die because they have taken a conscious risk within a hostile social infrastructure, Shankar is a victim of chance and a misunderstanding, and the misfortune of his death is interpreted in terms of his physical suffering rather than the broader injustice of minority persecution. His unstoppable roll into traffic symbolizes the effect of forces beyond their control upon other characters, but is not given the same psychological and existential depth as these other deaths. He, rather like Yorick, has been characterized as good spirited and happy-go-lucky, and not markedly self-aware. His screams as he dies, and the accidental uncovering of his body at the funeral procession, horrify other characters, but Shankar's death is not a death that is interested in itself.

A comparison between Shankar's death and Maneck's is particularly telling, as the two are so alike in their particulars, and yet so different in their register and signification. While Shankar is accidently hurled into traffic, Maneck throws himself in front of a train; along with Rustom, the two are killed by being run over. However,

while Maneck's death is presented in terms of psychology, Shankar's is realised externally: Shankar "reached the edge of the pavement and screamed. The platform took flight, sailing out into the busy intersection" (576) whereas Maneck is given his last thought, that "he still had Avinash's chessmen" (710). In fact, Maneck's suicide, which arises out of unbearable grief and alienation, inverts Shankar's terror at dying. Although Shankar's personal circumstances are quite challenging, his simple and optimistic spirit enables him to enjoy his life, and he is therefore horrified to find himself about to die. Maneck, by contrast, is outwardly well-off, with good looks, a loving mother, and a reliable income, but his guilt and remorse makes his life intolerable. Maneck's egoistical suicide is the culminating tragedy of the novel, and carries echoes of Hamlet as well as Anna Karenina, while Shankar's happenstance death is only a gesture toward the tragedies that will come: Shankar's freak accident anticipates the deaths and mutilations of the novel's final chapters; it becomes evocative of a looming sense of human tragedy rather than a tragedy in itself.

The way these disabled characters die in Mistry's fiction may be an illuminated by a comparison between two scholars, Simon Critchley and Davidson. Davidson, speaking from the point of view of disability scholarship, suggests that becoming impaired can provide "a sudden reminder of mortality, an awakening to what Ato Quayson calls 'the tyranny of contingency'" (100). Davidson is quite apt in suggesting that the first-person experience of disability can provide a reminder of the fact that one will die, and can make the fact of mortality comprehensible in a way that is very immediate. Critchley, by contrast, provides musings upon disability and death based on his experience of watching his father become severely disabled in old age. Critchley builds from the objectified body of his father in a medical setting to make observations about death, likening his father's pained and medicated state to a living death. As

Critchley progresses from talking about his father to talking about literature, he suggests that "death is radically resistant to the order of representation," and that "representations of death are representations of an absence" suggesting that a "representation of death is always a mask – a memento mori – behind which nothing stands" (*Very Little* 26). It is interesting to consider how these two scholars' different disability premises may have led to very different readings of the relationship between disability and death, as, while Davidson suggests disability can be a source of self-recognition of one's own mutability, Critchley progresses from the example of an uncomprehending disabled other, his father, to other examples of resistant representations of disability and death in modern fiction. A lack of apprehendable interiority seems to be key in creating in disabled people and characters hollow masks of death.

Thus, disabled characters' deaths can become accessory to structure. As I have already suggested in relation to Shankar, disabled characters can be used somewhat arbitrarily to foreshadow textual events of greater emotional resonance, or to shore up the metaphorical structures that underpin this realist fiction. In the next section, I will consider how disabled characters, through their deaths and lives, facilitate the maintenance of a symbolic structure in these realist novels. Disabled characters, as they are free of the many social and biological contingencies that make material nondisabled characters, are effectively made available to do the symbolic work of the novel. They are removed from the realistic world of cause and effect, and to a great extent become symbolic.

Symbolic Closure and Disability

The division between the predominant causal structure of Mistry's novels and the symbolic logic that governs the lives of disabled characters highlights the "radical split between the formal laws of the novel and its content" through which, as Sorensen has suggested "the totalising intentions of the novel shape an inner form" that fails to perfectly reconcile plausible narrative and powerful symbolism (Sorensen 60). Within Mistry's fictive world, ill-reconciled symbolism often takes the form of "coincidences, random events and accidents" which "constitute a large part of the novel's mechanisms of cohesion, the bolts and screws holding the text's events together" (124). Disabled bodies in large part provide these mechanisms of cohesion, as they are not only subject to symbolism in and of themselves, but become a part of the narrative apparatus which allows nondisabled characters to encounter unlikely, significant events.

Shankar, in particular, is often given a catalytic function in the more plausible lives of normal characters. He enables the tailors to escape from the work camp, due to his relationship with Beggarmaster, hides stolen hair for Rajaram, thereby unwittingly enabling him to get away with the murder of two disabled beggars, and is the direct cause of the funeral procession at which Dina encounters her brother Nusswan, and is thus given an opportunity to embarrass him that will help motivate his eventual revenge when he makes her assume the role of domestic help. Shankar's presence in all of these instances is the coincidence that allows unlikely events to be grafted into the otherwise logical and probabilistic structure of the novel, as his physical difference also affects the laws of likelihood in his proximity. Tehmul, like Shankar, tends to present himself coincidentally, and his anomalistic appearances occur at instances convenient to either the narrative or affective structure of the two texts. As I have already discussed, Tehmul's habit of popping up at Gustad's window, or else emerging wherever else he is needed to prompt the action of the novel, is readily evident, and Tehmul's largely

directionless existence makes him available to complicate Gustad's motivated behaviour. Tehmul causes trouble, and does so most often by being an unwitting witness to what is going on in Gustad's home.

Beyond his catalytic function, Tehmul has a role in providing symbolic closure to *Such a Long Journey* through his death. In addition to the role of Tehmul's death in prompting action on Gustad's part, and in effectively ending the brewing riot that threatens Gustad's neighbourhood, Tehmul is also the symbolic sacrificial object of, or receptacle for, Gustad's family strife. Over the course of the novel, and in what amounts to a comic subplot until the end of the text, Gustad's wife Dilnavaz applies a series of magic charms and potions to transfer the strife that is affecting her eldest son Sorhab into Tehmul. Although it is never made clear whether Dilnavaz's magic is genuinely effective, her exchange of Tehmul for domestic peace is certainly carried out within the symbolic universe of the text. The emotional reunion that Tehmul's death predicates is the product of either a domestic or an authorial magic that circumvents likelihood. This happenstance death not only directly enables the reunion between Gustad and Sohrab that effectively ends the central plot of the novel, but also provides a sense of an ending in the manner described by Mitchell and Snyder.

The aptly named final chapter of *A Fine Balance*, "The Circle is Completed," depends even more heavily than the ending of *Such a Long Journey* upon disability to bring the narrative to a close. As the title suggests, the ending is achieved primarily through symbolism as opposed to a plot closure, as, while Gustad's plot is resolved through a positive solution to his domestic strife, Dina, Ishvar, and Omprakash end with a surrendering as all three give in to economic stasis and subservience. This giving-in is both premised upon and enacted through disablement, as emaciated Dina, castrated Om, and legless Ishvar suggest through their bodies a cessation of rebellions against

economic marginalisation, and therefore a sense of finality and quiet. While in Dina's case a loss of agency has dictated a loss of physical strength, for the tailors the process has been the reverse; but all, like Shankar, have the fact of their social impotence written on their bodies.

It is interesting to consider the possibility that Shankar's death has in a sense created space for Ishvar's disabled body, as, within the tokenism of the novel, there should be one, but not two, men on wheeled platforms. Shankar is symbolically replaced by Ishvar at the end of *A Fine Balance*, as the parallel between the two men's disablements, as well as the chapter title "The Circle is Completed" assert symbolic meaning in the causal plot. The unlikely congruity of Ishvar's body with Shankar's is indicative of the shift in narrative structure evident in "The Circle is Completed," as the narrative increasingly moves from idea to idea rather than event to event in the novel's closing pages. During his brief return to Bombay, Maneck's focalizing consciousness moves attention from Dina's physical change, to the disintegrated quilt, to Ishvar and Omprakash's disabilities, and finally to Avinash's chessmen. Symbols that grow out of Maneck's memory guide his final walk through the city, as he moves under no compulsion other than to witness and to mourn. Ishvar's diminished role as a disabled character is underscored by focalization through Maneck in this section, as Ishvar is reduced to an object of pity in Maneck's eyes. Although before his disablement Ishvar, or Ishvar-and-Omprakash, has quite often been the focal consciousness of the novel, after he loses his legs he is presented only in external terms, and is thus similar to Shankar both with regard to corporeality and narrative proximity.

In the ending of *A Fine Balance*, Mistry varies an image that has become a trope in modern and postmodern literature: that is, the immobilized or fixed person who remains without the possibility of redemption or resolution, and without his or her

extensive suffering having accomplished any larger moral end. Critchley employs the ableist metaphor he has built around his ailing father and observed in literature to describe the ways in which philosophical immobility is often symbolized through the disabled body:

> Our difference with antiquity, for good or for ill, is that there is little sense of philosophy as a calmative of consoling influence that prepares the individual stoically for his passage on to either nothingness or eternal bliss. Beckett's Murphy strapped to his chair has replaced the garden of Epicurus as the image of a philosopher. (25)

The disabled body is identified by Critchley as a symbol of intellectual paralysis or surrender, as the immobilized character is seen as a literalization of the philosophical acceptance of a meaningless life in death. In *A Fine Balance*, we find that not only Ishvar, but also Dina's mother and Dina, become less mobile as they give up on improving life, or give up on improving life as they become less mobile. All three become a shadow of their former selves as they yield ambition to decreased mobility. Although Ishvar is a more jovial and less fearful character than Murphy, there is a sense that his good cheer, like Shankar's, is based in the meek acceptance of his place in life, whereas before the accident all of his joviality came from hope for the future. He has exchanged his optimism for surrender, and is satisfied with life because he no longer expects anything from it.

Conclusion

These disabled bodies, then, can be argued to cease to be bodies and to become instead literalizations of an idea. They have been in a sense reduced in that they have lost the compulsions imposed by biology and desire, and are left with only significance. While metaphor may at times take an authoritarian ownership of any body in *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*, including those bodies marked out by Mistry as normal,

disabled bodies are more persistently and pervasively dominated by their metaphorical function. In these two works, it is most often the normal body that is realised as a body, as it is made visceral, material, and sympathetic on the intimate level of text as well as in its positioning in the plot of the fiction. In his realist mode, Mistry treats the normal body toward the end of realising it as an organism, as it is endowed with hunger, pain, desire, and the capacity to care about and plan for the future, and is through these and other aspects realised as a material body. The disabled body, by contrast, becomes immaterial through the absence of the very contrivances that make the normal body multidimensional.

Chapter 4: Collective disability and the Dis-located Normal in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*

> "No deal! No deal!" The second demo in a week, here we are again, the paltaniyas of the Apokalis, the people's earth-shaking platoons. This day, which is the seventh of the Nautapa, it's the fiercest heat yet. Not yet ten in the morning but the steps outside the courthouse are like bars of hot metal. We've arrived full of excitement because the Kampani's deal has not been signed and the hearing's about to begin. (305)

This epigraph is a description of a community protest in the fictional city of Khaufpur. In the scene, the "we" is true to the character of the protesters, as the resistant community has achieved a degree of solidarity that can be described only with the collective pronoun. The Khaufpuris of *Animal's People* have a highly traumatic history in common, and it is the fact of this violent history that enables their incredible solidarity in the face of a lengthy struggle. The narrator's interjection, "here we are again," can be read as an expression of exasperation over the need for continual agitation, as this is not only the "second demo in a week" but one of many resistant actions over a two-decade political struggle. The Khaufpuris are still here, still suffering ill health, and still working together.

The theme of community consolidation in *Animal's People* sets it apart from many other novels included in this thesis, despite the obvious congruities of location, epoch, and the theme of medical abuse on a mass scale. The novels by Mistry and Rushdie included in this thesis present a case-in-point, as each narrates the disintegration of community, despite dreams of consolidation and the overcoming of

minority disadvantage. While Mistry's Bombay does at the outset open up possibilities for its four primary characters, and catalyses their brief unity as an economically integrated foster family, it ultimately presents the obstacles that destroy this household and the ideals it represents. Likewise, the dream of solidarity-within-diversity presented on a national scale in *Midnight's Children* is destroyed by political corruption and partisan difference, and this theme is repeated in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, in which both Aurora's unconventional marriage and household, as well as the surrounding city, are ultimately ruptured into avaricious relations between vicious special interest groups. Unlike the fissured or self-destructive families and cities represented in Rushdie and Mistry's work, Khaufpur depicts the possibility of solidarity in the midst of horrifying material and political circumstance.

This community solidarity is created with disability as its epicentre, as the Khaufpuris achieve something akin to what Siebers has described as the "coalition-building and political action" of a disability community (*Disability Theory* 190). While Siebers writes of a first-world disability community that has very intentionally consolidated itself to oppose inequality, however, what we see in Khaufpur is a fellowship borne of accident within a pre-existing community that became a disability community because of a shared historical trauma. Rather than a minority which has chosen to "organize themselves according to their healthcare needs," Khaufpur represents a high ratio of disabled people within a third-world economic demographic which is such that the medical justice campaign subsumes able-bodied members of the community as well (*Disability Theory* 66). The Khaufpuris share an organic unity which is founded in their shared experience of disability as a common signifier of traumatic history as well as the commonality of economic disadvantage.

In this chapter, I will consider the ways in which Indra Sinha constructs disability as a collective concern and a collective experience, and how this might be understood to explode the concept of normalcy in service of a deeply politicized fiction. Beyond his straightforward agitation on behalf of the real city of Bhopal (which is fictionalized but recognizable in the imaginary city of Khaufpur) Sinha creates in this fiction a subtler challenge to contemporary global distributions of power through the disability-centric community he imagines. Sinha posits a world in which disability is not peripheral, but, rather, in which the direct or indirect experience of disability is prerequisite for community acceptance. The nuances of this community, and the experiential criteria which separate the members from the outliers, are deeply revealing of a potential disability politics which is rooted in the material immediacies of the third world, as well as the disparities of global politics. I will consider the ways in which the presentation of disability in *Animal's People* reverses many of the representative expectations in literary disability theory, most notably those articulated in Mitchell and Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis*.

Animal's People as Committed Artwork

In *Animal's People,* it is a historically recognizable demographic and political context which creates the imperative to include rather than exclude disabled characters. The novel's fictional city of Khaufpur, which was affected by an industrial gas leak twenty years earlier, bears a very obvious resemblance to the real city of Bhopal, which was similarly affected by an industrial accident about twenty years before the novel's publication, in 1984. Rather than merely exploiting the historical fact of Bhopal for its lurid visuals and dramatic potential, Sinha writes a fiction that engages with the moral and political exigency of this ongoing disaster, and which is evidently vested in bringing awareness to this historic injustice as well as the larger political realities that

allowed it to happen. Sinha's political engagement is perhaps both inspired and amplified by his previous work as an advertising copyrighter for Oxfam and Amnesty International, and specifically his work around the disaster in Bhopal: he was the creator of the Bhopal Medical Appeal poster which used the celebrated Indian photographer Raghu Rai's photograph of a child killed by the methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas, as well as other high-profile pieces of fundraising copy, before his retirement from the sector in favour of his novelistic and journalistic career. His post-advertising nonfiction writing and internet activism has included many works of conscience, such as an attack on DOW Chemical's sponsorship of the 2012 Olympics and a 2009 Guardian editorial to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, which perhaps tends to foster the sense that his fiction is deeply politically activist.

Given the political entrenchment of Sinha's fiction, it is unsurprising that much criticism of the novel has taken the Bhopal connection as at least a starting point, or used this historic tangency to provide a fulcrum for analysis. While some critics have praised the novel's evident commitment to fixing the Bhopal disaster in the first-world imagination, there is a degree of reticence with regards to Sinha's glorifying of philanthropic interventions in the postcolony. Robert Nixon approbates *Animal's People*, saying that Sinha's

> approach to the aftermath of the catastrophic gas leak at Union Carbide's Bhopal factory in December 1984 throws into relief a political violence both intimate and distant, unfolding over time and space on a variety of scales, from the cellular to the transnational, the corporeal to the global corporate (444).

Likewise, John Marx affirms the politics of *Animal's People*, and Sinha's literary formulation of the same, arguing that, through "the twisted and scarred Animal, Sinha goes further than some sociologists in imagining how subjects of governance can become expert" in "NGO self-interest" (70). Pablo Mukherjee adds to this praise,

suggesting that “the blasted and ravaged postcolonial grounds of Khaufpur/Bhopal provide an ideal base for the story, since the toxic logical outcome of the contemporary mantra of globalization and development find their fullest expression here” (231). Mukherjee goes on to suggest that “the novel imagines an ethics from which resistance to the lethal environment of postcolonialism may be mounted” (231). Sinha’s astute political commitment is given the limelight in these comments, which rightly identify his extratextual objectives and his efficacy in pursuing them. Sinha could be read as explicitly identifying the challenge he has set himself as an author in the text of *Animal’s People*, when, near the beginning of the novel, Animal dismissively says to a foreign journalist that “many books have been written about this place, not one has changed anything for the better, how will yours be different?” (3). The above critics suggest that *Animal’s People* is different, and that, as a literary fiction, it may accomplish more than many non-fiction works.

However, *Animal’s People* does more and is more than a very accomplished pamphlet and both the aforementioned and later criticism of the novel branches out into reading the novel’s polymorphous discursive energies beyond their potential for generating ameliorative justice. Ecocritical, zoocritical, postcolonial, medical humanities and disability studies approaches have all been used in relation to *Animal’s People* by scholars I will engage with in this chapter. Most importantly for the present analysis, Barker has laid the foundation for a disability studies approach to this novel in her (at the time of writing unpublished) study of the relationship between Animal’s voice, his disabilities, and the legacy of charity and aid discourse. Barker has considered the “interplay between fiction and charity discourse that focuses on the Bhopal disaster of 1984” (1) in relation to postcolonial guilt, which she describes as “the uncomfortable awareness of stark differences in wealth and power between

developed and developing nations and the desire to do something to alleviate suffering in the postcolony" ("Charity, Aid, Activism 3). She argues that, while traditional charity advertising has reinforced paternalistic approaches to imagining disabled people and subjects of former colonies, Sinha rebels against paternalistic tropes through Animal's characterization and narration, as the unseen, profane storyteller becomes an anti-type for the powerless and photogenic "disabled poster child" ("Charity Aid Activism" 7).

I take my lead from Barker in this chapter in that I build upon her observations regarding Animal's characterization as a profane, disabled storyteller, and use as a groundwork her and others' observations of the postcolonial specificity of *Animal's People*. However, my focus will be the disability politics imagined through the collective dynamics of *Animal's People,* as I consider how disability becomes a collective concern and collective experience, and how any paradigm of normalcy is disrupted in the context of a third world ecological disaster. Disabled Khaufpuris, including Animal, are in the unorthodox position of being both marginalized through global politics, but central to the context of their own community, as disability becomes the premise of group solidarity. While I appreciate the importance of the actuality of the Bhopal disaster in this alternative disability imaginary, I will for the most part pass over the historical parallels of justice and injustice in favour of focusing on disability discourse rather than a single specific rights struggle.

Animal as Wounded Storyteller

Despite my focus upon collective dynamics in *Animal's People*, however, I must begin my inquiry with an analysis of Animal's narrative voice, as it is integral to the emergence of disabled solidarity in this text. Animal's own character arc within *Animal's People* is a progression from self-isolation to an increasing identification with

his community, as the gulf between his selfish and cynical world view is closed through what Mukherjee has described as the "intense recognition of the inner life of others," as Animal's direct and vicarious experience of the community change his outlook (226). It is perhaps the act of telling the story of Khaufpur that so solidifies Animal's identification with his town. After telling the story that comprises the novel, Animal reaches a decision not to undergo corrective surgery which would enable him to stand upright but might impede locomotion on the rough grounds of Khaufpur; his emotional attachment to Khaufpur is such that he wants to be able to come and go in his city, even if that is on all four limbs. As Barker has noted, this happy ending suggests a very different ideal resolution than that presented by charity discourse, wherein a disabled child is most typically rescued through Western philanthropy and/or relocation. Animal saves himself by rejecting intervention, and taking his place as a disabled member of a disabled collective. He does not just chart his community's history for an outside listener, but effectively talks himself into a stronger identification with his home and people.

