THE POLITICS OF RETRIEVAL: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELECT POSTCOLONIAL NOVELS

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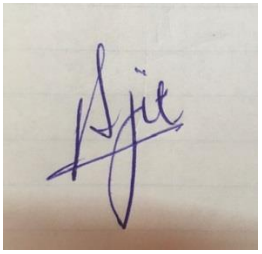

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Introduction

Writings from the colonies started appearing in Asia, Africa and other parts of the world right from the fourth decade of the twentieth century. But their early reception in England, as part of what was known Commonwealth Literature then, prompted many writers from these countries to express their angst and disappointment with what was written about them. In "Colonialist Criticism" Chinua Achebe argues that assessment of such writings by Eurocentric critical standards is unfair and even inhumane. So he pleaded that such writings should not be judged by invoking the widely used principle of universality.

Some advancement in the direction suggested by Achebe was made by three critics—Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin—when they published *The Empire Writes Back*, with a significant sub-title, *Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, in 1989. This stimulated a lot of critical activity all over the world, especially because the liberal humanist outlook that had ruled the academy till then had fallen into disfavour. The new approach to these writings, now called the postcolonial writings, grew with such rapidity that the publishers of *The Empire Writes Back* put together another massive volume, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, which consists of more than eighty essays and extracts from books and periodicals. It was published in 1995, and edited by the same critics who wrote the earlier work.

Since a great deal of diverse and contentious positions, representing different theoretical orientations, added much complexity to the reading of such literature, the same critics put together another volume *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* in 1998, as a guide to help readers to grapple with new theories and concepts that got associated with it. The three major critics of Postcolonial theory—Edward Said, Homi Bhaba, and Gayatri Spivak—have been so heavily influenced by the French high theory that some critics have seen a kind of division between these theoreticians and other

postcolonial critics like Achebe, Wole Soyinka, William Harris, Derek Walcott and many others. Because of this, Bart Moore-Gilbert begins his book on the subject with a chapter entitled "Postcolonial Criticism or Postcolonial Theory?" (5), though eventually he comes up with some vital points of convergence between the two, which is also the standpoint of this study.

The present study is rooted in one of the most significant aspects of the postcolonial novel, which is its serious engagement with the past/history of the countries of their origin. Almost all the postcolonial novelists have written novels in which they have tried to retrieve the past of their countries majorly because it has either been disfigured or misrepresented or misinterpreted mostly by the historians and novelists of the colonizing countries. Because of this, there is a strong political dimension to such writings, which has been widely noticed and commented upon.

The present study takes this political engagement a little further by taking a cue from Michael Wilding's *Political Fictions* in which he states that politics in a novel is not limited to the political nature of its theme, but goes beyond this. This is because the novelist while dealing with the theme also makes choices with regard to the appropriate fictional style for working it out. That is, the novelist chooses a specific kind of plot or plots, characters and modes of characterization, and narrative management and narrative voices for the purpose of realizing the political theme. These choices are heavily influenced by the novelists' political vision and cultural moorings. Because of this, the politics of retrieval is not limited only to the themes of such works but also embraces the choices already mentioned.

To work this out, the present study examines closely six novels from six different countries of the world: *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe from Nigeria, *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o from Kenya, *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao, from India, *Ice Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa from Pakistan, *Benang: from the Heart* by Kim Scott from Australia, and *The Diviners* by Margaret Laurence from Canada. The approach is to compare the manner in

which they use elements of the fictional style—plot, character, and narrative management—to realize the intention behind their involvement with the past of their countries. This constitutes the politics of retrieval for the purposes of this study, and is reflected in its title: *The Politics of Retrieval: A Comparative Study of Select Postcolonial Novels.*

The study includes a comprehensive chapter on the theoretical exposition of the concept of the politics of retrieval. It makes use of the fictional and non-fictional writings of the chosen novelists as well as the insights of postcolonial critics, so that the main thesis of the study is situated within the existing scholarship on the postcolonial as well as on the chosen writers. This not only provides a solid and useful perspective on the issues related to the politics of retrieval but also a proper frame for its ensuing chapters. Using the method of close reading of the texts, the chapters provides details relating to the novelist's choice of specific historical, political, and cultural details that shape their plot, determine their handling of characters, and choice of narrative procedures.

To understand this engagement of the chosen novelists, the study is spread over five chapters. Chapter I is organized in four sections, and provides the necessary background for seeing the work of the novelists in its proper perspective. The first section of the chapter deals with the phenomenon of colonialism across the globe, as a part of historical experience, which is at the core of colonial experience; the second examines the special kind of relationship that this envisions between the colonizers and the colonized, and its implications for the work of the novelists; the third discusses the rise of postcolonial theory as a reading strategy to deal with the writings produced by the writers from the colonies, including the present ones, and how it extends the bounds of such writings beyond the actual historical experience of colonialism; the last one provides a brief overview of the work done on these novelists, to show how the present work adopts a perspective on them that has not been explored fully and certainly not in a comparative frame.

The second chapter explains the concept of retrieval in its fullness by first putting it in the larger and also traditional perspective of the Western realistic novel and then explaining it in its specific postcolonial context. Since all the novelists whose novels are discussed in the study have commented on the nature of their work with regard to the act of retrieval, including the need for looking at the act in the comprehensive manner suggested herein, the chapter also presents their views to elaborate the concept and thus to strengthen the legitimacy of the approach used in this study.

This chapter is followed by three chapters—which constitute chapters three, four, and five of the study—that deal with the treatment of plot in these novels, the approach to character and characterization, and the use of narrative procedure and narrative voice. Each of the chapters is prefaced with a short theoretical discussion that explains variety in the use of these elements over time, to understand how the novelists choose from amongst the methods available to them, to suit their needs.

In a way, the chapters provide a close reading of the fictional style of the novels in relation to their intention to bring out their political colouring, a procedure that is not generally available in the corpus of scholarly writings on them. Besides, the features of these novels are compared consistently to show how the novelists use them, highlighting their similarities and dissimilarities and also explaining the reasons for that. A short concluding paragraph at the end of each chapter provides a more compact picture of this comparison.

The chapters are followed by a short Conclusion to the study that sums up the key features of the analysis of the fictional features of the novels and also makes some broad generalizations on the entire corpus of novels. This is followed by a section on Bibliography that lists all the books and essays that helped in the making of this study.

Chapter I

Background: History, Theory and Criticism.

This chapter is organized into four sections, and is meant to provide an exhaustive background for a proper study of what is at the heart of this work: the postcolonial novelists' engagement with their past through the fictional mode. In their case, unlike the novelists of the Western world, this engagement is much more than a generic necessity, because it is pronouncedly political. This element in them though varies on the basis of the nature of the colonization that their countries have gone through, for it provides for substantial differences in the power relations between the colonizers and the colonized. Since such political dimension has already been noticed and commented upon by critics, this study, as has already been hinted earlier in the introduction, examines how this political dimension works beyond this, for it is reflected also in the distinctive fictional styles the novelists choose for realizing their purpose. That is, their handling of plot, characters, narrative management, and various other fictional strategies in their novels, which constitutes the politics of retrieval.

The first section of this chapter deals with the complex phenomenon of colonialism across the globe, as a part of historical experience. The second examines the special kind of relationship that this envisions between the colonizers and the colonized, and the manner in which it affects the work of the novelists. The third discusses the rise of the postcolonial theory as a reading strategy to deal with the writings produced by the writers from the colonies, including the present ones, and also how it also accommodates writings that are not a part of the historical experience of colonialism, but reflect other varieties of power relations. The last one provides a brief critical assessment of the work that has been done on these novelists, to show how the present study adopts a perspective on their novels that has not been explored in its fullness and certainly not in a comparative perspective.

Colonialism across the globe

In her exhaustive work on colonialism and postcolonialism, Ania Loomba states that the term Colonialism is derived from the Roman "colonia," (Loomba1) which means farm or settlement, and refers to the Romans who conquered other lands and settled there for adding to their wealth.

The tendency to go out of one's home, in a way, can be traced to the eternal human quest for knowing the unknown and reaching for the new and the hidden. History is full of examples of people who left their homes to travel to different parts of the world to see and know things beyond the confines of their own lands. The rulers, who generally happened to be kings in old days, did much more than that: they conquered lands, and took away whatever they found worth taking from there. Quite often, they also took control of these territories and created large empires, such as the Roman Empire, the Mongol Empire, and the Ottoman Empire.

The impulse to explore and to go into the unknown received a vigorous impetus by the release of several new tendencies in the whole of Europe because of the advent of the Renaissance. As a hugely liberating movement, it opened up new vistas of knowledge, glorified individual assertion, and stimulated desire for attaining new heights in varied fields of human endeavor. All this had two major outcomes.

First, some people strove hard to move out of the shores of Europe in search of new places, to know the unknown parts of the world, which led to the discoveries of America, India, and many other places, which became the source of the future colonies of European rulers. Advances in maritime technology nurtured this tendency in a big way.

Second, the discovery of new places provided a new outlet for individuals to come out of their socially defined roles within a stratified society that had enjoyed the sanction of tradition and the power of the Church, which had also strengthened the grip of religion on the lives of people. For a large number of such people, finding new lands, like that of America, for

example, offered an escape from the tyrannies of social and religious systems. In his book on postcolonialism, Robert Young remarks that there exists a recorded history of people from England and Europe who went by a ship, braving risks to their lives, to a country away from their ancestral homes, where they could give a new shape and direction to their lives.

For many others, the discovery of new lands opened up possibilities of trade and commerce, and also of means to acquire wealth. It is quite well known by now how the beginning of trade by the Europeans with Indians led to the establishment of trading companies and the eventual control of the various parts of India, making it into a colony of the British, the French, and the Portuguese. They fought their wars on the soil of India to gain control of its territory. The British succeeded in taking control of a huge mass of this territory, which became known later as British India.

A similar development took place in Africa too. The British, the French, the Portuguese, and the Belgian people, and much later, the Italians, took control of the various parts of the continent of Africa, resulting in a virtual redrawing of its territorial maps.

Colonies, in course of time, also helped the European countries to create outlets for dumping their excessive population. Britain, for example, deported huge number of people to these countries, which eventually helped them to set up colonies and for developing possibilities of trade. Since France too faced the problem of excessive population, they forced the local French people to settle in Algeria. To increase the French population there, the government extended French citizenship even to settlers from Spain, Corsica, Sardinia, Southern Italy and Malta.

The practice of transportation of people to these new places was also used to push out anti-social and undesirable elements from their society, which included criminals and shady characters. Britain used colonization for transferring its convicts to Australia.

In its early phase, colonization was similar to the present-day immigration, for it did not lead to the rule of any country over the indigenous people of another country or extraction of wealth from such countries. It was primarily the transfer of people from one place to another, who maintained their association with their original culture even when they lived outside it. They moved from their original habitat only in search for a better life in economic, religious and political terms. From these early beginnings up to the nineteenth century, colonization was rarely a deliberate policy of metropolitan governments; it was a haphazard growth of commercial interests and group settlements. Nevertheless, this did not prevent rivalry among the European nations to own the riches of each other's colonies and in this Britain proved successful. In purely economic terms, colonial set up was pre-capitalist in its character. Later on, it coincided with the growth of capitalism in Western Europe.

Modern colonies were not just about taking wealth out of the conquered land but also about creating a complex relationship with it, so that there was an influx of human and natural resources between the colonized and the colonial country. This influx worked in both directions. Indentured labour, domestic servants, travellers and traders moved from the colonized state. Slaves moved from Africa to America and in West Indian plantations where they produced sugar for consumption in Europe. Raw cotton was taken to England from India where it was manufactured into cloth and sold back to India, because of which the textile industry of the latter suffered.

The colonizers moved as administrators, soldiers, merchants, settlers, travellers, writers, domestic staff, missionaries, teachers and scientists. Whatever direction the people and materials moved, the profits always went to the colonizing country, often called mother country. This produced an economic imbalance that helped the European capitalism and industry to grow.

As mentioned earlier, colonialism, in its early phase, was not connected with political and economic ambition; it was a settlement for a better life.

However, with the passage of time, the colonizers made sure that they maintained a distinction between them and the original people of the colonies. They did not want to integrate with the local community as it had generally happened with their ancestors or like what occurred with the Portuguese and the Spanish ancestors who integrated with the natives of the places they took to.

In other cases, the colonizers' preference was to exterminate the indigenous people instead of ruling over them, as for example, in the case of the Spanish and the Anglo-Saxons. Still, in other cases, the natives were pushed out of the land they previously occupied, a process that occurred in the colonies of Africa, such as Algeria, Kenya, Rhodesia and South Africa. Also, in places where labour was required for plantations and the indigenous people were not considered appropriate, others (largely from West Africa, India and China) were brought in as slaves, stripped of their rights and their social and political organizations. (Young 20-23).

Because of the manner in which the colonizing people took to the new place, colonialism took two distinct shapes: in some places, the colonials created occupation colonies and in the others, settler colonies. In the former, the Europeans occupied the space of other people because of their military and political prowess, and exploited the natives economically for the benefit of their country.

In the latter, as the name suggests, white people from the colonized countries, settled down to a new life in these places. Examples of settler colonies are Australia, the US, Canada, Brazil and to some extent South Africa. A prominent feature of the settler colonies was violence, as the places wherever the Europeans settled, were previously inhabited by the natives. These indigenous people were annihilated, attacked or robbed of their land rights.

With the passage of time, colonialism acquired a distinct shape and a massive reach of staggering proportions, as is clear from the statement of Robert Young "By the time of the First World War, imperial powers

occupied, or by various means controlled, nine-tenths of the surface territory of the globe; Britain governed one-fifth of the area of the world and a quarter of its population" (Young 2).

The Colonial Encounter: Features and Issues

The countries in either of the two colonial forms had in them the colonizers and the colonized. Their emergence and therefore their being together changed the social fabric of the countries that turned from sovereign countries into colonies, with far-reaching consequences for both parties. In both situations, the indigenous people were robbed of their land rights and forced into submission. This was done mostly in two ways.

The colonial subjects were subdued by the might of the colonizers either by attacking them physically or controlling them psychologically, by denigrating their social system and religion and luring them to embrace their religion and their ways. Invariably, the two complemented each other. The colonizers also tried to convince them that they were inferior to them, primitive in their ways and thinking and needed a healthy dose of civilizing medicine to uplift their condition. Thus the assault on the colonized was both physical and psychological.

These two aspects of the colonial encounter are quite known by now, but it took a great deal of effort on the part of committed writers and intellectuals from the colonies to understand them fully and to grasp their implications. These are also reflected in the writings of the novelists who wrote under what Chinua Achebe calls the "Imperial Fire" (Achebe "Home" *1*) which lent a distinct character to such writings from the colonies and necessitated a different reading strategy for their proper appreciation.

Frantz Fanon, the famous doctor from the French Antilles, had a first-hand experience of one of the major characteristics of colonialism, racism, both as a student and a professional worker. The experience shattered him so much that he resigned from the post of the Head, Psychiatric department and joined the Algerian rebels fighting against the French occupation of the

country. He also wrote two path-breaking works on these two aspects: *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin White Masks.*

The seminal statement with which the first book begins is that the colonial outsider is responsible for creating the classes of the settler and the native: "For it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence. The settler owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say his property, to the colonial system" (Farrington 28). So the two parties to the colonial encounter are the result of the colonial situation.

In this new system, the natives undergo a fundamental transformation: from human beings, they turn into things, objects, and a kind of property. This is done by the colonizer by making them believe that they are inferior because they lack intelligence, which is reflected in the difference in their colour.

The colonizer also perpetrated the myth of their mental inferiority and invoked the help of scientists and even their scriptures to establish their superiority over them. In *Black Skin White Masks,* Fanon provides startling details about the absurdity of what the white people did in Africa. As, for example, in the following statement: "It is laid down in the Bible that the separation of the white and black races will be continued in heaven as on earth…." Or this: "We [whites] are the chosen people—look at the colour of our skins. The others are black or yellow: that is because of their sins" (Markmann 23).

The colonizers ensured that there remained a wide margin between them and the colonized so that their racial superiority is sustained. And they did all they could to belittle the colonized. The latter were forced to see themselves not as human subjects with their hopes, wants and aspirations but as objects that place themselves superior to him and these superior beings define him and his existence. Derogatory phrases like "dirty nigger" or "look a Negro" were commonly used to describe the Africans. They were robbed of their dignity as human beings and as the citizens of their country. The natives felt violated and imprisoned by the way the colonizers took away their right to define themselves and express their own identity.

The trauma of the colonized subject was immense as he was taught to look negatively upon his own self, his fellow beings and his culture. A world was created by the Europeans in which the colonized were made subservient to them. Not only this, their beliefs and cultural values were also viewed negatively, as proof of being uncivilized. The Europeans are civilized, rational and intelligent, whereas the natives remained the "Other" doomed to live under the traumatic belief of their inferiority. This imaginary distinction between the Europeans and the colonized was used by the colonizers to imprison the mind of the colonized, almost like chains that imprison the body.

The colonial masters also created a whole body of literature, fictional as well as non-fictional, to substantiate their claims about themselves and the subjugated native population. In 1978, Edward Said published what turned out to be one of the most influential books of the late twentieth century, in which he studied how a great divide was created between the colonial masters and the colonized. He explains that the Europeans formed knowledge about the colonized as part of a continuous process, to justify their domination over the colonized. France and Britain spent a good deal of time producing knowledge of the countries in which they were dominant.

The Europeans never tried to understand a place and its people from its history or from its natives. Rather they made their own observations, based on assumptions about the Orient, as a place of exoticism, moral laxity, and sexual degeneration. This distorted and derogatory knowledge by the colonizers ceaselessly produced a degenerate picture of the Orient. The latter turned into a place of ignorance and naiveté while the West is considered a junction of knowledge and learning. So the picture of the colonized, as given by the colonizer, is all fabricated and based on myths and false assumptions.

Achebe has mentioned that during the years of his formal education, he learnt how the colonizers presented a distorted picture of his country and of the whole of Africa in fictional works like Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In fact, right from the sixteenth century

to the twentieth, nearly five hundred volumes of fiction and non-fiction, analyzed by Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, in a book called *The Africa that Never Was*, shows how a body of fantasy and myth about Africa developed into a tradition with a vast storehouse of lurid images to which writers went again and again through the centuries to draw "material for their books" (qtd. in *Home and Exile* 27). This produced very asymmetrical relations between the colonizers and the colonized.

Thus it becomes clear that the colonizers and the colonized were cast in different images because the former not only wanted to establish their superiority over the natives, but also to make the natives believe that their presence was a boon for them, for it was the only possible way in which they could move forward on their path from barbarism to civilization. The colonizers were creating a moral basis for their presence in lands where they otherwise had no locus standi.

Since, the encounter between the two had a considerable influence in shaping the mindset and thinking of the natives, many theoreticians, such as Homi Bhabha, have investigated this influence acutely, much beyond the easy formulation of inferiority and abasement of the natives. Making use of advances in the field of psychology, Bhabha states that the colonized is always the "Other" and the marginalized, which can never be on equal terms with the colonial master. Two of his influential essays, which figure in his *The Location of Culture*, 'The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism' and 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', show how the colonized were imprisoned mentally. Using the insights of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Fanon, he propounded the concepts of "Ambivalence" and "Mimicry," which have a bearing on the complicated relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

First about ambivalence, Bhabha states that colonialism is perpetuated by a series of assumptions that present the colonized as degenerate beings, on the basis of their racial origin, colour of skin, and several other features, but he

also argues that the aim of creating this degenerate picture is never fully achieved. It is because colonialism works in two different directions. On the one hand, the colonized is presented in negative terms, as bizarre and eccentric, and thus outside the frame of civilized society. At the same time, colonialism also attempts to domesticate the colonized and thus work towards abolishing this radical "otherness," so that they can be brought inside their fold.

Because of the working of these contrary strains, the colonial subjects virtually get split into contrary selves: they are wild, harmful, and mysterious; at the same time, they are also being domesticated, so that they become harmless. Because of this, the colonized slide ambivalently between these polarities.

Since this did not go well with the colonizers, they resorted to the practice of denoting the colonized as static beings, developing the stereotypes of the colonized as savages, brutes, anarchic and lustful. Bhabha states that without this stereotyping of the colonized, the colonists could not establish their inferiority. They therefore strengthened the validity of these stereotypes to put on a firm footing the inferior position of the colonized and the dominating position of the colonials.

Because of this, the colonized was not only told of his subservient position but also made to live it. This adversely affected his psychological make-up, causing him depression and anxiety and plunging him into a state of hopelessness and despair. The colonized becomes a mental wreck and made to live a traumatized existence.

To escape this condition, the colonized takes to imitating the colonizer's ways, by adopting and adapting to his culture. This Bhabha calls "mimicry," an exaggerated copying of the language, culture, manners, and ideas of the colonists. This is an ironic compromise as colonial mimicry is a desire for the reformed, a recognizable other, which leads to yet another psychological dilemma. The colonized is made to believe in his inferior position because of his race, colour, ethnicity, which makes him the derogatory other. To escape

this, he tries also to become like the colonial master. Because of this, he neither remains what he actually is nor is he accepted by his colonial master as an imitator. The result is that he is totally shattered, because he does not have his own identity, dignity and self-esteem. So the colonized is doomed to stay in this situation of despair, frustration and hopelessness. And a nation with people bearing this state of mind can never become great, can never prosper.

The rise of the postcolonial literature(s) and postcolonial theory

To legitimize their superiority over the colonized, the colonists also produced literature that, as is quite understandable, was extremely biased. They wrote for themselves and presented a false picture of the colonial culture and society. Elleke Boehmer has observed that wherever the British went, there they introduced their language, methods of town planning, cuisine, dress-sense, which were meant to bring home to the colonizers their social inferiority.

The colonials who essayed writings concentrated on the limited canvas of their sheltered lives in Cantonments, Civil Lines, European quarters or Hill stations, dominated by mundane activities like social rituals, tea-parties, club-life, sports, with focus on etiquette and manners. In short, the colonial writing was the narrative of the colonizer for the colonizer. Some writings, like that of William Arnold's *Oakland*, which is about the white man in British India, dramatize the moral uprightness of the officers of the East India Company. Indians figure marginally in it and are generally relegated to the background. In Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, the European protagonist occupies the centre stage and his Indian friends, Mahbub Ali or Hari Chandra Mukherjee, exist only in relationship with Kim or in relation to the Secret Service of British India (Boehmer 68).

However, this changed when the colonial subjects started writings of their own, in the language(s) of the colonizer. Writings emerged from India, Nigeria, Kenya, the Caribbean islands, and also from Australia. Ironically, the stimulus for writing, especially in India, Nigeria, Kenya, and the

Caribbean, was the direct result of the policy of the British and also of other colonial powers to introduce the language(s) of their country in the colonies.

In India, the British considered the English language and its literature as a tool for colonial domination and control. In her massively documented work on the subject, Gauri Viswanathan shows how the British introduced the teaching of English literature in India even before its introduction in England: "English literature appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before it was institutionalized in the home country" (Vishwanathan 3). Exposure to this literature was meant to make the colonial subjects see and understand for themselves their barbarous past and to get a taste of refinement and culture that they needed to better their lot.

Implied in this exercise was also to create a class of people who would work for the colonials and also take this message to other rungs of their society. Thus the British would get people who would work for them by looking up to them, and also influence the thinking and actions of other sections of society as well. This would provide for peace and stability and blunt opposition and resistance to colonial control.

This idea of using literature as a tool for pacifying people had its roots in England. Literary historians and critics have provided enough evidence to substantiate this. In his short discussion of the origins of English studies in England, in his book on literary theory, Peter Barry states that this thinking flowed from Matthew Arnold to the Newbolt Report of 1921 and became the basis of introducing teaching of English literature first in London University and its licensed colleges in industrial cities, such as Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, and others (Barry 14). Since he does not accept wholly the idea of literature as a means of ideological control, he comes up with a more rounded formulation on this by stating that

> There was, behind the teaching of early English, a distinctly Victorian mixture of class guilt about social inequalities, a genuine desire to improve things for everybody, a kind of

> missionary zeal to spread culture and enlightenment, and a self-interested desire to maintain social stability. (Barry 13)

Even this inclusive comment does clarify that literature had a social mission: of maintaining social stability and reducing possibilities of unrest caused by the presence of social inequalities. Terry Eagleton provides a longer and much more insightful discussion on this in an exclusive chapter on 'The Rise of English' in his book on literary theory (15-46).

In the Indian setting, the possibilities of such pacification through the language of the imperial masters were much greater than what they could be in England. Although English was introduced in India as a means for political control, there was also an aspect to this, which, in a way, diluted this effect, when Lord Macaulay, in his speech to the House of Commons in England on February 2, 1935, said:

> What is power worth if it is founded on vice, on ignorance, and on misery; if we can … as a people blessed with far more than ordinary measure of political liberty and of intellectual light, we owe to a race debased by three thousand years of despotism and priest-craft. We are free; we are civilized to little purpose, if we grudge to any portion of the human race an equal measure of freedom and civilization. (qtd. in Viswanathan 16-17)

Exposure to western education did bring about a change in the thinking of many Indians and prompted social reforms as well. And it certainly stimulated people to write in English, especially novels that dealt with the political situation of the country before its independence, as is evident from the novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao.

In the autobiographical accounts of Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o we have a fairly good account of the missionary activities that promoted education in Nigeria and Kenya. In fact, it forms an important theme of Ngugi's novel *The River Between*. Both Achebe and Ngugi were provoked to write novels

in the realistic mode that dealt with the political situation of their country because their education made them see the unfairness of what had been written about them.

These new writings from Africa and India dealt with the colonial past of their countries and also their attempts to come to grips with it with varying degrees of self-consciousness. Achebe wrote with a kind of missionary zeal, almost like a teacher, which he stated clearly in one of his essays. Ngugi too wrote with a great deal of vigour, but looked at the past of his country with a perspective that is different from that of Achebe. Both of them used the resources of fiction to deal with the social and cultural life of their people as they understood it, which was quite different from what had been written about Africans by the Europeans. Just as colonizers had written for the colonizers, the colonized wrote for the colonized, to provide them a truthful picture of their situation.

The main thrust of most of these writings was an attempt at what Hans Bertens calls "cultural self-definition" (194), convincing their readers that they were quite different from what they had been painted by their colonial masters. For the fact is that the British and Europeans had virtually rubbished the African past. So the writers virtually gave back to their people the voice they had lost during their subjugation and stimulated them to fight for self-determination. That is why Bertens says that "Self-definition and political self-determination were two sides of the same coin" (Bertens 194).