Beyond this role of his narration in changing Animal's character, Animal is crucial as what Mukherjee has described as the "linguistic glue" that "holds together the threads of the relationships around him" (225). Barker also identifies Animal's loquacious coarseness, noting Animal's declaration that his is a "song sung by an ulcer" (*Animal's People* 12) is a reference to Faulkner's Benjy, who, in *The Sound and the Fury*, narrates "a tale told by an idiot" ("Charity, Aid, Activism" 23). Faulkner's allusion to *Macbeth* also highlights a key difference between Animal and Benjy's experience: while Benjy witnesses the implosion of the Compson family catalysed by the prejudices and selfish actions of those in his midst, and watches divisions of gender, race, and disability drive his potential community apart, Animal narrates his

community's progress from flawed to near perfect solidarity, and the overcoming of many social prejudices. While Animal resembles Benjy in several respects, Animal's tale is an optimistic one with a moral lesson, rather than one "signifying nothing" (Macbeth V.iv.28).

Rather than interpersonal divisiveness, the primary source of pain in *Animal's People* is physical suffering in the form of untreated illness or under-supported physical disability. Within this tale told by a very disabled person, there are many examples and many layers of the suffering body, as many other characters describe their sufferings directly to Animal or to Elli while Animal translates, and these descriptions are passed on in Animal's oral narrative, along with Animal's many descriptions of his own body. Amongst the illness details Animal includes are the heart-breaking story of Aliya and her family, poignant somatic details about Somraj and the hunger-striking Zafar, and many others. These stories often take the form of testimony in the sense that sociologist Arthur Frank describes in *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics.* While the Khaufpuris are denied the opportunity to give legal testimony against the company, they are, through Animal, perpetually enabled to give the sort of testimony which "calls others" out of monadism and "into a dyadic relationship" which hinges upon strong identification with another (143). It is in Animal's testimony as well as his recreation of other Khaufpuris' testimony in this sense that the history that compels the Khaufpuris struggle becomes strongly felt as a shared history.

Animal's ethical progress from a point of selfishness to strong identification with his community is mapped in his receptivity to stories, as his consumption of narrative is very indicative of who he cares about. During his money-grubbing, Zafar-poisoning stage, Animal makes direct references to internet pornography and the American movie *Fight Club*, which presents a myth of glorified male conquest and

destruction. While at this point in his life Animal is actively producing exaggerated illness stories in exchange for money, he is apparently consuming quite a different sort of narrative, and, whether you read Animal's entertainment preferences as trigger or symptom, there may be some correlation between his favourite stories and his tendency to see men such as Zafar and Farouq as opponents, and women such as Elli and Nisha as sex objects. Rather than a community of which he is a member, Animal sees a set of assets which the shrewd man might exploit. Animal's ethical transformation is catalysed through his consumption and recreation of a very different sort of narrative, the illness story.

In the 2013 revised preface to *The Wounded Storyteller*, Arthur Frank describes the tendency of illness to impose a sense of unnarratability or chaos, in which perception is reduced to "a series of present-tense assaults" (xv). Frank's comments are noteworthy in light of Animal's explanation of life in the Nutcracker to Elli Doctress. When Animal first takes Elli to the Nutcracker, he attempts to contextualize life in the context of pervasive sickness and extreme poverty for her, and does so by telling her that it is perpetually "now o'clock" in the slum (185). Animal characterizes the Nutcracker not as a place that is incomprehensible as Elli finds it, but as a place that cannot narrate a future for itself, that cannot escape the sort of "present-tense assaults" Frank describes. Notably, Animal is projecting this perpetual immediacy onto the place as opposed to the people in the Nutcracker, as if this aspect of the illness experience were grounded in place rather than individual ill bodies.

The "now o'clock" of acute illness is realised by Animal at many other points in the text, and in many different ways. Animal's summary of his early childhood in the acute pain of fever begins with the observation that he lost his memory, and could not interpret what was happening to his body: "nothing else do I remember from that time,

my first memory is that fire. It was so bad I could not lift my head. I just couldn't lift it" (15). Animal goes on to describe a series of faces and images he sees in his delirium, and to which he has had to assign meaning in later years. In a later scene, Animal recreates the immediacy of the chaos he experiences when he, Somraj, and Nisha are attacked at the factory site and during the confusion of Zafar's purported death and Elli's supposed betrayal. This is accomplished through the withholding of information which the narrating Animal is privy to, in what is ultimately a highly stylized rather than a mimetic recreation that achieves the effect of chaos, rather than actually being chaotic. One of the many things Animal manages through his verbal artistry is a sense of participation for the reader of or listener to his narrative, who is placed in a state of suspense and confusion along with the Khaufpuris.

Another key device for creating the sense of an unnarratable future is the serial characterization of the Khaufpuris as the "people of the Apokalis," which is first voiced by Ma Franci as her literal truth, and later employed by Animal as a symbolic reality. The characterization of the Khaufpuris as the people of the apocalypse is very apt, because it communicates the commonality of an unknown but ominous future. Had Ma and Animal invoked the Christian Hell, they would have conjured up a worse environment than the apocalyptic one, perhaps, but at least one given to be relatively stable. The apocalypse, however, carries with it the potential for further violence: as Animal says, "tomorrow there will be more of us" (366).

That "us" is the final word in *Animal's People* is strongly suggestive of the fact that, while the plot has not resolved the huge difficulties faced by the Khaufpuris, it has resolved the internal struggle for community membership experienced by many, and which I will explore later in this chapter. For Animal, this resolution is achieved through watching and telling, as he comes to identify with a community that is suffering

as much or more than he is, rather than feeling like an outlier because of the nature of his disability. Animal, who, at the outset of narrating, equates his difference from other with a species difference, now still identifies as an Animal, but without the disavowal of human responsibility and human community.

Disability Community and Postcolonial Precontexts

In his comments on the depiction of community in *Animal's People*, Mukherjee suggests the link between the formation of Khaufpuri identity and the realities of a postcolonial environment. Mukherjee argues that, as the characters strive to "leave behind their monadic selves and reach for a collective consciousness" we witness "the emergence of a politics of transpersonality and collectivity in response to the toxic degradation of the postcolonial environment" (228). And, indeed, the demographic depicted in this fiction pervasively underpins the disability politics imagined therein. Mass disablement is more frequent in the postcolony, where spatial as well as social location catalyse the importation of dirty, dangerous industry.

The slow violence of a Chernobyl or a Bhopal, as Nixon has argued, is enabled to occur because a colonial or neo-colonial power has outsourced its hazardous industry to a location that a postcolonial, capitalist world understands as being available for danger, pollution, and contamination. Physical distance from the affluent metropolis is complemented by a sense of social distance, and, as such, some bodies in some location are understood to be available for a greater degree of exposure to risky industry. Thus, while some disabilities can be caused by third world poverty in the direct sense, as plagues, drought, nutrient-specific famine, and so on, take their toll upon the body, other disabilities may be caused indirectly by poverty, as the attempt to generate new revenue or exploit cheap labour results in cataclysmic or gradual damage.

Given the role of global economic inequality in informing the depiction of disability activism in this text, there is a need to put pressure on working definitions of disability originated in first world criticism before employing them in my analysis. One of the most important of is what has been called the medical paradigm, which I discussed at some length in my introduction, and which has been very eloquently articulated by Thomas Couser:

> The medical paradigm bids to demystify, de-moralize, and naturalize somatic aberrancy, stripping away any supernatural or moral significance and insisting that human variation is solely a matter of defect or irregularity in the individual body that medicine may cure, fix, rehabilitate, or prevent (*Signifying Bodies* 25).

This summary of the scientific analytic that disability scholars have identified in the west sets it in contrast with the paradigm that preceded it, namely the symbolic paradigm. However, the narration of this progression from symbolic to medical terms needs to be reconfigured to be of use in reading the postcolonial environment of Khaufpur, and process of reconfiguring the medical model to one recognizable in this postcolonial context that may reveal key features of postcolonial disability experience. In *Animal's People*, the effort to "demystify, demoralize, and naturalize somatic aberrancy" by foreign doctors takes the form of a denial of disability and its scientific causes, which is tantamount to a denial of the specificity of the postcolonial environment and the contingencies of place. The stripping away of moral significance from disability here is not a denial of the moral entanglement of the disabled individual, but a denial of the moral entanglement of the company, and of postcolonial social arrangements more generally. This difference in the role of doctors, which I discuss at greater length in my penultimate chapter, has a knock-on effect in how medical paradigms are positioned in relation to the activist rejection of doctoring by the

Khaufpuris, as it is in some ways a very different medical practice from the one addressed by first world disability advocates.

A related difference imposed by the Khaufpuri demographic is that there is a blurring of the distinction between sickness and disability which is integral to the struggle of the disability activists. The crux of their political work is that many of the Khaufpuris would be in better physical health if something would be done to address their sickness, and many of the Khaufpuris would be in better physical condition if the company would provide medical assistance and clean up its environmental mess. While many characters are clearly permanently disabled, those with permanent disabilities and those without are often also sick, in the sense that they could be completely cured if they were given rudimentary medical assistance. Further, many of the Khaufpuris who experience physical symptoms do not actually know to what degree their ailment is treatable. When the government doctors hand out chits for aspirin, they are in many cases pretending that what is severe permanent disability is in fact minor transitory illness. While in most respects mysterious or untreated sickness functions as disability, the ambiguity around sickness and disability creates a degree of difference, in that those who participate in the community struggle do not always know to what extent they stand to benefit from its potential success.

However, while individuals may not know if they are disabled or sick, the Khaufpuris know that their community is disabled as well as sick. This is not a metaphorical collective ailment, in the sense of sickness or disability representing another difficulty or a societal defect; rather, this is sickness compounded and disability compounded, as the pervasiveness of both creates a need that is felt by all community members. The child Aliya's story is perhaps the most obvious microcosm for the ways in which disturbed health of the community has compound effects: Aliya, who was

orphaned by the poison leak, is cared for by grandparents, Hanif and Huriya, who are very elderly, and one of whom is blind. Their domestic poverty is exacerbated by the absence of suitable primary wage-earners, Aliya's parents, as well as the grandparents' respective medical issues. Aliya's ultimate death is directly caused by fever, but is perhaps more determined by the pervasive physiological difficulties experienced by those around her, as well as generational and economic gaps directly attributable to the disaster. Her story is highly suggestive of the ways in which disability can be read as a directly-lived collective reality, as, in the context of a high precedence in individuals, individual disability experience is changed, and subsumes non-disabled players as well.

In large part, the Khaufpuris' disability experience is subsuming because their community is poor. However, their reactions to philanthropic intervention by outsiders are strongly determined by the shared memory of the foreign involvement that left so many of them sick in the first instance, and by the malevolent or ineffective meddling that has happened in years since. Liam O'Loughlin has offered a productive line of insight into *Animal's People* as a rejection of what he calls the NGO model of postcolonial literature. O'Loughlin argues that, in its depiction of Elli's travails as she tries to be accepted into the community, *Animal's People* offers "an illustration of an alternative solidarity, based on reciprocal exchange between the aid worker and the so-called 'distant suffering' other" (103). To put it bluntly, interlopers such as Elli are all suspicious because they are rich, even as they are potentially of high instrumental value for the same reason. As O'Loughlin has noted, the mocking of the paying journalist by Animal at the outset of the narrative sets the tone regarding how moneyed outsiders are to be approached: Animal's scrutiny is a trait shared by the other Khaufpuris as well. While most have very obvious reasons to court wealth, they also, because of their position in the world, have reasons to be cautious about embracing humanitarian

interventions from outside. However, while the international dimension of interventions like those offered by the journalist and Elli makes them suspicious, the novel does suggest the potential for group affiliation beyond Khaufpur. Animal's provocative suggestion at the close of *Animal's People* that "tomorrow there will be more of us" may be read to imply both that his community is part of a growing swathe of the postcolonial world that has been subjected to violence, and also that there is a growing community of similarly radicalized postcolonial citizens.

However, despite the importance of poverty and postcoloniality to imagining these alternative networks, it is ultimately disability or vicarious disability that underpins community belonging in *Animal's People*. In the following section, I will analyse the ways in which five characters, Somraj, Nisha, Zafar, Ma Franci, and Elli, achieve membership in the Khaufpuri community, despite having identities that are potentially tainted by affluence, foreignness, or both. While postcoloniality, poverty, and disability together create the demographic need for the Khaufpuris' activism, the most salient feature of group identification is disability. The stigmatization of ghettoization of disabled people is inverted as, for the Khaufpuris, having social links to the disabled and chronically ill becomes a requisite for inclusion in community life.

The Politics of Inclusion in *Animal's People*

Images of poverty are used over and over again to reinforce the sense of frustration experienced by the Khaufpuris, but it is ultimately fellowship of the disabled rather than fellowship of the poor that defines belonging in *Animal's People*. While the greater majority of insiders in the sick community are economically insecure, the positioning of middle-class characters like Somraj and his daughter Nisha, as well as the activist Zafar, suggest that while poverty the central concern for most Khaufpuris, being

touched directly or indirectly by disability is the criteria for participation in grassroots activism.

Somraj, who is something of a fixture in the struggle against the company, has been affected by a combination of poison fumes and poetic irony: a world-famous classical singer before "that night," he lost his singing voice to the gas. Somraj also lost a wife and a son, although a daughter, Nisha, survived. While Nisha apparently has no health issues herself, she becomes her father's caregiver when he has relapses of fever related to his poison exposure, and she therein takes up the role that many other non-disabled Khaufpuris, such as Huriya and Pyare, must fulfil in a community that is pervasively sick. Nisha and her father become economically important to the community, as their empathetic charity toward Pyare, Animal, and others, allows these poorer disabled characters to escape economic coercion. However, it is primarily their role in organising protests and resistance work that makes them trusted leaders in the community, and Somraj's especially poignant and tragic disablement, along with his pre-disability fame, creates in him authority and respect. He was called the "Voice of Khaufpur" before the disaster, and was, as Animal explains, "always singing on the radio plus he gave concerts and the like" (33). Thus, his loss of breath and voice is a loss felt by the wider community. Although he has obvious material advantages relative to his neighbours, he is an embodied part of the collective memory, and participates in the struggle for justice as part of, rather than as a hero for, the Khaufpuri community.

Somraj's organic centrality and stable moral authority may be what Zafar, an activist who came to Khaufpur after the disaster, aspires to. Unlike Somraj, Zafar is often cast as being somewhat aloof from collective disablement, as he is idealistic, and distant from the material reality of the Khaufpuris, tending to be revered as one on a pedestal rather than as a co-sufferer like Somraj. Although he is often called "Zafar

bhai" or "Zafar Brother," he is called so at his own insistence, and is a brother for whom characters like Farouq and Bhoora put on airs, and whom the poorer Khaufpuris tend to defer to and revere. As Hanif explains, the people have earnest "respect" and even "love" for Zafar, but this sentiment is bolstered not only by Zafar's close association with Somraj, but also the fact that Zafar has money, which he distributes quite liberally "to help us poor" (182). Zafar does not become an equal shareholder in the community until he has his own direct encounter with sickness through his hunger strike, and thereby moves from an idealizing, valorising view of disability to an insider's understanding of being sick.

The figure of the well-meaning interloper is introduced at the outset of *Animal's People*: Zafar's faulty idealism and interventionist mission recalls the well-meaning Australian journalist, and Animal's line of retort directed at the journalist presupposes his various attacks on Zafar. "You told me," Animal complains to the journalist, "that sometimes the stories of small people in the world can achieve big things, this is the way you buggers talk" (3) Like the journalist, Zafar seems overgenerous and naive to Animal when he offers encourageing comments such as "think of yourself as specially abled," going on to say "you don't walk on two legs like most people, but you have skills and talents they don't. You are a human being, entitled to dignity and respect" (23). Animal's retort, replete with very intentional lewd language, could be directed at the journalist or Zafar as he asserts "my name is Animal" and "I'm not a fucking human being, I've no wish to be one" (24). That there is a degree of congruity between the foreign journalist and Zafar reinforces the sense that Zafar is an outsider, and that for all his good intentions, he does not really understand the internal dynamics of the disabled collective, and does not truly belong.

The opening scene with the journalist also presupposes the importance of money to Zafar's inclusion in the struggle of the Khaufpuris, and reveals how both interlopers use their finances to buy their way into the disadvantaged community. Their artificial participation inspires censorship and self-censorship amongst the Khaufpuris, who reserve a manicured version of their story for charitable outsiders. The local thug Chunaram, who runs a side business selling narratives of victimization to the likes of the Australian journalist, succinctly summarizes the motive behind Khaufpuri self-censorship when he says in an aside to Animal "who's going to pay for this foul-mouthed shit? Why don't you just spout the usual?" (6). Zafar's relationship with Bhoora and others is complicated by the fact that Zafar is both an idealist and someone who acts as a gatekeeper for aid, and many Khaufpuris therefore modify their speech and censor their opinions for fear of offending his sensibilities. Animal mocks Zafar's ostensible fairness and magnanimity before the "big democracy," a meeting "where everyone has their say, followed by a big fucking row, after which everyone does what Zafar wants" (123). Animal's constant barbs regarding Zafar's lofty ideals might be read as the expression of what other Khaufpuris are unwilling to say, as their compliance to Zafar's wishes and their self-censorship must be interpreted within the context of their material need to attract and exploit activists, journalists, and so on. The adulation of Zafar is partly genuine, but is also exhortative, and flattery is undermined by the evident expedience of spouting what Chunaram means by "the usual."

Ironically enough, Zafar is further alienated from the community through the sheer extent of his willingness to sacrifice for it: Zafar is almost arrogant in his morality, as he is surrounded by those who must make moral compromises to survive. Animal's dream of Zafar carrying the world on his shoulders provides an image of the gratitude, concern, and spite that accumulate around Zafar's character, as he both puts

himself at risk and demonstrates his superior moral strength by refusing help with his burden. The image of Zafar carrying the world is an image of territorial dominance, even as it is an image of self-endangerment, as it implies that the world (or at least Animal's world, Khaufpur) belongs to Zafar in the sense of being both his responsibility and his procession, rather than a community in which he is an equal player. His controlling personality comes to the fore in his suspicion toward Elli Doctress, as Zafar's "mad paranoia" makes him suspect that Elli is conniving against his city. There is an aspect of dictatorial leadership that underpins Zafar's crusade on behalf of the Khaufpuris, as all he does for the community is underscored by a demand of loyalty (157).

Zafar is ultimately emancipated from his own dominance through his hunger strike, during which he takes on the role of a patient, if not a disabled person. When Zafar learns that the Union Carbide lawyers are coming to Khaufpur, he commits to a hunger strike along with four others, who promise to refuse food and drink during the hottest weeks of the summer; although two of the hunger strikers are not able to complete the fast, both Zafar and Farouq do (288). This hunger strike has great import because of Zafar's charisma and popularity, yet also causes him to shed the traits that have made him charismatic, as nutritional depravation gradually leaves him unable to speak loquaciously or filter his profane thoughts, and makes him increasingly emotionally dependent on others. Through his fast, Zafar imbibes disability, in that, while not permanently disabled, he comes to better understand both the disability and the poverty experience. Where the healthy Zafar used to spout clichés about disability, the hungry Zafar observes that "the only way to deal with tragedy is to laugh at it" (301). The "thin and slow" Zafar that appears at the end of *Animal's People* is one with whom both Animal and Khaufpur can have a more brotherly relation (354).

Ma Franci, the French nun who has lived in Khaufpur for most of her adult life, provides an important contrast to Zafar up until his hunger strike, in that she becomes a naturalized participant in collective disability, despite other factors that might estrange her from the Khaufpuris. Both Zafar and Ma have in common that they reside in the city as part of a charitable mission, and that they have given up more comfortable lives in favour of working with the Khaufpuris; however, Ma works independently of Zafar and his company, and is accepted into community life on much more equitable terms. She is not treated with the same reserve and caution that surround Zafar, and is integrated into the community in the Nutcracker, despite being ethnically and religiously different, and a unilingual Francophone. While she is at times treated as a "foreigner" and "incomprehensible" by medical professionals and those outside the Nutcracker, Ma is accepted into the society of the poor in the Nutcracker, because she is appreciated as a survivor of the gas leak, and a participant in the biological and social aftermath (55).