In spite of the novelty of their content, that distinguished these novels from the work produced in England and Europe, their reception in those countries came as a big disappointment to them. What actually happened was that from 1950s onwards, critics began to use the term Commonwealth Literature to include what John McLeod calls

> literature from the predominantly European settler communities, as well as writers belonging to those countries which were in the process of gaining independence from British

> rule, such as those from the African, Caribbean and South Asian nations." (McLeod 10)

Even when many colonies became free, they became a part of the Commonwealth of Nations or the British Commonwealth. Therefore the tag of commonwealth literature continued to be used for writings from such countries. Though this literature encompassed writings from a diverse number of countries, which had a distinct character to them, they were judged primarily as part of English literature and by the norms of English criticism.

English criticism in those days judged literature in terms of liberal humanist approach, for it was the one that ruled the academy. It postulated that all literature had a universal appeal, even if it dealt with people and situations from different geographical locations. So it hardly mattered whether a writer was from Nigeria, Kenya, or India, or New Zealand, or from anywhere. This was clarified by Norman Jeffares, the editor of the newly-founded *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* and also by William Walsh who wrote about literature from the commonwealth countries by using the same liberal humanist stance.

What Walsh comments on George Lamming's novel *Season of Adventure*, which is quoted from McLeod, illustrates how literature was evaluated in terms of its capacity to transcend the local to touch the universal:

> In this novel the African theme and connection become stronger and more positive, although it is never allowed to puff into a merely abstract existence. Indeed, Lamming's achievement is to make us hear the scream of the humiliated and the persecuted to make it simultaneously a metaphor for the damage universal in mankind. (qtd. in McLeod 14)

This clearly shows how the British and European critics read writings from the erstwhile colonies as part of English literature and invoked standards that

were Eurocentric, exemplifying the same old colonial mentality in the field of literary studies. Because of this, it was bound to produce a reaction from the writers of those countries and it did. Achebe, who had by now become a crusader for establishing the true worth of such writings, reacted to this in his essay 'Colonialist Criticism.'

Achebe calls the criticism of African literature by the Europeans as "specious criticism," because it smacks of "big-brother arrogance" on their part and therefore calls these critics "colonialist critics" (Achebe, "Colonialist" 69). He openly states that he has "problems with universality and other concepts of that scope," (69) and wants that "the European critic of African literature must cultivate the habit of humility appropriate to his limited experience of the African world," (73) and must be willing to admit that "every literature …must speak of a particular place, evolve out of the necessities of its history, past and current, and the aspirations and destiny of its people" (74). Therefore, he says that

> I should like to see the word 'universal' banned altogether from discussions of African literature until such a time as people cease to use it as a synonym for the narrow, self-serving parochialism of Europe, until their horizon extends to include all the world." (Achebe "Colonialist" 76)

In short, the burden of Achebe's long essay is to reject the western standards of evaluation because these do not bring out the concerns for which these writers wish to be known to the world at large.

This was enough incentive for critics to evolve a new reading strategy for dealing with the writings from erstwhile colonies, and that created room for a new post-colonial theory. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* describe it thus: "The idea of 'post-colonial literary theory' emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing" (Ashcroft et al 11).

The authors of the book clearly saw the need for a new approach to deal with such writings because of the distinct nature of the experiences they embody. They surveyed such writings and pleaded that universal and timeless approach is wholly inappropriate for reading them, for they need to be read in their specific historical and cultural contexts. Their book also examines some theoretical models that have been used to deal with them. However, in their search for an appropriate overarching theory, they homogenized and totalized the production of such writings, which ran contrary to their plea of texts to be read in their specific historical and cultural contexts.

In course of time, many other critics, from different parts of the world, who had to say something on the nature of the experiences embodied in these works, became a part of the postcolonial theory. Some of these have already figured in the discussion of the intricacies of the colonial encounter, in the second section of this chapter, in the complexities related to the relationship of the colonizer and the colonized.

Since, the colonizers had deliberately painted a false view of the political and cultural past of the colonized, "postcolonialism," as Leela Gandhi observes, "can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past" (Gandhi 4).

Because of this, the postcolonial theory gets involved with problems associated with representations of the past, which includes the complex relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, that are dealt with in colonial discourse, the envisioning of the nation and its representations, and the place of women in them.

Dealing with the concerns outlined above has also led to the use of what Bart Moore-Gilbert calls French "high theory—notably the ideas of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault" (Moore-Gilbert1) by three of its major critics: Said, Bhaba, and Gayatri Spivak, which has led to several

contentious debates among other critics in the field, who include Robert Young, Abdul Jan Mohamad, and Aijaz Ahmed.

In spite of this, and also in spite of the cleavage that some critics have hinted between postcolonial theory and postcolonial criticism, Moore-Gilbert provides a comprehensive picture of what postcolonial criticism is like, and which is generally accepted by critics working in the field:

> Postcolonial criticism can … be seen a more or less distinct set of reading practices, if it is understood as preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination—economic, cultural and political—between (and often within) nations, races or cultures, which characteristically have their roots in the history of modern European colonialism and imperialism and which, equally characteristically, continue to be apparent in the present era of neocolonialism. (Moore-Gilbert12)

This description brings out the historical roots of colonialism and the contentious relationship between colonizers, the wielders of power, and the colonized, the people who are subjugated by them. It also emphasizes that the relations of domination and subordination can exist outside the actual historical situation of colonialism, and can be studied within the frame of postcolonial theory.

That this thinking has gained acceptance is clear from the fact that there is a constant expansion of the category of the colonized. Because of this Helen Tiffin's introduction to a collection of essays on postcolonialism and postmodernism also provides a fairly comprehensive example of this use. She explains it by referring to its two archives. The first one includes writings that are "grounded in those societies whose subjectivity has been constituted in part by the subordinating power of European colonialism." The second one is a "set of discursive practices, prominent among which is

resistance to colonialism, colonialist ideologies, and their contemporary forms and subjectificatory legacies" (Tiffin vii). The second one opens up the field of colonialism to embrace other means of ideological control, which could be political, social, and even linguistic.

This study understands colonialism in this comprehensive sense, but focuses mainly on how the novelists use the resources of fiction to retrieve the past of their countries in the manner in which they understand it, by using their own specific style. The focus, therefore is not just on what they retrieve, which in itself is a political act, but also on the manner in which they do it, by using the elements of fiction in their distinctive ways, which gives the political act an extra dimension and constitutes the politics of retrieval. The study makes a studied comparison of the efforts of six novelists to illustrate its wide and complex variety.

Review of scholarly writings on the novelists

There are several exclusive studies on all the writers who form part of this research. Some provide useful introduction to the entire corpus of their work and some elaborate analyses of the technical aspects of their work, but they do not deal exclusively with the politics of retrieval. For example, G D Killam has a book each on Achebe and Ngugi: *The Writings of Chinua Achebe: A Commentary* and *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi.* Both these books are old, for they appeared in the 80's of the earlier century, and are meant to provide a very general kind of introduction to the novelists meant essentially for beginners.

Even the specialist volumes of critical essays on their work, which seek to pay closer attention to different aspects of their fictional art, such as the nature of the narrative in their novels, their art of characterization, and native cultural influences on their work are also old. Published by the Three Continents Press in America, the volume on Achebe, edited by C L Innes and Bernth Lindfors is titled *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* and the one on Ngugi, edited by G D Killam, is titled *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o.* These are also old and do not include the work that the

novelists produced after 1985. There are also critical works on the two novelists that deal with historical and cultural aspects of their work as well as the nature of their involvement with history.

Robert M Wren's *Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe* places each of Achebe's first four novels—*Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, *Arrow of God*, and *A Man of People*—in their proper context. For this purpose, the critic provides a useful overview of the cultural and historical background of Achebe's writing. In the main it follows the strategy used by historical critics, which is that for a fuller understanding of novels, there is a need for discussing the historical factors that shape them and the cultural content that is woven into their texture. Thus we are made to see how Achebe's novels arise from his response to the colonial situation to which he was a witness and to show he celebrates the richness of his Igbo culture to give a distinctive flavour to his novels.

David Carrol's *Chinua Achebe: Novelist, Poet, Critic* provides a discussion on all of Achebe's works, including short stories and poetry, and contains a chronology of major events in Achebe's life and literary activities. It examines the context in which Achebe wrote the complex intermingling of his love for Igbo society and his understanding of the baneful effect of European colonialism and provides a critical discussion of all his novels, poetry and short stories.

M. Keith Booker and Simon Gikandi's *The Chinua Achebe Encyclopedia* provides an overview of Achebe's life and career, highlighting its significant moments. The volume provides a discussion of his novels, short stories, poems, and his influential essays. Such books, by their nature, are highly informative, cover almost everything concerning the writer, but are deficient in discussions on specific issues. That is why apart from dealing with Achebe's literary writings, it provides information on adaptations of Achebe's writings in other mediums, such as film and television. It also

provides information about aspects of Achebe's life that have been commented upon by others and the persons who have played a prominent role in the development of his career.

Rose Ure Mezu's *Chinua Achebe: The Man and his Works*, provides key details about Achebe's life, the factors that shaped his career and literary sensibility, and the major content of his novels. The discussion of the novels is supported also by biographical details, which contain interviews with Achebe's family, and discussions on the characteristic features of Igbo culture. More interestingly, the book also contains a discussion on the representations of women in Achebe's work, a subject that is not covered in many books on Achebe.

Another significant critical work on Achebe is *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*, a collection of essays edited by Harold Bloom. All the essays on this novel cover its several aspects, such as the nature of novel's engagement with the Igbo past, the problems associated with its hero, and on issues related to gender, masculinity, and polygamy. It also contains sections on the chronology of Achebe's career and a bibliography.

David Cook and Michael Okenimpe's *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings* provides a comprehensive discussion on Ngugi's major works, with special focus on his social and political philosophy, issues regarding language, and his vision and aspirations. Each of his novels—from *Weep Not, Child* to *Matigari*—and his dramas and short stories, have been examined in depth. There is also an evaluation of Ngugi's standing as a writer and social figure.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o by Patrick Williams is a short but concise exploration into Ngugi's work as that of a significant contemporary writer. Williams builds an appropriate context for studying his main work in his opening chapter 'Contexts and intertexts' and divides his six novels into two large thematic categories: the first three build a sense of community and are

attempts at narrating the nation and the last three dramatize the betrayal of the struggle of the ordinary people of Kenya, mostly of farmers and labourers, in the post-independent Kenya, climaxing in the biting satire of *Matigari*. Williams writes a chapter also on his essays and provides an overview of critical response to his work and a bibliography too.

James Ogude's *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation* is a critical work on Ngugi that is close to this subject of research, for it deals with the issue of how Ngugi uses the narrative space of his novels to project his concept of history to visualize the image of Kenyan nation and how it contests colonial versions of Kenya's past. In spite of making use of advanced thinking on historiography, particularly of the ideas of theoreticians like Hayden White, he still adheres to the old view that "the epistemological usefulness of literature depends on how close it approximates the historical truth which is its ultimate referent" (3). This overlooks the problematics of the so-called historical truth and assumes that such truths are given by the historians that the novelists have to follow. The present study concentrates on how the novelists look at the past of their country differently from those of the historians and are most of the time and in many ways in contention with them.

Simon Gikandi's *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* is an in-depth analysis of all the major works of Ngugi, based on the premise that his novels are "a series of experiments in narrative form, experiments driven by the author's search for an appropriate style for representing an increasingly complex social formation" (1). So he writes an elaborate chapter on each of his novels, in which several of Ngugi's concerns are dealt with at length. These include the colonial terror and national resistance, the tension between the ruling elite and the farmers and labourers, the individual versus the collective, and the use of allegory and irony as important narrative modes. His chapter on *The Grain of Wheat* is quite insightful, for it dramatizes some of the themes already mentioned.

Ngugi scholarship has been served well by Charles Cantalupo who has edited two volumes of essays on different aspects of Ngugi's work. The first one *The World of Ngugi wa Thiong'o* has an essay by Neil Lazarus that discusses the work of Ngugi within the crisis of Postcolonial African intellectualism and one by Kathleen Greenfield who writes about the call of revolution in the work of Ngugi. These are followed by two essays on *A Grain of Wheat*, two on *Petals of Blood* and two on *Matigari*, a comprehensive essay on the 'Ngugi and the Legacy of Fanon,' and a long interview of Ngugi with Charles Cantalupo.

The second volume *Ngugi wa Thiong'o Texts and Contexts* is a much bigger volume, with more than thirty essays that cover varied and unusual aspects of Ngugi's personality and work, right from the time of his early education, aspects of cultural colonialism within which Ngugi had to work, on nation and postcoloniality, on writing and politics, commonalities between African-American narratives and Ngugi's *Matigari*, modes of resistance, and many more. The essays, in short, provide a comprehensive context for making sense of Ngugi's concerns in his novels, poems, and short stories, and also for viewing his work in the larger context of Afro-American writings.

Two early studies on Raja Rao, *Raja Rao* by C D Narsimhaiah and *Raja Rao* by M K Naik are of an introductory nature, which discuss the man, the milieu in which he flowered into a writer, and his major published works. Narsimhaiah's book, in particular, emphasizes how Rao's work can be appreciated fully by his effort to devise an appropriate form to realize the thematic concerns of his novels.

Shyamala A Narayan's *Raja Rao: Man and his Works* deals with the work of Rao in more depth, developing some vital connections between the man and his work. The discussion on *Kanthapura* places it in the larger tradition of village novels in Indian writings and also focuses on Rao's attempt to weave history through local narrative modes and social realism. It also analyses in depth the philosophical and metaphysical aspects of the two novels that

followed—*The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare*. Since Rao's longest novel *The Chessmaster and His Moves* appeared just around the time the book was being finalized, Narayan discusses it briefly in the Appendix to the book. Though she traces the influence of several foreign writers on the making of his short stories, they are firmly anchored in the culture and ethos of his country.

Paul Sharrad's *Raja Rao and Cultural Tradition* evaluates the critical response to the work of Rao, which in his view is largely based on the explication of their main themes and is dominated by what he calls moral-philosophical criticism. Since his main thrust is to put Rao's novels in an appropriate cultural context, he explores the cultural politics that has characterized the earlier response as being simplistic and argues that its complexity has not been paid adequate attention. Basing his study on the interaction between metropolitan and provincial cultural forces, he shows how Rao's fiction is engaged in a quest for post-colonial Indianness. He discusses the pressures of colonialism and culture and pays attention to the formal features of his novels, their narrative structure, and their style.

K.C Belliappa's *The Image of India in English Fiction* is about the portrayal of India in the fiction of Indo-Anglian writers Rudyard Kipling and L H Myers and the Raja Rao. It is a carefully worked out comparative study in which the author discusses the motivation of Kipling and Myers for writing about India and the Indians—their social, religious and spiritual concerns. He puts their effort in a proper critical context, which is largely Western, discusses their choice of techniques to suit their attitudes and concerns. In the chapter on Rao, Belliapa discusses Rao's thematic concerns, which are similar and also different from that of Kipling and Myers, and his use of language in his short stories and novels. He also shows how in *Kanthapura*, Rao uses local traditions for stirring national consciousness among the Indians and in *The Serpent and the Rope* he explores the notable aspects of the complex quest of its protagonist.

Critical work on Kim Scott's award winning novel is available mostly in the form of journal essays or doctoral dissertations. 'Benang: Shaping Identity under white Gaze' studies the manner in which the aboriginals were exploited and dominated. Yet another journal article 'The Stolen Generations, a Narrative of Removal, Displacement and Recovery' by Martin Renes analyses the pain and trauma of "Stolen Generation". It's a critique of the practice of taking away children from their biological parents and giving them for adoption or for bringing them up by foster parents to inculcate European values. It speaks on forced assimilation.

Cornelis Martin Renes's article 'Kim Scot's Fiction within Western Australian Life: Voicing the violence of Removal and Displacement' discusses the physical and mental abuse of thousands of aboriginal children who were forcibly taken away from their homes. He studies "forced assimilation" in Kim Scott's work with the work of Glenyse Ward, Doris Pilkington Garimara and Sally Morgan.

Michael R. Griffiths doctoral thesis 'Unsettling Artifacts: Biopolitics, Cultural Memory, and the Public Sphere in a (Post) Settler Colony' analyses *Benang* through the premise of "Biopolitics" wherein he postulates that the colonized aboriginal were treated as objects to be brought under control and marginalized in order to become the masters of the country.

Critical response to the work of Bapsi Sidhwa has mostly revolved round the issues of gender, minorities, and agency, dominated by feminist reading of her novels, as, for example in an essay by N E Bharucha in *Indian Literature* of 1996. Geeta Phogat and Shalini Attri's essay 'Acceptance/Existence: A Postcolonial Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man (Cracking India)'* analyses the effect of partition on women.

'Themes Seen in Indian Diasporic Writing' a journal article by Prabal. J. Roddannavar analyses Sidhwa's work as part of a larger diaspora study, which includes a host of other novelists as well. Zia Ahmed's journal article 'Pakistani Feminist Fiction and the Empowerment of Women' deals with the

violence that women had to face during India's partition and how eventually they mature into responsible beings to lead lives of their own.

Chelva Kanagayakam's essay 'Allegory and Ambivalence in Cracking India,' which figures in Volume 2 of *Parsi Fiction*, argues that in the novel Sidhwa creates two worlds, the affluent and trouble-free world of the Parsis and the turbulent world of the others. She uses irreverence and parody to create humour and a narrator whose voice is ambivalent and deliberately inconsistent.

Of the two book-length studies on Sidhwa, the one by Pramod Kumar Singh is *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa: A Critical Evaluation.* Its introductory chapter provides a short phase-wise history of fiction in India from 1900 to the present, followed by analytical chapters on all her four novels, a chapter on language and style and a conclusion. Quoting from an interview from the *Hindustan Times*, Singh comments on the strong autobiographical elements in the *Ice Candy Man* and how Sidhwa wrote about the partition because of her criticism of the Congress leaders of India.

Amit Kumar Dubey's *The Fictional World of Bapsi Sidhwa: Gender, Community and History*, argues that the three concerns in the subtitle are the dominant ones in each of her novels. *The Crow-Eaters* is largely about the life of the Parsis and *The Pakistani Bride* addresses issues regarding the gender. *The Ice Candy Man* includes a bit of Parsi history, but is largely about Sidhwa's own understanding of the partition of the subcontinent, in which she blends humour with irony. As an ironist, she reveals "the disparity between the ideal and the actual conditions of the leaders of Indian Independence movement" (74) and exalts the image of Jinnah.

Margaret Laurence's novel *The Diviners* has several dimensions to it, which have been commented upon by critics, such as Margaret Atwood, Neil Lazarus and several others.

James King's *The Life of Margaret Laurence* is clear and concise, and deals mostly with the analysis of problems and relationships in the novelist's life. The author has highlighted newly revealed facts, true as they may be, about marital difficulties and personal problems of a heroic life unknown to most readers of Laurence's works.

Lyall Powers's *Alien Heart: The Life and Work of Margaret Laurence* is the first full-length biography of Laurence that combines personal knowledge and insights with a study of her work, which often paralleled the events and concerns in her own life. Drawing upon letters, personal correspondence, journals, and interviews, Powers discusses the struggles and triumphs Laurence experienced in her efforts to understand herself in the roles of writer, wife, mother, and public figure. He portrays a deeply compassionate and courageous woman, who yet felt troubled by conflicting demands. Powers provides an in-depth analysis of all of Laurence's work, including the early African essays, fiction, and translations, and her books for children, as well as the beloved Manawaka fiction.

Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Margaret Laurence edited by Colin Nicholson is a collection of critical essays by different critics on the novels of Laurence. On *The Diviners*, the essay by John Thieme studies the use of myths. But his focus is to analyse the impression Laurence created about Europe through the use of these myths. In this regard his focus is Europe, not Canada. 'Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*: The Uses of the Past' by Gayle Green discusses the past in the novel but largely through a feminist angle. It shows how the inner realization of a woman is manifested in actions that liberate a woman from a stereotypical set up. Morag suffers from self-doubt and battles inner conflicts to realize how she could be true to herself by steering away from a life dictated by others. And once she gains this confidence, she shares her experiences and insights with others to help them live their lives. .

Another essay on *The Diviners*, 'Caliban's Revolt: The Discourse of the (M) other' is by Barbara Godard. She uses the analogy of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to present Laurence's feminist views by refuting the stereotype of

Miranda. The latter is passive and submissive to the will of her father, but Morag and Pique are defiant daughters who speak for themselves. Miranda speaks to the colonized (Caliban) while Miranda listens to them (Jules).

This short literature review clearly shows that most of the published works on the writers included in the present study are very broad in their scope and deal with issues that go beyond generic considerations. The ones with limited focus do not touch upon the issues that are central to the research in the present study. Because of this, the present study will not only be different from the work that already exists, but will also open up a significant perspective for reading postcolonial writings. Its nature, scope, and justification, is provided in the chapter that follows.

Chapter II

The Politics of Retrieval: A Conceptual Framework

> The novelist must be considered as absolutely an artist: his work is the expression of a reality which … already has in his mind a form and a meaning, and he expresses it by means of techniques, some of which he has inherited from his predecessors and some of which he has worked out himself from phenomena he has actually observed. (Zeraffa 9)

The literal meaning of the word "retrieval" is to get back, especially something that is not at the place where it should be. In the present study, the word retrieval has been used in its most comprehensive sense of the novelists' effort to get back from the past what has either been lost, or misconstrued, or misrepresented, and for whatever reasons. In the colonial setting, this means to recover the past of a country that has either been destroyed or disfigured by the colonial powers to show the colonial subjects in a poor light and also to justify their moral right to rule over them.

The act of retrieval involves the visualization of what is to be retrieved, the reasons for doing that, and the manner in which that is or has to be done. All these constitute what the present study considers the politics of retrieval. Since the novelists are not historians, but writers of fiction, the compulsions for undertaking this exercise are quite strong. The politics, as will be clarified, a little later, does not inhere only in what the novels deal with but extends to the fictional choices that the novelists make. That is, their choice of plot, characters, and narrative.

Since literature produced in the erstwhile colonies shows diversity in all aspects of the activity of retrieval, a comparative study of six novels from this perspective will not only promote understanding of a significant aspect

of such writings, but also help in knowing the reasons that account for this diversity.

The study is also based on the premise that though the postcolonial novelists have been doing something that had not been attempted before; their choice of the novelistic mode implicitly involves working within the tradition of novel-writing in the West. So before expounding the scope and reach of the concept of retrieval and its politics, it is necessary to see this within the larger perspective of the Western novelistic tradition.

Right from the time of its beginnings in the West, the novel as a literary form has witnessed a steady expansion in its range and depth because of the novelist's engagement with the history and politics of his/her country. This not only gave the novel the form of history, that is presenting events and happenings in a manner that they look like what they are in real life, but also encouraged novelists to bring in actual events and happenings and even actual people within its frame.

In a large measure, this involvement of the novelist has helped its renovation from time to time. M. M. Bakhtin, in his pioneering work on the novel, goes to the extent of stating that the novel as a genre is in a constant state of renovation: "It is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review" (Bakhtin 39). In fact, novel writing is like a force, "novelness", as he calls it, because one of the major concerns of the novel is its constant dialogue with the past.

The novel's involvement with historical and political events through their fictional representation constitutes a significant aspect of its politics, because the novelists use novels not only for producing engaging narratives but also for commenting on them and also interrogating them. Many critics who have written on this aspect of the novelistic tradition have sometimes used the term "political novel" for such novels. Irving Howe's *Politics and the Novel*

is a classic study of this novel, in which "political ideas" and "political milieu" play a dominant role (Howe 17).

Several critics have looked at politics in the African novel within this frame. In his essay 'Politics and the African Writer,' Kolawole Ogungbesan, for example, states that

> The African has been very much influenced by politics, probably because the African intellectual is a part of the political elite. The writer is a sensitive point within the society. Thus, African literature has tended to reflect the political phases on the continent. Chinua Achebe is a very suitable example. Beginning during the colonial days his writing spans the succession political crises which has beset Nigeria. (Ogungbesan 37)

Some critics like M S C Okolo think that the interest of the African writers in politics is of such a high order that they are no less than political philosophers, who strive for "raising social consciousness" and for providing "critical evaluation of existing political forms and political arrangements, beliefs and practices" (Okolo1). Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o figure prominently in his list of such novelists, whose writings "mould or redirect society's actions, beliefs, ideals, values and ideas" (27).

Politics in the conceptual frame that is at the heart of the present study goes beyond the novelists' concern with political events and happenings, and is closer to what Michael Wilding states in his *Political Fictions:* that politics in the novel is not confined to the novelist's choice of a theme or subject that has a perceptible political colouring; it also extends to the form that he or she considers appropriate for this. In fact, he pleads for what he calls "a radical literary criticism" that reckons with a "radicalism of form as well as content" (Wilding 19). The politics of retrieval therefore involves studying the nature of the novelists' engagement with representing or rewriting about

his or her country's past by relating it to the kind of fictional choices that he/she makes for the purpose.

Though politics in this comprehensive sense permeates all kinds of novels, it differs in its nature in the mainstream Western and American novels and the novels produced in erstwhile colonies, which have gone through the actual historical experience of colonialism and also in novels that deal with other forms of colonialism: of sources of domination legitimized by social practices, linguistic power, and other kinds of obvious and subtle hegemonic controls. The former deal with issues and problems that are related to a cultural set up that is different from the one that obtains in the colonial situation. Because of this, it is studied within the frame of postcolonial literature. The radical literary criticism of the politics of retrieval provides an extra edge to the reading of postcolonial literature.

In the present study, the politics of retrieval therefore involves studying the nature of the novelists' engagement with representing or rewriting about his/her country's past that emanates from the colonial situation, used in the comprehensive sense already stated, and the kind of fictional choices that they make—that is, the kind of plot, characterization, narrative strategy, and other devices they choose for the purpose—and to do all this in a comparative frame. That is, by analyzing the fictional style of the novels in a sustained manner and by comparing these in the six chosen texts, belonging to six different countries of the world, with their distinct social, political, and cultural history. This will bring out the variety in these writings and also sharpen understanding of the entire range of activities involved in the politics of retrieval.

Since the novelists whose work forms the basis of the present study have commented on the nature of their work vis-à-vis the act of retrieval, the study, therefore, presents their views to elaborate on what has already been said. This will not only strengthen the legitimacy of the procedure followed in the study, but also clarify the basis of the present investigation.

Though writings from the colonies written by its people started appearing in India in the 1930s, a clear articulation of the need for retrieval was made by writers from different parts of Africa. This is mostly because the colonizers vilified their people more blatantly than the people in a colony like India, and virtually erased their historical past. They used all kinds of fictional and non-fictional writings to make the Africans believe that their past was not worth anything. That is why, the two African writers Achebe and Ngugi, whose novels form a part of this study, have been its most aggressive spokesmen.