Ma was fluent in Hindi up until the gas leak, but lost her comprehension of the Khaufpuri language in "a wind full of poison" (37). However, despite her acquired mental illness, she is still competent to go "from house to house attending to small sicknesses and injuries" in an adaption of her role helping at an orphanage before the gas leak. As Ma tells Animal in French, "it's not with words that you treat such wounds. The people ache, their bodies are bottles into which fresh pain is poured every day" (100). Ma is familiar with the ache she describes both as a participant and as a health practitioner, and her affective participation in the community's illness seems to replace language as a means of belonging in Khaufpur. That Ma goes about her work without language as an intermediary may actually increase her perceived value to the community, which is cautious about the idealistic speech of other activists, and cynical

about the empty speech of the company and its representatives, (which I will discuss at greater length in the following section). Ma's assertion that "it's not with words that you treat such wounds" can be read as an indictment of the legal filibustering on either side of the case, as much as a justification of her own activities.

Ma's observation about words and wounds is followed by one of her apocalyptic visions, in which she observes that the Khaufpuris'"flesh is melting, coming off their bones in flakes of fire, their bones are burning, they're turning into light, probably they're becoming angels" (100). Her explicit, violent visions of the apocalypse complicate Ma's otherwise stereotyped role as a sweet old nun, and, while only polyglot Animal has direct access to this side of her character, it underpins her importance within the disability community. While Ma's public persona is that of "this old lady, more lines has her face than our lord's fishing net" who has given herself so entirely to "the poor of this city" (142) she is also the "bony old bint who sees in dreams the moon turning to blood, the world curling up like a leaf in the palm of her hand" (65). She, like Zafar, reconciles what she experiences in Khaufpur to a pre-existing belief system, as, while she makes the events she witness conform to her biblical knowledge, he imagines the world conforming to his humanism. However, unlike Zafar, Ma embraces the disaster of disaster, rather than brandishing hope and optimism against the reality around her. Her ability to reconcile devastating world events as well as local upheaval to her version of reality provides an anti-type to Zafar's often alienating and febrile optimism.

Ma's charitable identity, then, is transmuted by her apocalyptic visions, and her meek public persona is complicated by an imaginative life that exploits the nightmarish potential of the night of the poison leak, and thereby grounds her faith in an aesthetic that suits the biological absurdity of Khaufpur. Rather than a Christ figure, with the

expected attributes of outsider, deliverer, or healer, Ma acts as a participant, and is as much subject to her apocalypse as those around her. Her moral obligation to the Khaufpuris is that of a community member rather than a missionary. Thus, when a priest comes to Khaufpur to bring Ma Franci back to France, she refuses to go with him, asking "who's going to look after my people?" and asserting that "my home is right here" (142-143). Throughout the cleric's insistence that she return to a retirement community near her "family home" in Toulouse, she insists that her home is amongst the people of the apocalypse, rejecting a cultural or linguistic definition of home in favour of one premised in shared physical suffering (143). Her death at the end of *Animal's People* cements her belonging, as she perishes alongside Huriya and Hanif as the trio work to evacuate Khaufpuris from a fire in the site of the defunct factory. Ma's death-by-fire provides a culmination of her own imaginative experience of apocalypse, as well as a final demonstration of her solidarity.

Elli Barber, the other non-Indian protagonist in *Animal's People,* initially lacks Ma Franci's credibility amongst the Khaufpuris. Although Elli speaks Hindi, she is unable to navigate the social channels that Ma has mastered, and, despite the superiority of Elli's medical knowledge and equipment, she faces interpersonal impediments that effectively prevent her from caring for the sick. When Elli opens a free clinic in the Nutcracker, Zafar and others assume that she is working to provide false medical reports to the company, so they organise a boycott of her clinic; Elli's first efforts to convince the Khaufpuris that she means to help are unsuccessful because she cannot understand the human needs and human networks that cause people the "tolerate" Zafar's imposition on their medical access (151). What Elli cannot discern is that many Khaufpuris are willing to give up their hope of individual health improvements in favour of maintaining the truth of their collective disability: the Khaufpuris have

learned in the past that false medical studies can be used against them in their ongoing legal case, and are thus willing to sacrifice potential physical improvement to resist false medical documentation (112). The Khaufpuri activist leaders expect Elli to record official lies about the bodies she treats, so they respond by subordinating the potential benefit to individuals who might be treated to the concerns of the community as a whole.

The degree of Elli's generosity fuels the Khaufpuris' suspicions. Although Animal tells us she is one of "plenty of Amerikans" who are "here in Khaufpur these days doing all kinds of work from teaching to planting herb gardens, all because they don't agree with what the Kampani did," she is different from most of these philanthropists in that "not one has ever opened a clinic. Not with their own money. Not by themselves" (73). Elli's money and her willingness to spend it on Khaufpur distinguish her from other foreign aid workers, and make her seem too good to be true. However, Elli is finally accepted into the community after she explains her motives through the story of her childhood and young adulthood, thereby justifying her moral interest in Khaufpur. Elli's story, delivered directly to a large section of the community at a picnic, is about her experience of her mother's mental disability, and the effect it had on her father, whose struggle to both to provide materially for his disabled partner and to provide care is more the focus of the story than the illness itself. As Elli explains, "I decided to become a doctor not to save my mother, but my father" (202). Her emphasis upon her father's experience of dangerous employment and the way in which her mother's illness affected the entire family suggests that she is a doctor not merely aware of the biological side of sickness, but also its immediate economic and emotional ramifications. Elli becomes a tenuous insider in Khaufpur once she proves that she has a personal comprehension of disability that surpasses the typical clinician's interest, and

that she is neither a corporate puppet nor a scientific dabbler of the ilk who put the foetus Kha in his jar.

Elli's clinical knowledge ultimately makes her very useful to the community once it has accepted her, and her nationality proves incredibly provident to the justice campaign. She acts as both an intermediary and a spy when the American lawyers arrive in Khaufpur, and her previous relationship with the lawyer named Frank enables her to attempt an intervention on behalf of the community, and later to stage a mock-gassing at the hotel. Elli proves useful for all of the reasons that she is perceived by the Khaufpuris to be a potential traitor: she looks like the white professionals that descend upon the city, and is intimately familiar with how they think and operate, and especially so in the case of her ex-husband. Moreover, as regards the motif of first world guilt that pervades the novel as a whole, Elli provides a foil for the American scientists, CEOs, and lawyers who remain a lurking threat despite their absence through most of *Animal's People*. As Animal remarks at the beginning of his narrative, much of the challenge to the activism of the poor comes from the guilty parties maintaining a safe distance, as the company bosses stay "far away in Amrika" where they do not have to engage with those they have harmed, and, when they do finally visit the city, barricade themselves within the safe enclosure of the hotel (33). Elli, by contrast, places her clinic at the centre of the poorest part of the city, and takes up residency in Khaufpur on an indefinite basis. Thus, her function as an American decoy and a Khaufpuri sympathizer on the level of the plot is underpins a moral rectitude that is developed on a thematic level: Elli's alignment with the community of the disabled against the community of the powerful shores up the larger indictment of *Animal's People*, as the other Americans have their moral deficiency set in relief to her good example.

This contrast is key to maintaining the idea that the disabled collective is resistant to violent economic colonialism generally rather than Americans or foreigners specifically, as their acceptance of Ma Franci and Elli suggests that it is not a national or ethnic invasion they are working against. Far from being xenophobic, the disabled collective creates links between people in communities in India, as well as between people from other parts of the world. Disability activism in *Animal's People* may not erase differences of culture or social class, but it does to a degree efface or mitigate these differences. Not only actual foreigners such as Elli and Ma Franci, but those "sections of the middle class" which Kumkum Sangari has observed to be "equivocal in their cultural alignments" are seen here to align themselves steadfastly with the underclass, becoming trusted ringleaders in a resistance project that hinges on the continuities of corporeal experience (Sangari 19). For those on the side of Khaufpur, collective identity is constituted through the shared problem of sickness, and the source of unity, the disabled body, supersedes other potential sources of division.

However, and as I will discuss in my next section, there are many Indians and Americans in the novel who do not take the side of the activists in *Animal's People*, and who align themselves with crony capitalism as they work to discredit and thwart the medical campaigners. Like the activists, Union Carbide's allies share that their common social goals enable them to largely overlook differences of national origin. These multinational antagonists in the novel work together to deny the facts of the history that has inscribed so many of the bodies of the Khaufpuris, and they are corporeally marked as evil in unique ways as *Animal's People* creates its own unorthodox code for denoting corruption through the body. These stereotyped bodies complement the role of the corrupt bureaucrats, doctors, and lawyers in purveying a myth of health as they attempt to efface the fact of Khaufpuri disability.

Health and Exclusion in *Animal's People*

Mitchell and Snyder have noted a very pervasive representational pattern whereby the disabled body is marked out as a contrast to the normal body, which they characterize as being the body that is "transparently average" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 17). However, in *Animal's People*, Sinha bucks this representational pattern to a fair extent, as, through the lens of Animal's observations, it becomes the strong body that is remarked upon, objectified, sneered at, and therein made symbolic of his company's selfish motives. Physical prowess is interpreted by Animal as suggesting ruthless force, and marks out obvious aliens who do not belong in the community of the disabled poor. The serial characterization of the large body as evil both contradicts and affirms Animal's assertion that "people see the outside, but it's inside where the real things happen, no one looks in there" (11). Sinha does encourage the reader to judge by appearances, but he also often inscribes the body in a subversive way, making the healthy, large body an indicator of moral shortcoming, and the sick body a sign of integrity.

In a pronounced contrast to the characterization of Elli and Ma, American lawyers who descend upon Khaufpur toward the end of the novel are demonized in terms of physical size and robust health. Animal compares the most pronouncedly sinister of these lawyers as a "bison," and describes Frank, Elli's conniving ex-husband who tries to convince her to close her clinic and leave Khaufpur, as "the youngest of the American lawyers, the handsome one" (270). Frank also later brags of living on "omelettes and fries," and, given his involvement in a legal effort to disenfranchise the disabled poor, his own overstated good health takes on sinister connotations (323). In a parallel gesture, Indian government allies are set in physical contrast to Indian activist allies through excess body weight, although Indian officials and regulators who join forces with the American company against the sick community are marked out through

fat rather than muscle. Animal's "old enemy Fatlu inspector" is, evidently, noted for his obesity, as is the complacent government doctor who denies Animal help (266). Although they are not large in the same mode as the Americans, the Indian officials share that their bodies parade an excess of resources and suggest luxury and disproportionate power.

Animal's characterization of the bureaucrats, Fatlu, and the lawyers suggests a possible inversion of the symbolic paradigm of disability, which is an understanding of disablement by which "some irregularity, defect, dysfunction, or anomaly in the body is seen as a stable, legible, and reliable sign of a moral condition" and by which "the outer appearance of the body is understood to reveal the inner character of the person" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 21). In *Animal's People*, we find the contrary paradigm, wherein the most robust nondisabled bodies are subjected to the most typifying corporeal prejudice. Animal does not much distinguish between fat and bodybuilding bulk, but treats these rather in terms of a common trait, bigness, which loans itself to a character assessment. Big becomes what Couser would describe as a "master status" when he argues that the symbolic paradigm "erases individual differences" and reduces "complex humanity to a single (visible) attribute" (22). While *Animal's People* goes to great lengths in differentiating the sick and disabled people who form Animal's community, meretricious outsiders become as homogenous as a herd.

However, within this dominant pattern, it is important to note a few exceptions, as well as to consider the ways in which healthy Khaufpuri allies are marked as different from the big bad lawyers. The journalist who incites the dictation of the novel is described as fat, and is subject to scrutiny and insults because of his fatness, but he is ultimately more naive than truly evil. Otherwise, morally valid healthy characters are marked as not-like the antagonists through their thin bodies. Nisha and Elli are both

characterized as young and slim, as Elli's oft-invoked midriff indicates. Somraj is thin. Zafar is not described as large, and, as I have discussed in the previous section, his credibility increases when he loses weight. Ma Franci has a bony figure. The "power of nothing" that Zafar attributes to the Khaufpuris refers to poverty, but is manifested in the small or lean body as a symbol of self-deprivation or a lack of greed (45). Further, the repeated motif of the smaller body in confrontation with a larger body or force reaffirms the novel's corporeal coding of good and evil. Animal's physical confrontation with Fatlu Inspector and Zafar's hunger strike outside the courthouse have in common that they set a puny, sickly underdog in potentially mortal combat with a bloated establishment. The smaller, sicker body becomes the David in the many David-and-Goliath conflicts of the novel, and is associated with outsize courage through these conflicts.

The healthy bodies of the antagonists of *Animal's People* take on a degree of irony along with their thuggish dimension. The objective of these overly healthy players is to maintain a fiction of health in the wake of pervasive disability, and, even as they are parading their bulk and knocking emaciated protestors on the head, they are also engageing in the generation of official lies to the effect that the Khaufpuris are not disabled, an assertion obviously contradicted by the actualities of Khaufpuri bodies. In the next section, I will consider how the maintenance of the official story of Khaufpur, namely, that the Khaufpuris are not pervasively disabled, becomes absurd in the wake of the proof furnished by the Khaufpuris' bodies, and how the material evidence provided by the disabled body makes it a valuable as a symbol of a traumatic past.

Disabled Bodies as Irrefutable Proof

The disabled collective of *Animal's People* is more than the sum of its parts, but it undoubtedly draws upon its collective clout: while ingenious and coherent leadership are key to the success of Khaufpuri legal resistance, the sheer number of disabled people in Khaufpur also provides a strength to the campaign beyond that of the passion for justice of a few individuals. Disabled bodies provide evidence that is useful for legal resistance, and disabled people provide a compelling impetus to maintain the community's work. If the activists are relentless in evidencing the company's moral and legal culpability, the bodies of the community are, in a passive sense, a relentless evidencing of the past. The company's efforts to deny the extent of Union Carbide's human rights offence become ridiculous in the context of a growing number of disabled Khaufpuris, and official tactics of denying are undermined by a preponderance of disabled bodies. Individual disabled bodies are a site of economic struggle, as disabled people such as Animal struggle to glean a subsistence, but the presence of disabled bodies en masse is a potential asset to the entire community. As Animal explains

> the case against the Kampani had been dragging on endless years. It stood accused of causing the deaths of thousands on that night, plus it ran away from Khaufpur without cleaning its factory, over the years the poisons it left found their way into the wells, everyone you meet seems to be sick. The Khaufpuris were demanding that the Kampani must pay proper compensation to those whose loved ones it killed, whose health it ruined (33).

As Animal's comments suggest, the dead "loved ones" provide emotional motivation in the campaign against the company, and the disabled sick maintain the practical need for compensation payments. Rather than being marginalized as reminders of a collective trauma, disabled people become valuable to the community because they prove what happened "that night."

Further, on the level of the text as a politically-motivated document, disabled characters also function as a proof to the foreign "eyes." While Animal and others listed

to testimony of the suffering body and observe disability within networks of depravation, they create oral testimony for the reader of *Animal's People*. Taken together, the bodies of the novel create a sort of alternate legal dossier, as, rather than documents that suggest a certain version of events, the novel accumulates bodies that indict both the first world reader and the company portrayed in the novel. As such, the evidence of disabled bodies is explored on the level of the text as well as within the text, as images that might have only shock value or metaphoric value are given extrinsic moral significance. Disabled bodies signify themselves, in that they signify the circumstances of disablement, and make an atrocity impossible to ignore or imagine away.

This signification is acted out by many generations of Khaufpuris. Elderly disabled characters such as Hanif Ali and I'm Alive function as the exception that proves the rule in Khaufpur, as their survival of the initial poisoning and subsequent poison sickness is not the norm. I'm Alive in particular is identified with his own surprise at his survival. As he tells others with incredulity at the fact that he has not yet died: "my eyes are failing, chest is bad, plus I don't know how many times in the night I have to get up for the latrine, there is a numbness to the left leg, fingers also tingle" (109). I'm Alive's sense of his survival as an anomaly is fuelled by the deaths of his contemporaries from symptoms of comparable severity. He describes the deaths of his near neighbours, saying "in that house opposite lives Sahara, one day blood came from her womb, it was cancer, forty-six years old she was" and goes on to say of his neighbour Rafi "he is gone too, leaving me to remember him" (109). I'm Alive's memory acts as a sort of oral medical record for those who have died of poisoning.

The young as well as the old are exposed to toxins in Khaufpur, and Sinha often emphasizes the physical sufferings and depravations of the young, be they disabled or

otherwise affected by the toxicity of their environment. One of the most jarring scenes in the novel involves a young mother spilling her breast milk on the ground as her hungry infant looks on; the mother explains that she "won't feed" her "kid poison" in the form of contaminated breast milk (107). Also, the orphan Aliya, as I have already suggested, becomes an exemplar of the compound disadvantages children in Khaufpur inherit, as she both lost her family to the chemicals and is ultimately killed by a fever brought on by chronic poisoning. Her death is perhaps an alternative version of Animal's own story, as he was also orphaned, and survived a poison-related fever as a small child. They share a special report because they have become precociously clever through their experience of the economic implications of orphaning, and the pain caused by untreated illness, which are evidently standard features of the Khaufpuri childhood. The absence of healthy and adequately nurtured children in *Animal's People* underscores the sense that disability is a cradle-to-grave affair in the community. A further emphasis on the destruction of the unborn is important to interpreting the social disturbance wrought by the pesticide leak. Images of miscarriage and infertility arise repeatedly in relation to the poison, as the inability of parents to produce living children becomes as problematic as the inability of children to retain living parents. Damaged fertility is also denoted through menstrual dysfunction, as in Elli's horrified observation that "I see young girls who bleed three times a month, and others who have one period in five months" (332).

Animal's friend Kha-in-the-Jar, who is a two-headed foetus produced by poisoning the maternal body, functions as a mouthpiece for innumerable miscarried foetuses, albeit only through Animal's imaginative intercession (58). Kha tells Animal: "after twenty fucking years nothing did they learn from us except that when you poison people bad things happen. No longer wanted we're, to the incinerator we'd have gone"

(138). Kha-Animal surely speaks for a collective beyond the other pickled foetuses on his laboratory shelf, as he reduces any potential scientific lesson to the simple truth of what violence does to the body. Kha's presence in a medical setting is also strongly indicative of the absurdity of the official evidence-gathering process in Khaufpur. His role as a scientific specimen amounts to a proving the role of pseudo-science in obscuring the obvious fact that the chemicals released in the explosion had, and are continuing to have, terrible human consequences.

When all of the testimony given of and by disabled bodies is taken together, it amounts not only to a negation of official denials of wrongdoing, but a complete discrediting of their sources. While I will discuss Elli's role in catalysing the proof-value of bodies in greater detail in my conclusion, in the following section my focus will be upon the integrated forces of officialdom, including doctors, lawyers, and bureaucrats, and their use of language and especially of written language to try to suppress the truth manifest in Khaufpuri bodies and oral testimony. The perversion of science as a truth-seeking discipline, of medical beneficence, and of due process in law becomes a central source of black humour in *Animal's People,* as Kha, Animal and others respond to lies which are not only unethical but also absurd. Demonized healthy interlopers are paired with language which is as incongruous as healthy bodies in Khaufpur, as they parade excessive health and purvey hoax health.

Hoax Health in Khaufpur

For all his verbosity, Animal's experience in life has made him deeply suspicious of words: this is unsurprising, given that he has grown up in a community that has been in a perpetual struggle against official lies. As Animal notes, "on that night it was poison, now it is words that are choking us" (3). In another metaphor of the mouth, he suggests

the tongue which “has no bone” is excessively flexible in the moral sense (296). This boneless tongue is used by foreign intermediaries to maintain the fiction that the Khaufpuris are healthy, or to suggest that their disabilities can be ascribed to more mundane causes than mass poisoning. The persistent denial of the cause or extent of Khaufpuri disability enables the company not to pay medical compensation to the Khaufpuris: thus, the maintenance of health in name leads to its destruction in practice.