The introductory chapter of this study has already established how Achebe found quite early in his life that accounts of his country's past had deliberately been painted in lurid colours by the colonizers as a part of their policy to retain control over it. They wanted to instill in the colonized subjects that they were inferior to them because of their barbaric and uncivilized ways. Because of this, Achebe was compelled to think and enunciate what an African writer should be like and how he should use his talent in the service of his people. The issues involved in this, which have a strong bearing on the act of retrieval and the politics attached to it, were formulated by him in his landmark essay 'The Novelist as Teacher' which appeared in *New Statesman* in 1965, and was included later in his first collection of essays in 1975, and reprinted in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*, in 1990.

Because of the differences in the cultural climate of the European world, where people were free to do whatever they liked, and the African world, where people lived in a state of political subjugation, Achebe sees a fundamental difference in the positioning of the writer in these two locations. The European writer "lives on the fringes of society," and is in "revolt against society, which in turn looks on him with suspicion if not hostility" (Achebe, "*Hopes"* 40-41). The African writer is different from such a writer, because he is a part of his society, and as its responsible

member, he has obligations towards it, for he is the "sensitive point of his community" (45).

Achebe conceives a special role for the writer that is clearly suggested in the title of his essay, that of a teacher with a special and specific obligation towards his people. He has to undertake a massive program of the "re-education and regeneration" of his people, which is meant to help them regain belief in themselves and put away the "complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" (45). That makes it quite clear that the writer has to work to repair the damage caused to his people's psyche and morale by the colonizing masters. To meet this commitment, he has to teach his people that "their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (45).

This is a key statement, for it clearly states that the past of Achebe's people was not barbaric and uncivilized, as the Europeans had painted it. Because of this, the Europeans had to be seen differently from what they had projected themselves: they were not their saviours; they were their exploiters. Their propaganda that they had come to deliver them from their abject state was only a falsehood that they had been perpetrating for years on end, which had to be exposed.

Achebe's exposition brings out two distinct objectives of the act of retrieval: one, to spread awareness among his people that they are better than what they have been made to believe. Since this also helps them to know the real intention behind the colonial project, it also strengthens their belief in themselves to fight the colonial masters. Second, the purpose of education is not just to add to their knowledge, but also to gear them into resisting their oppressors. The writer is thus the harbinger of an attitudinal change as well, compelling them to find appropriate means to fight them.

It is also important that Achebe is realistic enough to see that his country's past is not totally perfect; because of this, he ensures that he does not romanticize it. Since it has its share of imperfections, people have to be made aware of that too. The act of retrieval thus acquires the additional dimension of course correction, which helps the writers to continue with their good work even in post-independence times, to fight all forms of neo-colonialism.

In *Home and Exile*, Achebe represents this activity of the writers by using a powerful metaphor. He states that the production of false accounts of the past by the colonizers is like gaining absolute power over the narrative of the subjugated people. They had not only colonized his people but their stories too. So the job of the writers is to retell the story of their people in its proper shape, what he calls "re-storying" so that they understand that, in spite of all the imperfections that they have, their past was not worthless and forgettable.

In another essay 'The Writer and His Community' Achebe emphasizes that though the writer's role has taken on a new urgency because of the colonial situation, his role in the affairs of the society is actually a part of the more elaborate and diversified cultural tradition of his society, in which artists from different fields of activity created objects of art for his society. In a large measure, the act of retrieval as an activity is very much a part of his traditional role in his society.

Apart from theorizing the act of retrieval in all its multiple facets, Achebe wrote a series of novels, including the one included in the present study, in which he recreated his society's past at the time of the colonial incursion to help people understand all the aspects of the colonial encounter. Because of this, he calls his writing "Applied Art", distinguishable from the European variety of pure art.

Considering Achebe's multi-faceted engagement with the past of his country, he structures *Things Fall Apart* in a manner that makes it different from the work of most of his contemporaries. He chooses a specific kind of plot, a set of characters who figure in its action, a particular kind of narrator to fit his purpose, and also a variety of English language suited for his effort. Therein lays the basis of the politics of retrieval in Achebe's novel, which will be dealt with in the chapters that follow this and will also be compared with other novels that figure in the present study.

From amongst the writers who form part of this study, Ngugi is more avowedly political than the others. This is borne out from the shape and tone of his novels and his numerous non-fictional writings. In the 'Author's Note' to his very first non-fictional book, *Homecoming*, he clarifies how he is political both in the choice of his subjects as well as the form he chooses for weaving them into novels. To quote him

> Literature does not grow in a vacuum: it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and these other forces cannot be ignored, especially in Africa, where modern literature has grown against the gory background of European imperialism and it's changing manifestations: slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. (Ngugi, "Homecoming" xv)

Ngugi emphasizes that literature is closely connected with the social, political, and cultural conditions of the times in which it is born; not just that, these conditions also shape its distinctive form. But these acquire an added significance in the context of Africa, because the countries of Africa had to reckon with the problem of colonialism, which made their people into slaves. In a way, it would not be an exaggeration to state that the first major writings in Africa were the product of this special historical condition. And this was true of many other countries as well.

Ngugi elaborates this in some of the essays contained in the volume. In the one called 'The Writer and his Past,' he states that the novelist's engagement with the past emanates from being "heir to a continuous tradition" (Ngugi, "The Writer" 39). In his own words, "The novelist is haunted by a sense of the past. His work is often an attempt to come to terms with 'the thing that has been,' a struggle, as it were, to sensitively register his encounter with history, his people's history" (39). In this way, he reasserts what novelists have tried to state from time to time. But the African novelists have a special reason for doing that because their people's history has been radically different from the history of people in the Western world.

Ngugi had first-hand knowledge of the exploitation inherent in the colonial situation by watching his own family: how his father and his father's wives worked hard but hardly got anything worthwhile for their efforts. In his childhood memoir *Dreams in a Time of War*, he recollects the suffering inflicted on them by the Europeans: "From 1902 onward when Europeans stole our lands they turned many of the original owners into squatters by force, or guile, or both" (Ngugi, "Dreams"127). And this they did, in wave after wave, and became the theme of a famous song that narrated "a tale of displacement, exile, and loss … a story of Kenya" (128). Echoing both Fanon and Achebe, Ngugi states how through colonial education, the African

> found the image of the past distorted. His colonial middle-lass education and brain washing told him that he had no history. The black man did not really exist, had slept in the dark continent until the Livingstones and Stanleys woke him into history through a mixture of piety and violence, the Bible and the gun. (Ngugi, "Dreams" 41)

This is almost like learning things under what Achebe calls the "imperial gaze." The educational programme of the colonizers was propagandist in nature and meant primarily to brutalize the natives.

Like Achebe, but in a more specific manner, Ngugi describes how the historians like HG Wells and Hugh Trover-Roper and writers like Rider Haggard, Robert Ruark, and the creators of Tarzan only reinforced the colonial narrative of Africa and its people. This put a special obligation on the writers of the African continent, which some writers had already succeeded in doing, for he says that he heard a different song from the Africans, different from that of the colonials. He also understands what the African novelists had already started doing:

> What the African novelist has attempted to do is to restore the African character to history. The African novelist has turned his back on the Christian god and resumed the broken dialogue with the gods of his people. He has given back to the African character the will to act and change the scheme of things. Writers like Peter Abrahams and Chinua Achebe have paved the way. (43)

Since Ngugi started writing after Achebe and Abrahams, he reaffirms what they had already done. Two things stand out in this. One the novelists had brought the people back within the societal fold and reconnected them with their own past. Second, and which is important, they had given the Africans the much needed strength to change the course of their lives by resisting the control of the colonizers and working out a new path for themselves. Ngugi also writes how Achebe was able to do that in his work

> We can see, and feel, how his characters, their world-view, their very aspirations have been shaped by a particular environment in a particular historical phase…. He has succeeded in giving human dignity to his characters, whether living in their traditional communal life or resisting European colonialism. (44)

The passage is a clear articulation of Achebe's art of characterization that is shaped by the requirement of the times, which this study deals with more extensively in its analytical part.

Ngugi, quite interestingly, adds an extra dimension to the act of retrieval. It has already been stated that the politics of the act of retrieval involves the visualization of what is to be reclaimed, followed by how it has to be reclaimed. In more concrete terms, it means to reclaim what was destroyed by the colonizers and also the mode in which it is done. Ngugi extends it a little further, because of the kind of vision that he associates with a society that is truly free from the colonial yoke, and this, as will be shown later in this study, has both a political as well an economic dimension. That is why his forceful comment about reclamation: "…but the very condition of a successful and objective reclamation is the dismantling of all colonial institutions, and especially capitalism, as patterns of social and economic development"(45).

For Ngugi, the act of retrieval goes beyond educating the colonized and developing in them the strength to fight the colonizing oppressor, because he thinks that this in itself will not remove all the traces of colonial influence. What is needed is to dismantle all those institutions and practices that the colonizers had set up to enslave people, a theme that he explores at length in *Decolonizing the Mind*. Without this, reclamation would only be partial. He also wants the restoration of a pre-capitalist order that the colonials had destroyed.

Because of this thinking, which bears a strong influence of Fanon and also of Karl Marx, Ngugi extends the boundaries of the writer's task, which go beyond Achebe's role of the writer as teacher. He writes: "It is only in a socialist context that a look at yesterday can be meaningful in illuminating today and tomorrow. Whatever his ideological persuasion, this is the African writer's task" (Ngugi, "Decolonising" 46). In his visualization of the act of retrieval, the past has to usher into a new today, but it has also to pay

attention to what has to happen after that, the establishment of a new and better tomorrow.

Because of the considerations already discussed, Ngugi's act of retrieval takes on a distinct character and coloration. His plots become complex; the characters who figure in his novel rub shoulders with actual historical figures, which gives the novel's action a direction that is radically different from the understanding of so many other novelists and historians, and his narrative strategy too acquires a quality of its own.

There is no explicit and consciously stated position on retrieval by the Indian English novelists that could compare with that of Achebe and Ngugi, though many of them have been engaged with the colonial situation and its representation in their work.

Mulk Raj Anand, for example, wrote about the need to study his country's past because he wanted to know the reason of the British presence in the country and its debilitating effect on its people. He makes an explicit statement on this in his *Apology for Heroism*, when he writes that he wanted to "realize the significance of the history of my country, all my heart and brain devoted to the search of those causes which had led to its present degeneracy" (Anand 104).

T N Dhar, in his essay *Historiographic Contest and the Post-Colonial Theory*, states that the degeneracy that Anand refers to was the enslavement of the Indians by the British and the acceptance by Indians of their situation without any effective resistance. Because of this, Anand builds a contest between two kinds of views about historical change in his novels. One view is that gods shape history, which the Indians believed for a long time. The other view is that human beings have the power to control the movement of history. The purpose of doing this is to make the Indians understand the second view and thus use fiction as a source of consciousness raising, so that

they get into the right frame of mind to resist the colonial domination of the British (Dhar, "Historiographic" 33-35).

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* deals with the colonial situation in a different way and exemplifies what Fanon in the *Wretched of the Earth* describes one of the characteristics of the act of retrieval. He states that writers weave the colonial situation in their writings not merely to reclaim the distorted past but also to use its representation as a source for shaping a new nationalistic consciousness. He, in fact, states that this exercise helps in starting "national literature," in which people visualize their future in a new set up. In historical terms, in India, it gets associated with the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi, who injected a new awareness among the people of the country to resist the British and look ahead to have a nation of their own.

Kanthapura takes up this project quite vigorously. Since it deals with the efforts of people to organize resistance against the British colonizer, as they figure in the novel, it is like what Fanon calls the literature of combat, for it moulds the "national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons" (Farrington 193).

Fanon also writes about the manner in which the writers generally do that. Invariably, he says, they use old songs and epics known to their people to "bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental. There is a tendency to bring conflicts up to date and to modernize the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and the types of weapons" (193).

It is interesting to note that Rao articulates the same strategy in the short 'Foreword' to his novel. He casts the colonizer-colonized situation into a tale that might "have been told of an evening, when as the dusk falls, and through the sudden quiet, lights leap up in house after house, and stretching her bedding upon the veranda, a grandmother have told you … the sad tale

of her village" (Rao vi). One can easily see that Rao relates his effort to an ancient tradition that is quite known to his people.

In such traditional tales, that are more popular in villages, gods and godlike heroes rub shoulders with common people. That is why Rao too conceives his tale as one in which "the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of [the] grandmother always bright" (v).

Through this mixing of the past and the present and the divine and the human, Rao creates the story of the "contemporary annals," almost in the manner in which Fanon suggests, to promote national consciousness and forge a new mode of resistance.

Rao's strategy is to mix the past and the present to make a sharp comment on the present, of his times, to galvanize his people to lead resistance against their colonial masters in a new spirit, which is non-Fanonian, for it is non-violent and not violent. Here, we have the example of a retrieval of the past through the mode of a rich, cultural memory and tailored to generate resistance against the oppressors. Rao, in a way, brings in Gandhi within the postcolonial fold, who, together with Fanon represents "radically different and yet closely aligned elaborations of postcolonial recovery" (Gandhi 18).

Because of these new features, the novel is used by Rao to build a new connection between the use of history and myth in the process of retrieval, which makes his fictional style quite different from that of Achebe and Ngugi.

Kim Scott's novel *Benang: From the Heart* is a much more complex work from the ones that form a part of this study. It dramatizes one of the most shameful aspects of the activities of the colonials in Australia about its original inhabitants, called the Aborigines, whose tragic fate remained under the wraps for nearly two centuries. It sounds unbelievable that till the year

1967, these people did not exist in the list of the people of the country. That is why efforts at retrieving their past have engaged the attention of activists and writers in a big way.

The British colonization of Australia, which began around the eighties of the seventeenth century, also led to the production of accounts related to their settlement in the country. These mainstream accounts projected the idea that the process of settlement was a benign one, for they simply had to settle on land that was unoccupied because it belonged to no one. Enquiries by people in the twentieth century, including the ones by human rights activists found that this made up history of colonization of the country was an outright lie, which people had been made to swallow for long.

Investigators also discovered a massive pile of documents that confirmed the existence of such people and the manner in which they had been treated by their colonizers and made into the marginalized ones. Systematically, they were first pushed to the fringes of the land itself, exterminated wherever it was possible, and also altered into different beings, by resorting to experimentation in eugenics. The situation they were made to face was so bad, writes novelist Colin Thomas Johnson, who is known by his popular name of Mudrooroo, that it "resulted in many persons becoming strangers in their own land, so alienated that sometimes they seem to have lost the will to survive" (Mudrooroo, 2-3).

Kim Scott makes the fate of the Aborigines the theme of his novel, which by its very nature is political because of its polemical nature. In Tina Makareti's two interviews, one exclusively with him, and one in the company of another novelist, Scott admits that he too is the product of the process by which some of the aborigines were slowly bleached of their colour and their cultural moorings, through a complex process of assimilation. This is what he states:

> *Benang* was very much a strong polemical reaction to all the

> existing histories that I'd read that were talking to some extent about who I was and what my history was. I wanted to use that very language to turn it back on itself. It's hard to say that in a way other than being polemical. (Makareti, *"Social and Political Histories")*

In another interview, Scott remarks:

> [The] urgency is that deep-felt sort of urgency to strengthen up one's connection to our pre-colonial heritage and carry it forward in ways that can be inclusive of the now and of my mixed cultural background ….There are new ways of being and they're all about who I am now. (Makareti, *"That Dead Man Dance")*

Read together, these statements clarify the theme of the novel. The person at its centre has been bleached into whiteness and wants to find out who he actually is. Though seemingly a search into one's past, it turns into a search of familial past, and then of the past of the entire community of people, who had been victims of the colonial suppression. The intricacies of the whole recuperative process are quite unlike what happens in the other novels discussed in this study.

The fictional style of this novel too is a mixture of several strands**.** In so far it is an exposure of the falsities of what had passed off for truth for generations, and unravelling of what happened actually, it is a perfect example of the postcolonial retrieval, but its style touches some aspects of the postmodernist style as well, the kind of mixture that is associated with novels like Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

Harley, the protagonist, starts like Saleem Sinai, to write "nothing more than a simple family history, the most local of histories," for the purpose of

making “certain things clear” (Scot, “Benang” 12). But soon he realizes that it transcends the local and embraces a larger social and historical narrative.

Harley is also a highly self-conscious narrator. Time and again, he speaks of his fears and anxieties, and also of his efforts to look for different sources to write his narrative. In *Midnight’s Children*, Saleem constantly talks to Padma about what he is doing. In *Benang*, Harley takes the reader into confidence about what he is doing. Because of this, a lot of non-narrative material, different sources of information about the aborigines—statements, official circulars, reports, files, letters—find their way into the narrative proper. This makes the novel into a work of metafiction that Linda Hutcheon associates with the postmodernist mode of historical recreations, discussed elaborately in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism*.

The novel is thus a mix of these diverse materials of reclamation, some of which have been documented by the novelist in its four pages of Acknowledgements, a combination of the actual and invented people, and an extremely sensitive use of language. All these constitute its distinct fictional style, which is geared to bringing out the psychological damage suffered by the colonized because of their cultural dispossession, and also recovering their actual indigenous history. Its strong personal element is corroborated by Scott’s work *Kayang and Me*, in which Scott responds to the stories of his people narrated to him by Hazel Brown.

The intricacies of the act of retrieval make the novel quite distinctive in the manner in which Scott creates a highly complex plot, a self-conscious narrator, a set of characters drawn from different strata of society, including real and invented characters, which will be dealt with in detail in the chapters that follow.

The fifth novel included in this study, Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man*, which appeared in the U.S. as *Cracking India*, provides an interesting version of an unparalleled event in the entire history of colonization in the

world, which is related to the Indian subcontinent. Because of its complex history of a multicultural, multi-religious, and multi-lingual society, the struggle of its people for independence from the British control led to a situation in which the British felt that the only way in which the two of its major communities could live peacefully in post-independence times was by dividing the subcontinent into two, thus creating the independent states of India and Pakistan.

The division resulted in one of the largest migrations of people in the history of the world and unleashed brutal violence of colossal proportions, in which on either side of the divide, thousands of people were killed mercilessly, women were raped and disfigured, and a whole generation of people was left bewildered and traumatized. The scars on the psyche of the people and the problems that they brought in their wake were so huge that even after seventy years, writers and scholars continue to write about the partition.

Sidhwa is highly conscious of the manner in which writers before her, but mostly from India, wrote about the partition from a perspective that she thinks is unfair to the country to which she belongs. She speaks explicitly on this in her interview with David Montenegro, and that defines the overall tone of her act of retrieval:

> The main motivation grew out of my reading of a good deal of literature on the partition of India and Pakistan … what has been written by the British and Indians. Naturally they reflect their bias. And they have, I felt after I'd researched the book, been unfair to the Pakistanis. As a writer, as a human being, one just does not tolerate injustice, I felt whatever little I could do to correct an injustice I would like to do. (Montenegro 36)

Sidhwa's act of retrieval is in the nature of an alternative history of the events leading to the partition of the subcontinent, in which she provides her own assessment of the events of the past and the leading political leaders

involved in them. She also claims objectivity for her account, because she thinks that she rises above the prejudiced view of the Hindus and Muslims.

To lend credibility to her effort, she creates a protagonist, who is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, but a young Parsi girl, who is expected to be neutral. For this purpose, Sidhwa frames a plot that traces the history of Parsis in the subcontinent and creates events to locate her in Pakistan. Because of this specific angle, the recreation of the partition in the novel provides an interesting contrast to the views of the Indian writers and historians, which impacts her characterization as well, especially with regard to the actual historical figures like Gandhi and Nehru. It also acquires a polemical tone, which critics like Chelva Kanaganayakam consider "anticanonical" and "irreverent" (Kanaganayakam 36).

As a postcolonial novelist, Sidhwa is also conscious of the medium that she uses for writing about her country's past. Though she knows Gujrati and Urdu, she prefers to use English as her medium because she admits in her conversation with Feroza Jussawallah that writers from countries that have gone through colonization are "condemned to write in English," (Jussawallah 214) and she does not consider it "a bad thing because English is a rich language" (214). To give it a local colour, she punctuates her English with "Gujrati and Urdu words" (214).

All these elements, the plot of the novel, its characterization, its narrative voice, and a wholly transformed English language, which emanate from Sidhwa's special understanding of the partition of India will be discussed and compared with other novels included in the study, in the chapters that follow.

Margaret Laurence is very unlike Achebe, Ngugi, and Rao, and others because her concerns are different from theirs. Like them, she does not deal with the reclamation of the past for shaping a new future of a specific kind.

The reason for studying *The Diviners* along with five other novels in the present study is to bring out variety in the act of retrieval and its politics.

In Laurence, the concern with past is related to the writer's attempt to discover oneself through writing that "involves an attempt to understand one's past, sometimes even a more distant past which one has not personally experienced" (Laurence, "Heart" 1). In this respect, she is unlike all the other novelists. They write mostly about the past that has been quite near to them, a part of which they themselves have experienced. It also underlines a significant aspect of a writer's concern with the past: that it may not always observe any depth in terms of time. Even a day that has just gone by is a past for the writer.

It is interesting to note that Laurence's interest in the past was stimulated by her reading of the work of African writers who she found were heavily involved with the past of their country because they wanted to "come to terms with their ancestors and their gods in order to be able to accept the past and be at peace with the dead, without being stifled or threatened by their past" (2). Achebe and many other African novelists have already clarified that the colonials had painted their ancestors and gods with a tarred brush, because of which it looked ugly and dreadful. So their coming to terms with their past was to see it in its true colours and thus accept it without any embarrassment or shame.

Laurence's own forays into the past had the same purpose behind it: to be "freed from it, partly in order to try to understand myself and perhaps others of my generation, through seeing where we had come from" (2). This clearly indicates that the revisiting of the past is for her a means of knowing her roots and her ancestors. It is this search that enables her to see how her ancestors had also done the kind of things that the colonials did with the colonized. That is how a part of her journey moves out of the purely personal into that of the history of her country in which the past of the aborigines was rubbished to gain control over them. Lies were invented to

stifle the voice of truth. The protagonist uncovers them, and through that act she experiences her own liberation and turns into a better human being.

The act of coming to terms with the past, of seeing and knowing it, helps Laurence to free "herself from the stultifying aspect of the past" and also seeing its "true value (5). It also helps in preserving human dignity and some "human warmth and ability to reach out and touch others" (6).

To sum up, the six novelists touch upon different aspects of the activity of recreating, remaking, or re-visioning of the past. Their motivation for doing this is also different because their effort is actuated by its differing perceptions and visions. A marked feature of this retrieval is one of narrative abundance, for the novelists give a new shape to the Western form of the novel by energizing it with their traditional forms of narrative and bending the imperial tongue to meet their needs.

Since the writers undertake the task on the basis of their specific understanding of the phenomenon of colonial encounter and use different techniques for the purpose, there has been a steady expansion in the area covered by the politics of retrieval. The varieties of perspectives used in understanding historical happenings, the varied ways of resisting power structures and the visions of emancipated communities have also made the politics of retrieval a highly problematic area. Some of these have figured in critical works on all the six writers but there has been no exhaustive study exclusively on the politics of retrieval, as has been demonstrated in the literature review of the critical work on them in Chapter I.

The chapters that follow will study the distinctive nature of the fictional style of the chosen novels by comparing how the nature of their intent, that is, the nature of the retrieval of their past makes them choose a specific kind of plot, mode of characterization and narrative strategies to realize their ends. The exercise will not only bring out the distinctive quality of each of

the chosen novels but also help in appreciating how and why they also differ from each other for realizing their purpose.

Chapter III

Management of Plot: Distribution of Space and Time

> Imagination is the magic that makes possible connection across time and space. (Thiong'o, "*Birth"*94*).*

The main argument of the present study is that politics in postcolonial novels goes beyond the political nature of their theme and embraces choices exercised by the novelists with regard to their fictional style. These choices, in fact, impart a literary character to the novels, for as Terry Eagleton observes, "part of what we mean by a 'literary' work is one in which what is said is to be taken in terms of how it is said" (Eagleton "How to" 3). And plot figures prominently in what the novelists want to say.

Since any effort at analyzing the plots of the novels in the present study presupposes clarity about the choices that were available to the novelists when they wrote their novels, this chapter begins with a brief discussion of the nature of the plot and its possible variants, as they have developed over time.

Though plot forms an essential part of any novel, its shape and also its function has constantly changed right from the time the novel emerged as an important genre in the West. This could possibly be because like the poets or dramatists, the novelists did not need to observe any rules or conventions that had descended down the ages and were considered "correct." That is why Jane Smiley, a distinguished contemporary American novelist, observes that every novelist was "free to experiment with what might be 'incorrect' but satisfying. When their compositions became famous and popular, each novelist's techniques entered into both the narrative and the technical lexicon of the novel" (Smiley 129).

At the heart of every novel is the story-telling aspect, which E M Forster considers the "fundamental aspect of the novel," (Forster 33), and is made

up of a series of events. When these are presented in a deliberately chosen order or arrangement, the story is transformed into a plot. Behind every plot is an unstated intention of the novel that a reader can grasp only if s/he is skilled enough to perceive the linkages between the scenes and happenings contained in it. Often the implicit nature of this intention adds a touch of mystery to the novel. But it is unfolded and resolved by a close analysis of the arrangement of events and the reason behind them. For being the first major attempt at defining the plot, Forster's definition merits attention:

> A plot is … a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. "The king died and then the queen died," is a story. "The king died and then the queen died of grief," is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. Story satisfies curiosity. Plot requires intelligence and memory. (Forster 93-94)

Elaborating on the distinction between the story and plot, Forster states that the story satisfies readers' curiosity about what happened. But unlike the story, the plot makes demand on their intelligence and memory: memory for remembering events to make connections and intelligence for the ability to do that. In this manner, Forster developed the concept of what is called a well-knit plot, in which events are held together by a chain of cause and effect. Since writers have constantly experimented with new kinds of plot-organization, to suit their concerns, critics too have enriched the critical discussion on plot to build on what Forster wrote about it.

While endorsing the view that a plot is "the arrangement of events to show cause," Dietrich and Sandell state that in this "cause and effect" notion, life is seen as a matter of "sharp conflict and clear resolution" (Dietrich and Sandell 127,128). At the heart of such a plot is conflict, generally associated with the character at its centre, which has two forms: external and internal. The former is between an external force, which could be represented by

another person, society, environment, nature, universe, even God. The latter is within a person, between the contrary aspects of his or her personality.

Dietrich and Sandell further state that the main purpose behind such arrangements is to indicate how a given state of equilibrium is ruffled through an event that generates conflict, which is strengthened by a rising action resulting in some crisis, which eventually rises to a point of climax. Its impact is a falling action that leads to a resolution through epiphany or denouement (129).

Some critics have used new terminologies relating to plot. A brief account of these is provided by Jeremy Hawthorn in *Studying the Novel.* The first set of terms is connected with what he calls the "order." A novel, instead of moving in a chronological manner, may proceed backwards or forward, which he calls "anachrony", in which "analepsis" is flashback and "prolepsis" is flash forward.

Hawthorn also uses terms related to gaps, omissions, and absences in a plot, collectively called ellipses, in which "unmarked ellipsis" stands for a character that disappears and his actions remain unknown till he reappears again. He also uses terminology related to the element of duration, because the novelist might stretch or collapse time through a scene or summary. A scene exhibits explanation through dialogues, whereas a summary provides a descriptive outline (Hawthorn 112-113).

R S Crane refines the idea of plot of the kind stressed by Forster in his essay on the 'The Plot of Tom Jones.' Since the plot of *Tom Jones* has been praised widely for its perfection, he pleads that there is a need to account for that perfection and says "We may say, the plot of any novel or drama is the particular temporal synthesis effected by the writer among the elements of action, character and thought that constitute the matter of his invention" (Crane 71). It is therefore difficult to say what the plot is without including the study of the three. Correspondingly, there are plots of action, plots of character and plots of thought. In the plots of action, there is a gradual or sudden change in the fortunes of the protagonist; in the plot of character,

there comes a change in the moral character of the protagonist; and in the plot of thought, there is a transformation in the thoughts of the protagonist.

Crane further says since in most of the classics, including *Tom Jones,* plots are of the first kind, many critics have reduced the plot to action alone, which is not correct. Anyway, the synthesis of action, character and thought influences our opinions and emotions and form expectations as to what is coming, and this desire to know as to what is coming is a necessary condition of pleasure in all plots. But a plot cannot be termed excellent only because of this. Other parameters like possibilities of language, manner of representations like dramatic or narrative have also to be taken into consideration (Crane 69-73).

Norman Friedman carries forward R S Crane's concept of the three-fold plot to create a whole typology of plots, which he details under three heads. The first one he calls the plots of fortune, which are related to what happens to the fortune of the protagonist. Included in this are the action plot, the basic plot in which the important consideration is what happens next; the pathetic plot, in which the characters suffer, as in most naturalistic novels; the tragic plot, where the suffering is related to the qualities of the character; the punitive plot, where the characters are unsympathetic and suffer because of that; the sentimental plot, in which a sympathetic character's fortune becomes better; and finally the admiration plot, in which the character gains because of his nobility of character.

The second group consists of plots of character, which is related to changes within the protagonist. These include the maturing plot, in which the protagonist slowly overcomes his or her deficiencies; the testing plot, in which the character is put under pressure, and eventually comes off well; and finally, the degeneration plot, in which the protagonist succumbs to pressure and loses our sympathy.

The last group is that of plots of thought that concentrate on changes in the thoughts of the protagonist. Three categories in this are the education plot, in which there are changes in the conceptions, beliefs and attitudes of the

protagonist; the revelation plot, in which the protagonist learns of his lack of knowledge; the affective plot, in which the protagonist sees somebody else in a different and truer light, which affects his feelings; and finally, the disillusionment plot, in which the protagonist slowly loses his faith in whatever ideals he had believed because of being subjected to some loss or some threat.

These schematic categories of the plot derive their life from the plots of works that have been written from time to time, which Friedman has quoted with each of the categories. However, along with them has also existed another variety of plot that the novelists learnt from the epics, the one called the picaresque episodic plot. In their essay 'Plot in Narrative,' Robert Scholes and Robert Kelloggs observe that "it is the most primitive form of plot employed in the novel, but it has retained its vitality and still flourishes today" (Scholes and Kelloggs 279). Examples of this kid of plot abound in the eighteenth and nineteenth century novel and in the twentieth century as well.

With developments in unravelling the complexities of human mind by thinkers like Sigmund Freud, many novelists shifted the mode of representation of human lives from their social externals to the inner workings of their mind, which had a huge impact on the plot-making aspect of novels. A well-structured plot that focused on external actions of characters was considered ill-suited for presenting this new reality about human beings.

In her essay 'Modern Fiction,' Virginia Woolf questioned the truth value of well-structured novels and considered Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy and H G Wells 'materialists' who spent "immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear true and enduring" (Woolf "Modern" 159). Her belief is that they go on "perseveringly, conscientiously, constructing … two and thirty chapters after a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision in our minds" (160). She wants novelists to be closer to life, by discarding conventional plots and accepted

styles, and focus on “dark places of psychology: Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each site or incident scores upon the consciousness” (161). That is why she praises *Gusev*, a short story by Anton Chekov, which provides insight into the mood of a character and in which not much action takes place. In short, Woolf supported the novel that explores human consciousness, which became the norm for writers who wrote under the influence of modernism and high modernism.

The qualitative contrast between the plots of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and those of the twentieth century has been elaborated by Arthur Honeywell in his essay ‘Plot in the Modern Novel.’ He states that in earlier centuries, the plot stressed temporal progression, that has three aspects: one, it has a definite beginning and ending; two, that it must be sequential in that each event must arise out of the preceding events and give rise to succeeding events; and three, the events that follow should be related in a way, that is universal and belongs to “the same vision of reality” (Honeywell 240).

In the twentieth century, plots shift from appearance to reality. There is a change in perspective, which results in the change of valuation. The character is viewed from a particular perspective but later he is seen in a different perspective. This reversal of perspective results in the reversal of valuation. The modern novels do not operate on the basis of causal sequence. The reader is not apprised of the causal influences immediately, but is brought about gradually as the plot unfurls. New methods of narration had to be introduced to bring about this gradual emergence of significance. (Honeywell 240-251).

This changes when modernism gives way to postmodernism. In her essay ‘A Brief Story of Postmodern Plot,’ Catherine Burgass states that the main difference between the two is in the handling of time in them. The modernists disrupted the temporal-causal connection, shifted the spatial contours of the novel from the tangible outer space to the inner space of the

mind, but retained the sense of time. That is why she says that even though modernist fiction "demonstrated an increasing preoccupation with time in its experiments with plot, [it] did so in the service of realistic representation. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* contrasts subjective and objective time; the disjunction between the former and the latter is signified by the chimes of Big Ben slicing into Clarissa's consciousness. The purpose is to render faithfully internal consciousness, including the perception of time" (Burgass 401-2).

In postmodern fiction, "thematic and plot devices are designed specifically to question linear history and temporality," (402) as can be seen in the fiction of Gabriel Marquez. That is why beginnings and endings have a special function in postmodern metafiction, marking the "entrance and exit of the fictional world and its parallel time" (405).

This short discussion on the changing shape and function of plot from the early stages of the novel to its present shows that the novelists have always shown their readiness to make changes to suit their needs. Because of that it seems sensible to accept Milton Friedman's idea that there can be no single general principle of plot-making. Every writer constructs the plot differently because he or she wants to achieve a desired effect (Friedman 147-8).

In the case of postcolonial novelists this acquires an extra significant dimension because of their location, which makes them pronounce their views on art in relation to the special needs of their society, their avowed intention of their novels which is invariably worked into the intention of the novel.

One of the biographers of Achebe gives an interesting detail about the making of *Things Fall Apart*, which confirms that Achebe paid serious attention to the best possible shape for his projected novel. When Achebe was in London to attend the BBC staff school, his colleague Bisi Onabanjo encouraged him to show the manuscript of the novel to his teacher Gilbert Phelps. Although Phelps thought highly of it and even volunteered to help

him find a publisher, Achebe did not accept his help. Instead he "asked for more time: 'It isn't quite what I wanted yet'" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 62).

Soon after this, Achebe reworked on the book by excising "the second and third parts of the novel, leaving only the story of Okonkwo." And then he reconstructed that part by "adding fresh chapters and paragraphs and generally turning it into what he considered a reasonably substantial novel" (63).

Bernth Lindfors provides more details on this. He states that Achebe originally conceived the novel as a story of several generations, but decided against it by cutting it into two bits. He quotes Achebe's interview with Robert Serumaga on this, in which Achebe observes:

> My conception of the story was really a combination of the two books—it was one story originally, not even very long, and it covered the whole period of *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*. And having done it I immediately felt that it was not right—that the time covered was too long and therefore the story was going to be too thin. So what I did was simply mechanically to cut it into two and blow up the first part. (qtd. in Lindfors 40)

In effect, what Achebe did was to redistribute the fictional space within the novel and adjust its time line. In this new arrangement, Okonkwo remains central to its conception, as its binding force. But to "blow up the first part" and make it look substantial, Achebe adds many scenes and paragraphs to it, which take on the shape of thirteen chapters. Thus the novel that finally appeared in print has a tri-partite structure, with a series of scenes in each part, six each in the last two, but more of them in the first part, thirteen to be precise, more than double of the last two parts. These, as will be demonstrated in the analysis that follows, are there for a well-conceived purpose, which informs both the structure and texture of the novel.

The key for understanding this arrangement in which the first part is blown big is provided in the very last sentence of the last chapter of the novel where the District Commissioner Brown speaks of his plan to write a book about the tribe that he has come to control as a British colonizer. The title that he gives to it "after much thought" is *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, in which he plans to give a "reasonable paragraph" to Okonkwo.

Things Fall Apart is Achebe's counterpoint to this, his book about his people and Okonkwo, with two objectives that are a part of his novelistic theory and practice. The first one is to dismantle the idea of the primitivism of the tribes, as a false perspective on Igbo life, which reflects the sustained effort of the Western people to paint the African people and their history and culture as barbaric. And second, that from being more than an individual, Okonkwo symbolizes what actually happened to the Igbo people because of the colonial onslaught.

The driving force behind the plot is to use the space of the novel to provide a version of the Igbo past, including the coming of the colonizers, and how they consolidated their position by controlling the lives of Igbo people. The reason is to challenge the versions invented by the colonizers about them through the written and spoken word, of which Brown's contemplated work is yet another example, which reflects the warped thinking of the Westerners. The arrangement of scenes in the three sections of the novel is geared to realizing that purpose, and building in the process an interesting historiographic contest between the imperial and the native versions of history.

The first part constitutes the bulk of the novel. Its first two chapters establish Okonkwo's newly-realized stature in society because of his hard work and bold spirit, which contrast with his father's weaknesses. Okonkwo's qualities could have provided an effective launching base for

some onward moving action, but there is hardly any, because that is not what Achebe wanted his novel to do. In fact, there are at least three trigger moments in the chapters in this part, somewhat like moments of crisis, that could have created a basis for possible action, in which the scenes could get interlinked as they do in a causal plot, but no such thing happens. These include Okonkwo beating his wife, Okonkwo killing Ikefuma in defiance of the advice given by his friend not to kill him on his own, and the accidental killing of the son of another elder, which is used by Achebe only to provide a basis for changing the location of Okonkwo and his family.

The chapters in the first part are held together not by any planned interlinking but by a number of dramatized episodes that are meant to dispel the idea of primitivism and give a lie to the purported thesis of the Commissioner.

Almost all the chapters that follow the first two dramatize incidents and happenings that are meant to create an elaborate picture of the Igbo society, which is one of the primary concerns of the novel. Because of this, the scenes distributed over the chapters do not follow any strict sequential ordering. Their thrust is to incorporate details that provide a fulsome picture of the social organization of the Igbo tribe and the customs and traditions that govern its orderly existence.

The scenes concretize the modes of socialization in the tribe. Whenever the tribe is faced with a problem or needs to sort out an issue, they seek the help of the Oracle Agbala, which warns people, like Okonkwo's father, for example, for their weaknesses. The conduct of people within the tribe is judged by their compliance with the established norms of social set up. Readers make sense of Okonkwo's brusqueness and irresponsible behaviour by his violation of the societal norm of exercising restraint during the Week of Peace. In a similar vein, there is an elaborate description of the Feast of the New Year, celebrated in honour of goddess Ani, with a great deal of

eating and drinking and the grooming of the youth in the well-organised wrestling matches.

This is complemented with episodes that deal exclusively with the depiction of other facets of Igbo society. One of them relates to the ceremony of marriage, in which men gather to drink palm wine and fix the bride-price. The other is related to the birth of wicked children, who, after their death, enter their mother's womb to be born again. Another one recreates the communal ceremony meant exclusively for men in which the ancestral spirits of all the nine clans of the village are invoked and addressed as bodies. They act like a judicial body, hear parties involved in a dispute, and announce their judgment, which is binding on them.

There are also story sessions in which stories are narrated by young and old. In another elaborate scene the daughter of Okonkwo is summoned by the priestess of Agbala on her back to the cave of the goddess taking the form of a fantastic journey of vague frames and hazy shapes. There is also a scene of the betrothal ceremony of Obierika's daughter, in which the whole village participates by sharing work and eating together. The bride comes with a cock in her hand, which she gives to the musicians, and dances to the tune of songs, and leaves with the groom's party.

To complete the picture, the last chapter deals with the death of Ezeudu which is announced with cannon fire, to reach all the nine villages. The ancestral spirits are also around. When Okonkwo's gun explodes and kills a young man accidentally, which is reckoned a female crime; he is punished with exile for seven years in his mother's land, which provides a transition for Part II.

This short description makes it clear that in line with the intention of the book, the requirement of the plot is that it has to provide space for incorporating scenes that provide a wholesome picture of the Igbo society, from birth rites to funeral rites, and key events like betrothals, marriage ceremonies, modes of socialization, settlement of disputes, and other details

to show that Igbo society before the coming of the colonial powers was well organized and well regulated.

Though the scenes are in the realistic mode, they have a strong mythic element to them, because that is in conformity with what the Igbo society was like, which makes it different from what the colonizers had in their own land, but certainly not inferior because of that. In such a society, time operates differently from the Western chorological mode; its movement is perceived in changes through seasons and weather.

The idea of relational connection between scenes, which are bound by the principle of causation, would have been inappropriate for the purpose that Achebe has in mind. That is why a different kind of ordering, a simple aggregation of scenes creates an episodic plot, in which the scenes though apparently disjointed acquire cohesiveness by creating a big picture.

Parts II and III are organized differently and deal mainly with how the British make inroads into the Igboland, not as much for the pacification of Igbo people, as Brown thinks, but for gaining control over their land and their minds. Of the six chapters in Part II, the first and the last deal with Okonkwo's welcome in his motherland, which is also utilized for edification, and the last one about his farewell, which is marked by fear and apprehension, and provides a firm transition for the fast-moving events in the part that follows.

The four scenes that are framed within these two dramatize the slow but steady intrusion of the British in Igboland. The movement of time that was almost missing in the first part is heavily compressed in this section. Okonkwo and his friend Obierkia meet a couple of times with big gaps of time in between and it is through their exchange that readers understand the coming of the British, how a white man on a bicycle made his way into the city, how he was killed by the people there and how they were wiped out in retaliatory action. In the second move, the British came into Umoufia as missionaries, and how in Okonkwo's motherland, the villagers thought that by providing them a piece of land in the Evil Forest they would not be able

to survive. The villagers also act softly towards the low caste people who seek liberation in the church of the white people.

The thrust of plot-making in this part is to emphasize that the British made slow inroads into the people of Igboland. Although they are critical of their religion and speak highly of their own, they do not resort to force, except in the very opening encounter where violence was initiated by the people of a village and the British used force only in retaliation. Implicit in the colonial incursion is the idea of the tribe falling apart, the phrase that forms the title of the novel and figures twice in Part III.

The six compact chapters that constitute Part III of the novel have two special features. The return of Okonkwo to his birthplace is used by Achebe to reflect on the state of his tribe: how some known people have joined the white people, how the colonizers have put a knife through them and how they have fallen apart. Okonkwo also watches how the colonizers had widened their work base to gain admittance among the people, by running schools and hospitals and creating opportunities for trade.

This interconnection leads to the last three scenes of intense confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized. In the first one, the tribe is virtually challenged by one of the local converts by unmasking one of its spirits. The spirits retaliate by destroying the Church building. The Commissioner summons the six leading figures of the tribe for talks and in a surprise move gets them imprisoned. They are released only after paying ransom. This compels the tribe to reflect on their condition in a meeting where the Commissioner's men come to stop the meeting. Okonkwo, who is already worked up, kills one of them, and the people let the others run away. To escape humiliation at the hands of the whites, Okonkwo commits suicide, which provokes his remark about the writing of the book.

This analysis of the plot in the novel makes it clear that for realizing his twin objectives, Achebe uses two kinds of plot in the novel. In the first part, the plot is almost like a pile of episodes from Igbo life. In the second part, the scenes move in time, to focus on Achebe's understanding of the key features

of the colonial encounter. The last part dramatizes how the colonial control is exercised through a well-developed institutional mechanism, which the natives find difficult to fight.

The plot mechanism thus shows Achebe as an interpreter of the history of his tribe, which he recreates with all its good and bad aspects. Its major thrust is to counter not only the projected work of Brown from within the novel but also of all those accounts that had attracted his attention, and which Oliver Lovesey sums up as "ethnographic accounts like that of GT Basden's, colonial novels like Joyce Cary's *Mr. Johnson* and Conrad's self-conscious palimpsest of ethnographic misreading" (Lovesey 116) or what Cary Snyder calls "a tradition of colonial discourse" (Snyder 177).

If Achebe had to work hard to put *Things Fall Apart* into the shape that it has now, Ngugi too had to put in a lot of effort to create *A Grain of Wheat* as it is now. Richard Lane states that in its manuscript version the novel was called *Wrestling with God*, which was changed into its present one in 1967. Even after that, Ngugi subjected it to another revision and republished it in 1986. This confirms that a good deal of thinking has gone into its making.

Compared with Achebe's engagement with his country's past, Ngugi's is different, complex and, problematic. It is different because like Achebe, he is not interested in recovering the societal past of his country in which the focus is on creating its multi-faceted picture and the beginning of colonialism in it.

Ngugi's *Grain of the Wheat* begins when colonialism in Kenya is almost over, for it is only four days away from freedom from colonial rule. But because the occasion turns into a moment of looking back on how it all happened, it also goes into the country's more distant past, to the point when the British made their inroads into the lives of the people and whose resistance compelled them to impose Emergency in the country, which led to the arrest of the rebel fighters and harsh measures against the civilian population.

Complexity in Ngugi's handling of these two pasts arises from the manner in which they are enmeshed with private lives, creating a mix of public and private histories that result in a serious conflict of values. The clash between private dreams and public responsibility which is so clearly demarcated in Achebe's novel operates differently here, creating ironic tensions that also impinge on public life.

This strategy also becomes problematic when it is connected with the manner in which the past is perceived and constructed by the novelist, which touches the sensitive issues related to historiography. In Achebe novel, the tension between the imperial and Igbo nationalistic historiography is more implicit and less visible at the surface, but in Ngugi, it is openly confrontational and takes on a more dramatic colouring, because his understanding of the colonial past and the resistance shown by the people comes into direct clash with the generally accepted nationalistic historiography of the leader-centric kind, which does not bode well for the newly independent nation.

To deal with these issues, Ngugi weaves a plot, which has three major interlocking strands. A major part of its action, cutting across the strands is located in the village of Thabai, where people are getting ready to celebrate the cherished moment of freedom, which is utilized by Ngugi as the moment to reflect on how they had reached that milestone.

The two opening scenes introduce all the three strands, which are expanded in the chapters that follow. The first one is located in Mugo's hut. He is widely recognized as the very embodiment of suffering that people endured during the colonial regime, but because in the scene he is in a state of anxiety and fear, doubts make their way into the mind of the readers. Since he is invited by the members of the Movement to address people on the day of freedom, this paves way for transition to the second chapter, which deals with the rise of the Movement and how Kihika took over from the older leaders and how he was betrayed and hanged.

From now on, beginning with chapter three, the logic for one strand of the onward movement of the plot is to draw Mugo out from his self-imposed seclusion, investigate the circumstances in which Kihika was caught and hanged, and to find the person who played the traitor. The entire movement is charged with irony because almost everybody thinks of Mugo and Kihika as brothers, little knowing that Mugo himself is the traitor, which is revealed towards the end of the novel.

Since the plot begins and ends with Mugo, when he makes a public confession about betraying his friend, many critics consider the novel's plot a variety of a betrayal plot, in which the logic of its onward movement is to reveal the traitor. Some critics dwell on its "intertextual links with Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*" (Lane 47), but the plot links betrayal with many more lives under the shadow of colonialism, which impacts their actions in many complex ways, creating small ironies of its own.

This untangling happens intermittently, when the plot gets connected with the lives of individuals, in the chapters that follow, who figure prominently in the events connected with the colonial situation, and open their minds to Mugo, who inspires them to come clean about themselves, because they believe, again ironically, that he is a superb example of quiet suffering. So, all the betrayals are laid at his door, which provokes Mugo too to open up about his own betrayal.

Mugo hates for being drawn into the radical politics of the times, and betrays Kihika in a fit of stupefied anger. Gikonyo, a fervent supporter of Kihika and the husband of his sister Mumbi, betrays the oath to go back to his wife, only to be shocked to find that is his absence she had a child from his competitor Karanja. Both he and his wife open up about their actions when they are with Mugo. Mumbi explains to Mugo how the reason for her action lay in the terror-striking ways of the British who punished people for knowing and sympathizing with the rebels.

The rise of the Movement in chapter two and the coming of their leaders to Mugo in chapter three paves for the introduction of the British in chapters

four and five who announce their coming into the country "as messengers from the Lord," (Thiong'o,"A Grain" 10) who converted people to the new religion, and how in response to their exploitative ways, resistance took the shape of the Movement, when people of the village had to suffer brutal suffering and torture both in prisons as well as in their homes.

Since the chapters take off when freedom is round the corner, Thompson and his wife Margery, experience the waning authority of the whites and the growing boldness of the blacks. Thompson believes in the spiritualizing mission of the British, compiling notes for his projected book *Prospero in America*, but is now on the verge of resigning to escape being humiliated by his former minions. Much later, though, in chapter eleven, he feels hopeful of staying on, because he still believes that Africa cannot do without Europe. The projected book is ideologically much stronger that the Commissioner's projected book in Achebe's novel.

More details on this strand are mixed with details about the rise of Kenyan resistance, which follows immediately after this, in the falsities in the educational programme of the missionaries, which eventually leads to the making of Kihika, the imposition of the Emergency after the attack on the colonizer's camp, and the unleashing of brutalities on the fighters in the Rira camp because they refused to answer questions of the white men and the sufferings of the people of Thabai who are held guilty for providing food to the rebels and how women are forced to offer themselves to soldiers for food.

Gikonyo's opening of his heart to Mugo brings in details about affair with Mumbi, his rivalry with Karanja, the love affair of Kihika with Wambuki, Gikoyo's betrayal of the oath, and his disillusionment with his wife and also with the new political bosses who make more promises than what they can deliver and how Karanja had disrupted his life during his absence.

Mugo's life too is filled up in bits and parts in his reflections that are stimulated by the visits of the people connected with the Movement, which eventually prepares him for the public revelation of his betrayal of Kihika,

with which the plot reaches its end. Since General R and others are keen on trying him for his action, it evokes different responses from the members. But for estranged persons like Gikonyo and Mumbi, it has a sobering effect, which brings about their reconciliation.

The problematic aspect of Ngugi's engagement with the past of his country, which has a bearing on its fictional style and has evoked critical controversy, has been hinted by Ngugi in a statement that functions like an epigraph for the novel:

> Although set in contemporary Kenya, all the characters in this book are fictitious. Names like that of Jomo Kenyatta and Waiyaki are unavoidably mentioned as part of the history and institutions of our country. But the situations and the problems are real—sometimes too painfully real for the peasants who fought the British yet who now see all that they fought for being put on one side. (Thiong'o, "A Grain")

The statement hints that the novel is grounded in situations and problems that are "real," though the mechanism chosen by him for dealing with them is by combining characters that are fictitious with names that are historical. But the most operative part is the last sentence where he hints at the disillusionment of the peasants, who fought for the freedom but did not get their due.

Considering Ngugi's interest in recreating the past of his country, even in his two novels before *The Grain of Wheat*, some of his early critics, like Killam and Andrew Gurr, discuss it in the usual postcolonial paradigm of a writer who wants to present an alternative to the imperial versions of his country's past, as for example, Achebe did in *Things Fall Apart*. In a similar but slightly different vein, Shatto Gakwandi considers Ngugi's attempt as that of a historical novelist but criticizes it because its plot and political theme are not held in a coherent frame and does not provide adequate space to political leaders (Gakwandi 118). Charles Nnolim too thinks that Ngugi's

involvement with leaders and situations is flawed on many counts (Nnolim 80-81).

Even James Ogude, who brings a whiff of fresh air in looking at the history-fiction connection in the novel with a greater degree of realism, makes the error of judging the merit of his attempt by postulating that the novelist has to go by what the historians have already said about people and situations: "the explanatory power … of literature depends on how close it approximates the historical truth which is its ultimate referent" (Ogude 3). It assumes that the historians are the sole custodians of historical truth, which is wrong, and which even the historians may not be willing to accept.

Ngugi's words prepare the reader for his unique manner of recreating the past of his country from the times of the British to the day of their freedom. When he says that the past leaders are "unavoidably mentioned" as part of history, he is also making a point that is corroborated by Kihika in the novel that they are not important for him because their role is already over. The Movement has already passed into the hands of the Mau Mau, the fighters, who actually fight for the freedom of the country. That is why at a crucial moment in the novel, he takes over the fight against the British, because the other leaders are not able to reach the spot.

In this re-visioning of the past, the leadership of the people has already passed into the hands of the young farmers, who have lost their land, which Ngugi considers the society's valuable asset, and they are willing to pay the required price for that. This might look like an ordinary transition, but is not, because it proposes a whole new orientation of the freedom struggle. So Ngugi is not merely contesting the imperial version of Kenya's history, but a variety of nationalist historiography that gives too much importance to leaders and ignores the role of ordinary people in the nationalist struggle.

Another implicit message in this kind of thinking is one of intense questioning. Though freedom is round the corner, is it really going to change the lives of people who fought for it? Ngugi subtly suggests that it may not. This is partly suggested in the hard work that Gikonyo has to do to advance

his business because the new leader who has to take care of the needs of the people keeps them waiting for hours together to listen to them. Instead of being with his people in the village, he chooses to be in the capital of the country.

In this way, the third strand of the plot is not only a visualization of the country's struggle of freedom through the efforts of the farmers and fighters, who were denounced by their own leaders, but also casting doubts about the gains of liberation, for it does not promise what he visualizes as perfect and total decolonization, but what Gikandi calls "arrested decolonization," (29) signaling almost prophetically that the struggle of ordinary people is not totally over.