Zafar has a dream in which, in a characteristically heavy-handed bit of symbolism, he envisions a building that represents Union Carbide: one floor of this building is “reserved for the Kampani’s three-and-thirty thousand lawyers” while “another is for doctors doing research to prove that the Kampani’s many accidents have caused no harm to anyone” with another floor for similarly engaged chemists, another for public pundits, and so on (229). The subsuming of doctors into this composite structure suggests the importance of the misrepresentation of disabled bodies to maintaining the official story. *Animal’s People* presents several doctors who, in contrast to Elli, either collude with the company or at least give in to its demands. When the doctors of Khaufpur halt the “thighs-of-fate” injections that prove the antecedents of Khaufpuri disability, or when they hand out aspirin in response to respiratory collapse, they not only fail to provide appropriate care, but also effectively help obscure in official medical records the degree to which the Khaufpuris are affected, as minor interventions suggest minor ailments (112). Their refusal to name disability as such becomes a method of control, as medical denial allows the company to deny the implications of its negligence.

Wealth, or the greed for wealth, provides both the motivation and the justification behind lying about the medical dangers in Khaufpur. Not only the doctors, but a whole network of affluent professionals are party to the information control that,

as Stanley Cohen has argued in his scholarship of mass atrocities, enables the "powerful to go on doing what they have always done" (Cohen 286). The gratuitous or even farcical representation of wealth-as-entitlement is perhaps encapsulated in bulky lawyer who arrives in Khaufpur declaring that

> when you get to my age and you have two Italian greyhounds and you've read as many books as I have, and have as many friends among lawyers and judges, and have won as many cases, you don't have to spend time justifying yourself (307).

The sense of wealth as both justification and prerogative is replicated by the media management of the bureaucrats in Khaufpur who do everything they can to conceal the disaster. This motif of very brazenly lying for money is replicated in the Khaufpur.com website, the address of which is included on the cover page of *Animal's People*. The website parodies an official tourist site, and extols the beauty of Khaufpur while filtering out evidence of the disaster. The readily evident money-making goal of the site is undermined by intimations in the personal pages and classified advertisements that suggest the widespread health problems in the city, and it becomes increasingly obvious as one peruses the site that medical information is being suppressed in favour of potential tourist dollars.

The banality of the company's greed, selfishness, and immoral behaviour in the pursuit of instrumental motives finds its corporeal microcosm in Animal's penis. In an echo of the bulky, healthy lawyers, it is Animal's notably large and robust penis, rather than any of the scarred or disabled parts of his body, that coincides with his immorality, as his expansive sexual appetite seems to push all other moral considerations out of the way. The "deception of the standing cock" other characters in the novel identify with Animal becomes self-deception, as he comes up with increasingly adroit excuses for his own behaviour to justify himself to himself as well as others (122). When Animal

poisons his perceived sexual rival Zafar, or when he engages in peeping tom behaviour involving both Elli and Nisha, he finds ways to describe this behaviour as morally inspired rather than selfish. In one instance, when he is construing his own sexual jealousy as a brotherly desire to safeguard Nisha's chastity, he goes so far as to suggest to himself that "morally, I have no choice but to climb the tree" and look into her window at night (123). When Animal has difficulty reconciling his behaviour to his belief system, he directly invokes the company's example, arguing that "guilt is just a feeling, you can choose not to feel it, how else would the Kampani bosses sleep?" (118). These comments strongly prefigure the head lawyer's non-argument that "you don't have to spend time justifying yourself" (307). While Animal will ultimately contend with his friend Farouq's accusation that "you pretend to be an Animal so that you can escape the responsibility of being human," and will realise that he cannot justify his bad behaviour toward others, the bison-like lawyer is never shown to go through such a reformation (209).

One of this lawyer's coterie, Frank, provides a rather more complex example of disavowal of responsibility, as, rather than explicitly refusing to justify himself, he attempts to do so in hollow terms, which are rendered all the more hollow through their placement within Animal's loquacious narrative. In his encounter with his ex-wife Elli, Frank employs the sort of empty language dissected by Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, a case-study of the process by which average people cooperate in the perpetration of mass atrocities which is set upon the backdrop of the criminal trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1962. Arendt could be addressing Frank when she describes Eichmann as a man who "was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché" and who uses "stock phrases, which constitute his entire lexicon" (46). Over the course of Frank and Elli's hotel encounter, Frank buttresses his clichés with

flattery, affectionate touching, and the guilt pressures of family to try to win Elli over to his side, as he must find routes around his own incapacity to make an intellectually adequate explanation for his own behaviour. Each of Frank's defences relies on what Arendt describes as the "criminal capacity for self-deception" as well as "the aura of systemic mendacity" (52). While Frank presents himself as being frank with Elli, his "lack of imagination" renders his speech as devoid of meaning as the company's slogans, as he tries to shirk the weight of his moral incursion.

Elli offers stories of sick bodies as her defence against Frank's empty language as part of a motif that extends through *Animal's People*. Other references to banal corporate language in *Animal's People* often set it in direct juxtaposition to the actualities of poverty and violence, emphasizing the vapidity of the language that glosses over or justifies the slow violence inflicted upon Khaufpur. The Union Carbide slogans mentioned in Zafar's nightmare, including "SHAKES HANDS WITH THE FUTURE" and "NOBODY CARES MORE," are similar instances of glaringly positive contextless language demarcating the landscape of apocalypse (229). The words that are choking the Khaufpuris are not given their oppressive power through an impressive intellect that lays behind them, but are rather endowed with killing power despite their banality, through the sheer dominance of those who utter or them.

That the Khaufpuris, despite their many levels of disempowerment, are able to mount a substantive resistance to powerful liars depends not only upon the Khaufpuris' relative ingenuity, but also upon their ability to offer up a story that is deeply and obviously rooted in the body. The Khaufpuri resistance functions intratextually as well as on an extratextual level, as both the fact and the fiction of disability experience create an indictment of the representative and the real complacency of those outside the poison city. Mitchell and Snyder argue for the power of literature to bring disabled people into

view, and perhaps to even counteract the erasure of disabled people from other cultural forums. They suggest that "disabled characters fill the pages of literary narrative even as disabled people in society are locked away or sequestered from view," and that literature has the potential to "make disability a socially lived, rather than a purely medical, phenomenon" (*Cultural Locations* 166). In *Animal's People*, we find that literary disability has the power to disrupt the sense of a normal social experience, and that the disabled body brings into clearer focus not only individual disability, but the sort of community experience that is so often elided from public discourse.

Conclusion

Indra Sinha constructs disability as a collective concern and a collective experience, and this might be understood to explode the concept of normalcy in service of a deeply politicized fiction. Beyond his straightforward agitation on behalf of the real city of Bhopal (which is fictionalized but recognizable in the imaginary city of Khaufpur) Sinha creates in this fiction a subtler challenge to contemporary global distributions of power through the disability-centric community he imagines. Sinha posits a world in which disability is not peripheral, but, rather, in which the direct or indirect experience of disability is prerequisite for membership in the imagined community. The nuances of this community, and the experiential criteria which separate the members from the outliers, are deeply revealing of a potential disability politics which is rooted in the material immediacies of the third world, as well as the disparities of global politics.

Chapter 5: Unaccommodating Fictions: Disability and the Politics of Failure in Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow*

> Being able-bodied means being capable of the physical exertions required in a particular system of labour (McRuer 8).

> The bitter demonology that surrounded Thatcher emerged from outrage at her perceived failures and, more accurately, out of the change that the new, undeniably better, life which Thatcherism brought to so many demanded from them. It was the most dangerous change to demand from anybody – a change in self image. Britons were being asked to admit that they wanted more money, that risk, competition and even failure are part of success, that being decent is not a substitute for working hard, that welfare benefits come not from a mythical state but from the pockets of those who work for their money (248).

The first epigraph is taken from the introductory chapter of Robert McRuer's 2006 text *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* in which he argues that there is a strong connection between discourses of sexual orientation and those of able-bodiedness, and proposes a reading practice he calls "cripping" as a potential outgrowth of queer theory. McRuer draws on Judith Butler to suggest that, in tandem with compulsory heterosexuality, compulsory able-bodiedness requires a performance that can never quite be achieved, as all adherents fall short of the able-bodied, heterosexual ideal: he notes that "Butler's theory of gender trouble might be resignified in the context of queer/disability studies" to "highlight" the ways in which ablebodied heterosexuality is both compulsory and impossible (10). This unattainable ideal, which unites a paradigm of embodiment with sexuality, is enmeshed with the ideal of normalcy described by Davis. McRuer contends that, like heterosexuality, the performance of normalcy is both amorphous and ubiquitous: "if it's hard to deny that

something called normalcy exists, it's even harder to pinpoint exactly what it is" (7). At the margins surrounding able-bodied normalcy, McRuer finds a compelling critique of the ever fluctuating able-bodied heterosexual ideal. He suggests that a marginal disabled-and-queer "crip" position is a particularly apt vantage for a contestation of contemporary permutations of heterosexual ablebodiedness as well as its political manifestations, arguing that "crip theory" can speak "back to both nondisabled and disabled liberalism and, even more important, to nondisabled and disabled neoliberalism" (41). McRuer contends that "crip experiences and epistemologies should be central to counter neoliberalism and access alternative ways of being" (41-42).

Gay and disabled writer Firdaus Kanga does not use his marginal position to critique neoliberalism, however; he instead uses his marginality to zealously affirm right-wing politics. The second epigraph above is taken from his 1991 travel memoir *Heaven on Wheels* (1991), which is in large part a discussion of what he considers the panacea-like promise of Margaret Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister. In *Heaven on Wheels,* Kanga establishes himself as a highly qualified proponent of capitalism and competition precisely because he is gay and disabled: rather than the critique of neoliberalism rooted in the different body advocated by McRuer, Kanga takes the stance of authority in validating political hegemony in a rhetoric that is rooted in both his sexuality and his body. The political obsession of *Heaven on Wheels* is nascent as a personal politics and domestic ethos in Kanga's earlier novel, *Trying to Grow*, in which the central protagonist Brit establishes himself as a writer and as a man through his superior fortitude, as measured against able-bodied others in his midst. This earlier novel shows in the germ a disability politics that shores up and validates hegemonic standards of economic competition and cultural valuation within a recognizably neoliberal paradigm. Through his passionately elitist narrator Brit, Kanga presents a

new version of ability in which fortitude of mind and spirit are prioritized over the able body, and which represents a vision of neoliberal masculinity in which qualities of mind and character become the sole determinants of success. Kanga toys with ideas of normalcy in relation to ideas of capitalism, retaining the sense that capitalism is best for individual and collective progress, but revising the implication of this ideology for disabled people. While Davis has suggested that the norm was "meant to apply not only to moral qualities but to the body as well," we see in Kanga an attempt to extract a moral from a physiological ideal (*Enforcing Normalcy* 25-26).

In this chapter I will consider Kanga's politics of authorship and success, as well as his version of failure, in the semi-autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow*, while making secondary reference to the non-fiction memoir *Heaven on Wheels*, as well as a variety of Kanga's other journalistic writings. I will consider Kanga's gay and disabled (as opposed to crip/queer) politics through the lens of disability scholarship which has focused on how regimes of normalcy have morphed but remained recognisable in the neoliberal era, with reference to the idea of tolerance described by McRuer, and the apologetics of diversity as critiqued by Davis in *The End of Normal: Identity in a Biocultural Era*. As Davis argues in that text, while the valorisation of difference in recent decades may seem to completely efface or replace the ideal of normalcy, this valuation actually depends upon the elision of certain differences, as "what is suppressed from the imaginary of diversity, a suppression that actually puts neoliberal diversity into play, are various forms of inequality, notably economic inequality, as well as the question of power" (13). A particularly consistent elision, Davis argues, is that state of inequality of health or the powerless body, the disabled body. Thus, in its omission from a discourse of diversity, disability becomes "an atavism representing the remainder of normal at the end of the normal" (14). However, rather than critiquing

power from such a vestigial periphery, Kanga inserts himself at the centre of such a discourse by reimagining the location of power in terms of gumption and creativity, and by evidencing power and equality in the form of a series of triumphs over other men. Thus, I will consider Kanga's representation of authorial, sexual, and economic success in terms of the failures of able-bodied men in *Trying to Grow*, and will argue that, within an imaginary that includes gay rights, disability rights, and feminism, Kanga zealously affirms the terms of a politics of ability and achievement that have been identified by disability scholars.

Introduction to Firdaus Kanga and *Trying to Grow*

In both his fictional and his nonfictional works, Kanga disrupts any piety surrounding disability, and especially rejects the mode of asexual objectification repeatedly elucidated by Garland-Thompson, as he writes sexually voracious, not to mention unforgiving, critical, elitist, and egoistic narrators. Kanga and his narrator Brit could be said to outdo Animal for sex drive and Saleem for egocentricity, in fact. Owing to the autobiographical or semiautobiographical turn in some of his works, Kanga's biography is relevant to reading these texts. Kanga, a Parsi who grew up in Bombay, began his career in India as a journalist publishing stories in Indian magazines, and later emigrated to the United Kingdom following the publication of his two full-length works, the semi-autobiographical novel *Trying to Grow* (1989) and the travel memoir *Heaven on Wheels* (1991). Of the two works, *Trying to Grow* has been the more important in terms of breaking taboos surrounding disability as well as homosexuality, and has also garnered greater recognition for its literary execution. While *Heaven on Wheels* has remained relatively more obscure, and was perhaps something of a career-killer, *Trying to Grow* had a high-profile afterlife when it was adapted into a full-length

BFI/BBC film, *Sixth Happiness*, for which Kanga wrote the film script, and in which he played the starring role.

Trying to Grow is a bildungsroman that explores Brit's experience of growing up in Bombay in the 1970s and 1980s, and is as much about his family's response to his disability as his physical and social experience of his own body. *Trying to Grow* tells the story of Brit's emergence as a writer through the crucible of his struggles against his father's anti-disability bias, his realisation that he is bisexual in a deeply homophobic society, and his fight for economic autonomy. The underlying argument of *Trying to Grow* is that Brit's childhood and adolescent difficulties equip him with the fierce honesty and independence of mind that literary production require. Brit establishes his toughness as a writer in the self-description that marks the dénouement of *Trying to Grow*, as he appropriates the language of ridicule and ostracism to describe his own body. Brit looks in the mirror "long and hard" and provides the following unabashed and brutal description of his own body:

> My neck squat as a toad's and my hollow shoulders, one higher than the other like Richard the Third's, my ribcage thrust forward so that it bulged at the centre and sloped down at the sides, and below that my legs thin as a famine child's, the shins bowed as if some kid had plastered on some clay as a joke, an afterthought (200).

Brit's inclusion of the most detailed description of his body at the end rather than the beginning of the narrative creates in that body an object that is processed by his narrative ability, rather than a literary prosthesis that will compel narrative. Especially when this description is read in the light of the many descriptions of male beauty that pepper the text, the brutality of Brit's characterization of his body is heightened through the contrast with the other bodies of *Trying to Grow*. Description here is an act of self-procession, as, rather than the body described presenting a reason to read Brit's story, Brit has told the story of how he has become qualified to describe his body.

Kanga's non-fictional writing establishes an intriguing set of tangencies between the real Firdaus Kanga and the fictional Brit Kotwal. *Heaven on Wheels* begins with an introductory vignette of Kanga's first trip to a Tesco supermarket, and, while grocery shopping, Kanga explains that he made his trip the United Kingdom to meet the publisher of *Trying to Grow*, and explicitly contextualizes the continuities between the real Firdaus Kanga and the fictional Brit Kotwal. The first third of *Heaven on Wheels* is set in London, and depicts Kanga making good on Brit's anglophile tendency as he fawns on his publishers and various others of the British literati. Kanga also expresses shock at the disjuncture between his imaginary England, which is very similar to Brit's, and the actualities of the metropolis. The disjuncture between Kanga's anglophile dreams and the reality are further explored in the second portion of the book, the titular "Heaven on Wheels" section, in which Kanga recounts travel through the United Kingdom. Concerns that are evident in *Trying to Grow* are taken up as foci of *Heaven on Wheels*. These include the experience of being gay in the city; accommodations for, and attitudes toward, disability; authoritarian governments and the deleterious spread of socialism; and British literary history. The overlapping of Brit and Kanga's characters is most readily evident in their unanimous rebellion against the cultural establishments that, while seeming to offer help through cooperation, actually threaten circumscribe his literary and sexual potential.

Beyond the piquancy of Kanga's toying with the relationship between his self and his protagonist, there is a more pertinent question raised by the entanglement of Brit Kotwal with Firdaus Kanga through *Heaven on Wheels*: can *Trying to Grow* be read as a disability memoir, or can life-writing scholarship have degree of credence in interpreting the novel? Couser, a scholar of disability memoir, has described memoir as involving an implicit contract or at least a premise of trust between the reader and the

author, which obliges the writer to a pattern of fidelity to factual truth; while this fidelity is not entirely present in *Trying to Grow*, it is not entirely absent, and the differences between Brit's and Kanga's life stories are glossed by Kanga in *Trying to Grow*, as well as in his journalistic writings. While one could not classify this semi-autobiographical novel as a memoir, Kanga's indication of truth or veiled truth in *Trying to Grow* does loan itself to an analysis which is cognizant of or engages with this dimension of the text. Considering *Trying to Grow* through the lens of Couser's scholarship of disability life-writing is thus appropriate as well as a potentially illuminating way to consider the secondary generic affinities of this novel.

In his most recent book on disability and life-writing, Couser considers the "much-ballyhooed" rise of the so-called "nobody memoir," which he provocatively suggests is "in effect *constituted* by disability, the different body," in an observation which is an outgrowth of Mitchell and Snyder's foundational assertion that the irregular body has been endowed with a particular potential to compel narrative (2). Couser argues that, while formerly memoir depended upon the fame or the accomplishment of its subject personality, the recent turn has been to the unique physicality to compel both the writing and circulation of life stories. Couser takes this observation further to argue that the flourishing of the "some body" (as opposed to "somebody") memoir has both antecedents and ongoing implications within the civil rights struggles of disabled people, and suggests that "disability life-writing has not sprung up in a cultural or legal vacuum but rather responded to, and helped to create, greater opportunity and access to public life" (5). He develops this observation into a comparative analysis of the legal evolution of disability rights alongside life-writing in later chapters. With few exceptions, Couser focuses upon American life-writing and the American legal and social context to provide a coherent reading of disability memoir within a bounded

political context. This national focus comes coupled with a demographic focus that Couser suggests he cannot avoid: as he notes in his 1997 *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life-writing*, "those who produce narratives of illness and disability are not very diverse in terms of race and class. They tend to be white and upper middle class" (4). Despite the pertinence of Couser's scholarship for reading Kanga, then, differences imposed by Kanga's nationality and ethnic status must be given due consideration.

Couser engages in borrowings from other scholars which complicate a reading of Kanga's oeuvre through his criticism, but this complication is fruitful rather than deleterious. Couser repeatedly invokes the work of Mary Louise Pratt, adopting her observations of what she describes as the "autoethnographic" in postcolonial writing in his analysis of disability life-writing. Couser contends that

> like other postcolonial subjects, disabled people are beginning to produce texts that are autoethnography in the senses of ethnographic autobiography and native anthropology – texts that explore the creation of identity within particular subcultures and texts that contextualize the way the author's community is characterized from the outside (95).

As I detailed in my introduction, Mark Sherry has suggested that appropriations of postcolonial scholarship for disability scholarship can be read as inherently problematic. Beyond this, a reading of *Trying to Grow* and Kanga's work more generally through the observation of this "decolonizing" impulse in disability life-writing is complicated by the fact that Kanga performs this autoethnographic function in more traditionally postcolonial terms as well. Kanga represents Parsi identity for a British audience while he is representing disabled identity for an able-bodied audience, and the impel of the novel, even if rooted primarily in Brit's "some body" qualifications, owes something to his ethnic difference as well. Characters in *Trying to Grow* (and even more so in *Heaven on Wheels*) become corollaries for a larger

precedent of misjudgement of what it means to be disabled or what it means to be Parsi, and many scenes of combative dialogue are evidently in the service of debunking assumptions of able-bodied or Parsi experience. Pratt's definition of the word "autoethnography" thus applies very well to Kanga's spokesmanship for the Parsi community. Pratt describes autoethnography as referring to

> instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations (7).