The plot of *Kanthapura* is quite different from the plot of *Things Fall Apart* and *A Grain of Wheat* because of variations in the span of the historical past that they deal with in their novels. The plot of Achebe's novel goes deep into the Igbo past of his people, in which the accent is on recovering a well-regulated and well-maintained social, political, and cultural system that is disrupted by the coming of the colonials. The plot of Ngugi's novel covers several decades of his country's colonial past to the time of its independence to present his understanding of how the colonials were resisted by a group of highly motivated fighters who changed the anti-colonial strategy of their earlier leaders to secure the liberation of their people.

Unlike these two novels, Rao's novel recovers a significant phase of the freedom struggle in India that is inspired by the thinking and efforts of Mahatma Gandhi, by focusing on the steady awakening of the people of a sleepy village in southern part of India, which, as C D Narsimahiah says, is like a microcosm of India, for "what happened there is what happened in many places during India's fight for freedom" (Narsimahiah x).

Other differences in their plots follow from the method followed by them. Achebe creates a two-fold plot for realizing his purpose and Ngugi, because of the manner in which he perceives complexity in the processes of history, creates a unique mix of private and public histories. This is unique because

this mix is quite different from what was made fashionable by postmodern novelists soon after the publication of the revised version of Ngugi's novel. Rao does something different. He casts the novel in the frame of a rich cultural memory, of the epics of yore, in which history and myth are brought together to make inroads into the popular imagination and thus galvanize people to fight their oppressors.

Plots in both Achebe and Ngugi conform to the known Western form of the realistic novel, though they do make some minor changes. Rao makes heavy use of the oral story-telling tradition of his country which, among other things, directly affects the plot structure of the novel. In his Foreword to the novel, Rao mentions the epics of the past that are quite long and in the manner of one "interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought" (Rao, *Kanthapura* vi).

Kanthapura is structured like on interminable tale. That is why, like the novels of Achebe and Ngugi, it does not have part and chapter divisions which observe linkages of some kind or the other. The small and big transitions are marked on the pages by space-gaps and page shifts, but they do not necessarily provide any linkages, as we find in Achebe and Ngugi. The plot moves like a procession of episodes, not necessarily linked in any causal order, but it succeeds in realizing the intended effect of making the readers see how the people are awakened to a new understanding of their situation and the need for fighting their enemy.

To provide for the positioning of episodes, the initial episodes of the plot frame the space in which they have to be cast. The village of Kanthapura is presented in its fullness and in graphic detail. It is steeped in a traditional way of life that does not admit of easy change, for people are divided into different castes and professions, located in their fixed spaces, and living a life style that is orderly and tradition-bound, with goddess Kenchamma at its centre, with a village-head, a priest, and a moneylender too.

Apart from the religious festivities, the practice of reciting Harikathas by learned and professional people about the good deeds of characters from a shared mythology bring people together for collective celebrations. This time-tested medium is utilized for making Mahatma Gandhi into an incarnation of a god, sent specially on the earth to bring back "light and plenty to your enslaved daughter," (16) which is Bharata. Like Krishna, people follow him from village to village to "slay the serpent of the foreign rule" (18). This is how Gandhi is deified and made acceptable among the people of the village, through the mode of a Harikatha.

Having set the place and introduced the agent of change, the plot now moves from episode to episode to register how things change in the village. But because Gandhi cannot be present in every village, in Kanthapura, he is represented by Moorthy, whose conversion to Gandhi's ways constitutes one of the important episodes in the plot. The crucial message that changed the course of his life sums up the essence of Gandhi's message:

> There is but one force in life and that is Truth, and there is but one love in life and that is the love of mankind and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all (Rao, *Kanthapura* 48).

After that he gives up his foreign books and clothes and turns into a Gandhi man and devotes himself like a devout follower of his master to change the lives of the people of his village.

The episodes that follow are in the nature of the working out of the Harikatha that introduced Gandhi, a kind of its expansion, for they deal with the effect of Gandhi on the people of Kanthapura, which has three aspects: a) several episodes bring out the effect of Gandhi on people's thinking and their eventual turning into non-violent satyagrahis; b) some episodes identify the enemy and his exploitative ways that they fight; c) some deal with resistance to Gandhi's and Moorthy's ideas from within the social fabric. And all the three have a close resemblance to what actually happened In

India during the time Gandhi wielded his influence, which is like what actually happened in history.

Moorthy makes the people understand how the spinning of khadi is not just an activity that helps to produce cloth for personal use. It stops the use of foreign cloth and prevents the flow of money from the country into the foreign land. To help people get used to this, he distributes spinning wheels free to women. Since that is not enough to convince everybody, Moorthy puts another spin on this: "spinning is as purifying as praying," (27), which works instantly. In this way, the entire Gandhian programme is given a spiritual orientation. The enemy too has to be fought not by resorting to violence but by non-violence.

Several episodes are devoted to the enemy who in the novel is located in the Skiffington Coffee estate, which functions as a concentrated micro picture of the exploitative ways of the British, because workers have to work in sordid conditions, suffer sexual abuse and death for not submitting to the colonial authority. The law-enforcing agencies too are on the side of the perpetrators of brutal violence. Hunter Sahib is the typical British sahib, arrogant and heartless, who delights in inflicting pain on the poor workers.

Moorthy also attempts to fight orthodoxy among the villagers by mixing with the low caste people. This is resented by many, especially by Brahmins like Bhatta, who tell others that Moorthy's actions can lead to the confusion of castes and the "the pollution of the progeny"(39). They make efforts to have him excommunicated, in which they eventually succeed. In one episode, he has to bear with his mother's anger, which compels him to stay away from the village.

Moorthy makes people aware of the activities of the historical Gandhi and tries to replicate some of his techniques. A couple of episodes are devoted to his going on a fast in the manner of Gandhi before going in for the vital "Don't-touch-the-government campaign," to burn the dross of his flesh, to

let ahimsa flow through him so that he can love even his enemies. Rao's rendering is so powerful that it affects the people to make them into non-violent soldiers: on his face, they saw "primordial radiance, and through every breath more and more love seemed to pour out of him" (91).

Because of this, the confrontation with the enemy turns into a pilgrimage, the people into pilgrims, into soldier saints, who follow the "path of the spirit, and with truth and non-violence and love" (180). It is in this spirit that in episode after episode we see the people getting ready to face the lathis of the police. The policemen drag, slap and shovel Moorthy but he bears it all, putting into practice the ideals of Gandhi. His fellow comrades shout slogans "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai" and "Vande Matram." The officials arrest Moorthy and take him along with them. A case is filed against him and after the trials the judge pronounces three years rigorous imprisonment.

In his absence, the members of the Congress Panchayat Committee decide to continue his good work and more and more women step forward to become volunteers, keeping the spirit of the committee alive. When Moorthy returns, he tells people of Dandi March, wherein Gandhi would lead a march of thousands of people in response to the Salt Law imposed by the Europeans. He organizes a similar march in their village to the toddy grove which is owned by the British colonisers, and a source of revenue for them. The volunteers march to the toddy grave with Moorthy leading. They defy the police warning. So the authorities come after them with lathis and blows. The natives cover themselves but do not budge. The physical assault is borne with a constant cry of slogans.

The episodes of the plot in this way realize the intention of the novel, of illuminating a significant phase in the history of India's freedom struggle. In their eagerness to show how a novelist uses myth as a sort of counterpoint to the western mode of realism, some critics like Helen Tiffin have misjudged Rao's use of myth in this novel. She states:

> …by always converting history, including the history of Gandhi's movement which the novel traces, into myth, by placing the narrative of western intrusion as one story of the vanquishing of the demon by a goddess within the framework of timeless comparable legends, western exploitation is contained as a moment in illusory time on the seamless canvas of Indian space. (Tiffin 175)

In this context, Dhar has clarified in his essay 'History, Myth and the Post-colonial: the Indian Context' that the episodic movement of the plot has already demonstrated that Rao's intention is not to change history into myth, and certainly not the British exploitation of the Indians, which is too real and too brutal, into something illusory, but to show how myth is deployed first to promote people's understanding of this exploitative state and then to use it to galvanize them into a highly motivated disciplined force to resist this exploitation, which has already been dealt with in detail by critics.

In comparison with the plot of *Things Fall Apart*, *A Grain of Wheat*, and *Kanthapura*, the plot of *Benang* is different in a major way because of the nature of the colonial experience that is at its centre. In the first three novels, the colonizers make their way into countries to gain political control over their people and their material resources. Because of the resistance of the colonized, they eventually have to leave the colonies. In *Benang*, the colonizers came to the colonies to stay there.

In the novels of Achebe, Ngugi, and Rao, the natives are pushed into a subservient position through political coercion, but in Scott's novel the natives are robbed of their true identity, and made a part of the race of the colonizers through their planned cross-breeding. Because of this, the very nature of the content of the novels also changes. While the focus in the first three is on retrieving a large or small part of the historical past of their people, which determines the manner in which the novelists design their plots, in *Benang*, the focus is on reclaiming the past of a community that has

either been destroyed or transformed into a new one. Though it starts as a reclamation of Harley's familial past—"I wish to write nothing more than a simple family history, the most local of histories"—he adds that he "wants to make certain things clear" (Scot "Benang" 11). It is this urge to make things clear that eventually makes him see and write about the atrocities perpetuated on his ancestors through physical and psychological violence and the lies that were put into official records.

For this purpose, Kim Scott devises a plot for the novel that consists of a large number of scenes and episodes, with no numbers but short and pointed captions, which are punctuated at many places with official letters and documents. It moves in a slow unwinding manner to bring within its fold all that the colonizers did to obliterate a whole community of natives. Since the scenes revolve round the protagonist Harley, the plot also takes on the shape of a personal journey, an early form of organizing novelistic plots, but with a difference. The journey in this novel does not observe any linear progression as is common in many eighteenth and nineteenth century novels, but it is a journey that moves from the present into the past, and moves by slow degrees from the individual to the family to the entire community of the obliterated natives.

In line with this, the first three units or chapters function like parts that clarify the nature of the plot and the direction that it follows. In the first one, Harley writes that through him he hears "the rhythm of many feet pounding the earth, and the strong pulse of countless hearts beating" (9), signifying that his journey is a combination of the individual and the collective of "something discarded, something cast away and let drift and only now washed up"(10).

What had been left adrift and has been now washed up is clarified in the second chapter is his "whiteness which was surface only with no depth, and very little variation" (13). In this connection he remembers the people who were instrumental in shaping him into such a mechanical being, particularly his grandfather, who felt happy with his achievement, and fleeting visions of

his great grand-parents Sandy One and Fanny who were Nyoongars, one of the aborigine races, and their unhygienic living conditions.

As if these stirrings of how a black Nyoongar could become a white person were not sufficient to push Harley to find things on his own, chapter three spells another forceful reason to make him blaze the trail: "search for the biological family of one of my girlfriends," which led "me to reconsider who I am" (21). The journey takes on the spirit of an exploration of his true self, his real identity. His fate, that is his present condition, is crisply summed up in the statement of A.O. Hume, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, that "all I see it, what we have to do is uplift and elevate these people to our own plane" (13).

Hume's mission is almost like the mission of the colonizers in the novels of Achebe and Ngugi in which the natives are to be made humane and civilized. To show the falsity in these positions, Harley wishes to reverse the upbringing that changed him from his original to his new self, "not only for the sake of my own children but also for my ancestors, and for their children in turn. And therefore, inevitably, most especially, for myself" (21).

After introducing the drive behind the plot, which sets Harley on the course, flow details in the chapters that follow. In "Funerals," Harley is saved from the charge of killing his father by his grandfather and goes to stay with him. In his company, he learns of his interest in history, pores over documents and photographs, and also learns how "he was intended as the product of a long and considered process" which his "grandfather had brought to a conclusion" (30).

So Harley writes about the mechanics of this colonization right from the times of his great-great grandparents Fanny and Sandy One, to his times, a massive sweep of timespan comprising four generations. He uses his grandfather's notes and visits his Uncles, Jack and Will and his aunts, and his reading of excerpts, anecdotes, letters and applications from the official

documents from the Aborigines Department that apprise of their policies to subjugate the natives to make his own account.

Towards the end of the novel he accepts his true identity of a Nyoongar, without any shame or regret and that actually provides him the strength to pen down his family history of four generations. So the angst that he feels at the time of his beginning to write his account is transformed into a mature understanding of acceptance.

It is quite understandable that one of the longest chapters in the plot relates to Harley's grandfather titled 'Ernest Solomon Scot' which follows soon after. This describes his arrival in Australia, his meetings with Auber Neville who has evolved the strategy to colonize the natives. It also becomes clear that Auber would not have been successful in carrying out his ambitious plans of dominating the natives and documenting their history, had it not been for Ernest, who becomes his "accomplice." Auber put him on the job of carrying out patrolling inspections on his behalf. Documents and applications are lifted from the official files that authenticate the existence of A.O. Hume, the Chief Protector of Aborigines.

The subsequent chapters are episodes that crisscross the different incidents experienced by different characters of different generations. Sometimes it is Dinah or Harriet; other times its Tommy and then Kathleen and Jack. The rationale behind this is to bring out in as brutal a fashion as possible the mission of treating the natives which in the words of James Segal, the Travelling Inspector of Natives is: "Let them multiply in wretched camps, let rations cost more, let them be useless and untaught, keep them out of sight; or absorb them into our population," (48) which boils down to slow extinction or absorption and assimilation. The latter course is an exercise in changing the colour of the skin along with changes in the "colour of the mind" (50).

As mentioned earlier, Ern was the biggest reason and the cause of Harley's existence and his intentions can be understood from the comments mentioned in his file, "The need for both biological and social absorption"

and "Uplift a despised race" (*Benang* 29). And this ambitious project has a well-planned strategy, to attain the desired goals. A close reading of the episodes reveal this strategy through which the subjugation of the natives is carried out, primarily in three different ways. And these are, putting the natives at one place, similar to a ghetto; social ostracization of the natives; and finally, forcibly taking away the native children and putting them in foster homes.

It was A.O. Neville's idea to put them all at one place. In the episode titled 'Steel Fences', he puts forth this suggestion augmenting with the argument that it would be easy to supervise the natives and use them as a source of cost effective and ready to procure labour, as and when required. Once Ern takes Topsy out for some sight-seeing, and shows her the Settlements, the Reserves and the Missions, names given to places were natives are huddled together. They are dwelling places, but Missions have a religious colouring; the inmates are imparted knowledge of the practices pertaining to the colonizer's religion.

The natives are forcibly put into wagons and made to live in these Settlements, Reserves and Missions. The guards supervising them carry a whip which is tipped with glass. They mention the reason for their being put in this camp in the episode titled 'well meaning friends and that entrepreneurial spirit', as; "For training? Yes, perhaps. Certainly it was for breeding, according to the strict principles of animal husbandry" (93).

The living conditions in these ghettos are pathetic, where inmates have to eat stale bread and take soup with floating eye-balls. Scores of people are crammed in a small space with just a narrow opening for ventilation, which results in deaths. The ghettos are located in rubbish dumps that release perpetual stench. Supply of ration is very low.

The second practice used is to socially ostracize the natives by ordering white people not to deal with them. The episode titled 'In Black and White' mentions a new Legislative Proclamation released on April 27, 1937, that

defines “natives.” Its last line mentions that the non-natives are to stay away from the “blacks”. The constables and officers are directed to ensure that the natives are kept away from the public. In the episode ‘strictly routine singing’, Daniel, Harriet and Jack are together at a place, when they are confronted by a Sergeant. When he asks Daniel about Jack, he, for fear of earning his wrath, does not acknowledge him as a family member.

In the episode titled ‘jetty’ Sergeant Hall, on patrol warns Sandy One who is with Cuddles, a notorious native. Similarly in the episode ‘white right’? the police officer reprimands Harry Cuddles and Jack, as the natives are not allowed to hang out together. The blacks are not allowed entry in pubs, and take part in recreational activities and festivities. Hospitals have a different section for natives which are poorly equipped. The episode ‘stormy birth’ describes how Dinah does not get proper attention when she is brought to one of the hospitals after being raped, which eventually causes her death. Topsy too dies young because of lack of attention during her sickness.

In sync with the policy to keep the natives isolated, their children are denied education. Kathleen and Jack along with five children of Harry Cuddles go to school. And on the first day they learn a new adjective for themselves; “Nigger.” Jack is bullied and beaten by a gang of boys while Kathleen is raped. After a long tussle of arguments the native children are debarred from school. They also have no access to mainstream jobs. The only work Sandy One and Daniel have is mining and ferrying ores to different places. The explosive infested mines cause health problems to them; Sandy One has a parched tongue and a dry skin while Daniel dies of cancer. Sandy Two and Uncle Jack attempt to get jobs but are denied. Uncle Jack remarks, “It’s another sort of murdering. What the law was doing. And helping people do. Killing Nyoongars really, making ‘em white, making ‘em hate themselves’ and pretend they are something else, and keeping ‘em apart’ (339-340).

And the last strategy and perhaps the worst form of colonization is taking away the native children and putting them into Missions or with white

couples, in order to be brought up in English ways. A practice called "Stolen Generation." *Benang* was written two years after the publication of *Bringing Them Home*, a report of the "Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission" in 1997. It was based on an inquiry conducted into forced separation of aborigine children and found that from 1910 and 1970, "Between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities" (qtd in Reading Closely: Writing (and) Family History in Kim Scott's *Benang* 1*).*

The chapter title 'Mirrors' states yet another policy of the colonizers, which is elaborated from an extract from one of the files of Neville. Native women are to be sent into the white community; if they get pregnant, and give birth to children, they stay with them till they are of two years. After that the mother is sent back to the Settlement while the child grows with adopted parents or in missions completely unaware of his/her roots. The woman gives birth to a number of children as she is just meant to produce a new 'white generation'.

Harley writes how his mother too has to contend with the same reality. In the episode titled 'Mother', he mentions that his mother is just another maid to Ern. Once Ern attempts to rape her so Tommy and she move to some other place, but eventually she is sent back to the Settlement. Kathleen is taken away from the Carrolop Native Settlement and sent to Sergeant Hall for adoption. She learns the English mannerisms and is convinced to marry Ern. Later Topsy is adopted by Ern, and suffers sexual exploitation. In the episode titled 'Aunty Kate' Tommy experiences weekend meetings at his aunt, Kate's home where she runs a school. All the children of the school are to meet visiting couples who choose children. The children have no clue about their parents. The little ones are taken out on the pretext of going to the beach and there, they are sexually assaulted. Tommy experiences the same ordeal, because he too sent to one of the missions.

While the above mentioned plans were to subjugate the natives and keep them in a subservient position, another tactics of the colonisers was to enhance the "white population." It was supported by the 1905 Legislation wherein the natives had to seek permission for getting married. And white men had to take the responsibility of producing white offspring, abandoning the mother and the child after that. They are responsible for impregnating women, not raising children.

Apart from depicting the varied forms of colonial subjugation, the plot also uncovers the lies about the natives that are passed off as truth. In this respect, it resembles the plot of the novels of Sidhwa and Laurence. Sidhwa shows how it is wrong to blame only Muslims for unleashing violence during the Partition and Laurence uncovers the lies told by the Scottish colonizers about what they did in Canada.

In *Benang*, Scott exposes the lies that the Europeans penned in the official documents. The colonizers set up a separate department for the natives to protect their interests, but it worked to abuse them and legalize their oppression. In episode after episode, lies are spread about Fanny, Harriet, Kathleen, Dinah, and many others. When the native kids are not allowed to enter school, the meeting between the parents and the school authorities is reported in a local newspaper to have been very successful, and ending in an amicable settlement, which is not true. Facts related to the natives are manipulated by the European and presented in a distorted manner.

The driving force of the plot is to unravel how Harley becomes the-first-white-born-in-the family. But in this process, which is quite a long-drawn one, the entire exploitative colonial machinery is unraveled to the reader. Harley is also successful in finding the biological parents of his girlfriend. The write-up 'last but one' mentions that her mother is one of the Nyoongar woman and her father is rumoured to be Ern. He also becomes aware of his mother. Having this task accomplished, another important one is done too.

Of accepting his roots, without any shame or guilt but that breeding out of his past remains a pain. As he mentions;

> At so many funerals I have felt lonely, that it was I who had already been dead longest, that I myself represented the final killing off; the genocide thing, you know. Destroy memory of a culture, destroy evidence of distinctive people, bury memory deep in shame. (Scot, *Benang* 448)

This is how Harley's story becomes the story of all the aborigine children, which uncovers a shameful aspect of the colonial past of Australia.

Bapsi Sidhwa's main purpose in *Ice Candy Man*, which has already been stated in Chapter II, is to write about the Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, because of her keenness to correct what in her interview to David Montenegro she calls the bias of the British and the Indian writers. Her own research has led her to believe that they were unfair to the Pakistanis, and this injustice needed to be corrected. In a somewhat different way, she says the same in her interview with Feroza Jussawalla. Conceding that novelists like Khushwant Singh and Chaman Nahal had written novels on it, she says "I attempted to write it from a somewhat more dispassionate perspective than that presented by some Indian and some British authors, who conveyed their own bias" (qtd. in Jussawala 200).

Sidhwa's statements make it clear that the novel is meant to be an alternative history of an event that has already been written upon by others. This makes her novel different from those of Achebe and Ngugi, whose novels contest imperial versions of the history of their country. Ngugi also contests a variety of nationalistic historiography as well. By stating that she is not satisfied with the British and Indian versions of the partition, Sidhwa too contests the imperial and some versions of the nationalistic historiography of India. The texture of the novel confirms what Sidhwa has said in her interviews. In his review of a recent book of essays *Revisiting India's*

Partition: New Essays on Memory, Culture, and Politics, Dhar rightly remarks that India's Partition has been one of the most contested events in the history of the subcontinent. That is why even after seventy years, partition continues to be written upon both critically and creatively. However, Sidhwa's motivation for writing her novel is different from what the editors of the volume indicate.

An element of complexity is woven into the novel by Sidhwa's admission that she made in an interview given to the *Hindustan Times* that "Of all the books, *Ice Candy Man* was very personal. I had to create a distance between Lenny and myself. I have given her incidents from my life, the body in the gunny bag" (qtd in *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa: A Critical Evaluation* 65).

Lenny is the child protagonist of the novel, chosen by Sidhwa so that her version of the partition rises above the Hindu-Muslim bias. Lenny, like the novelist, is a Parsi, who lives in Lahore and stays on there after the partition of the country. Because she is a Parsi, the novel puts Lenny within the larger community of Parsis. Because of this, apart from being a novel about partition, *Ice Candy Man* is also about the Parsis who are caught in this terrible political upheaval, with Lenny providing a connection between the two. The novel also dwells on her growth as a woman. These need mention because these have implications for its plot too. But because the focus of this study is only on her partition theme, it will not pay attention to these aspects of the novel.

For combining the concerns that are at its centre, Sidhwa weaves a tightly-knit plot, which is spread over thirty-two chapters, crammed with scenes and incidents, with a large number of characters who, apart from Parsis and Christians, belong to the Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities. The episodes in its first four chapters create the space for locating the polio-stricken Lenny, under the care of her doctor, Col Barucha, within her home, with her parents and her brother Adi and a number of servants and the Ice

candy man, who for the first time, speaks of Bose, Nehru, and Gandhi, whose names Lenny does not like.

Sidhwa slowly weaves the theme of partition in the chapters that follow by mixing it with events in the lives of Lenny and her family. The details about the partition are brought within the plot through slow whisperings of people around Lenny, in discussions in meetings and parties to which she is a witness. Scenes of communal turmoil and violence are either heard by Lenny or reported to her by others or seen by her in the company of other people. Only once do they figure in the account of one of the sufferers of such violence.

In the Murree Hills where the British victory in the War is celebrated by people including all the Parsees, discussion shifts towards Gandhi's efforts to fight the British. The Parsee response to this is seen in their specific historical location, when they were allowed entry into India, and accepted to stay in the country. Their neutrality towards what is happening in the country is established when they decide "We will abide by the rules of their land" and the Parsees of Lahore say "We will cast our lot with whoever rules Lahore" (Sidhwa 40).

The rumblings of communal tension between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are dramatized soon after, in chapter seven, in a village where Lenny is taken by Imam Din on his bicycle. The Sikhs and Muslims respond to the disturbances they hear in other places by blaming the British government and firmly believe that the madness witnessed in the cities will not spread to the villages, especially in their village, for "they come from the same racial stock. Muslim or Sikh, we are basically Jats. We are brothers. How can we fight each other?" (56).

In a party in chapter eight, the British blame Gandhi and Nehru for creating problems. Rogers tells the gathering that they rejected the plan of a Federation of the Hindu and Muslim majority provinces, which Jinnah

accepted, and are "forcing the League to push for Pakistan." (63). He calls Gandhi and Nehru "Hindu fanatics" and Akalis a "bunch of murdering fanatics" (63). In this way, both the British and Jinnah are absolved from the creation of a two-nation theory.

It is interesting that the plot also brings in Gandhi personally to Lahore in chapter ten. Lenny's remarks about him suggest her contempt for him:

> He is small, dark, shriveled, old. He looks just like Hari our gardener, except he has a disgruntled, disgusted and irritable look, and no one'd dare pull off his dhoti! He wears only the loin-cloth and his black and thin torso is naked. (Sidhwa 86)

As if this were not enough, Lenny's choice of details presented about him, which are mostly about alimentary canals, has a clear mocking tone. And her opinion too, that he is "an improbable tossup between a clown and demon" (87) and her saying that she does not understand why he is famous.

In chapters that are not directly related to the partition, conversations among the inmates of the house, especially among the servants who belong to various communities, there are whispered references to violence in different parts of the subcontinent. The overwhelming opinion among them is that because of Nehru's proximity with the Mountbatten's "Nehru will walk off with the lion's share" (131).

Amidst talk of the impending division, one episode in chapter sixteen, brings Master Tara Singh, the Akali leader, to Lahore, and that leads to an open confrontation between the Sikhs and Muslims, generating terror "like an evil, paralysing spell," (135), leading to huge fires, and "charred limbs and burnt logs are falling from the sky" (137).

When Pakistan is finally born on Lenny's birthday, Lahore becomes its part. Punjab is divided into two pieces, and that starts the migration of people.

Most of the Hindus and Sikhs known to Lenny's family leave the city, although Jinnah speaks of the new nation as a secular state. Addressing the Constituent Assembly, he said:

> You are free. You are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or any other place of worship in the State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed, that has nothing to do with the business of the State…. Pakistan Zindabad. (Sidhwa 144)

In spite of this public declaration, some servants of Lenny leave Lahore. To escape punishment from the Muslims, one of her servants becomes a proper Muslim and another one a proper Christian. Because her Ayah is still with her, she is dragged out of Lenny's house by a furious mob and taken away by it, which includes the Ice Candy Man, who has been her friend. Much later, she is rescued after having been put into prostitution by him and sent back to Amritsar.

Close after the division of the country becomes known, an episode in chapter twenty that discusses these changes is also utilized to present contrasting short portraits of Nehru and Jinnah, in which Jinnah comes off as a better person, more reliable, honest and uncompromising. In spite of this, the British and Indian scholars have "caricatured and portrayed [him] as a monster" (160). In support of her view of Jinnah, she quotes elaborately what Sarojini Naidu said of him at one time: that he was "pre-eminently rational and practical, discreet and dispassionate…the obvious sanity and serenity of his worldly wisdom effectually disguise a shy and splendid idealism which is of the very essence of the man" (161).

To show that the violence is not suffered only by Hindus and Sikhs in Lahore, the plot also includes an episode of unparalleled brutality which is brought within its fold through Hamida, the new ayah of Lenny, in chapter twenty five. Ranna the sole survivor of this horrific experience narrates how

all the Muslims of his village in India were killed by furious crowds of Hindus and Sikhs, and how he survived because in his injured state he was taken for dead.

In the later part of the plot of the novel, Lenny observes the mysterious moves of her mother and her godmother with serious concern only to discover at the end that secretly and with utmost dedication they were working only to help the distressed females affected by the rioting. The house opposite their own that was once the home of a happy Hindu family has become the refuge of such women, who, because they had been subjected to sexual abuse during the rioting, were not accepted by their own society. Lenny's mother also helps to send those women to India who had not been able to leave Lahore in time, and the Ayah is one of them.

The plot of *Ice Candy Man* has breadth and span to accommodate much more than her concern with the partition of India, and has many parts that are totally about Parsee life and Lenny's growing up, that are not dealt with here.

The Diviners is a complex and a multi-layered novel, which, besides, dealing with many things that have been worked out by Gayle Greene in one of her insightful essays, combines "personal quest with the search for Canadian past" (Greene 177). These two major concerns are woven into the plot of the novel through the person of Morag Gunn, a writer, who uses her writing to make sense of the world around her. This makes it different from the novels of Achebe, Ngugi, Rao, and Scott, which are grounded in the harsh reality of the historical experience of colonial control and exploitation. Their intention is to bring out the varied aspects of this brutal subjugation, the truth about the colonized, as well as their attempt to fight the colonizers.

In its spatial arrangement, The *Diviners* is like Sidhwas's *Ice Candy Man*, which looks at the Indian partition specifically from the Parsee perspective, because of which Parsee life in India and its representation through the

family of Lenny occupies a great deal of its fictional space. Likewise, Laurence's novel is about the journey of a woman towards self-realization by fighting the demons of her past, which also includes a part of the national past of her country, in which a sordid aspect of the early settlers is exposed to show how the original inhabitants of the place were exploited and how lies were created to cover it up. That is how this part of the colonial experience and its retrieval, constitutes one of its significant sub-themes, and resonates some of the concerns that Scott deals with in *Benang*.

The plots of the first four novels are solely framed to deal with the novelist's concern with the colonial past. Variations in them are the result of the specific angle within which the experience is viewed. In the last two novels, the plot is shaped by concerns that go beyond this. If Sidhwa weaves the partition into the life of Lenny and her Parsee ancestry, Laurence accommodates a part of the past of her ancestors in the larger personal journey of Morag Gunn.

The ancestors of the protagonists in *Things Fall Apart, A Grain of Wheat, Kanthapura, Ice Candy Man, and Benang* are a part of the colonized, but the ancestors of Morag were colonizers. She gets involved with the original inhabitants of Canada through her friend Jules, who becomes the father of her daughter.

The plot of *The Diviners* is organized around happenings and events that are arranged under five divisions, and each has several sub-divisions, which illuminate aspects of the two pasts, and the two are intertwined. It unravels through shifts in time, from the present into the past, through several intricate techniques that will be discussed in the chapter on narrative technique. Since the present study is about the retrieval of a historical past, the discussion of the plot in the novel will be confined only to those parts of the plot were it figures prominently.

In section I, Morag revisits her childhood till the time of the death of her parents, when she is handed over to Christie and his wife. Details about the colonial aspect figure in the second section titled 'The Nuisance Grounds' in the form of Christie's tales to Morag—the 'First Tale of Piper Gunn,' the 'Tale of Piper Gunn and the Long March' and the 'Tale of Piper Gunn and the Rebels'—about his Scottish ancestors. After telling her about the people who belonged to Scotland, he narrates to her the story of Piper Gunn, a Scott hero, who is involved in innumerable battles and has to live with the reign of terror and darkness in Sutherland as the Duchess of that place is a brutal and heartless woman who is interested only in amassing money. With their farms confiscated, they are forced to live on rocks and thus rendered homeless and helpless.

Out of these people Piper Gunn is the bravest, who plays pipes and mesmerizes both men and animals with his talent. With the help of a sea captain, he and his wife Morag escape the harsh conditions of his home and reach Canada.

The event dramatizes what actually happened in the history of colonialism: many people left the shores of their countries with their settled lives because they could not put up with the difficulties caused by their heartless rulers. But the escape of Gunn and his people was not easy, for the captain of the ship landed them at a wrong place and so with their tired selves, sick children, meager supplies and pregnant Morag, they all landed up where living conditions were tougher than the place they had left. They had to face extreme cold conditions with only the meat of polar bears and foxes as their food. But Piper encourages them to move on, and they reach a place where there are Métis, the natives of the place.

After some time, the Métis decide to take over the government of the place with Louis Riel as their leader. They do form a government after taking possession of the court. Piper by playing songs encourages people to fight them and they succeed in taking the court the next day. A little later, Piper

Gunn dies. Eventually, they are saved by the Army that is sent by the government from Ontario. Riel is caught and hanged.

In these recollections of what happened, there are comments in parenthesis that raise doubts about the authenticity of these accounts, which are already a part of official history. Just after Christie finishes the account, we get this rejection of what has gone in the books of history:

> The book in History said he [Riel] was nuts, but he didn't seem nuts to me. The Metis were losing the land—it was taken from them. All he wanted was for them to have their rights. The government hanged him for that. (Laurence, "Diviners" 107)

Riel is labelled a brutish half-breed who is mad, though what is true, as he sees it, is that he fights for the rights of his people whose land had been taken away from them. This is what the colonizers always did. Any act of resistance for their rights was always punished.

Morag's recollections of her past with his step-parents, which involve her attempt to relive and recover the past that she had deliberately tried to obliterate makes her learn that the very act of retrieving past, no matter whether personal or social or national, is problematic, thus pointing to a crisis in historiography that has largely legitimized fictional recreations of history and has been the basis of the postcolonial novelists' serious engagement with the history of their countries. This is how she puts it:

> What happened to me wasn't what anyone else thought was happening at the time. A popular misconception is that we can't change the past—everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it. What really happened? A meaningless question. But one I keep trying to answer, knowing there is no answer. (Laurence, "Diviners" 49)

Although she does not admit it, the answer is contained in her own account, which is that here is no single fixed account and that there can be several accounts of everything. That is why the 'The Nuisance Grounds' provides yet another version of the Scottish entry into Canada. Morag's schoolmate Jules Tonnerre tells her that his ancestors, the original inhabitants of the place, were brave people. His version too comes in the form of narrative bits: 'Skinner's Tale of Lazarus Tale of Rider Tonnerre', 'Skinner's Tale of Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet' and 'Skinner's Tale of Old Jules and the War out West'.

Jules's grandfather was called the Prince of the Braves, who possessed excellent horse-riding skills. He was a Métis, also called Bois-Brutes. He was a big strong man, seven feet tall, won all the races, with an equally strong stallion, and a rifle called "La Petite" that truly is formidable.

Later, the English and the Scottish people came to take away their lands and stop them from hunting. There was a bloody ambush in which the invaders were defeated. Sometimes later, the government men came to take away their lands but by this time Rider Tonnerre was old and not strong. Louis Riel, also known as Prophet because he could see through the walls and read people's mind, took the lead. So along with his men, he put up a strong fight and took the fort that was captured. Later the Prophet was hanged.

Morag becomes aware that what she was told about her ancestors wasn't all that glorious as it was portrayed to be. Her elucidation of conflicting histories of the Scottish and the Metis is a testimony to this. The experience gathered from these incidents and people, she wants to share with people as towards the end of the novel Morag mentions that she has a gift of insight and she wants to use it to learn and understand more that would help others.
There is a mention of the Scottish colonizers and the Canadian natives again when Morag's daughter Piquette comes to visit her. She mentions them and there reference is given under the title 'Morag's Tales of Christie Logan'

and Morag's Tale of Lazarus Tonnerre'. This is given in the fourth part of the plot, 'The Rites of Passage'.

The mention of Piper Gunn and Rider Tonnerre comes for the third time when Morag writes a letter to her friend Ella and mentions that she has just finished writing a book on the stories that she heard about Piper Gunn and Rider. She names the book the *Shadow of Eden.*

In section III of the novel titled 'Halls of Scion', Morag who is interested in Literature, comes across writers like Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekov, and learns that "English is not the only Literature"(151). This proves another humbling experience for her that English people are not the only wise ones; there are other people and civilizations in the world that have great wisdom.

There is a similarity between the suffering of the natives in *Benang* and *The Diviners.* The stories told by Christie and Jules show that the colonizers had perpetuated violence in order to settle in Canada, just like Hume and Ernest had done in Scott's novel. Just like the ancestors of Harley, the past generation of Skinner had to live in ghettos because they were ostracized from the mainstream society. Once when Tonnerre and Morag meet, he tells her that when his father died, he and his brother were not allowed to bury the corpse in the graveyard of the Valley or the town. A respectable burial could only be given in the graveyard which was meant for the people who had come from outside. His indignation and hurt is reflected in his statement, "The Metis, once lords of the prairies. Now refused burial space in their own land" (219).

Just the way Harley's Uncle Jack is refused to enter in the pub for which he complains to the officials, Brooke Skelton is fazed when he comes to know that Morag may have offered some Scotch to Jules. Brooke says, "Anyway, I thought it was supposed to be illegal to give liquor to Indians" (220). Just like Jack, Kathleen and Harley's father Tommy are humiliated in school by fellow mates, Pique, Morag's daughter, faces similar racism in school and

just protects her from getting raped. One boy in her school says to her, "half-breed girls can't wait to get fucked by any guy who comes along" (344). She is called a "half-breed," just like the natives in *Benang*, and a derogatory myth associated with natives is also mentioned.

The oppressors in Settler Colonies even resorted to killing the natives. Jules's sister Piquette dies because their dwelling place is set on fire and she is burnt to death. One of his brothers Paul, who worked as a Tourist Guide, is killed by some American tourists sailing on a river.

The suffering of the natives, which becomes the cause of their psychological depression and self-depreciation, is quite visible both in *The Diviners* and *Benang***.** Kathleen loses her mental balance after reading an article in which the natives are called 'inferior' people. Jules too suffers pain when while singing a song about his ancestors, the audience yells at him. He retaliates by getting violent and breaking his guitars and getting drunk. In his drunken state he talks about his sister Piquette who was burnt alive in a fire.

On her part, Morag learns that if she has to get a truthful picture of her own past and of the country to which she belongs, she has to include in it the history of the Metis, which is available in their songs, in the songs of her lover Jules and also of her daughter Piquette. She has to go through moments of pain and anguish to learn this. And then write it out and thus be a diviner of sorts.

The analysis of the plots of the six novels clearly shows how the making of their plots is heavily influenced by the nature of the past that they try to retrieve, and making the novelists think carefully about the choices they need to make for this. That is why they show considerable variety in the distribution of space and time in them, reflected in their varied arrangements of scenes and episodes.

Achebe stands apart from all other novelists because in *Things Fall Apart* he retrieves his country's past to challenge the false picture of the primitivism of the Igbo society that the colonials had projected in their fictional and non-fictional writings, which is represented in the novel by the projected work of Brown, and also to provide his understanding of how the British made inroads into his society.

For this purpose, unlike other novelists in this study, Achebe uses two different kinds of plots in his novel. In its first part, the plot is in the form of an aggregation of scenes and episodes that present a wholesome picture of the social and cultural aspects of the Igbo society, by dramatizing all the important aspects of their life. They do not follow any perceptible sequential order and are linked by the person of Okonkwo. In contrast to this, in the second and third parts of the novel the plot consists of fast-moving interlinked scenes which deal with the coming of the British and also dramatize how the tribe really falls apart, partly because of the British treachery and partly because of its own failings.

Compared with Achebe's novel, Ngugi's is much more complex and problematic because of its multiple concerns, which account for the different shape of its plot. Like Achebe, Ngugi does not retrieve the country's traditional past. *A Grain of Wheat*, in fact, starts when the country is about to gain independence, but moves back in time to dramatize the brutality of the British control of the country and people's resistance to it. So the plot has a retrospective flavour to it, moves between the past and the present and also gets enmeshed with private histories as well.

Within this arrangement, the plot develops three major strands: of bringing out Mugo from his seclusion and a slow uncovering of how he betrayed Kihika, the Mau Mau leader; of the exploitative British presence in the country; and the pressure of public events on private lives, which leads to betrayals. Cumulatively, the plot contests imperial historiography, like what Achebe did in his novel, but Ngugi also contests aspects of nationalist

historiography as well, by showing that the resistance was led by the forest fighters.

The historiographic contest is at the core of the plots of *Benang* and *Ice Candy Man* too. The Colonial experience in *Benang* is different from what it is in the other novels, except *The Diviners*. In both these novels, the colonials come to settle in the colonies, creating a different kind of relationship between the colonizers and the colonized.

The plot in *Benang* is arranged almost like the journey of its protagonist Harley, which unwinds slowly to build within it a large number of short and long scenes that bring out how the colonial project in Australia was worse than what it was in other colonies. Harley is a victim of one of the major aspects of this project, which was to change the very identity of the aborigines, so that they could fit into the white society of the country.

The plot identifies the perpetrators of this project Arthur Neville and its main executant Ernest Solomon Scott and several other functionaries, who figure in its evolving action. The natives had to be shunted into ghettos, ostracized and brutalized, and some had to be assimilated by changing the colour of their bodies and minds. The thrust of the evolving action of the plot is to help Harley to uncover not only the manner in which he was changed from what he originally was, but also the kind of fate his family and his community had to suffer.

To lend credibility to this transformative programme, the plot is interspersed with varied official documents and letters, which also expose the false official narrative that had been created to suppress the oppressive programme of the colonials.

In *Ice Candy Man*, Sidhwa's contests the accounts of the Indian partition provided by the British and Indian writers and historians, because in her view, these were unfair to Pakistani leaders. For this, she arranges the plot around a neutral protagonist from the community of Parsees, Lenny, who is an invalid child.

For this deliberate historiographic intervention, Sidhwa creates a compact and crowded plot, chockfull of events and happenings around the sick Lenny, first to locate her in her Parsee setting and then to bring in known Indian leaders, like Gandhi and the Sikh leader Tara Singh within its fold to show how in comparison with them, Jinnah is more gentlemanly, honest and well meaning. The only British character Rogers too is brought within the frame in a small party to clarify that the real troublemakers in the subcontinent are the Congress and Sikh leaders.

Since Lenny cannot move out often because of her physical condition, scenes are woven around Lenny's servants and Ayah's friends that report scenes of violence. One long scene of brutal violence against the Muslims is brought within the frame of the plot by the story of Ranna.

The plot in *The Diviners* is complex and multi-layered, almost like what it is in *Benang*, though arranged differently, because it deals with the personal past of its protagonist Morag, the past of her country and also the past of the original inhabitants of Canada. From her present, when she is a published writer, has a child from Jules, her lover, she revisits her childhood, her marriage that ended in divorce, and learns also about the exploitation of metis the original inhabitants of the county by the colonizers who come to settle in the country.

The scenes and happenings that move from present to the past and back, which are woven as pictures that she watches and the memory blocks that she reimagines are mixed with scenes and happenings in Morag's life in her present. In this exercise, Morag also comments on a vital truth about past itself: that it is not fixed, but gets revised every time one goes into it.

The arrangement of the plot in the novel, in fact, is in the nature of a massive revisionary exercise, in which Morag revises her relationship with her foster parents, sees fault lines in the history of her ancestors, and understands fully the untruths in the historical narrative of the country in which the Metis, who were not only subjected to exploitation, but also excluded from it. In the end, Morag comes off not only as a humble human being, but also one who learns

that for a truthful picture of her multicultural country, she has to accommodate the songs of Metis in the national narrative.

Unlike all these novels in the study, Rao's *Kanthapura* recreates only a significant moment in India's past through the medium of a rich cultural memory. In line with the traditional mode of oral stories in the epic manner, Rao writes a novel in which episodes and scenes follow each other without any specific linkages. And like a harikatha, it brings in the person of Gandhi into it like an avatar born to kill the British demon.

Within the frame of these scenes and episodes that constitute its plot, Gandhi is represented by Moorthy, who has become his ardent devotee. The plot dwells on how he influences the villagers to follow Gandhian ideals and how some people, for personal as well as political reasons, oppose this. Eventually, Moorthy's influence prevails and the villagers, especially its brave women, fight their oppressors without resorting to retaliatory violence, and lose their homes.

Chapter IV

Characters and Characterization: Adjusting people within the Fictional Space

> Novelists do not first invent a protagonist with a very special soul, and then get pulled along, according to the wishes of this figure, into special experiences. The desire to explore particular topics comes first. Only then do novelists conceive the figures who would be most suitable for elucidating these topics. (Pamuk 77)

The words of Pamuk, the Nobel Prize winning contemporary novelist, affirm how the novelists first think of what their novels are meant to do and then create characters suitable for realizing that. This confirms the central argument of this study: that novelist create novels with a purpose and then, among other things, create characters to realize that. In the case of postcolonial novels, both the purpose and the characters are heavily implicated in politics.

Considering that the novelists included in the study wrote at a time when the novel as a genre had been in existence for more than two centuries and had gone through varied changes in its form and content from its early beginnings till then, it is in order that we clarify what the character in fiction is like and how the mode of presenting characters has changed over time because of changes in people's thinking about human nature and the use to which they have been put in the novels by their creators.

Terry Eagleton has an interesting take on this. He states that the word character derives from "an ancient Greek term meaning a stamping tool which makes a distinctive mark. From there it came to mean the peculiar mark of an individual, rather like his signature". (Eagleton, "How to" 48). Gradually, it shifted to mean the individual himself, and because of the rise of individualism around the fifteenth century in Europe and England, which

also stimulated the rise of the novel as a distinct variety of prose fiction, the character meant "individual's mental and moral qualities" (49).

These qualities provide for a wide range of people or characters who have inhabited the fictional space of novels right from the eighteenth century, quite often in recognizable social space, and their modes of presentation have also admitted of considerable variation, from the early realistic form to its modernist and postmodernist varieties, which are discussed here briefly to provide a perspective on the modes of characterization in the novels discussed in the present study.

The most pronounced form of the early novel, what Ian Watt calls its "defining characteristic," (Watt 10) is "realism," which differentiates it from "previous fiction"(10).This means that the novelist conforms to the principle of "realistic particularity," which has a direct bearing on two important features of a novel—"characterization and presentation of background" (17). The characters have to be individualized and there has also to be a detailed presentation of the background in which they come to life.

The novel, in short, has to read like a book of history, populated by people in a recognizable world, with qualities that are associated with normal human beings. For this purpose, novelists use two of the most known and tried out methods of characterization: direct and indirect, with the help of which the novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created a huge number of memorable characters.

The direct method involves describing in detail, which could be both short and long, in one go, or in bits, about his or her name, generally a name with which the readers are familiar, external appearance, profession, if any, and maybe the class to which he or she belongs, and also the larger environment in which he or she is located. The novelist may also comment on his or her actions and their manner of speaking. In short, providing a large number of signs by which the character acquires a distinct, recognizable shape and personality. Most of the novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries present a galaxy of such characters, and such characters in novels of our

times too. In fact, such a method has been used by most of the novelists who form a part of this study.

Novelists can also complement the direct method with what is called the indirect method, by showing the characters involved in dialogues and actions and let the readers form their opinion about them on the basis of their knowledge and experience. E M Forster puts the two together in these words:

> The novelist … makes up a number of word-masses, gives them names and sex, assigns them plausible gestures, and causes them to speak by the use of inverted commas, and perhaps to behave consistently. These word-masses are his characters. (Forster 44)

This description more or less conforms to the explanation of the character already discussed. However, Forster cautions us to understand the difference between the real and fictitious characters—between what he calls *homo sapiens* and *homo fictus*. The latter he says "are real not because they are like ourselves (though they may be like us), but because they are convincing" (62). That means that they look real within the world of the novel, which works within its own laws.

The characters are real also because the novelist knows everything about them, even though he may not tell us all that he knows. He "will give us the feeling that though the character has not been explained, it is explicable, and we get from this a reality of a kind we can never get in daily life" (63). Precisely because of this we know the characters in a novel more fully than we know people in real life.

Forster calls characters "flat" and "round." The former are one-dimensional beings, who can be described in a line or a sentence, because they are consistent with their attributes throughout the novel. They don't change with the situations they face. The "round" ones undergo a change because of the circumstances that they have to face and are remembered for what happens

to them and the scenes that they are made to pass through. Some though prefer to call them dynamic and static ones. Generally, the major characters in a novel are dynamic and the minor ones are static. Forster also points to the existence of caricatures: people drawn with exaggerated traits, so that they look funny.

Forster emphasizes that characters in a novel have also to be understood "in relation to other aspects of the novel: to a plot, a moral, their fellow characters, atmosphere, etc. They will have to adapt themselves to other requirements of their creator" (45). In a complex novel, characters are interdependent and "part of a closely woven fabric from which nothing can be removed" (45). In short, characters are a part of the larger design of the novel and they have to fit into it. It is likely that the novelist might wish to focus more on the character or on the incidents. In that case, we have what Henry James calls "the novel of character" and the "novel of incident" (16).

This conception of the character in early realistic fiction has been summed up by David Daiches thus:

> The older English novelist selected what were the significant things in the behaviour of his characters on a principle publicly shared, and part of that publicly shared principle was the fact that what was significant in human events was itself manifested in publicly visible doing or suffering, in action or passion related to status or fortune. (Daiches 4)

In other words, human lives are understood in terms of human behaviour that can be clearly understood by others because human self is embedded in frameworks that are plain and visible. Or as Eagleton says, that individual lives are grasped "in terms of histories, communities, kinship, and institutions" (Eagleton, "How to" 64).

Soon after the Victorian era, by which time the realist novel had attained great heights, there was a change in the perception of human lives, and

Virginia Woolf articulated that in her critical writings and worked it out in her novels. In her essay 'Modern Fiction,' she states that the portrayal of characters that relies on explaining only their external attributes is an incomplete description of their character. She says that writers who do so "are materialists…. they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body." That is why her rhetorical questions: "Is life like this? Must novels be like this?" (Woolf, "Modern" 158, 160).

Woolf's critique of the methods of characterization practiced by novelists like HG Wells, John Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett is lucidly presented in another essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*. She accepts Bennett's view that character-creating is an important task, but contends his view that younger novelists of his time are "unable to create characters that are real, true, and convincing" (4).

She questions the very notion of "real" and "true" about the characters, because these are relative and not fixed. To indicate that they are no longer what novelists had believed for long, she states that "on or about December 1910 human character changed" (4). What actually changes is the manner in which writers and also people look at the characters. She explains this by creating the person of Mrs. Brown in a train, and how she would be made real and true by the three novelists by using their methods of characterization. These she finds wanting, because what they do leaves her "with so strange a feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction" (12). For their methods only create a clutter of facts around her and thus do not focus on her, or on life, or on human nature. Because of this, she says that these novelists "have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things," and there is no "complete and satisfactory presentment of her" (24). That is why she is severely critical of their conventions and tools. "For us those conventions are ruin, those tools are death" (16).

The modernists, as Woolf and Joyce and others are called, questioned the very basis of reality. The insights provided by psychology and psychoanalysis led them to evolve a new connection between time and

space. Since reality is illusive and cannot be captured, the focus shifts to experiences made available through the perception of characters. It doesn't matter, what they look like or the space within which they work, for the truth about them lies in their perceptions. Their self, Eagleton clarifies, is "just a bundle of chance sensations but with little continuity" (Eagleton, "How to" 66).

Because of this, the radical shift in characterization is that novelists choose to focus on the inner world of their characters, as against their outer world that was the focus of the realistic novelists, depicting what Mürüvvet Mira Pinar calls the "unorganized flow of thoughts, impressions and emotions" (Pinar 4) through the techniques of stream of consciousness and interior monologues. So the truth and reality about the characters leads to a radical shift in the mode of characterization.

In this context, it is also important to mention that characterization in some modernist novels become a means of exploring the forces that "shape the self at the deepest level" (Eagleton, "How to" 67). For this, they go beyond the conscious mind and touch the depths of the unconscious, as in the novels of D H Lawrence, where it touches what Eagleton calls the "the dark, primeval, profoundly impersonal realm of being," (68), which cannot be mastered. It is like a mysterious force and therefore beyond considerations of ethics and politics.

Pinar brings both the difference in characterization in the modern and post-modern eras, and says that the post-modern characterization is different from its preceding "era", so much so that literary critics and theorists have opined that the concept of character is depleted and readers can't find a hero. Consequently, a postmodern character can be understood as an outcome of various problems that arise due to postmodern perception of the self.

When the novel came into existence, the Self was taken to be static and centred; because of this, the characters were stable, had proper names, were predictable and had a socio-economic background. In the modern times, because of the influence of Freud's theory, the concept of "Self" underwent

a change, so characters were expressed psychologically. In the postmodern era, "the rise of economically and technologically developed, media-driven and consumer societies" (Pinar 6) has given rise to metanarratives. Therefore in these times, the Self is no longer unified; rather it is polysemous and diverse. Since the Self is fluid, the characters deny singularity and stability with regard to their own being.

Pinar further mentions that in the contemporary times of "computer technologies, omnipresent advertisements, and mass communication, the conventionally immediate relationship between reality and its representation is disrupted" (9). This statement accentuates on representing a character on a multidimensional level. There is not one, but layers of consciousness to understand and portray a character. In the eighteenth and the nineteenth century fiction, the character had a purpose, a function, a tool to accentuate authenticity of the text, but in postmodern fiction, the character is an aid to raise problems on self, reality and its presentations.

The rise of the novel as a literary device has witnessed a change in the presentation of characters as well. From a static presentation to a multidimensional entity, character in a novel has witnessed steady growth. And this growth has enriched novel writing as well. Since there are varied presentations of characters, the novels in this study have an equally varied range of characters and they can be analyzed on the premises of the some of the ways mentioned above. And the presentations of characters tell us the intent and purpose of the novelists.