Kanga's double ethnographic aims are again complicated by the third of his minority statuses, his homosexuality. In addition to reading disability through the glyph of postcoloniality, Couser draws upon the work of scholar Ken Plummer to establish parallels between narratives of becoming disabled to coming out stories. In his *Telling Sexual Stories* Plummer suggests that coming out stories are part of a larger wave of sexual storytelling, and that the proliferation of first-person sexual narratives was part of a general "crumbling" of "natural hierarchies of order and dominance" and the sense of having a "fixed place in the world" (151). Plummer suggests that sexual stories may be read along the lines of the inauguration of a new dimension of rights discourse, which focuses upon the "most intimate desires, pleasures and ways of being in the world" (151). Plummer could be talking of disability as easily as sexual diversity when he writes that "now the stories of what we do with our bodies" have "firmly entered the agenda of politics and daily life" and that, within an era of political change that focuses upon the most intimate experience of the body, "new narratives of the body are in the making" (156). The many very intimate scenes of *Trying to Grow* can be read very provocatively along these lines, and can be argued broadly to suggest through the immediacy of sex the potential for equality, or rather, for equal competition, across

differences in sexual orientation as well as differences in ability. I will return to this line of inquiry in the section of this chapter which focuses upon the relationship between Brit and Cyrus.

Reading *Trying to Grow* through the lens of disability memoir, then, is complicated by the fact that Kanga engages with minority memoir on multiple levels. His articulation of an ethos of neoliberal competition tends to be amplified by his triple minority statuses, as he is triply disadvantaged, and thus triply qualified to decry those who flounder despite their advantages. The ruthless honesty Kanga or Brit unleashes upon himself in the description of his own body in *Trying to Grow* is validating, as it indicates his willingness to be completely frank about the intimacies of his own body, as well as what he elsewhere represents as a marginal sexual and national status. However, the authorial ruthlessness Brit validates in self-characterization as he attacks what he sees to be his innate disadvantages or shortcomings is also often directed outwards, at those the fictional Brit finds to be life failures. While Brit succeeds despite adversity, he depicts others as failing because of weakness of character. His stance in terms of disability politics, autoethnography, and sexual storytelling is thus unified along the lines of the possibility that character is proved through competition, and that the disabled man with enough pluck can outdo straight and ablebodied cowards. His writing back to the metropolis, or the heterosexual, or the ablebodied interlocutor takes the form of a study of failure in others as measured against his own hard won success.

In the sections that follow, I will consider how failure is represented in *Trying to Grow* in terms of two of Brit's key mentors, Sam and Cyrus, as well as in two key themes of the novel, sex and money. As Brit narrates the failures of those around him, what emerges is a procrustean standard or a norm against which he is willing to measure others brutally and to which he holds himself accountable. This standard is one

of character rather than embodiment, but Brit's qualification to judge others against his standard is rooted in his disabled body. While *Trying to Grow* has moments of tenderness and delicacy, what ultimately emerges is a brutal contest in which the best men win. In my analysis of the politics of failure in *Trying to Grow*, I will consider how some of its themes are re-emergent in Kanga's political expostulation in *Heaven on Wheels*, in which the brutal honesty about individual character presented in *Trying to Grow* has evolved into brutal honesty about a nation's character and politics.

The Adversarial Caregiving Family

Trying to Grow focuses on relationships, and the character studies of the novel are often an outgrowth of Brit's relationships with his many caregivers. As Brit is physically fragile in his childhood and remains small as an adult, and because he lives in a city without significant disability infrastructure, he is accompanied almost continuously by aides and caregivers. During Brit's early childhood and adolescence, these caregivers are Brit's family members, whose caregiving role provides a formative context for Brit. During Brit's early years these caregiving relationships are not only practical but are also emotional in nature, as he depends upon his parents and sister for guidance as well as for forward propulsion. However, there is a great deal of dissonance in the emotional help provided by Brit's family, as, while he engages in constructive relationships with the women in his household, his relationship with his father is for the most part adversarial. As he matures, Brit becomes increasingly able to defeat his father in battles of will and to rebut his father's frequent discouragement, and manages to maintain an increasingly high degree of intellectual autonomy despite practical dependence.

Brit's father, Sam, stands in stark contrast to the very courageous caregiving of his wife and Brit's mother, Sera, whose strength and tenacity perhaps upsets gendered

expectations. The tenor of Sera's caregiving is established in the scene of Brit's birth, when, as the doctor explains Brit's prognosis and litanies the difficulties he and the Kotwal family can expect, she breaks into unstoppable laughter both at his dour pessimism and at the face of her funny-looking new-born. Throughout Brit's childhood, Sera will continue to defend him from the insults of the medical establishment as she rebuts the doctors and religious healers who want to affect a cure upon her incurably disabled child. Where Sam bows under the weight of his existential concerns for Brit, Sera focuses upon the practicalities of his existence. Although Brit often refers to her fortitude as her "brave act" to mean it is a bit of a performance, Sera becomes all the more valorous in his eyes for supressing her frustrations and doubts so that she can provide constant support. She is perhaps the prototype for the valorous Margaret Thatcher of *Heaven on Wheels*, as both characters scorn melodrama, espouse and demonstrate frugality, and discipline others in self-reliance. Sera is so consistently valorised in Brit's narrative that her complexity as a character is quite limited, and she functions primarily as the gold standard by which Sam fails.

Dolly, Brit's older sister, is also established as a contrast to Sam, but, unlike Sera, evolves as a character as she and Brit grow up in a mutually constitutive caregiving relationship. As children, Brit and Dolly both take advantage of one another, and manipulate expectations about caregiving transactions. Brit's name, "Brit," is actually in part a taunt Dolly offered him at birth, as it refers to both his brittle bones and Great Britain (25). Dolly also abuses Brit's trust when he is a child and she encourages him to drink carbonated water at a canteen, with the result of his getting the hiccups and breaking two ribs (29). On a later occasion, Brit blackmails Dolly into not going on a date, with the motivation of "enforcing my rights" to prevent potential marriage and thereby keep her in the family home to provide care (55). However, for

both Dolly and Brit, this sort of childish selfishness gives way as they grow up, and for Brit in particular a relinquishing of his presumed right to Dolly's labour is a turning point in his maturation and development. His resolute hope that Dolly will not marry and leave the Kotwal household eventually gives way to a role reversal, in which he convinces her that she ought to leave her caregiving role in favour of a distant suitor (139). Dolly's exit is key to her own maturation as well as Brit's, as she becomes an adult by pursuing her own happiness, and leaving off the roles of doting daughter to Sam and caregiver to Brit. This is a reversal of the pattern identified by Judith Feder and Carol Levine, who have noted that many representations of women in caregiving roles employ the type of the "saintly caregiver" who proves her worth by choosing self-abnegation and poverty as they are subsumed by a caregiving role (118). Dolly is depicted as being in the right when she does exactly the opposite, leaving Brit to make his own way as she leaves to build a life for herself.

Sam, unlike Dolly and Sera, is not successful in establishing boundaries between his identity and that of his son, and gives in to the sort of blurring of identities or over-identification with Brit that his wife and daughter both successfully avoid. While from the moment of Brit's birth Sera and Dolly are shown to find humour in Brit's disability, Sam is already defensive and sensitive about his son's body: when Dolly suggests that they "call him Brit! That's short for brittle" Sam argues back that "that's very cruel" because "you don't call a Mongol kid Mong," by which he evidently means a child with Down syndrome (27). Sam then bends "over the cradle" to kiss "his fractured hopes" (196). Sam's mixture of sympathy and disappointment becomes an ongoing problem as Brit grows, as Sam remains in a static state of inadaptability, shame, and disbelief as regards his son's disability. The scale of the tragedy Sam perceives is most readily evident in a later scene in which he comforts his neighbour

Jeroo, who has lost her deaf daughter to a human trafficking scheme: Sam implies a symmetry between Jeroo's inability to adjust to the permanent loss of her daughter Tina, and his own inability, many years after Brit's birth, to accept that he has "a son who's a stunted cripple" (39).

Sam's disappointment is based in the desire for a very specific mode of professional, generational progress within a father-and-son relationship, and Sam's perceiving what he takes to be regression in that relationship instead. This desire for success in and through progeny is readily evident in other fictional fathers and sons in the novels of this study. Ten Kortenaar has described *Midnight's Children* as representing the desire of parents for vicarious success, as the parents of the novel "want their children not merely to replicate themselves" but "to be better than they are" (65). Although this desire is expressed on a rather more modest scale in Mistry's fiction, it is readily evident in the many fathers who pressure their sons into what they perceive to be better careers. Ten Kortenaar suggests that representations of father-to-son or father-through-son progress are coded in "the language of investment" and that "in the capitalist world" such language presumes "change is expected and expected to be progress" (65). While Ahmed, Gustad, Farokh, and many other parents have economic hope for their children, Sam perceives his hope for his son to be categorically nullified by the fact of Brit's disability.

Sam's obsession with what he perceives to be Brit's lack of earning potential is especially interesting given that the Kotwal family has a good financial endowment through the maternal line. While Sam is only a modest earner, the family has enough money through Sera to provide for Brit's needs indefinitely. Thus, Sam's perpetual sorrow that his son cannot compete is based in abstract desire rather than practicality. Brit, as I will discuss at greater length in the next section, wholeheartedly absorbs this

desire for career success and money that extends beyond a practical need for the same, but differs from his father in that he believes he can achieve. It is not the challenge of capitalism that hurts Brit, but his own father's attempts to remove him from career aspiration and valuation. Brit recounts how, when one party guest asks what Brit means to make his profession, Sam jumps to deflect the question with a humiliating degree of vigour, saying "don't be ridiculous" and "life's tough enough for him as it is. I've said that a million times. How on earth do you think he can go out and compete with all these young men bursting with energy?" (81). Sam very tellingly parodies Brit's life options by suggesting that Brit might, like his father, "find a rich wife" (80). In a later scene Brit confronts Sam with the sort of comments he has apparently made "a million times," and tells his father that Sam's protective discouragement has made him feel as if he "weren't a man" and "had no business being alive" (125).

However, Brit does not give in to feelings that he has "no business being alive;" Sam does. Sam's ultimate suicide can be read as an inversion of many available models of disability narrative, as, following his catalytic function in Brit's life, and because of his inability to cope with the fact of Brit's disability, Sam dies. A reading through Mitchell and Snyder's theory of *Narrative Prosthesis* might enable an interpretation of Sam as the character who is marked from the novel's opening scene:

> the (re) mark upon disability begins with a stare, a gesture of disgust, a slander or derisive comment upon bodily ignominy, a note of gossip about a rare or unsightly presence, a comment about the unsuitability of deformity for the appetites of polite society, or a sentiment about the unfortunate circumstances that bring disabilities into being (55).

When we are introduced to Sam through Brit's narration, we see Sam's superstitious weakness rather than Brit's deformity becoming the primary target of slander and derisive comments. The novel begins on a bus, where Sam shares the story of his son

with another Parsi commuter. However, despite Sam's efforts to draw attention to his disabled son, it is Sam who bears the brunt of his interlocutor's judgement:

> 'Shame on you!' insisted the old man. 'Educated, speaking English so well and going to a mumbo-jumbo Baba.'
>
> Father laughed. 'If my old school friends could see me doing this they'd jump out of their tailored suits. So would I, if I didn't know how desperate a man could get.'

Sam's desperation rather than Brit's disability is marked as the "socially anomalous" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 55). This is not to suggest that Brit does not also experience his disability as a stigmatized position over the course of *Trying to Grow*; but it is Sam's sometimes pathetic desperation that presents the (mere) device which is used to compel narrative, and then ultimately destroyed or corrected in the mode Mitchell and Snyder have identified. Sam's weakness "inaugurates narrative" but is ultimately eliminated as "narrative punishes its own prurient interests by overseeing the extermination of the object of its fascination" (*Narrative Prosthesis* 57). Handsome and weak-willed Sam's difference, not only from the rest of the Kotwal household, but from the educated middle class he is a part of, is the compelling human difference which is examined and then eliminated in *Trying to Grow*.

Sam's death is also interesting in that it is framed as an escape from misery and worry. In suggesting what lay behind Sam's decision to try to cross a busy street blindfolded the day after Dolly's wedding, Brit directly suggests that the emotional demands of caregiving, within the context of a difficult life and a fragile character, prompted Sam's suicidal act:

> He had been on his own almost all his life. He'd been through school and climbed up the bank ladder, met Sera and had me, which was harder than climbing. And he'd fought, sure as Sera had fought but without her brave act to keep him safe. Because he never stopped feeling; he couldn't pretend to himself that everything was all right. Maybe he looked at life too straight.

> I knew how he must have felt. Being able to shut his eyes and move, for once. Without worrying whether Sera would go off balance or Brit would break a leg or he'd lose that new job which paid him half of what he used to get at the bank. Such fun, such bliss. I mean, there's only so much you can go through. After that you've got to take a break (169).

While Brit is not an active agent in Sam's suicide, he does go through apologia or a justification process that is an echo of narratives in which the disabled person is killed, or in which the disabled person's suicide is explained. In her study of the caregiver of *The Fruit of the Tree*, who ultimately kills her paraplegic charge, Garden has noted that "ending suffering by eliminating the person who suffers is a common justification for euthanasia," but here we find a similar energy expressed in the suicide of the caregiver who cannot cope (227). Couser notes that in euthnography life-writing, which narrates the decision to remove life-support or otherwise "euthanize" a severely disabled relative, real-life caregivers provide "an elaborate defence of a painful choice" to enable the death of somebody close to them who has become disabled; here, we see Brit providing an elaborate defence of Sam's choice to die (126). This continuity between the life-writing and the novel becomes more compelling when considered in light of the fact that Kanga's real-life father Jamshed also killed himself. Brit's reading of Sam's suicide as an act of forgivable cowardice or excessive sensitivity, and especially using the justification involving education and the marketplace Brit has provided, carries with it an implicit comparison, as Sam cannot tolerate the adversity that Brit can.

Aside from this act of self-directed violence, however, Sam does most often lash out at Brit to express his frustration, and thus becomes as much a source of adversity for Brit as Brit is for him. Sam's intentional verbal attacks and accidental gaffes are too numerous to count, as they punctuate almost every interaction between father and son. Sam's indirect physical abuse of his son through doctors is an important theme which I will address in my conclusion. The most important conflict between Sam and Brit in

Trying to Grow is the scene in which Sam physically punishes Brit by spanking him; it is a scene in which Sam attempts to assert his authority over his son, but which actually enables Brit to assert his toughness. "Sam," Brit tells us, "had been really mad" over some childish mischief:

> Then he spanked me and spanked me and spanked me and said I was cheeky, and I said 'is that all? I'm not scared, you know.' I really wasn't because spanking was to a fracture what a firework is to the A-bomb. Besides, I wanted to laugh, because every time Sam brought his hand down he hesitated, looking for a target that wouldn't crack (52).

The spanking is formative for Brit, but not in the way that Sam had intended. Rather than Brit's learning his place in the sense of learning that his father is an authority figure, Brit sees his father's hesitation and uncertainty about how to handle his disabled son as comedic. Brit masters the situation, and this represents a turning point in the novel as, while Sam's verbal abuse of Brit continues after this scene, Brit is less and less discouraged or affected by it. As Sam says, Brit proves he is capable of "taking it like a man," but Brit simultaneously has the insight that his father does not have comparable fortitude (52).

Brit's disappointment with his father as a caregiver is echoed in Kanga's commentary about the caregivers he meets in Great Britain in *Heaven on Wheels*. However, while Brit's father is at times presented in a relatively sympathetic light, the dogged caregivers or depressed adults in England who cannot cope with their domestic roles are mocked quite straightforwardly. One homeless woman tells Kanga and his personal assistant Juice about her sufferings and ill luck, causing Kanga to laugh "in a gush" when she appeals to him for sympathy (124). In another instance, an Italian woman recounts with anguish how her mentally disabled daughter "'bangs her head like this'" causing the Italian woman to "'cry and cry and cry,'" Kanga and Juice once again make her the butt of a joke (232). By contrast, Kanga is generous in his depictions of

the Sera Kotwols of *Heaven on Wheels*, as he praises their ability to manage their disabled children without giving in to despair or requiring outside help. In one scene in a restaurant, Kanga observes "a family with two sons and the older son was paralysed," and praises their ease and integration in the social setting (210). He also shares the story of Andrew, a hotel clerk who explains how his family takes care of one disabled brother: "he is spastic and severely retarded. My brothers and I do everything for him, we love him as much as we can. We all chip in, we'd never put him away" (195). Kanga's complaint in *Heaven on Wheels* that "growing up disabled, you get fed up with people asking you to be brave, as if you have a courage account on which you are too lazy to draw a cheque" could be judged to be hypocritical in light of his own expectation of infinite courage and fortitude from those who give care (253).

These very obvious straw men of *Heaven on Wheels* may offer an insight into Sam's role in re-presenting disability politics through Kanga's eyes. Sam can be read as something of a reader substitute, in that he perpetually articulates stereotypes and assumptions about disability which Brit then goes on to refute in word and deed. Sam's depressing assumptions about Brit's future are a received imaginary which Brit resists through argument, and which he disproves by authoring *Trying to Grow*. Brit's self-representation and self-assertion is thus at play on two levels, as he gets the better of Sam within the moment he narrates as well as by narrating the moment, and in so doing not only disproves his father's assumptions, but those of the able-bodied audience Sam represents. As Couser argues with regards to disabled writers, "insofar as they initiate and control their own representation, they become less vulnerable subjects. Indeed, their narratives seek to reduce their vulnerability to pre-inscribed narrative" (*Signifying* 18). Brit narrates Sam's vulnerability in opposition to his own gumption, and in so doing, makes himself less vulnerable to the sorts of assumptions Sam represents.

That Brit can, in fact, compete with the young men Sam identifies as "bursting with energy" is demonstrated through the character of Cyrus, who arrives in *Trying to Grow* just as Sam's influence upon Brit is beginning to wane. In the following section, I will discuss Cyrus's role in Brit's emergence as an autonomous man and a writer. Aside from his sexual relationship with Brit, Cyrus engages with him as both a mentor and a competitor, and effectively proves to Brit that he can compete with an able-bodied male. Cyrus enters *Trying to Grow* as an object of sexual interest, but his and Brit's relationship increasingly becomes a proving ground for Brit, who progresses from boyish adulation of Cyrus to intellectual independence through their love and rivalry. The possibility of equality and competition despite a great disparity in the two men's physical strength and social status becomes the proof against Sam's despair.

Cyrus and Validation

Although Cyrus does not arrive until the second section of *Trying to Grow*, his emergence is anticipated in the descriptions of the body that riddle the first section of the novel. Brit's interest in strong male bodies is established from the first pages of the narrative, in which he admires the "dong" of both a faith-healer (5) and a *Playgirl* model (7). The child Brit is both an admirer of male beauty and aware of what he perceives as his own lack of the same, and, even as he admires the male body as an observer, he registers a mixture of jealousy and desire when he is made to compare his own disabled body with the "firm little hips" and "strong, straight chests" of other children (45). Yet, Brit's childish envy is always less intense than the feelings Brit ascribes to Sam, who indulges fantasies of an imaginary son:

> "I can't quite believe Brit is the way he is. I keep thinking, I know it sounds stupid, but I keep thinking that one day the real Brit will jump out of his body; a Brit who's six feet tall with long legs that he swings in great strides." Sam smiled a helpless smile (97).

When the very image of this imaginary Brit arrives in the Kotwol household, it is little wonder Brit's reaction is conflicted. Cyrus both gives Brit a sexual thrill, and makes him jealous. Brit's reaction to Cyrus is a mixture of hope and self-consciousness; for every physical characteristic Brit admires in Cyrus, he finds in his own body its anti-type. Brit meets "this six-feet-tall guy" and his first response it to turn "my chair so he wouldn't be able to see my legs" (107). Brit watches Cyrus "smile with every sturdy white tooth in his mouth" and becomes too self-conscious to smile back: "I saw my lantern-jawed grin in the mirror and turned it off" (108). Yet, the asymmetry that Brit feels so keenly is exactly what Cyrus manages to dispel: when his aunt introduces Brit as a "poor, handicapped boy," Cyrus immediately contradicts her, and soon takes Brit on as a protégé, proving to Brit that, although he is handicapped, he does not need to be poor (108).