It is appropriate to begin the discussion on Achebe's characterization in *Things Fall Apart* with the words of Ngugi that have already appeared in Chapter II of this work:

> We can see, and feel, how his [Achebe's] characters, their world-view, their very aspirations have been shaped by a particular environment in a particular historical phase…. He has succeeded in giving human dignity to his characters,

> whether living in their traditional communal life or resisting European colonialism" (Ngugi, "Homecoming" 44).

The passage confirms the key idea of this study that the fictional style of a novelist is shaped by what his or her work is about. The African novelists call this the requirement of the times; that is, to locate characters in the recognizable space of a communal life, who also resist the colonial masters, because they have gained control over their lives.

Considering that *Things Fall Apart* has its basis in the twin objectives of presenting an authentic picture of the Igbo society, for contending its distorted versions produced by imperial writers and historians, and to show how the colonials made their way into his land and succeeded in staying on, Achebe created a three-part plot that is joined by its protagonist Okonkwo. Because of this, the focus of most critics has centred on him, and their response to his characterization is quite interesting.

In his guide to the essential criticism of Achebe's fiction, Jago Morrison shows how early criticism on Achebe, especially of the British critics, was written in the liberal humanist tradition and within the framework of Commonwealth literature, which was considered a part of British literature. As a critic in this mould, G D Killam argues that "the value of all Achebe's novels as works of art must be dissociated from their particular 'anthropological' or 'sociological' biases, and judged instead on their 'universality' and fidelity in reflecting the 'human condition.'" (Killam, *An Introduction to the Writing of Ngugi* 9). Commenting on his art of characterization, he says, that it is "primarily motivated by a concern to identify the protagonist Okonkwo's 'universally' human qualities…." (9).

This approach to characterization has not stopped with the demise of liberal humanist tradition and the tendency to read novels from erstwhile colonies as part of British literature. More recently, in his 'Introduction' to the 2010 Revised edition of the Critical Interpretations of *The Things Fall Apart*,

Harold Bloom writes that "Okonkwo's apparent tragedy is universal, despite its Nigerian circumstancing" (Bloom 2).

Achebe would have dismissed such a response as an example of 'Colonialist Criticism,' which denies that literature must "speak of a particular place, evolve out of the necessities of its history, past and present, and the aspirations and destiny of its people" (Achebe, "Colonialist" 74). Such assessments virtually overlook the purpose and essence of the novel, especially its first part, for which Achebe had to work hard to put it into shape.

Achebe disapproves of the word "universality" and gives the example of its use by Charles Larson's comment on a novel by Lenrie Peters, for "its universality, it's very limited concern with Africa itself," (75) which he spells out thus.

> That it is set in Africa appears to be accidental, for, except for a few comments at the beginning, Peter's story might just easily take place in the southern part of France or Italy. If a few names of characters and places were changed one would indeed feel that this was an American novel. In short Peter's story is universal. ((Achebe, "Colonialist" 76).

Achebe's disapproval of such a response is understandable because of the intimate relation that he believes exists between the writer and his community in Africa and between the characters and their community that figure in his novels.

Achebe's view about characters in his fiction is rooted in Igbo tradition and is different from the view of characters in western society of the modernist kind, reflected in such novels around the time he started writing his own. He himself tells us that these novels promote "the view of society and culture as a prison house from which the individual must escape in order to find space

and fulfillment" (53). Because of this, they are "designed to explore individual rather than social predicaments" (54).

As against this, the relationship between an individual and society in Igbo society is quite different.

> The Igbo are second to none in their respect of the individual personality. For whereas many cultures are content to demonstrate the value and importance of each man and woman by reference to the common fatherhood of God, Igbo postulate an unprecedented uniqueness for the individual by making him or her the sole creation and purpose of a unique god-agent, *chi.* No two persons, not even blood brothers, are created and accompanied by the same *chi*. (Achebe, "Colonialist", 57)

And yet the Igbo people as has already been noticed earlier set about balancing this extraordinary specialness, this unsurpassed individuality, by setting limits to its expression. The first limit is the democratic one, which subordinates the person to the group in practical, social matters. And the other is a moral taboo on excess, which sets a limit to personal ambition, surrounding it with powerful cautionary tales. (58)

This passage makes it clear that even though Igbo people recognize individuality of a person and allow its growth, it is always seen in relation to the society in which they live, for he or she has to live in subordination to the group and also not transgress its social and moral codes. Within the frame of such a close relationship between the two, it is not possible to conceive of an individual who can be other than an Igbo. And as the analysis of the plot of Achebe's novel has already made it clear, its first part is primarily a picture of Igbo society in its completeness. To even think of Okonkwo outside that frame, as the critics already quoted have suggested, would amount to doing injustice to Achebe's artistry in the novel.

All the characters in the novel have been described by the narrator, which clarifies that Achebe's approach to the character is external and may look like that of the novelists of the eighteenth century. But they are meant to be characters that are born and grow within a specific environment. He has himself admitted that "the characters are normal people and their events are real human events" (Lindfors 21). Readers know them by what has been said about them and also by what they do. On both counts, they are meant to be a part of the picture of a society that is recognizable by its social customs and traditions, which is going through a critical moment in its history, for people in it have to contend with the British incursion. Because of this, all of them have a given role to fit that picture, and Achebe does it quite well.

Since Okonkwo is a major figure in the novel, who symbolically embodies the Igbo idea of an individual within his community, and also because he figures prominently in all its three parts, it is important and also profitable to see how he has been drawn in the novel. The opening chapter of the novel is all about him, how he has successfully overcome his social disabilities caused by his irresponsible father and become known for his strength and valour. He has worked hard, from morning till evening, paid due respect to his ancestral spirits, and avoided all those actions that have been the bane of his father and the cause of his failure. He earns the admiration of Nwakibie for his "inflexible will," (Achebe, "Things" 24) and who unhesitatingly helps him to make a start in life by providing him yams to raise his first crop.

All these positive qualities not only make him a foil to his weak father, but also earn him social respectability. He, we are told, is "cut out for great things." In all this, he also exemplifies how Igbo society allows its people to realize their potential and get credit for that. "Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered" (8). Because of his well-earned respect, he is sent to Mbaino "as the proud and imperious emissary of war" to negotiate with the people there, in which he succeeds in fulfilling the

aspirations of his community. Okonkwo's efforts represent what Kwado Osei-Nyame calls the "African masculinist nationalist tradition" (8).

Apart from dwelling on Okonkwo's positive traits, the novel also provides details about his negative qualities. He is prone to anger and fear, because of which he acts in a manner for which he is duly punished by his society and to which he meekly, submits. In a fit of rage, he beats his second wife Ojiugo during the Week of Peace, which the priest tells him is a great evil; an offence to the earth goddess, which could spell trouble for the whole clan. Okonkwo quietly agrees to bring "one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries" (Achebe, "Things" 31) to make amends for his evil action.

He has to face another serious problem when the tribe decides to do away with Ikemefuna. Before going along with people who had been given the job of killing Ikemefuna, he is expressly told by Ezeudu that he should "not bear a hand in his death" (57). In spite of this, he cuts him down. In the presence of others he justifies his action by stating that he was carrying out the orders of the Oracle, but the real reason we are told quite reliably is that he did it because "He was afraid of being thought weak" (61). He senses that he has done wrong, because after doing the deed, he loses sleep for some days and he feels weak, and "now and then a cold shiver descended on his head and spread down his body" (62). He takes days to become normal, but lacks the courage to admit his mistake.

When Okonkwo's gun goes off accidentally during the funeral of Ezeudu and causes the death of his young son, he unwittingly commits a crime against the earth goddess. Okonkwo accepts the punishment for this act of pollution, even without offering any excuse or explanation. His life is devastated and he has to go in exile to his mother's place for seven years. Once again, like a true Igbo, no matter how high he might have risen in social hierarchy, he bows before the stringent societal norms.

All other characters in part one of the novel are like figures in a carpet, meant only to fill the picture of the Igbo society, who are used by the novelist to fit the numerous festivities, rituals, and important social events of the community. Women figure marginally in them and are always dominated by men. Okonkwo is quite hard on his wives and strikes terror in them and his children. All these responses are linked to his admiration for manliness, which he finds lacking in his oldest son Nwoye.

In the second part of the novel, Okonkwo figures marginally in Achebe's plan for the novel, and is a part of a fresh set of characters. Because of this, he is quite subdued and a mere shadow of what he is in the first part. Having finished with portraying the Igbo society, Achebe now dwells on the theme of the colonial encounter, which is largely reported by Obierika, for the first encounters between the colonials and natives happen in places where Okonkwo is not present. He learns about the first incursion of the British which results in their retaliatory violence, in which an entire tribe is totally destroyed. When the missionaries invade the place where Okonkwo is staying, all he can do is to mock at them. He experiences bouts of sadness that he cannot do anything effective which is compounded by the fact of his son's joining the missionaries.

Okonkwo's sadness is intensified when he returns to his native land and finds that the British have consolidated their hold there, by setting up their administration, their system of justice and prison-houses. When he finds that even people from high families have compromised with the situation, he realizes that things have really "fallen apart," (175), and "mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women" (183).

Only on one occasion does Okonkwo experience happiness. That is when the British control passes into the hands of James Smith, who is unlike his soft predecessor, and the overzealous converts are emboldened to do vile acts, which creates a warlike situation, in which the Church is destroyed by

the people. When Smith arrests the leaders through trickery and frees them by asking their people to pay ransom, Okonkwo can bear it no more. He speaks of fighting alone and seeks his own revenge. The result is that he kills the messenger of the colonizer. When he sees that the others who had come with him are allowed to run away by his people, he senses his end and chooses to end it on his own.

Okonkwo, in this way, is both an individual as well as a symbolic figure who honours his tribe by representing the best in Igbo culture. In the later phase of the book, he helps the readers see what has gone wrong with the tribe by letting the foreigners to encroach on their lives as well as their religion and culture.

An interesting aspect of Achebe's presentation of Okonkwo's character is that he is not merely an amalgam of positive and negative qualities, but an embodiment of what Patrick Narromele calls the paradoxical representation of a hero who "becomes both the disrupting and integrating principle of the community" (Narromele 41). In pursuing his individual interest "concomitantly with that of the society is a constant source of dynamic tension because his obligations to his society can become impediments to his individual quest for fame and reputation" (41). Whenever Okonkwo feels like doing what he thinks is heroic, he has to flout some convention or the other. Ironically, his last heroic act of killing the messenger of the colonial masters' forces him to commit suicide and earn a bad spot in the cultural memory of his people.

Though both Achebe and Ngugi are Africans and have written novels about the past of their countries, they differ in how they draw their characters. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe creates a towering figure in the person of Okonkwo, by presenting him directly with his strengths and weaknesses, as an important member of Igbo society. He ensures that his protagonist conforms to the delicate balance that the society permits between individual aspiration and social and cultural conventions of the community. Achebe's

artistic skill is such that in spite of observing this requirement, Okonkwo is nowhere near an over determined character, which explains why critics have interpreted him in varied ways. In the *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi chooses a different strategy for presenting his characters because the intention of his novel, which has a strong ideological underpinning, is quite different from that of Achebe's.

Ngugi's novel is based on his belief that the resistance movement of the people against the colonial masters was the work of farmers and workers who ran a movement and not of a party led by known leaders, some of whom are actual historical figures, mentioned in passing in the novel. So instead of focusing on just one major character like Okonkwo, Ngugi creates a number of characters, who respond to their life in the colonial setting in different ways. There are people like Kihika, Gikonyo, Mumbi, Karanja, Waiyaki, Githua, General R, and also Mugo, caught up in a situation that brings out divergent aspects of their being. This is significant because Ngugi's novels before this are focused on their main character. This shift is described by Gurnah as his move from individual-centric novels "to the social epic mode" (*A Grain of Wheat* ix) that bears a strong imprint of the ideas of Fanon. Lane too considers this Ngugi's attempt at "complex and sensitive character development … that functions to build a form of community writing" (Lane 47).

Ngugi's choice of the characters is influenced by his thinking, which is also the driving force behind the act of retrieval in the novel, that a section of the society which in his view formed a part of the struggle of freedom was distorted by the colonial masters and also neglected by the nationalist leaders. That is why Alamin Mazrui and Lupenga Mphande state that as Ngugi "revolutionized his perspective on African history, his mode of creative discourse about that history has moulded a new kind of novel" (Mazrui 164).

Apart from creating British characters and one or two of their African sympathizers, all the other characters are forest fighters or their

sympathizers, the Mau Mau as they were called during those days. Mazrui and Mphande tell us that the propaganda machinery of the colonials was so strong that even the locals looked at them from the perspective popularized by the colonials: that the Mau Mau are terrorists and their leaders like Didan Kimathi are no better than lunatics. Written accounts about them which Ngugi read and commented upon were unreliable. This led him to tap the oral sources and learn of the truth about their role in the freedom struggle. So he chose to draw characters from this group to see the movement of Kenyan history from the below. The most daring and heroic characters who dominate the novel are from their ranks.

Unlike Achebe, who describes and gives details about his characters, Ngugi allows the characters to bare their mind so that we get to know how they see themselves while coping with the situation they are in, share their fears and anxieties regarding their lives and the challenges that lie before them in a new independent country. That is why Ogude states that the key to Ngugi's characterization in the novel is the "interplay he creates between repressive political structures and the individual psychology of his characters, steeped in their social background" (Ogude 73). If Achebe's characterization is shaped by his adherence to the cultural norms of his community, Ngugi's is shaped by the manner in which he understands the march of history and the demands of historical necessity, which provides for conflict, guilt, betrayal, and a great deal of psychological wrestling.

These considerations are best explained by looking at the characterization of Mugo, who is crucial for understanding how in a colonial setting individuals have to be what Dhar has argued at length, "a proper historical subject" (*Ngugi's retrospective gaze: The shape of history in A Grain of Wheat* 176), that is, a person who understands what is expected of him in a given historical situation which, in the case of people in the novel, is one of colonial subjugation. The analysis that follows shows that Mugo is not, for he fails the test, and thus helps the readers assess other characters as well.

Since the novel opens and ends with Mugo and because his life gets entwined with the lives of almost all other characters during the days of colonial oppression and is most of the time reluctant to speak, critics have been tempted to interpret his actions in a manner that do not fit the intention of the novel. James Decker, for example, thinks that Mugo's silence is the most significant aspect of his person, which Ngugi employs "as a metaphor for the novel's stylistic concerns. Mugo then equals text" (Decker 45). A careful analysis of Ngugi's characterization of Mugo reveals a different story. This is realized partly by the details provided directly to the reader and by Mugo's ruminations, dreams, and aspirations, which collide with what is expected of him in the political climate in which he lives.

Two significant details about Mugo, provided right in the beginning, have a strong bearing on his actions in the novel: that his parents had died poor and left him in the care of his widowed aunt, who was troublesome. He felt "the world had conspired against him," and that made him violent. That is why "his one desire was to kill his aunt" (Ngugi, "A Grain*"* 7). Because of this streak in him, he keeps silent and wants to be left alone. But Gikonyo rightly tells him that that is not permissible in his situation. "You want to be left alone. Remember this, however: it is not easy for any man in a community to be left alone" (24).

In spite of his disadvantaged position, Mugo has dreams that are perfectly understandable: dreams of "success and wealth," which would "force society to recognize him" (8). But these unfortunately for him are out of tune with the times, because the new leader Kihika is asking for sacrifice, for blood to oust the colonials. When Mugo hears him say these things, "a revulsion starting in his stomach at the sight and smell of blood. I hate him, he heard himself say…. Something surged for release in Mugo's heart, something, in fact, which was an intense vibration of terror and hatred" (15). This is almost like the reaction towards his aunt. Hatred would make him kill the person. But he does not kill Kihika. Instead, he quietly reveals his whereabouts to the British, who arrest him and then hang him.

Because of the divergence in his aspirations and the demand made on him by his community, the tension between private dreams and public pressures, he experiences great conflict in his mind. That is why, he thinks: "Why should Kihika drag me into a struggle and problems I have not created?...He must call on me to bathe in the blood….I only looked after my shamba and crops" (188).

After betraying Kihika just because he thought he was meddling in his life, which he wanted to live according to his own dream, he almost turns into a stone, and loses capacity to feel pain. He puts up with hardships of the extreme kind, which earns him the respect of his fellow prisoners and sufferers. He turns into a hero, because he can suffer greatly. Since he survives all the hardships and pain, he becomes oblivious to what he has done. He even comes to believe that God has spared him for some higher purpose: of playing the seer and leader. So he must not die, but keep himself alive, and be healthy and strong. It is only because of the intrusion of other people into his life, who constantly invade his private space, that he opens his heart to Mumbi about his foul deed and much later makes a confession before the public.

The strength and artistry of Ngugi's characterization of Mugo lies in allowing the readers access to his mind, the seat of the conflict in his life, which has its basis in the obligations forced upon him by his society. This is what the novel emphasizes: the need for becoming a proper historical subject, to give up one's dreams for the larger cause of the society in which a person lives, which are personified in the person of Kihika.

In several ways, Kihika is a foil to Mugo. Young, daring, smart, he runs away from his school because the missionary education is a falsity. He proves it by his open confrontation with his teacher. He has also a proper assessment of the need of the times. He thinks that the older leaders, the leaders celebrated in history books, had become irrelevant because they had talked for too long. What the movement needed is violent action. That is why he becomes a Mau Mau.

Kihika is an action-oriented man who dares to attack Mahee, a big police garrison at the heart of White Highlands. It served as a transit prison for people to be deported to the concentration camps and was also a base camp of arms and ammunition to be sent to other police and military stations. In the darkness of night, Kihika attacks Mahee and releases the prisoners. Because of his daring actions, his rising influence among the ordinary people, and his elusive presence, he becomes a nightmare for the British. Even when they torture the ordinary people to get a clue about him, they fail to get anything. That is why Mugo's betrayal is a big blow. All the characters in the novel are determined to find and punish the traitor.

Kihika embodies an approach to freedom that Ngugi endorses because of the influence of Fanon on him. True freedom, which envisages a total dismantling of all the colonial structures is possible only when people rise in revolt and pay price for gaining freedom, which he spelled out in forceful language in his book *Writers in Politics*:

> The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions, yet made to her august claims, have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, all absorbing, and for the time being putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favour freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. (Ngugi, *Writers in Politics* 131)

The lines clearly state Ngugi's position on the ways of winning true freedom. It has both a physical and moral dimension. People have to be

convinced that they have to resort to violence and they also have to have a belief that that is the only right way.

The rest of the characters who have been drawn elaborately and are also provided the opportunity of speaking out their mind through interior monologues, veer between these two extremes: those who are willing to work for the cause and those who are not strong enough to stick to it. Characters like General R. are clear about what they have to do. He succeeds in withstanding the suffering of the colonial regime, and is keen on making sure that all those who betrayed the national cause are brought to book.

There is evidence to show that General R has been modelled after actual leaders of the times, who had self-belief and a sense of commitment to the cause they felt was dear to them. So Kihika and General R are the prominent characters who qualify to be historical subjects. Most others, who figure in the novel, buckle under pressure, creating two other kinds of characters.

The first one is represented by Gikonyo. Like other characters, he has been drawn elaborately, with details about his family, occupation, and his dreams. He knows Kihika and is willing to do his part in the struggle. But just before he commits himself to the cause, he succeeds in winning the love of Kihika's sister Mumbi and marries her. He considers himself particularly lucky because she is coveted by many others like Karanja.

In the detention camp, Gikonyo is all the time reminded of Mumbi. He misses her and longs to be with her. He even thinks that other men in the camp could afford to be there because they do not have a woman like Mumbi in their lives. So he confesses the oath in order to get released from the camp and be with her. In a way, he is almost like Mugo, except that he does not betray any fighter; he only violates the trust reposed in him by the members of the movement.

When he learns that in his absence Mumbi had a child from Karanja, to which she openly admits, he is unhappy but does not even think of asking

her why she had to do that. Instead, he devotes himself to improving his financial position. Since this involves dealing with the newly appointed ministers, Ngugi uses his efforts to expose the colonial mentality of the new wielders of power, confirming his fears that freedom of the country may not really bring the freedom dreamed by farmers and workers.

The characters of Mugo and also of Gikonyo also illustrate another irony of the movement of happenings in history: that history can also throw up false heroes, which strengthens Ngugi's case for praising the contribution of ordinary people in the struggle for political freedom.

On the extreme other end are characters like Karanja. He starts as a friend of the people who are with the Movement, but soon changes over to the British side because he believes that they are going to stay in Kenya forever. The British find him useful and employ him to spread terror among his own people. He typifies the mental slavery presented by Fanon in the fourth chapter of *Black Skin White Masks.*

Karanja imitates the British, follows them like a slave and behaves harshly towards his own people. However, when women in the village of Tabai are forced to offer themselves to the soldiers to get food, he does not exploit Mumbi. Her son from him is the result of her self-surrender to him in a moment of joy, when she learns that Gikonyo is to be released.

Compared with Achebe's, Ngugi's presentation of the British characters is a little more detailed, though their thinking about the colonized is the same. Brown of Achebe is like Ngugi's Thompson: both consider Africans inferior and needed to be uplifted, and both want to write their account of their backwardness, adding to the vast store of fictional and non-fictional writing on Africa that border on pure fabrication. Ngugi weaves irony into high-sounding ides of Thompson, of touching the souls of the natives, without even allowing them the right to exist.

Perhaps it would be unfair not to mention that apart from Mumbi, who receives a fair degree of space in the novel because of being the sister of

Kihika and also because she is desired by two other major characters, the novel has several other female characters who are not only a part of the suffering civilian population of the village but are also important for their comments on the happenings that take place there, especially towards the end of the novel, when Mugo makes his public confession. They are used by Ngugi to project alternative voices for making sense of the happenings just before the dawn of freedom. Quite appropriately, he names the last but one chapter after their name: "Warui, Wambui" (Ngugi, *"*A Grain*"* 235).

Thus it is clear that Ngugi's characterization in the *A Grain of Wheat* has both breadth and depth. It brings out Ngugi's understanding of how the historical processes shape human behaviour. He is particularly successful in dramatizing the wrestle they go through while coping with adversities that are not of their making.

Rao's novel, like an ancient tale, is about a village Kanthapura, which is almost like a character in its own right, which is inhabited by people who eventually become non-violent freedom fighters. Rao ensures that they do not pass off like a mob, but as people with recognizable shapes and names. That is why the first significant feature of characterization in the novel is that it provides for variety, for the characters cover a wide social spectrum. The narrator, specifically chosen by Rao, identifies each one of them in their respective locations within the social fabric in which they live their lives, as part of different castes and classes. In short with varied possible markers of differentiation.

To establish that the narrator knows them well and that they are on intimate terms with each other, most of them are recognizable by epithets associated with their location, profession, or any visible or known physical feature or quality associated with them. The list is quite long. Given here are only some illustrative examples: Front-house Akamma, Corner-house Moorthy, Shop-keeper Chetti, Postmaster Suryanarayana, Left-handed Madamma, Pock-marked Sidda, One-eyed Lingayya, Gap-toothed Siddayya. There are

some that do not have epithets attached to them, like Rangamma, for example, who after becoming a Gandhi devotee lets her house be converted into "something of a Congress House" (Rao, *Kanthapura* 23), and there are some more, some for Gandhi and some against him.

All the people live like a close-knit family, partake of each other's joys and sorrows, and always get together on special occasions like religious festivities and harikathas. The only people the narrator does not know fully well are from the Sudra quarter, people who are on the very fringes of the social fabric. The possible reason for this could be that the narrator belongs to a superior caste and has no truck with people living there. Rao makes sure that the village is home to all the castes and classes.

Since the main thrust of the novel is to demonstrate how Mahatma Gandhi's thinking shakes people off from their slavish condition and makes them strong enough to fight the British by using non-violent ways, Rao brings Gandhi into the novel as a presence and not as a character in flesh and blood. This is mainly because the people of the village are of a religious bent of mind that hold goddess Kenchamma in high regard as their guide, protector, benefactor and saviour and one who has never failed them. Rao therefore chooses the strategy of making Gandhi into a god sent from heaven to help the villagers fight the British demon and throw him out of the country. In the harikatha woven around him, he is sent by the gods to people because they have asked for somebody to liberate them.

It needs to be stressed that in this Rao is not being totally inventive. For the fact is that the historical Gandhi used religious vocabulary to establish rapport with ordinary people. He used terms like Ram Rajya, Satyagraha, and ahimsa to cast his fight with the British to spiritualize the political discourse. Moorthy presents even spinning as a spiritual activity. In Kanthapura, if Kenchamma is the traditional saviour, Mahatma is the new saviour, and his message has to be heeded. That is why immediately after the harikatha about him is over, several people become active Gandhi men.

To let the message of Gandhi spread fast and wide, Rao creates the character of Moorthy, who becomes Kanthapura's local Gandhi. The novel dwells on his coming to manhood in the village as the son of a Brahmin who becomes a diehard disciple of Gandhi soon after he hears him in a city. An interesting aspect of Moorthy's character is that he has both a physical presence and also what could be called a whispering presence.

In his physical presence he appears in the novel at crucial moments to spread Gandhi's message, like urging people to spin khadi, and also with news about what Gandhi does in different parts of the country, which are actual historical events about which the villagers are told as part of their education of the Gandhian method. Almost like his mentor, Moorthy sometimes enacts some of his actions, to make the desired impression upon the people. These include going on a fast before starting an important campaign, or taking out a march to replicate many marches led by Gandhi.

With complete dedication and strong determination he also carries out the more difficult task of fighting the deep-rooted conservative practices of the villagers. He pleads that people of all castes are equal, and makes personal visits into the quarters of the outcastes, which creates enemies for him. The orthodox people launch a vigorous movement against his actions and even plead for his excommunication from the Brahmanical fold. In spite of this, he suffers imprisonment and leads people to raise their voice against the foreign government and succeeds in making them face lathi blows and bullets silently and without resorting to any violent retaliatory action, which leads to the eventual displacement of the entire village of Kanthapura.

Quite often Moorthy becomes a whispering presence, because when he is not present in the village, he continues to exert influence over people through his associates who share Gandhi's ideals. When he is away in the city preparing for any event or when he is in prison, the work in the village continues on the lines suggested by him, because of a strong organizational structure that takes care of the programme and activities that have taken root there. And Moorthy's name figures with every activity that they undertake.