Cyrus's apprenticeship of Brit begins with slavish imitation on Brit's part. Brit tells us of how he "stopped reading poetry" because Cyrus does not like poetry: "there wasn't any point going crazy over beautiful stanzas if I couldn't share them with Cyrus" (115). Brit announces, to his parents' delight, that he means to study law so that he can become a solicitor rather than pursuing his writing, a decision perhaps prompted by Cyrus's comment that writers "drag their feelings up a hill and let go. What you read is the crash" (111). Cyrus's later admission that he gave up a promising career as a violinist to pursue law because "fighting cases would satisfy my brain more than making music" underscores Brit's eventual return to writing, the pursuit he finds intellectually satisfying (135). However, Brit's return to the page comes with an important difference, as, while before he met Cyrus he looked to literature for emotional fulfilment, Brit is newly engaged with writing as a way of making money. Brit's assertion that "I'm a man just like Cyrus is a man" comes only a few paragraphs

before his recollection of writing and selling his first story: “I wrote a story about a man who discovers he’s the last leaf on the tree. It got published and I got the cheque” (157).

Brit’s growing success as a writer is key to the second of his triumphs in *Trying to Grow*: Brit’s appropriation of Cyrus’s girlfriend, Amy, is a victory which grows out of his and Amy’s common love of books. This girlfriend theft takes place within a very unorthodox love triangle, as Cyrus, after leaving off homosexual activities with Brit, begins bringing Brit along on his and Amy’s dates because he thinks the pair are better suited to one another. Yet, this honourable or magnanimous act on Cyrus’s part never quite crosses the line into charity, because Cyrus does nothing to facilitate the pairing beyond bringing the two similar minds together, and tolerating a great deal of rudeness from Brit before Brit realizes his true feelings for Amy. Brit’s dislike of Amy is based in the fact that she has stolen Cyrus, and Brit’s eventual affection for Amy is based in her association with Cyrus, as he informs her quite directly during an argument: “why do you think I want you? Because you are Cyrus’s girl. I can’t have him, so I’ll settle for next best” (212). While other instances in the text suggest Brit has a more direct affection for Amy, the fact remains that her value is increased in his eyes because of her previous relationship. Brit’s jealousy of and love for Cyrus are both at play in his attraction to Amy, as Brit makes clear when he watches Amy and Cyrus kissing: “if I were him, just a little like him” (197).

However, Amy, for her part, chooses Brit out of sheer admiration, and specifically expresses this admiration through a metaphorical comparison when she tells Brit that he is “a lot bigger than many people, maybe even Cyrus” (197). Amy’s validation of Brit depends, once more, upon the presence of the able-bodied young man, whose availability as a romantic alternative is the most important context of Brit and Amy’s relationship. Cyrus enables Brit’s answer to Sam, who has previously joked

about Brit's finding a wife, and has informed Brit very directly that he would never succeed in finding a sexual partner. While the attraction between Cyrus and Brit is genuinely sexual, I might suggest that the final bonding between Amy and Brit reads as though it may have more to do with competition than sex: when the book closes, Cyrus has departed, and Brit has apparently achieved the heterosexual relationship and financial independence that he was told by Sam that he never would. This is enormously satisfying for Brit.

The ending of *Trying to Grow* is all but "a textbook example" of what McRuer has described as "heteronormative epiphanies," but with one difference: while McRuer notes that disabled characters most often play a key but most often accessory role in these epiphanies, here we find Cyrus cast as the bizarrely willing catalyst or catalytic failure when Brit gets the girl (15). Cyrus thus takes on the role that McRuer identifies with bodies which are "invariably queer and disabled," in that Cyrus fulfils the role of "sites on which the epiphanic moment can be staged" (16). In the two sections that follow, I will consider how Brit's achievements, and how others' failures, allow Brit to realise his potential as a writer. Cyrus's enabling of Brit is epiphanic in that Cyrus allows Brit to see the potential he had all along, and, in a sense, to become the person he is, despite Sam's denials of the same. Brit's success at finding sexual partners and making money not only enables him to write in the practical sense, but supplies the matter of his writing as well as the the justification behind his literary project.

Edifying Sexual Frustration

Brit's conspicuous success in finding sexual partners presents a marked contrast to other disabled men in the novels of this study. Animal spends much of *Animal's People* bemoaning the fact that women do not want to sleep with him, and, at the close of the

novel, is planning to solve the problem of his sexuality by buying an old friend out of sexual slavery to be his wife. By the time he is apparently quite extensively disabled, Saleem is almost impotent, and Padma's attempts to bring his "other pencil" to life are described to comedic effect (*Midnight's Children* 39). Moraes is manipulated by more mature women. In Mistry, the genitals of disabled characters are a centre of particular fascination, and depictions overwhelmingly suggest that their sexuality is dirty or pitiable: Tehmul is shown manipulating his "big packet" (30) and leaves ejaculation stains on his stolen doll and bed sheets, while Shankar vents his sexual desires on prostitutes, and speaks raucously of "banging my balls and wearing out my buttocks" (381). All of these disabled men may mimic conjugal relations and heterosexual romance, but do not get to genuinely participate in either. Their sex drives, if present, become a negative trait or a source of pain, as aimless and unrequited sexual desire are part of a disabled character's disability.

Kanga writes Brit's sexuality to doubly opposite effect, as Brit not only has sex with multiple partners and becomes quite adept at attracting new lovers, but also enjoys his desire, and finds not frustration in his sexuality but inspiration. Brit narrates masturbation very frequently, and describes how it enables him to deal with his emergent sexuality and his homosexual desires in a household where neither disabled sexuality nor homosexuality is warmly received. "In the context of hierarchically oppressive relations between genders and between sexualities," as Eve Sedgwick writes, "masturbation can seem to offer – not least as an analogy to writing – a reservoir of potentially utopian metaphors and energies for independence, self-possession, and in rapture that may owe little to political or interpersonal abjection" (*Touching Feeling* 111). While the other disabled men in the novels of this study masturbate as an expression of desperation, Brit's masturbation is an act of self-possession, as he is able

to express the sexuality others would cover over, much as his writing will later enable him to express his intellect.

It is thus that autotelic sexuality as well as sex in practice becomes important to Brit's identity formation, and that Brit's sexual identity as a disabled man is entrenched against Sam's narrative long before Brit becomes sexually active. Much later, when Brit realizes he is interested in Cyrus and begins having homosexual as well as heterosexual fantasies, Brit's narrative proves doubly resistant to what would be his family's double dismissal of his sexuality. Sera reacts with horror and panic when she finds Brit and Cyrus in a sexually compromising position, and announces "our son is a pervert," an appraisal which is only underscored by Sam's droll "homosexual, you mean" (152). Even Dolly, the most accepting member of the Kotwal household, suggests in a letter that Brit's sexual (dis)orientation is a result of his experience of female caregivers, while Amy draws a different but comparable connection between his disability and his homosexuality, suggesting that Brit will feel an erroneous attraction to "beautiful men" until he realizes his own beauty (212). As narrator, Brit never directly refuses these explanations for his sexuality, but the contrast between these diagnostic descriptions of his sexuality and his own firmly established enjoyment of male beauty seems to put the lie to others' pathologization. The narrator's eye refuses to be reconciled to the expectations imposed by others.

Kanga's nonfictional writing may illuminate the reasons that Brit takes accepts his family's attack on his gay love with such nonchalance. Kanga's own comments about his experience of coming out in a BBC editorial reinforce a sense of disjuncture between disability and homosexuality, rather than a similarity between the two: "coming out," Kanga writes, "was easy for me because I had been stared at all my life – now I turned heads for happier reasons" (Kanga, "Broken Bones"). Brit's own

shrugging off of his family's rejection of his sexuality grows out of his increasing independence of mind as, like Kanga, Brit is so familiar with being subject to negative attention for his disability that responses to his sexuality seem superficial by contrast. Further, Brit's increased enjoyment of his body through the relationship with Cyrus overwhelms his negative experience of stigma within his family. As Kanga suggests in an editorial, "homosexuality was the different part of me that gave me pleasure, allowed me to hug my body – if rather gingerly – rather than fear it, fear the pain it brought me" ("Broken Bones").

In *Heaven on Wheels*, Kanga expands his depiction of the lukewarm reception of his sexual preferences by his family to consider how homosexuality is interpreted by Indian society as a whole. Kanga claims that, "to be gay, in India, was to surrender your claim to be a man," while rejoicing in his observation that "Britain, I knew, was different" (*Heaven on Wheels* 25-26). Kanga heightens the contrast he establishes between attitudes in India and the United Kingdom by portraying Britain as excessively tolerant of sexual difference as it is excessively minority-friendly, and he plays with the idea that he is better-liked because of his "Holy trinity" minority statuses as "gay, Asian, and disabled" (152). Aside from his self-mockery, Kanga infuses *Heaven on Wheels* with the sense that his homosexuality is a positive experience socially as well as privately, as his cosmopolitan, urban, and literary friends err on the side of idealization rather than suspicion when they encounter gay men. The freedom that Kanga observes in the West is demonstrated in a freedom of sexual attraction and expression, and, when Kanga meets other high-achieving gay men in the United Kingdom, he revels in the opportunity to flirt.

The magnetic sexual attraction that Brit experiences in relation to others in the United Kingdom is akin to the sexual attraction that others have for Brit in *Trying to*

Grow. Cyrus establishes in Brit the fact that Brit's intelligence is sexy, contradicting Brit's fear that Cyrus "tried to make love to me out of charity" with assertions of reciprocal worth (147). After Cyrus establishes in Brit the idea that Brit can be an equal participant in sexual relationships, Brit becomes something of a seducer, albeit on a modest scale. With his new sense of self-worth, Brit is able to make sexual inroads with Amy by demonstrating his intelligence, and has established the beginnings of a sexual friendship with Jerry at the end of *Trying to Grow*: when Brit asks Jerry about "'girls your mother is showing you,'" he is very bold in establishing Jerry's lack of interest in the aforesaid girls as a precontext for their friendship, and this act, like Brit's wooing of Amy, is based in growing sexual self-confidence (159). Brit's ability to find new sexual partners despite his emphasized disadvantages in the area of beauty and mobility becomes a form of achievement, as Brit figures his sexual desire as a productive drive rather than a problem.

Further, Brit succeeds not only at obtaining sex, but wins in a sexual marketplace with direct economic implications. As Amy tells him while she is drunk, she worries that Brit does not "love her," but only wants her in his life to "push-push-push-push-push" his wheelchair (233). Although Brit does make it clear that he genuinely cares for Amy, her usefulness as a caregiver is an asset that he effectively acquires through their relationship, obviating him of the need for hired domestic help. Amy's direct intervention when Brit's paid servant Esmero fails to do his duties is a case-in-point: it is this episode of Amy's outcompeting a paid employee that leads to Brit's change of heart, as he goes from hating to loving Amy a few pages later (189). Jerry is marked as fantastically wealthy from the moment he and Brit meet. Brit spends an entire chapter (notably, the chapter immediately following Sam's funeral) revelling in the glories of Jerry's wealth when Brit visits the family estate, noting everything

from the "pink crystal" (175) chandelier to the luxurious presentation of food on the table, described in a sort of mock-ode:

> I shall sing of hot chapattis silky with butter, pungent pickle of dark dates and golden almonds, tiger prawns fierce in their chilli-red sauce, tender kid gentle in creamed cashew nut, an emperor's pilaff with more raisins than rice and crowned with chicken breasts, a millionaire's custard crammed with plump apricots soaked in tongue-burning rum. When I'd finished, my tummy felt as taut as my poor cock used to be through all those long nights with Cyrus (179).

The last image of Brit's full belly as a replacement for his taught cock is very apt here, as, while Brit has loved Cyrus for his beauty, Brit's interest in Jerry centres on his wealth. This epicurean catalogue with its repeated invocations of royalty and regal trappings sets the mature Brit far from the child who was told derisive sarcasm by his father that he might "find a rich wife" (81). The adolescent Brit who, upon being told he is "awfully ugly" and not a fit sexual partner, and who retorts with the assertion that he has "'litres of charm to pour all over that. So it doesn't matter'" proves this assertion as an adult, emerging as a man who can make his way in a sexual marketplace through charm and wit (86).

Thus, for Brit, sex evolves from being a source of frustration to a source of opportunity and social climbing, as he makes his way in the sexual marketplace his father has told him he would have no place in. Brit's progression from pampered son to wage-earner follows a similar arc: in the next section, I will consider how money and the desire to earn a living in Kanga is figured as an expression of self, and how payment comes to validate Brit's writing enterprise. Especially as the afterlife of *Trying to Grow* is considered in *Heaven on Wheels*, money provides a great deal of validation to Brit and Kanga, who both look to the marketplace to justify their literary ambitions.

Money and Merit

Although, as I have already noted, Kanga focuses upon a relatively insular middle-class domestic economy in *Trying to Grow*, it is important to consider his articulation of money matters and his national consciousness in relation to his other writing. In his preface to Dario Mitidieri's photographic study of urban orphans, *Children of Bombay*, Kanga is judicious in accusing his childhood self of drawing a false parallel between the experience of disability and the experience of inescapable poverty. Kanga says that his boy self reasoned that

> if these children around me were starved and sick and abandoned, I too had something which allowed me to look them in the face and not smile. My legs that would not work and my body that would not grow became my alibi (*Children* 9).

His guilty memory grows out of a belief that these children "could not understand why an eight year old boy needed care when as old as I, they were earning their living already" (9). In *Children of Bombay*, Kanga polemically effaces any health-as-wealth comparisons between himself and the truly destitute, and explicitly differentiates between corporeal and class situation, suggesting that being poor is worse than being middle-class and disabled.

This suggestion on Kanga's part can be considered in the light of Davis's discussion of diversity, and particularly Davis's coupling of poverty and severe disability as the identities that he suggests are excluded from a discourse of neoliberal diversity. Specifically, consider Davis's suggestion that

> the idea of diversity is linked to a postmodern concept of subjectivity as being malleable, mobile, and capable of being placed on a continuum, complex, socially constructed, and with a strong element of free play and choice. In contrast to this mutability, disability is seen as fixed—sharply defined by a medical diagnosis and sometimes assigned to an abject position as "a life not worth living" or *zoe* (5-6).

While Kanga and Brit identify in dire poverty this sort of fixed or immobile identity, both narrators suggest that their identification with a similarly pitiable state is an act of childish cowardice, and one which they must outgrow. This strain of responsibility-taking elitism is readily evident in *Trying to Grow*, a book in which Brit more than once identifies street-dwellers as "urchins" and domestic helpers as "slaves," but holds himself accountable for responding to members of the lower classes as if there were parity between his corporeal situation and their social situation. When Brit beats his "slave" Esmero for drinking on the job and attempting to steal from him, he regrets the action afterward as a breach of good form, suggesting that "I couldn't hide behind my bones much longer" (185). He rejects the possibility of parity of his disabled state and the situation of the abject poor.

Brit is middle class, and, despite his father's contrary assertions, is readily able to earn, and thereby to enter the kind of consumer subjectivity Davis describes. He often buttresses his own depiction of himself as flexible and independent by undermining the economic competitiveness of other middle-class characters, most notably Sam. There is a bite to Brit's superficially sympathetic description of Sam as "a man mild as the Bombay Winter" (14) who takes a bank job that pays "rather badly to compensate for life-long job security" (22). Brit's assertion that "nobody who knew my father would believe that his father" was a fearless tiger-hunter's son perhaps suggests that grandfather Kotwol's bravado has skipped a generation, as Brit's ambition to not only make money, but to make it through an insecure profession like writing, implies (13).

Brit's use of his disabled subject-position to indict ablebodied people he identifies as lacking in gumption is carried over into Kanga's analysis of the British in *Heaven on Wheels*. Kanga's Thatcherism is articulated through depictions of lazy adults

who have become weak through coddling by a nanny state and who are too dependent upon the state. Examples of this sort of caricature abound, but two of the most indicative examples are the two middle-class women Brit meets early in his journey. Joy has a dysfunctional relationship with parents who punish her for "speaking with a working class accent" (46); Blanche remains unemployed because, as she says, "' it's the state's duty to get me a job I enjoy'" (40). While Kanga is friends with both of these women, he continues to register incredulity at their lack of ambition. He also expresses horror at the idea that, if he had grown up in their environment, he too might become complacent, and might be "excused from doing something I was perfectly capable of doing, and not even because I was disabled" (41).

While Kanga identifies a degree of financial constraint in his situation as a disabled person in Bombay, noting that "we lived in a tiny flat with no room for a wheelchair – one of those middle-class families trapped in Third-World irony," the real irony he explores in *Heaven on Wheels* is that of physically fit people in a strong economy who are unwilling to work (xi). Kanga's rather blatant bragging about his profit margins in *Heaven on Wheels*, including mentions of his "2,500 percent pay hike" (62) upon arrival in London, and his being described as "one of Bloomsbury's major assets" affirms Kanga and Brit's contention that earning potential is an expression of some quality other than physical fitness (28). Like his grandfather, who is contrasted with the "good-for-nothing-but-sex" Englishman who marries his widow, Brit has a desire to earn rather than to sponge off others (14). Money is a matter of self-respect.

Brit's depiction of his own parity with or superiority to able-bodied people is key to understanding his resistance to stereotypes of disability as he writes a "some body" fictional and memoir with a difference. In the next section, I will consider how

Kanga resolves the tension between narrative that focuses on disability in the context of a narrator who is preoccupied with ability, and identifies with competition as a positive value. Through Brit, as well as in his first-person writing, Kanga exploits his disabled identity by refusing to exploit it: as he writes disabled men who identify as strong, sexy, and capable, the centre of action and interest in his stories becomes his assertion of this identity against other's perceptions. This is especially evident as *Trying to Grow* is considered through the lens of the later *Heaven on Wheels*. The search for validation explored through the character of Brit has come to fruition through Kanga's travel memoir, as Kanga embraces a competitive market's embrace of him.

Publication and Validation in *Heaven on Wheels*

The scenario that takes Kanga to Britain, that is, the publication and success of *Trying to Grow*, resolves the problems that Couser has identified as confronting the disability memoirist. As Couser has suggested

> there are serious obstacles in the way of realising the counter-hegemonic potential of disability memoir. Difficulty can be found at three distinct junctures: having a life, writing a life, and publishing a life. Like minority, racial or ethnic status, disability may disqualify people from having the sorts of lives that have traditionally been considered worthy of autobiography (*Signifying* 31).

Kanga's arrival in England to meet his publishers in effect enables him to overcome all three obstacles. Insofar as there is a question of his having a life worth writing a memoir about, the very fact of his being a wheelchair user on an international trip provides the scenario that justifies memoir. Were Kanga without his disability, *Heaven on Wheels* would be little more than a vacation story involving a series of popular tourist destinations; it is how he travels, or who he is while travelling, that provides the basis of the narrative, as the encounters he and his personal assistant have while on tour provide a window into disability experience. The writing project that financed the trip

to England, *Trying to Grow*, also effectively established Brit's qualifications as a writer, and initiated the publishing relationship that would lead to the circulation of *Heaven on Wheels*.

However, Kanga actually inverts Couser's suggestion that "minority, racial or ethnic status, disability may disqualify" life writers, addressing instead the opposite proposition that the minority-valorising attitude he identifies with the London publishing scene may be giving him unfair advantages because of his multiple minority statuses. Kanga argues that "I was luckier than other new novelists who wrote as well as I did. Quite simply, because my disability caught the eye better than the brightest blurb or brightest jacket. It was an unfair advantage" (83). However, Kanga goes on to qualify this remark, noting that, once people read his book and had the opportunity to judge his work, he would find himself in a fair literary competition, "running with all the others or wheeling behind" (83). Kanga's expressed fear of undue credit and desire for fair competition is readily evident in many of Brit's comments in *Trying to Grow*. His annoyance when people assume he is a "wise little man" (157) and his disgust when he is awarded an "especial prize" in school solely because he is disabled are two very good examples (49). Brit's friendship with Cyrus blossoms when Cyrus argues with him and wins: Brit describes being "thrilled" with his "defeat" because he knows full well that he is not "a genius" (112).

Thus, Kanga's realisation of the counter-hegemonic potential of disability memoir relies more upon the possibility of failure than the sense of achievement: that Kanga is not a "some body" who will be greeted with a warm literary reception solely because of his body is key to the ethos expressed in his works. Kanga's meeting with Stephen Hawking, which is depicted in the closing chapter of *Heaven on Wheels*, underscores Brit and Kanga's belief that fair competition rather than valorisation of

disability is best. Kanga describes the scientist whose "mind" is "buoyant with thoughts that came out in frozen phrases stiff as corpses" (253) and whose body "twisted sideways in a slump" (254). When Kanga and Brit speak to one another, however, they both affirm each other's belief that disabled people ought to compete in a fair arena, with Hawking's more extensive disability and more extensive achievement affirming Kanga's social ideals. Both men reject the celebration of disabled difference in favour of a vision of disabled sameness. They echo Brit's assertion that "people live inside themselves: they aren't their bodies only" (220).

Conclusion

Thus, we find that in *Trying to Grow*, as in the rest of Kanga's oeuvre, the politics of success and failure seem to validate rather than challenge the vision of diversity imagined by Davis. Kanga's gay and disabled (as opposed to McRuer's crip/queer) politics suggest a vision of how regimes of normalcy latent in diversity might be revised to accommodate the disabled body, without becoming accommodating in other respects. As Davis argues in *The End of Normal*, while the valorisation of difference in recent decades may seem to completely efface or replace the ideal of normalcy, it actually depends upon the elision of certain differences, as "what is suppressed from the imaginary of diversity, a suppression that actually puts neoliberal diversity into play, are various forms of inequality, notably economic inequality, as well as the question of power" (13). A particularly consistent elision, Davis argues, is that state of inequality of health or the powerless body, the disabled body. Thus, in its omission from a discourse of diversity, disability becomes "an atavism representing the remainder of normal at the end of the normal" (14). Rather than critiquing power from without, Kanga inserts himself at the centre of an unabashedly neoliberal discourse by reimagining the location of power in terms of gumption and creativity, and by evidencing power and equality in

the form of a series of triumphs over other men. In his representations of authorial, sexual, and economic success Kanga modifies but also zealously affirms the terms of a politics of ability and achievement.

Conclusion: Good Doctors and Bad Doctors in Firdaus Kanga, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry and Indra Sinha

In *A Fine Balance*, the young Dina Shroff wants to be a doctor, hoping to follow in her father's footsteps; her aspiration becomes unattainable following his death by snake bite while he is far from home providing charitable medical services. Mistry later introduces the anti-type of Mistry's excessively self-sacrificing father in the bullied, subservient physicians at the sterilisation camp, who perform coercive procedures in unhygienic conditions in the name of efficiency, and who are willing to castrate Omprakash under a false medical pretext. In *Midnight's Children*, we are introduced to nightmarish hospitals and doctors who range from the incompetent to the unfeeling to the sadistic, and the motif of evil doctors culminates in the torture hospitals run by the Widow and her aide. The opportunistic Omar of *Shame*, and the unsympathetic practitioners and syringe-wielding sadists of *The Moor's Last Sigh* carry on the theme of medical violence, albeit with an important counterpoint in Aadam Sinai. In *Animal's People*, one of the worst visages of the hydra-like corporate antagonist is the physicians who gather false statistics to maintain the medical denial of the company, as medical research becomes synonymous with disability oppression. In *Trying to Grow*, doctors appear mainly to discourage and humiliate Brit during his childhood, and, like the Kampani doctors, provide obstacles rather than practical help.

Albeit with telling counter-points in the form of Elli Doctress and Aadam Aziz, the broad pattern across these novels is that disabled people are represented as fugitives from a pernicious medical establishment which allies itself too closely with, or too closely resembles, a pernicious government. While disabled characters are not the only

characters susceptible to medical and biomedical abuse, they bear the burden disproportionately in violent medical transactions which become deeply symbolic of governmental corruption. In this concluding chapter, I will argue that the representation of doctors should be read alongside the representation of disabled characters who are hounded by bad medicine, and highlight those exceptional doctors who are positive agents. My contention is that depictions of doctors are divided between those who act as agents of the state and also express their allegiances through an attack on the disabled body or disabling bodily attack, and those who enable disabled people and have some degree of counter-hegemonic political sentiment.

For the purposes of extending this investigation beyond doctors and practitioners to medical motifs more generally, I will turn to the theories of Michel Foucault, who used the phrase "the clinic" to describe medical infrastructure and ideology as a combined force in his *The Birth of the Clinic*. Thomas Couser offers the following summation of Foucault's idea:

> According to Michel Foucault, the "birth of the clinic" around 1800 involved a shift in the site and the paradigm of medical practice; accompanying this shift was the development of a powerful new medical discourse, the function of which was to monitor and regulate the health of the body politic (21).

The "shift in the site and the paradigm" suggested by Couser has been further described by Thomas Osborne, who suggests that "when Foucault refers to the clinic he is thinking both of the clinical method and the teaching hospital" (31). What emerges in the 1800s is a "clinical ethos" which constitutes a sort of "anti-epistemology," in so far as it "opposes itself to scholastic forms of thought, that is forms of *posthoc* rationalization or theorization" (Osborne 32). This new mode of anti-ideological thinking is very much involved both in the ways of educating doctors, and with the physical site of the hospital. Foucault notes that "clinical observation involves two

necessarily united domains: the hospital domain and the teaching domain" (*Birth of the Clinic* 109). What I will suggest in the pages that follow is that the paradigms associated with the clinical thinking Foucault describes are invoked in many of the medical motifs that emerge in the novels included in this thesis. These motifs, which include doctors and nurses as well as other hospital infrastructure and equipment, become strongly invocative of the idea of the West, or the intellectual influence of Western nations, in these texts. Given the confluences and interactions of the evolution of the modern medical paradigms, which I discussed in my introduction, it is little wonder that these four authors often employ bad doctors, ghoulish hospitals, and other apparatus of the clinic to represent political corruption; these will be the focus of this chapter.

Now, there is an argument to be made for not including a chapter about doctors in what is a disability studies thesis, for reasons articulated quite succinctly by Frank, who has argued that scholars who hope to design an approach from the viewpoint of the typically silenced ill or disabled person would be best served by "depicting health-care professionals only from the perspective of patients and minimizing even that," and thereby justifies his decision to write in a manner "that kept health-care workers generally, and physicians specifically, in the background" (xvi). His self-reflexive approach to illness is similarly manifest in the work of disability scholars, who for the most part try to make disability the centre of their enquiries, and approach doctoring restrictedly as a facet of disability representation. However, not only the sheer prevalence, but the importance of politically weighted doctoring in these texts makes it difficult to relegate practitioners to such a role. Furthermore, the actions of bad doctors are pivotal to the experiences of disabled characters, so an ancillary analysis focused on the figure of the physician may supplement the disability-centric analysis that

dominates this thesis. The clinic which so often represents the state most often acts upon disabled bodies through doctors, and the characterization of doctors is thus strongly implicated in the political symbolism of the novels.

Rushdie: From Aadam to Omar

While the fact that Rushdie takes up as a discursive concern a mythic then and a modern now is hardly contestable, the ways in which he accomplishes this effect can illuminate a reading of disability in these novels. A temporally duplicitous space not only facilitates the interlacing of pre-colonial and postcolonial conceptions of disability, but is accomplished in large part through the medicalized or non-medicalized body, as well as through the representation of doctors. The political dimensions of the divided temporality of these three novels are represented through doctors, as well as through the clinic more generally.

The *Midnight's Children* timeline begins with the introduction of Tai the boatman, an ancient figure who occupies the timeless space of the Kashmiri Valley; it is only with the incursion of the adult Aadam Sinai, who has just completed medical training in the West, that a numerical date is introduced, and the narrative is placed in Western time. Although *The Moor's Last Sigh* establishes itself at the outset with a series of puns on the Cold War and a family tree diagram which includes dates, the Cabral Island homestead is in many ways isolated from the ideological changes of the twentieth century. The one of the first pieces of evidence of contemporary history in this space is the house Francisco de Gama commissions from the European architect, which, like Adam's medical bag, is a Western artefact that fixes an ancient and static space in volatile time. *Shame* begins with the narrator's joke about time-location, as he explains that

> All this happened in the fourteenth century. I'm using the Hegiran calendar, naturally: don't imagine that stories of this type can take place longlong ago. Time cannot be homogenized as easily as milk, and in those parts, until quite recently, the thirteen-hundreds were still in full swing (13).

Although it may be taking Rushdie's joke a bit far, the reference to homogenized milk could be construed to be a reference to modern technological development, given that the distribution of cow's milk emulsion did not become widespread until well into the 1900s. Be that as it may, the image of time as resisting homogenization certainly invites the sense of twin strata of time which are commingled but refuse to be integrated. This metaphor of failed homogenizing comes up again in criticism of *Midnight's Children*, as ten Kortenaar notes that "Tai's presence in the novel" is "intended as the marker of an irreducible otherness that disturbs the homogenizing project of modernity" (*Self, Nation, Text* 24). Doctor Aadam and Tai may occupy the same community and even the same boat, but the presence symbolized by one can never be successfully reconciled into the moment of the other.

On the other hand, in addition to suggesting the incompatibility of past and present, "Tai's presence in the novel," as has been argued by ten Kortenaar, "constitutes a claim by the text to contain him" (24). Timothy Brennan's comments illuminate the contrast between Rushdie's portrayal of a world that cannot contain a multiplicity of times, cultures, and social classes, in a text that accomplishes its virtuosity by apparently engulfing them all: Brennan notes that "the portrayal of class tensions" in the novel "begins with the verbal battles that take place between the voluble and filthy boatman Tai Bibi and the foreign educated Aadam Aziz" but later describes the novel as Rushdie's "writerly *tour de force* because he was able to recreate an entire history of cultural conflict on the plane of style," noting that divergent generic conventions are "forced together" with great success (118). The successful portrayal of conflict in the

society becomes the mark of a successful discursive cohabitation on the level of the text.

One of the many elements of this successful negotiation is the presentation of medical treatment and doctors, which are used not only to juxtapose scientific and traditional paradigms of the body, but which also set in relief oral and written knowledge transmission. In *Midnight's Children*, this juxtaposition is explored most acutely in the scene in which Amina undertakes a passage into the slums of Bombay to consult a seer about her unborn child, and during which she is described as "a doctor's daughter entering a world older than syringes and cripples" (84). It is perhaps because she is very aware of medicine through her father that she is particularly observant of the "queuing cripples" she sees on her way into the seer's domicile, which is a sort of multi-service traditional medical centre (83). Her horror is strongly focalized as she observes that "the bone-setter is fastening twigs and leaves to shattered limbs, wrapping cracked heads in palm fronds, until his patients resemble artificial trees" (84). Amina, a rationalist on an uncharacteristically occult quest, is given a prophecy which refers to apparently rational actions she will later be party to: namely, the seer predicts that "doctors will drain" Saleem, in reference to the procedure Amina and Ahmed will have Saleem undergo when he is a teenager (87). And, of course, all of this is being narrated by Saleem, who is privy to Amina's future or at least his version of it. This sets up the following interlacing of occult and rational ideas of medicine: Saleem, who hates the clinic and favours magic, narrates Amina, who, in the middle of a superstitious lapse, is otherwise on the favour of her father's European medical paradigms, although in the future Aadam will also come to doubt his foreign knowledge that has left the hole in him, and will return to tradition fully. Saleem tells us that Amina receives an accurate and incisive prophecy from the seer, and that one of the things the seer foresees is the

abuse Saleem will suffer at the hands of ignorant and evil clinicians, meaning not only the "doctors" who "drain him" but the "tyrants" who will "fry him" well after Amina's death (84). The layers of medical paradigms here are too intricately tangled to be disentangled, and, even as Rushdie writes a character (Amina) in the moment of being unable to reconcile herself to another (lower class, traditional) way of treating the abnormal body, he is embracing that version of the body, as well as maintaining in tandem its medicalized other or counterpart.

However, while Rushdie does arbitrate both precolonial and postcolonial paradigms of disability in the same text, one finds that this arbitration is ultimately strongly politically coded, as, while the disabled body is alternately ennobled or maligned by supernatural paradigms, it is consistently tortured, destroyed, and degraded by the clinic in these three novels, and that degradation is metaphorically aligned with the degradation of the postcolonial state, most notably through the Emergency, which he presents as a sort of political Rubicon. Barker has noted that "Rushdie's condemnation of the Emergency's excesses is articulated through his reference to the state's biopolitical manoeuvrings as it administrates the extraordinary bodies of its citizens," and I would argue that this is largely accomplished through the unflattering depiction of the Western-style clinic and its apparatus, which is developed from the beginning of the novel through its culmination in the Emergency (*Postcolonial Fictions* 129). The hospital and its infrastructure is inscribed as pernicious, as the appearance of any medical equipment bodes ill. When the Sanjay youth attack the magicians' ghetto, in a show-down between normalisation and magic, they use ambulances to gather the victims of sterilisation (429). Saleem loses his telepathic gift at the Breech Candy Nose and Throat Clinic, where he is forcibly etherized so that his nose may be normalized, as Saleem notes that "what began in a washing chest ended on an operating table" (303).

Saleem is later once again etherized before he is castrated, and describes the "anaesthetic and count-to-ten, the numbers marching one two three" (438) before the "cry of children who had lost their magic" (439). Another related motif is that of Saleem waking from unconsciousness in a hospital to find himself much for the worse. In addition to the "operating table" (303) where his telepathy is ruined, he describes coming to consciousness following his head injury, as he "awoke again amid the clammy metallic fragrances of a hospital ward" (345). Later, after recovering from his amnesia, he recalls his last meeting with his sister: "seized by the bitter aroma of injustice, I remembered how Jamila Singer had leaned over the hospital bed" to bid him goodbye, before having him pressed into the Pakistani army's service (370).

Rather than a place of healing, the hospital is a site of normalisation-via-subtraction; the only midnight's child who is given (rather than relieved of) difference by the clinic is Sonny Ibrahim, who bears forceps hollows from his birth. Otherwise, bodies controlled by the clinic are controlled toward the end of violently eliminating physical difference. In conjunction with hospitals being inscribed as bad places, medical professionals are most often inscribed as bad or at least frightening people. Sanjay's interventions in the ghetto and with regards to the midnight's children have a nightmarish quality, and the magic or science that has allowed Sanjay to replicate himself (and which has strong ironic resonances, given his mission to stop others "replicating") makes him a nightmarish figure well suited to his terrifying ambulance. The Widow's cameo appearances in the persona of a bad doctor has extra resonance in the final chapters of *Midnight's Children* because of the motif of fear-provoking clinicians that has been maintained from Saleem's earliest childhood. The nurse who lives next door is described as the "most fearsome woman I ever knew" (97), while doctor Narlikar is a distant and unpleasant figure. When the Brass Monkey receives an

animal bite, Saleem says she "had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the Breach Candy Hospital, every afternoon for three weeks, to be given an injection to the stomach" (151). Beyond a sense of Saleem being phobic of hospitals or doctors, *Midnight's Children* establishes a pervasive sense of the clinic and its practitioners as terrifying or malignant.

That is, of course, with the obvious exception of Aadam Aziz, one of the most lovingly mythologized characters in the text. However, Aadam may be read as the exception that proves the rule, or, rather as a good man who has an uneasy relationship with his identity as a physician. As Quayson notes, Aadam experiences the painful dissonance with regards to his religious faith as "a Muslim educated in Germany" (*Fecundities* 741). Aadam has received his education as a medical doctor, and his medical bag becomes symbolic of the impossibility of his reconciling his experience overseas with his ancestral belief, but also of the impossibility of his fully taking on a new identity. The medical bag is an object separate from Aadam, but one which he must carry at his side to enact his professional role. Saleem tells us that although Aadam is a Kashmiri "stained by the bruise of a Heidelberg bag's clasp" he is also touched by the magic of Kashmir, which "makes us men apart" (107). While Aadam is presented as a very admirable figure, he has a very queasy relationship with the bag that marks him as a Europe-returned doctor.

While Aadam is optimistic and idealistic upon his return to Kashmir, it quickly becomes apparent that he will meet resistance both from other people and from magic in his attempts to practice medicine. Saleem describes how "the young, newly-qualified Doctor Aadam Aziz stood facing the springtime lake, sniffing the whiffs of change; while his back (which was extremely straight) was turned upon yet more changes" (12). Aadam, we are told, has come home from abroad to find his father has had a stroke. His

father now spends his days “in a wooden chair, in a darkened room” where “he sat and made bird noises. Thirty different species of birds visited him and sat on the sill outside his shuttered window conversing about this and that. He seemed happy enough” (12). While Aadam’s mother has had to come out of purdah to run the family business, Aadam’s newly disabled father has become the one confined to the home by a stroke of supernatural pathology. The scientifically trained Aadam is greeted with a hybrid magical-clinical disability which is inherently resistant to his Western systems of medical knowledge.

The dissonance between how Aadam knows and how his father is disabled is mild, but Aadam’s first encounter with Tai heightens the sense of the irreconcilability of the doctor with his environment. Tai, who is already known to be loquacious, offers the following description of Aadam’s medical bag:

> Sistersleeping pigskin bag full of foreigners’ tricks. Big shot bag. Now if a man breaks an arm that bag will not let the bonesetter bind it in leaves. Now a man must let his wife lie beside that bag and watch knives come and cut her open. A fine business, what these foreigners put in our young men’s heads. I swear it is a too-bad thing. That bag should fry in hell with the testicles of the ungodly (20).

Tai repeatedly personifies the bag, to the extent that he casts it rather than Aadam as the doctor. While Aadam has met Tai with the hope of renewing their old friendship, we are told the bag “sits between doctor and boatman, and has made them antagonists” (21). Rather than the pleasant whiffs of progressive change Aadam was smelling a few pages earlier, he will soon be confronted with Tai’s olfactory protest against foreign incursion. Wholesale rejection of European medical knowledge like that articulated by Tai will burden and hurt Aadam, and will “gradually wear him down” to the point that, in his old age, Aadam becomes mentally unstable (67). Aadam cannot be a successful proponent of the clinic in *Midnight’s Children* because, unlike other practitioners, he is

gentle by nature, and is not willing to impose medicine by force. Further, Aadam not only hopes for a willing change of paradigms, but also looks to fuse medical knowledges rather than obliterate the past. He, like the narrator Saleem, wants change, but cannot quite reduce his tradition into "everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation, whose defeat was entirely desirable in the context of a modernising, twentieth-century economy" (200).

Doctor Narlikar is perhaps Aadam Sinai's anti-type in this regard. Narlikar is a comic figure because he is deeply obsessed with obliterating the past, and, despite being the gynaecologist who delivers Saleem as well as Sonny Ibrahim and Shiva, he is also a shrill proponent of birth control and opponent of tradition. Although Narlikar is a minor character and a source of humour in the immediacy of Saleem's childhood, his remarks take on a rather darker shade if read with the fate of the midnight's children in mind. While Narlikar loses his stake in what he perceives as the battle between "all the old dark priapic forces of ancient, procreative India" and "the beauty of sterile twentieth-century concrete," the sterile beauty gains the upper hand during the Emergency (176).

It is perhaps relevant that doctor Narlikar is an obstetrician in a novel which is obsessed with pregnancy and childbirth. Much of the literature about *Midnight's Children* addresses Saleem's preoccupation with the supernatural dimensions of paternity, but far less attention has been paid to the narrative investment in connotative pregnancy. In *Midnight's Children* a reading of disability has a natural extension into a reading of pregnancy, as, while the ostensible object of pregnancy depictions is the mother's body, the real discursive fixation is the child she carries, and that child's body. The sense that an abnormal pregnancy will produce a physically or mentally abnormal child pervades two of Amina's three pregnancies. When she carries Shiva, she becomes big as a "leaden balloon," and promises Ahmed a "big strong boy" (100-101). Amina

has no difficulties in giving birth to Shiva, but the pregnancy that yields big-headed Saleem, the physically stigmatized child, ends in a terrible birthing and the death of the biological mother. While Jamila's gestation is summarized in a few lines, Amina's third pregnancy plagues her "with dreams of a monster child with a cauliflower instead of a brain" (332).

In *Shame* there is a single but also a prominent example of bad doctors: Omar, the named protagonist of the novel. Brennan has described the meaningful dissonance between the behaviour of Omar, and his namesake, "the famous medieval Persian poet, astrologer and mathematician" who was "also a doctor" (120). Brennan notes that while the historic Omar Khayyam was a sophisticated thinker, Omar of *Shame* at best "acquires Epicurean habits in Europe" and suffers beside rather than benefits from his comparison with the poet (120). Beyond being Epicurean, Omar is a pervert and predator, and his predation is knitted in with his medical role. Omar's predation upon Farah Zoroaster is undertaken after he learns about hypnosis from a book, and uses this knowledge to render her passive; Farah is exempt from community life after he rapes and impregnates her. This plot is echoed in Omar's later marriage to Sufiya Zenobia. Omar once again uses his knowledge, although this time as an immunologist, to gain access to a woman who is incapacitated, and, although he does not have sex with Sufiya Zenobia, he does enter into what is effectively a forced marriage with her. Omar gains access to the girl when she is "taken to the hospital," a space once again inscribed as evil, "with pus bursting from her sores, dribbling, incontinent, with the rough, cropped proof of her mother's loathing on her head" (141). After she is brought to Omar's attention in a stigmatized and degraded state, he falls in love with her. After subsequent incidences of demon possession, she is fed and sedated by syringe in her family attic, again by Omar. Omar and syringes seem to be a destructive pair, as they are brought up

by the narrator in an allusion to using "painless injections" to euthanize the feeble elderly and in Raza Hyder's direct suggestion that Omar ought to inject Sufiya Zenobia with lethal drugs (95).

Cundy's observations about the character of Omar and his medical role suggest a degree of contingency between Omar's role as a Western-trained physician, rather than a mere coincidence in the figure. Cundy contrasts the character of Omar to that of Aadam Aziz, noting that, while Omar is held to be an international medical celebrity, Aadam "is not shown as exceptional" in his medical role (55). Both men use their role as doctors to achieve a degree of "legitimate voyeurism" (47) but while this is mild and quite romantic in the earlier novel (and Aadam is perhaps put into the role of voyeur rather than taking on that role willingly) Omar's interest in medicine grows from his coercive tendencies. While, as Kimmich has suggested, Omar is "a watcher rather than a doer," his desire to watch and prod and not be accountable for his apparently neutral or professional involvement makes him a doctor for all of the wrong reasons (*Offspring* 97). Rushdie describes Omar's suitability for medicine as being in line with his "true, peripheral nature," going on to suggest that a doctor is "a legitimized voyeur, a stranger whom we permit to poke fingers and even hands into places where we would not permit most people to insert so much as a finger-tip" (*Shame* 49 cited in Cundy 55). This rather ghoulish articulation of the doctor's role stands in sharp contrast to the sympathetic-if-naive beneficence of Aadam, who, because of his moral rectitude, is unable to impose his Western training on others, and is himself hurt by the training which leaves him divided or not whole. By contrast, as Cundy has noted, "it is his Western legacy that empowers Omar – his skill as a doctor and his mesmerizing ability" (52).

The Moor's Last Sigh presents the clinic in more diffuse terms than *Shame* or *Midnight's Children*, with less emphasis upon the personified perpetrators and ghoulish,

cartoonish, or cinematic violence. Moraes is a more reticent narrator than either Saleem or the *Shame* narrator, and has the sane, retrospective adult ability to qualify and analyse his childhood experience of the clinic. He acknowledges that his mother and the clinic had good intentions when they attempted to treat his disability, but still invokes a long history of emotional as well as physical suffering:

> I will spare you the doctors; my medical history would fill a half a dozen volumes. The tree-stump hand, the super-speed ageing, the astonishing size of me, six foot in a country where the average male rarely grows above five-foot-five: all were subjected to scrutiny. (To this day the words 'Breach Candy Hospital' conjure up, for me, the memory of a sort of house of correction, a benevolent torture chamber, a zone of infernal torments run by well-meaning demons who mortified me) (162).

The double-meaning of the word "mortified" is important here: Moraes's disabled body is both physically scourged and embarrassed by the medical establishment. His language carries a hint of European medieval religiosity, and aligns the hospital with a violent exorcism of difference rather than the practice of systematic clinical treatment. When Moraes is elderly, he has to go to the hospital once more, and, like Saleem, loses his potency to a clinical encounter (340-1). The Breach Candy Hospital is once again inscribed as a site of parental rejection, as Abraham indicts his son: "'the one thing I wanted from you' he spat at my bedside at the Breach Candy Hospital, 'even that you can't give me now'" (341). The only hint of a medical breakthrough that might benefit Moraes comes at the end of the novel, when he is too old to benefit from the treatment, but still available to be taunted by its late discovery: Vasco Miranda torments the captive Moraes with a newspaper clipping which announces the clinical trials of a "wonder drug" that may slow down accelerated ageing (426).

The sense that Moraes has been born both too late and too early is poignantly underscored by this medical breakthrough which has come just a little too late for him. Moraes's emergence into the world after the heyday of his ancestors but before the

emergence of the medical miracles of the future figures in his characterization as occupying a temporal disjuncture, or his being born out of time, or his being subject to the worst of the past and the future. *The Moor's Last Sigh* presents the bleakest vision of modernity of any of these three novels, but shares with *Shame* and *Midnight's Children* the use of the clinic and the relationship of disabled characters with medicine to realise a doubling of time. Like Rushdie, Mistry, Sinha, and Kanga all employ doctors to approach the moral problems of modernity. In the next brief section, I will consider how Mistry and Kanga use the representation of medicine to idealise the past and the present, respectively. Both Parsi authors suggest either a strong endorsement for either the past or the future through the intimate experience of medicine in their novels: while Mistry idealizes traditional medicine and expresses terror at modern medical institutions, Kanga reviles the superstition he identifies with the past, embracing modernity, and especially Westernized modernity, and its approaches to the body.

Kanga and Mistry: Faith-Healers, Gurus, and Quacks

The progressive disgracing of traditional medicine by Brit in *Trying to Grow* echoes the representation of alternative medicine by Moraes in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. After medical science fails to help the boy Moraes, Aurora turns to various alternative forms of treatment, including "Ayurvedic specialists, Tibia College professors, faith-healers, saints" which he describes as "guru-fakery" by "quacks" (162). This recalls the incompetence of the "local Hakim" in *Shame* (100). The most scathing indictment of faith healers in *The Moor's Last Sigh* comes after the boy Khurso offers Moraes only a series of religious platitudes, followed by which Khruso's mother asks to be paid in foreign currency, which draws attention to her profit-motive.

Like Aurora, Sam expresses his parental desperation over his child's disability by dragging his son to a variety of weird alternative healers. However, while giving in to superstition is depicted as an unusual lapse in Aurora's character, Sam's desperation proves to be quite typical. As I discussed in my fifth chapter, when a stranger learns that Sam is taking his small son to a faith healer, he identifies this as a disgrace to Sam's social status and intelligence, suggesting that no one who is "educated, speaking English so well" should be going to a "mumbo-jumbo baba" (4). As soon as he reaches an age of discernment, Brit echoes this ridicule. He recalls with disgust being made to drink powdered pearls and be rubbed with almond oil, and recounts being intelligent enough as a child to know that his father was wrong to believe that eating the "bone marrow of a goat" will have any effect on his disability (30). What Brit describes as "Sam's flings with magic" become adulterous in an intellectual sense, as Sam exchanges the rationality and fidelity to Western modernity that Brit identifies with Parsis with what Brit derides as local and anachronistic hokum (28).

Brit's disgust at these "flings" becomes more finely pronounced as he mingles a degree of sexual impropriety in his depictions of healers. After his encounter with the faith healer Wagh Baba, whose name itself is a sexual innuendo, a newspaper article emerges that exposes him as a sexual predator (21). The paedophiliac and the religious again collide when Sam employs the so-called Breathing Generator, who is also referred to as "Rutty Regina" by Brit, to visit the Kotwol household and attempt to cure Brit's disability (30). Brit's nudity during his encounters with the Breathing Generator as well as her sweaty vibrating all contribute to the sense of these as perverse encounters. It is noteworthy that Both Wagh Baba and the Breathing Generator are depicted through pseudo-Hindu motifs, as the Breathing Generator is described as resembling a "holy cow" and Wagh Baba is on a mockery of a holy fast (30). Given

Kanga's penchant for maligning Hindus and Muslims, his figuring of these two healers as Hindu-like must be read as particularly pointed invective. While Kanga also makes fun of the one western-trained physician who appears in *Trying to Grow*, calling him "Saint Bernard-faced," this depiction is quite gentle in comparison to those of the faith healers (25).

Unlike Kanga, Mistry depicts traditional medical practice in a positive light, while often figuring the western version of medicine as sinister. In *Such a Long Journey*, Gustad avoids going to the mainstream hospital on the basis that the local bonesetter can provide much better care; this decision leads to a very good healing experience. While Doctor Paymaster who tries to treat Roshan's illness is not depicted as sinister, he is out of touch with the financial realities of his patients' lives, and offers insensitive comments when he learns that Gustad "'waited so long before coming'" (163). In *A Fine Balance*, while there are few mentions of traditional healing practices, there is a negative depiction of clinical medicine in the sterilisation camp which I have already discussed. Omprakash's medical horror shares with Kanga's faith-healing traumas that it consists of a violation of the body on the most intimate scale, and that it is entirely fraudulent.

Thus, while they differ in which mode of medicine they glorify, Mistry and Kanga both use medicine to idealize or malign either tradition or clinical modernity. The coercive, exploitative nature of bad medicine becomes a correlate for the negative features of the nation, as either the present or the past is represented as a bad influence on human behaviour. In the next section, I will discuss how Sinha also uses metaphors of doctoring to contrast two versions of the present, as opposed to a present and the past. While Kanga, Mistry, and Rushdie all represent the clinic to explore national politics of problems of national identity, Sinha tells a globalized story in which good

and bad doctoring play out on an international scale. Rather than present and past, he uses representations of the clinic to invoke alternative futures, which are figured as a dichotomy of moral alternatives.

***Animal's People*: Elli**

In *Animal's People,* as the focus is turned from national to international politics, the doctors who represent these politics are figured differently to invoke a new set of concerns. While Aadam Aziz, Omar Khayyam, and the other doctors of Rushdie, Mistry, and Kanga's fiction all suggest competing possibilities for India, Sinha presents a clinic that has global rather than national correlates. While the doctors of the company collude with power, Elli Doctress contrasts them through her deflection to the weaker side. Power is here tantamount to the corrupt corporation as opposed to the corrupt government, but the fact that corruption is displayed through the abuse of disabled bodies and the disabling of able bodies remains consistent. However, while the agency of good doctors such as Aadam Aziz and doctor Shroff is entirely thwarted in *Midnight's Children* and *A Fine Balance*, Elli is able to mount a strong counter-attack through her cooperation with the disabled community. She is not so much representative of a political idea as the power of an individual recognition, revealing the possibilities of rebellion in the context of gross disparities in power.

I have already discussed the role of sundry bad doctors in *Animal's People* in some detail in the chapter which focused on collective disability. As such, I will only offer a summary of their role here, as their pernicious presence in Khaufpur is set out in the fiction in a fairly straightforward manner. Doctors conduct false medical surveys, offer false diagnoses, hand out ineffective medications, and generally cooperate when they are pressured to lie. They help the American company maintain the fiction that

nothing is wrong in Khaufpur, and they help greedy bureaucrats cut costs. Doctors and medical researchers are included in Zafar's vision of the evil factory with good cause: although they do not take a leadership role in disability injustice like the lawyers or the bureaucrats, they are key participants in ongoing medical injustice.

Elli's direct argument with one of these physicians is very revealing of her character as well as his: he is revealed as being very cowardly in the light of her moral certainty. Elli is the antitype of this physician, and is offered in the fiction as a moral alternative not only to the other doctors, but also to the whole apparatus identified in Zafar's dream. She is heroic in that she intervenes for humanitarian reasons where the company has interfered for profit. While she does not integrate easily into the Khaufpuri community, she does not try to keep herself apart, and is therefore unlike the rest of the lawyers and bureaucrats who maintain their physical and social distance. Despite some difficulties in her encounter with "poor and disgusting" lives of the Khaufpuris, she still ultimately manages to break from her privilege as a wealthy professional to offer meaningful medical help (106).

Elli's moral significance grows out of her enactment of the role of doctoring not as a profession but as a call: the alignment of Elli's character with Ma Franci's emphasizes the sense that Elli has chosen her vocation over her career. On the other hand, however, where Ma Franci's medical work is in part based in her delusions of apocalypse, Elli is represented as being very clear-sighted, and compelled by nothing other than her secular conscience. Elli describes her own recognition at an early age that neither a higher power nor her moral desires could effect change without action on her part, saying that "I still recall the dismay I felt that my mother's illness could not be cured either by prayer, or by my own force of will or sincerity of purpose. After this I fell out with god, and we went our separate ways" (203). Elli's adult rejection of

television as a world of “dancing illusions” is a recognition in keeping with her childhood rejection of prayer, as in both instances she is rejecting the imposition of helplessness conferred by either religion or mass media (224). While Ma’s illusions motivate her to help, Elli is shown as having to overcome secular disillusion as well as religious illusions to effect change.

The “world of dancing illusions” to which Elli refers is one sustained through a transmission of images on television, and these images are complicated by expectations about what should and should not happen in certain nations. When Animal sees the 9/11 attacks on American television, he is shocked that such a thing might actually be happening in America. As he explains it, “stuff like that doesn’t happen in real life, Not in Amrika anyway. Here in Khaufpur it’s different. Here in Khaufpur we had that night. Nothing like that has happened anywhere else” (61). Elli, by contrast, describes being barraged by images of the things that happen everywhere else in the world, to the point that the terrors she witnessed ceased to be meaningful: Elli explains how, after medical school, she would “come home tired and flop in front of the tele” and how this amounted to she and her husband becoming “the sort of people they once despised,” and whose engagement with the real world is severely circumscribed (224). If, as Marshall McLuhan has famously suggested, “the medium is the message,” and television as a medium is particularly hypnotic, it is no wonder Elli must leave her couch and television to pursue the constitutive moral goals that inspired her as a younger woman (McLuhan 110).

Elli’s sloughing off of complacency grows out of a transcendence of nationalism, as she escapes the tendency to expect and accept suffering in other nations to recognize the equivalency of bodies. She identifies the suffering of her own disabled mother and her father’s dangerous employment with the Khaufpuris, and her childhood

urge to save her parents grows into a desire to help this disadvantaged community. Sociologist Stanley Cohen has remarked upon the tendency to both expect suffering in certain "zones of the world" and to naturalize violence in certain locations (173). Cohen argues that "historically interminable narratives" that originate in colonial racism make terrible atrocities seem natural or inevitable, as those in the postcolonial world "get what they deserve, not because of what they do, but because of who they are" (96-97). Elli's transcendence of this mode of national consciousness grows out of the commonality of disability, which provides her with a framework for appreciating the universality of pain.

Elli is perhaps the most idealized, and her counterparts in *Animal's People* the most demonized, of the many doctors that populate this fiction. Sinha, Kanga, Mistry and Rushdie all present doctors who become politically significant as they interact with and act upon disabled people, and as their involvement with disability becomes an articulation of political alternatives. While the failure of the state or failed ideology is so often figured in terms of pernicious doctoring and an insidious clinic or medical apparatus, possible political alternatives are personified in rebel doctors with counter-hegemonic political sentiments who help rather than harm disabled people. The representation of doctors is an important adjunct to the political imaginary that surrounds disabled characters, especially as the disabled body is normalised or threatened with normalisation: doctors and the clinic are the apparatus that does much of the symbolic work of these political fictions.

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In the epilogue to *A Fine Balance*, Maneck is surprised to find a much-changed version of his Aunty Dina: in the eight years since he saw her last, she has lost her eyesight,

gone almost entirely grey, and, whether as a result of depression, domestic abuse, anorexia nervosa, or some combination of the three, has become very thin. Maneck's surprise at her changed appearance is resonant as the narrator muses that "eight years in passing were entitled to take their toll; but this – this was more than a toll, it was outright banditry" and that "the grey in her hair had thoroughly subjugated the black" (702). Dina's hated brother Nusswan is perhaps the bandit and the subjugator implied in these descriptions, which inscribe Dina's unbearable living situation onto her body. Dina lost her apartment following the medical assault upon the tailors, and now must live with the male sibling who has acted abusively toward her since childhood. In the wake of her misfortune, it comes as a surprise that it is Maneck, rather than she, who can barely maintain his end of the conversation during their meeting; the dialogue between the two reveals Dina to be quite matter-of-fact about what has happened to her as well as the tailors, while Maneck is shaken to the core by the newly-discovered violence against his friends.

Given Maneck's exterior health and Dina's obvious infirmity, it is quite surprising that she is described as trying "to breathe life into" her friend during their final meeting (704). Maneck's lifelessness becomes all too literal a few pages later, when he throws himself in front of a train. While Dina and the tailors are described in the epilogue as getting on with their lives, and even finding humour in their situation (Ishvar and Om are described as "clowning" as they imitate a bullock and cart driver), Maneck simply cannot cope with the realities of loss and his changed circumstances (712). While Dina seems to have hoped to remind Maneck of the joys of the past during their brief meeting, her comments have actually had the effect of driving him to a psychological breaking point of grief. Dina reminds him of the meals the group of four prepared together, as well as the kittens they reared, therein invoking the time of

togetherness and unity they experienced if ever so briefly in her apartment. Their time together following the tailors' return from the work camp represented not only the possibility of a surrogate family for Maneck, but the potential of peaceful diversity as an alternative to state violence, as a female-headed, democratic, interfaith household offered both personal satisfaction and industrious solvency. That the ideal unravels following the disablement of the tailors, even as it is replaced by a secretive solidarity between the tailors and Dina, provides only a modicum of hope at the end of this bleak fiction.

The novels I have considered in this thesis all explore politics in terms of failed alternatives, and they all integrate this interest with an interest in disability. Disability often takes on symbolic value as it represents the potential for the postcolonial polis to survive and thrive despite regimes of oppression, but the ultimate death or medical normalisation of disabled characters in many of these narratives is tied to a loss of political optimism. While these texts in many instances disturb norms surrounding able-bodiedness and disability, they often ultimately narrate a pessimistic conformity to scripts of normalization, and in so doing, suggest the unjust triumph of a prescriptive politics of the state along with a prescriptive politics of the body. As disability is eliminated, or as people are disabled, so is the potential for any resistance to latent colonial forms. On the other hand, those fictions that narrate a sustainable disabled presence suggest the potential for the community to emerge from oppressive social structures unscathed.

For Rushdie, this symbolism is present in disabled characters who represent alternative temporal modalities, and the loss of the past as well as the failure of modernity are enacted in the medicalized destruction of disabled bodies. While Rushdie often represents the disabled body in a very simplified and rather bigoted register, he

also to some extent engages with the more complex potentialities of disability to represent the failure of the state. The normalizing perpetration of a Westernized medical apparatus against disabled people becomes the proof and at times the symbolic nexus of political disintegration and the dissolution of hope for the emergent nation, whether in the imaginary correlates of India or Pakistan.

Like Rushdie, Mistry uses disability to signify the nation's failures: while Mistry attempts to re-locate the normal type articulated by the European novel, and subverts the conventions of European fiction even as he employs them, he still depends upon a largely uncontested tradition of disability representation. While Maneck finds hope in the alternative normal on offer in Dina's household before he leaves for Saudi Arabia, all he can see in his disabled friends is an image of failure, because, in Mistry's fiction, disability spells finality and defeat. Mistry uses disabled characters symbolically to imagine problematic politics from a disadvantaged position, creating in disabled characters their symbolic correlates.

While Mistry and Rushdie ultimately write disability as narrative anomaly in the ways represented by Mitchell and Snyder, however, Sinha inverts the paradigm of the anomalous body in his fictional representation of the Bhopal disaster. The failure of the state to protect its citizenry results in collective disability identification, while those able-bodied individuals who might be treated as normal in another fiction become suspicious outsiders. The relative political optimism of Sinha's fiction is inscribed in the casting of disability as an identity from which resistance can be mounted, which removes from his metaphorics of disability a nullification of the disabled character. Even as international failure is realised in disability, resistance is written into the disabled body as it is made central to the community, and the normal body is given instead the place of signifier.

Kanga, in and almost diametric contrast to Sinha, articulates an elitist, competitive, neoliberal politics, and imagines failure in terms of molly-coddling and character weakness. Kanga validates neoliberal competition by re-imagining the potential for economic and social attainment as properties of mind at the exclusion of the body, and, in so doing, inaugurates an adaption of paradigms of normalcy. Kanga's imaginary valorises the economically competitive individual, but simply removes the constraint of bodily normalcy from this ideal marketable man. For Kanga, economic freedom from parental, societal, or governmental intervention is edifying, as masculinity is achieved through uninhibited economic competition.

For all of these writers, then, disability is about failed political alternatives, and whether or not disability is removed from a merely prosthetic function correlates to the relative optimism of the fiction. While for Mistry and Rushdie disability is powerlessness and authoritarian politics have the last word, for Kanga and Sinha disability is a site of potential resistance to political hegemony.

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