After creating an army of non-violent fighters, in a manner that Gandhi had wanted, it seems intriguing that Moorthy should disappear from the scene in the manner he does. After his release from prison towards the close of the novel, he does not go back to the people who gave up everything in their lives to follow Mahatma's ways, but questions the nature of the Swaraj that people would eventually get. In his letter to Ratna, he writes:

> Is there not Swaraj in our States, and is there not misery and corruption and cruelty there? Oh no, Ratna, it is the way of the masters that is wrong. And I have come to realize bit by bit, and bit by bit, when I was in prison, that as long as there will be iron gates and barbed wires round the Skeffington Coffee Estate, and city cars that can roll up the Bebbur Mound, and gas-lights and coolie cars, there will always be pariahs and poverty. Ratna, things must change…. Jawaharlal will change it… he says in Swaraj there shall be neither the rich nor the poor. And he calls himself an 'equal-distributionist' and I am with him and his men. (Rao, *Kanthapura* 257-258)

This is a significant passage that has escaped the notice of many scholars. Moorthy concedes that Jawaharlal is like "Bharatha to the Mahatma" (258) and shares the Gandhian method of non-violence, but he thinks beyond that, of what will happen after India attains freedom. Considering that the novel appeared in 1938, the passage is a remarkable for its prescience, of doubts about the gains of freedom, almost like Ngugi's fears in *A Grain of Wheat*.

Moorthy does not reject Gandhi's method, for even Nehru, his new mentor is with Gandhi. But he thinks beyond that and chooses to be with Nehru, a person with socialist leanings, which is historically true, that freedom should bring gains to all. Here too, there is a remarkable similarity with Ngugi, though he is more of a Marxist than a socialist.

To create a credible picture of the political reality of the times, the novel also provides for characters who oppose the Gandhian progamme. Prominent

among them is Bhatta, a thoroughbred Brahmin, who is also a businessman. The narrator's description of that aspect of his personality is quite ironic: "Money meant Bhatta—always smiling, always ready, always friendly…. With his smiles and holy ashes, we said he would one day own the whole village. I swear he would have done had not the stream run the way it did" (30). Many others oppose only one aspect of the programme, that of fraternizing with outcastes and untouchables. These fears are voiced by several others from time to time.

The opposition to this also acquires a political colouring, which is reported in a meeting that takes place in the city, where people are waxing eloquent about the success of Gandhi's methods and thinking. But one person, who turns out to be an associate of an influential Swami, gives the whole affair an unforeseen twist by justifying the British rule. His argument is that they saved the country from disorder and corruption: "…the British came to protect us, our bones and our dharma" (126). He goes to the extent of saying that the British were sent by the gods to save India and calls Queen Victoria "as the most courageous defender of our faith" (127). That such thinking was current in the country can be judged by the fact that this figures prominently in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand too.

Finally, the most pleasant aspect of characterization in the novel is the space that Rao provides to women. In the political campaign run by Moorthy, they play a prominent role. Rangamma and Ratna look after the work of the party in the absence of Moorthy, and speak to other women to strengthen their resolve to fight the enemy in a language that is both touching and inspiring. One example from what Rangamma tells them: "Well, we shall fight the police for Kenchamma's sake, and if the rapture of devotion is in you, the lathi will grow as soft as butter and as supple as a silken thread, and you will hymn out the name of the Mahatma" (153). In this, Rao scores over Achebe and Ngugi, because women do not have much of a presence in their novels.

Benang is different from *Things Fall Apart, A Grain of Wheat* and *Kanthapura* because of the manner in which the novelists deal with their country's past through the agency of a narrator, who helps the readers learn about the characters in them from their direct description. But the novelists also add to this by what the characters do and say. The characters in *Benang* are directly linked to the perception of its protagonist; he lets the readers know them from the manner in which he sees them, for he acts as the narrator.

In this respect, the novel is closer to the *Ice Candy Man*, because in this novel too, the characters are presented through its protagonist Lenny, but there is a difference between the two. The characters who figure in Lenny's account are a part of her lived experience; they are her contemporaries. In *Benang*, Harley writes about people who are a part of his world and also about the ones who lived long before he was born.

The two novels are also similar in that they present a different view of the past that they have known till then and attempt an alternative history. In *Benang*, the alternative account has more breadth and sweep for it deals with the history of several generations, encompassing a time-frame that covers nearly a full century. Besides, the novel narrates a new version of the history of Harley's family and his community in a manner that even while narrating it also dismantles the false one that had been constructed earlier and made current in the public domain.

Benang is its protagonist Harley's attempt to uncover the truth about himself, which leads him to explore his family's past and eventually the past of the entire community of the aborigines to which he actually belongs. In a large measure, it is semi-autobiographical, because the protagonist's effort is like that of Scott himself. He writes about the colonial subjugation that he and his ancestors had to face. He tells the readers about himself and also about how other characters appear within his account.

In the first episode of the novel titled 'from the heart', Harley says, "Sadly, I can begin only so far back as my great-great-grandparents" (Scot, *Benang*

10). This prepares the readers for knowing what Harley would tell them about the colonial past of his community, beginning from his great-great-grandparents, Sandy One and Fanny. He starts the sentence with "sadly," perhaps because he cannot go further back than that as he does not have any means of knowing about those early times.

The opening section sets up the paradigm within which the characters are framed. Harley is different from what he has been made into because of forces that represent the colonial control. So there are characters who represent the colonials, a number of officials, then Harley's parents and grandparents and other people associated with them, who represent the people who have to suffer colonial subjugation, and Harley himself, who, after realizing how he has been the product of the colonial control of an extraordinary kind, tries to find the truth about himself, and in the process, provides access to all of them.

Harley starts by telling us about himself, of how he is raised and shaped into what he has grown into by his grandfather Ern Scat. Brought up without his parents and siblings, he spends a tough and lonely childhood in his company. The details about how he is raised are shocking, for he has to suffer corporal punishment. When he does not do well in his studies, his grandfather is enraged, says Harley, "he suddenly struck me to the ground and delivered a kick which sent me sliding across the floor" (19). There are many other instances of his horrendous beatings, only because Ern wants him to conform to a set image of a human being that he has in his mind: of a person belonging to the white race, different from the one in which he had been born.

It is understandable that the portrait of Ernest Solomon Scat can only be a negative one. We learn from Harley that he is from Scotland. A distant relative A.O. Neville, the Chief Protector of the Aborigines in Australia, helps him find work in his new country, in construction and information storage. Since he is impressed by Neville's views on "the need for both social and biological *absorption* of the Native Race" (45), he joins his team

by making investigations on his behalf and also accompanying the travelling inspector James Segal on his patrols. In this way, he gets associated with the department of Aborigines, which makes him into a brutal colonial master.

To realize his dream of absorbing natives into the superior white race, he uses varied kinds of brutal procedures. He has sexual encounters with native women, which are not only a part of his lustful indulgences but also reflect his serious intention of impregnating them, to raise numbers for adding to the white race. It is not surprising that one of Harley's girlfriends in search of her biological parents comes to know that her mother was a native woman while her father is rumoured to be Ern Scat. He is heartless and promiscuous and women are just objects for him. He considers himself a man with a mission, as most of the colonizers have thought of themselves in different parts of the world, but his mission is not to civilize the native, but to transform the native into a new being, the member of the "white race."

Though Scat is the strongest influence on Harley at the personal level, the person who shapes the Australian community is Neville, another towering tyrant, who ironically is called the Chief Protector of the Aborigines. His main agenda is to uplift the aboriginal race and that he chooses to do by following either of the two ways: "keep them out of sight; or absorb them into our population" (48), which means to get rid of them or assimilate them into the white race. He takes decisions single-handedly to justify his position. He has a proper office, with a secretary, clerks, and travelling inspectors to work out the procedures to carry out his plans.

The natives who do not fit into his plan for whatever reason are subjugated to a level where they are no better than beggars. They are pushed farther and farther into locations where they become almost invisible. And those who fit into his plan are also made invisible by changing them into a new shape, which Harley aptly describes as one of "lack of substance" and "weightlessness" (39). Neville also makes sure that to raise the white population more and more people are encouraged to come from his country:

he "had once written brochures to attract British migrants to his country, and was even thought of as a purveyor of brides" (49).

Other than these two, who were instrumental in the planning and execution of the notorious policy of annihilation and absorption of the native population, there are other functionaries who work with them. These are Sergeant Hall and Inspector James Segal. They have their regular patrols and travels to ensure law and order. But they contribute to the "upliftment" of the race too. For example, Hall adopts Katherine to raise her as his daughter, to inculcate in her English habits and lifestyle. This he does to provide a lesson to other natives; to make them believe that having foster parents is an opportunity to escape their dingy living conditions. After training her in English ways, Hall and his wife convince her to marry Ern. She accepts their proposal because of the temptation of living a decent life, little knowing that she is playing into the hands of Ern by becoming an instrument to carry out his plan of creating people to suit his design.

The characters of Ern, his Uncle Jack and Uncle Will are described because of Harley's association with them. The two uncles actually provide him support to overcome many hardships that he has to live with in Ern's home. A fairly good deal of the action of the novel revolves around them, especially when they go to different places for outings and also for camping, which provide exposure to Harley to many realities about his people that he would have otherwise missed.

Harley's uncles help him in tracing his ancestors by sharing their memories with him, and also help him understand that though the fate of his people was largely the result of the machinations of the colonial authorities and unscrupulous people like Ern, his own people are no less guilty. Harley finds that some of his ancestors removed people from their family photos because they looked dark and not white. He writes: "My family, my people, we have done such things. Shown such shame and self-hatred. It is hard to think what I share with them, how we have conspired in our own eradication. It was my Uncle Will who taught me something of this" (108).

Benang shares this dark aspect of colonialism with *Things Fall Apart*, A *Grain of Wheat*, and *Kanthapura*, where the natives helped the colonial masters in suppressing their own people.

The memories of his uncles, and other pieces of information in diaries, letters, photographs, journals, newspaper cuttings, year books, and official records, and also the whiff of his own imagination, help Harley create all other characters, in places and locations where they lived and suffered and provided the material for his record, his song, and his book. At several places in the narrative, Harley is seen going up and up, almost flying: while inside the house, a gust of wind

> blew me against the wall. My head bumped the eaves, and then I was beside the roof and heading … well, further up … and there I was; uplifted and spread out to the wind, which whistled through me, and in and out of orifices, singing some spiteful tune (Scot, *Benang* 148).

Certainly, some kind of magic is at work here, which helps him see his dead ancestors that form a part of his song, his writing. That is how readers get to see Sandy One, Fanny, and their children Sandy Two, Harriet and Dinah and the Coolman brothers. At another place, he alludes to this by writing that "After all, I had brought them together after a very long time apart. [This] you might call it characterisation" (192).

The characterization of Harley and other victims conforms to what Michel Foucault calls biopolitics, a sort of domination where human beings are taken as objects and made to accept terms and conditions of the domineering agency, giving rise to racism and eugenics. It was a well-planned policy wherein the aboriginals are rendered as mere objects. All the colonised characters, from Sandy One to Harley have to live with the turmoil created by the colonizers. They have to battle discrimination, marginalization, social-ostracization, injustice and law-based domination. Added to this is the biological intervention of selective breeding to raise white population. Harley is the 'successful result' of these dominating agencies as he is 'the

first-white-born-of-the-family'. So he has been robbed of his "ancestry" his "roots" something that he can't do anything about, but only accept it. And this he does, as maturity dawns on him. But he shares his story, partly to bring out the truth of the European colonisers and also to ease off his pain and of all his ancestors.

All through the novel, there is a constant binary positioning of characters: the natives and the colonised, pitted against each other. Any of the other native characters, be it Sandy One or Katherine or Uncle Will or any of them together is in a conflicting situation with the colonial authorities. The colonial viewpoint is voiced by Neville: … these people are doomed to die anyway, therefore it is better to let them die" (85). The fact that the natives were mere 'things' is reflected in the views of Inspector James

> There seems a clear choice, let them multiply in wretched camps, let rations cost more, let them be useless and untaught, keep them out of sight; or absorb them into our population…How can we absorb these people into our community. We know how, but the law needs to be made more rigorous" (Scot, *Benang* 48)

So it does not matter to the colonizers if the natives die or suffer because they are not considered human beings in the first place. The native characters therefore typify the agony and suffering that they and their families have to bear.

Yet another noteworthy aspect of the characterization is the absence of prominent female characters. When Harley talks of his childhood and the people with whom he has actually lived are Ern, Uncles Jack and Will. There is no female figure, not even a mother figure in Harley's life. Women like Katherine and Topsy are like 'breeding grounds' for Ern. Even numerous maids in Ern's place would disappear after delivering children. Towards the end of the novel, Harley learns that his biological mother is a native woman, who is sent back to the Settlement after his birth.

One strand that is common to all the novels is the suffering that the native population had to bear. In *Benang* and *A Grain of Wheat,* the natives are made to live in ghettos and concentration camps and do hard and laborious work, which results in the death some inmates.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* is quite different from *Things Fall Apart*, *A Grain of Wheat*, and *Kanthapura* because it does not aim at the kind of exclusive focus with which these novels retrieve the past of their countries. Instead, it provides an alternative perspective on the partition of the Indian subcontinent by weaving it within the larger picture of the minority Parsee community, which decided to stay neutral in the polarization of the Hindu and Muslim communities. Because of this, it also lacks the serious tone that characterizes the three earlier novels. Instead, it combines the serious with the humorous, with a bit of satirical bite too. These differences are also reflected in Sidhwa's choice of characters as well as in her mode of characterization.

Ice Candy Man is rich in characters, both in their number and variety and also in the manner in which they are sufficiently individualized. It is because the primary intention of the novel is to look at the partition of the subcontinent from a fresh objective perspective, for which she invents a Parsee character in the person of Lenny, and a host of other characters to provide her a credible operating space. And because she is the one who narrates the novel, Siddhwa does the job through her.

Siddhwa skilfully makes Lenny do that job thoroughly well, for Lenny describes people mostly with physical details that define them accurately. This is in spite of the fact that Lenny is a child, who is polio-stricken, and heavily dependent on other people. Her growth as an adolescent, about which readers learn from her from time to time in the onward movement of the action of the novel, improves her understanding of what she experiences of life within her confined existence.

Among the persons attending on her, the one who remains with her most of the time is her Ayah Shanta who is described thus:

> Ayah is chocolate-brown and short. Everything about her is eighteen years old and round and plump. Even her face. Full-blown cheeks, pouting mouth and smooth forehead curve to form a circle with her head. Her hair is pulled back in a tight knot. (Sidhwa 3)

Some characters, who are only occasionally with her are described summarily: Col Bharucha, her doctor, is "awesome, bald, as pink-headed as an Englishman" and "cloaked in thunder" (4). Her parents are not described, but from how they treat her, one can make out that they are caring, considerate and loving. She has also a brother Adi, who is described with endearing detail, and a male cousin with whom she shares information and her dreams and anxieties as a growing up girl. At times, she is also crisp and humorous, as for example, when she describes Imam Din: "tall, big-bellied, barrel-chested, robust: he bicycles twenty miles to and from his village once a month to impregnate his fourth wife. Happily he is three times widowed and four times wed" (49).

Ayah has admirers, like the ice candy man and the masseur, and Lenny takes advantage of them. There are several servants in the house of her parents: Hari, Moti, Dilnawaz, and Yousaf, who keep on buzzing around her all the time. Since they belong to different religions, and have different voices, they not only add colour to Lenny's life, they also function like a chorus, for they bring to the attention of Lenny and also to the readers what people in the street think and feel about what is happening in the country, which is mostly related to political developments that eventually lead to its partition.

At the centre of the novel is Lenny, who connects the different concerns of the novel: being from within the Parsee fold, she helps in bringing in all the required information about the community, and also in clarifying the attitude and position of the novelist on the partition. Since her role as a narrator will be discussed in the chapter that follows, here the discussion is limited to how she is presented as a character by the novelist.

Since Lenny is the principal teller, everything about her person is known mostly from what she does and says. Siddhwa ensures that she is attractive, in spite of her physical infirmity, strong in her views and actions, intensely busy with activities, and a powerful reflective consciousness, and thus appropriate for the different roles that she plays in the novel. Considering that everything revolves round her, she is truly its centerpiece.

While talking about her brother, how smart and beautiful he is, Lenny cleverly pushes in a rare detail about her that would not normally be possible, for no one ever describes oneself. In comparison with her brother, she says: "I am skinny, wizened, sallow, wiggly-haired, ugly" (22). This sounds more mischievous than accurate, for she is quite clever in her speech and moves. She has also an uncanny eye for presenting minutest possible details, almost tirelessly, especially about the activities of her Ayah and the people who surround her all the time. More details follow from her visits to the Murree Hills, to Imam Din's village, the activities within her home and also the seemingly mysterious activities of her mother and godmother after the birth of Pakistan.

One of the admirable qualities of Lenny is her sense of humour, which is reflected in her crisp comments of varied shades that enlivens whatever she sees and describes. After a long discussion on the Parsee position in their meeting in Muree Hills which among other things discusses their future in the fractured country and eventually establishes the Parsee neutrality, she remarks: "There is nothing like a good dose of bathroom humour to put us Parsees in a fine mood" (40-41).

Lenny's reaction to the physical exterior of people too reflects her sharp humour, which has dark edges to it. When she sees Hari with his tuft of bodhi-hair, it looks to her like a tail which "appears fiendish and ludicrous" (95). Her humour also verges on the queer, as when she says: "Having polio in infancy is like being born under a lucky star. It has many advantages—it permits me access to my mother's bed in the middle of the night" (10). She

can also visualize crudities like Sikhs becoming "mentally deficient at noon" (95).

Sidhwa, time and again, ensures that Lenny is a special being, who can drift into states of mind that help her see and know things, which are almost like intuitive flashes. Early on in the novel, when Lenny watches her Ayah moan with pleasure because of the massage that she gets from her friend, she too absorbs its influence and drifts into a mood, which proves quite unusual:

> Very carefully, very quietly, I manoeuvre my eyes and nose. It is dark, but now and then a dart of twilight illuminates a subtle artistry. My nose inhales the fragrance of earth and grass—and the other fragrance that distils insights. I intuit the meaning and purpose of things. The secret rhythms of creation and mortality. The essence of truth and beauty. I recall the choking hell of milky vapours and discover that heaven has a dark fragrance. (Sidhwa 19)

It is a highly suggestive passage that clarifies two things. One, that Lenny has the ability to see and know things beyond the mundane with which she has to deal with all the time in the company of her servants, although "the secret rhythms of creation and mortality" sounds a little too tall for her child-like frame.

More importantly, the "dark fragrance" suggests that much of what she has to see and say is not pleasant. That is why, she has nightmares, and the very first one that she has "connects [her] to the pain of others" (21). In a way, that sounds like a foreboding of the pain and suffering that the partition brings in its wake for people in both the countries, but most especially to its women.

There is also another interesting aspect to Lenny's character. Her awareness of her growing into a woman has been studied by feminists across the globe, and does not fall within the scope of this study. But one or two details,

regarding this need to be stressed because these show her sensitivity to human suffering, particularly of women.

First, Ayah's association with her numerous admirers make her conscious of the complexities of male-female relationship. In an early scene in her company, she observes: "I learn of human needs, frailties, cruelties and joys" (20). One such joy is of male company that she seeks from her cousin. On her eight birthday, she even attempts to kiss him. And as she grows older, she seeks him and chases him. When she thinks of him, "I find my day-dreams, for the first time, occupied by his stubby person and adenoidal voice…. I feel tingles shoot from my scalp to my toe tips" (229). Much later, when her cousin helps her find her Ayah, she feels like comforting her; "I want to tell her I am her friend…. I don't want her to think she's bad just because she has been kidnapped" (254).

Because of her close focus on the partition, Siddhwa's novel does not provide much space for the British, but to suit her interest, she brings in one British, General Rogers, the Inspector General of Police, to a party in Lenny's home. He is a typical British braggart with an air of superiority about him, who blames the natives for all their ills and warns them that "If we quit India today … you'll bloody fall at each other's throat" (62). Having said that and also blaming the Indians, he is partial towards Jinnah, for compared with the other Indian leaders, he considers him reasonable and accommodating.

In her scheme of things, Siddhwa provides for a brief appearance of Gandhi in Lahore where he meets Lenny and her mother and many other women. He is only concerned with their health and his novel ways of advising them on how to improve their looks. It is like a one-dimensional caricature of a person, who is the motivating spirit of people in Rao's *Kanthapura*. There is hardly any reference to his political views or programmes. This is because it is in line with the novel's intention of making Jinnah look better than the other Indian leaders.

The same is the case with the Akali leader Master Tara Singh who makes a brief appearance only to threaten the people in a rally that he will not allow the birth of Pakistan and Lahore would in no case become part of the new country. Aside from what he says, which includes the slogans of Death to Pakistan, Lenny describes him exactly as a Sikh leader should look like, which is unlike the description of Gandhi: "His chest is diagonally swathed in a blue band from which dangles a decoratively sheathed kirpan. The folds of loose white pyjamas fall above his ankles; a leather band round his waist holds a long religious dagger" (133). This is as objective a description as it can be, accurate and informative.

Finally, the most significant aspect of characterization in the novel is Siddhwa's focus on the characters from the lower strata of society. Ayah, for example, has a big role in the novel, not only because she is Lenny's companion, but also because she symbolizes the brutality and suffering that women had to undergo because of the partition. Even Lenny could not save her from the clutches of the mobs that invade her home. Lenny's mother and godmother have to work strenuously to take her out of her miserable plight as a prostitute and arrange her migration to Amritsar. The same is true of the other Hindu servants. They either run away for their lives or get converted to the faiths that offer them a safe passage. One becomes a proper Muslim and the other a proper Christian.

At the centre of *The Diviners* is a woman Morag, who has reached a stage in her life where she feels the need to look back on it to see how she traversed the path to her present. So she revisits her past, in which she has left behind her foster parents, divorced her husband, because of his domineering attitude and infidelities, spent time with her old school friend, from whom she has a daughter Pique, about whom she is worried because of the hostile and degraded world in which she has to live.

While doing so, Morag realizes that her journey into the past cannot remain just a purely personal one. It gets intertwined with the past of her ancestors and that of her country as well. Because of this, her journey and the novel

acquire a new character. Gillian Siddall comments on this by stating that though Morag's journey is like an exploration of her personal history, "she believes it to be linked to the more public history of the Celtic settlement of Canada" (Siddal 41).

Morag realizes that the dominant culture has to acknowledge "that its own narratives, while providing a sense of individual and cultural identity, also oppresses others, and that there are other narratives about Canada besides the ones in the history books" (41). Because Morag revisits and revises her own past and also her country's past, the novel reads like the postcolonial novels that are the focus of attention in the present study.

Having said this, it is equally true that in one major respect *The Diviners* is different from the novels of Achebe, Ngugi, and Rao. The main characters in the latter have to suffer colonial oppression, but Morag does not have to live with such suppression, except that of her husband. The ancestors of Morag are actually the colonizers, who have treated the native population of Canada as the colonized.

The Diviners shares another quality with the novels of Scott and Sidhwa, in that their protagonists are semi-autobiographical. Harley's story is like that of Scott's and Lenny's story that of Sidhwa's; likewise, Morag's story is like that of Laurence.

The characterization in the novel is geared towards realizing the twin objectives of the novel: of enabling Morag to look back on her personal history to make amends for what she missed out in it and to have a better understanding of the national history, in which recovering the history of the natives forms an important part.

When the novel begins, Morag is already a known novelist, with five novels to her credit, has a daughter Pique from her old friend Jules Tonnerre, and yet she is restless, because of what happened to her during her past. So all

the characters of the novel come to life in her memory recalls, how they were/are, how she interacts with them, and how she feels about them in the present.

Since her biological parents die when she is small, and she hardly remembers them, she is brought up by a close family acquaintance Christie Logan and his wife Prin. Christie is short, skinny but strong, who carries muck, is made fun of by almost all, including Morag's classmates, especially because he has a drooping tongue and cackles like a loony. They call him Scavenger. Though he tries to make Morag understand that if he is muck, so are the others too, though they do not know it, but she is not convinced and feels embarrassed that she has parents like him and Prin, who looks like a grotesque figure because of her huge size. Morag fails to see her goodness, too.

In her present, when she has matured as a human being, she realizes how wrong she was in not acknowledging how good the Logans had been to her. She makes amends by attending Prin's funeral and telling her daughter about Christie, but that she thinks is not enough. When Christie is sick and about to die, she rushes to see him in the hospital, and says: "Christie—I used to fight a lot with you, Christie, but you've been my father to me." In his weak and fading voice, he says: "Well—I'm blessed" (Laurence, "Diviners" 323).

When she literally runs away from the Logan's in the past to study in the University, she gets friendly with her teacher Brooks, and they decide to marry. She informs Christie about it, but he assures her that he would not attend, which she very much wants. She virtually erases her past, not just her association with the Logans, but also her brief encounter with Jules, her classmate in school, with whom she had her first taste of sexual pleasure. She tells Brooks that she hardly had any past.

Morag marries Brooke, but the marriage does not work smoothly. She wants a child, but Brooks say no. He addresses her as child, speaks to her

patronizingly, and thinks that she has to be controlled and shaped into a woman of his liking, which she resents, but does not muster courage to oppose him. To escape her unpleasant situation, she takes to writing, but does not seek his help, and her novel appears under her maiden name. When one day she meets Jules and invites him for a drink, Brooks is incensed that she has finished his whisky and that too in the company of a half-breed, and that seals their relationship. She walks out and spends the night with Jules, and because Jules cannot stay with women for long, after three weeks, she leaves him to be on her own. They keep on meeting off and on and he also learns that he has a daughter from her, whom he meets occasionally.

When Morag is with Christie, he tells her tales about their Scottish ancestors who arrived in Canada a long time back. Likewise, Jules too tells her tales about his native ancestors. And these have lessons for Morag about the public past of her country. The Memory Bank titled 'The thistle shamrock rose entwine the maple leaf forever' describes an incident of Morag's school days, where the students sing the anthem. Because it is related to the Scottish colonizers, the Metis are silent, because the emblem does not reflect their historical presence.

Another noteworthy example is a painting in the classroom titled, *The Death of General Wolfe,* which Siddall calls "a monument to the success of British dominion over Canada" (Siddal 40). The picture shows a kneeling native and the Union Jack, which shows "the insidious pervasiveness of colonialism within Canadian culture" (41).

These have salutary lessons for Morag, for she understands that colonialism operates in Canada too and what is contained in history books is not the sole truth about the character of the country. There is not one but there are many versions of history about a place and all are to be considered for understanding its true history.

The novel provides considerable space to Jules, who flits in and out of Morag's life to give her his songs that are full of the suffering of his people. He also tells her how his father was denied a burial on the land that belonged to him. So Morag comes to know how, the Metis had been treated roughly by the colonizers and how their history had been erased from the historical accounts of the country.

Christie is the first to make her aware of the injustice meted out to the Metis. When she asks him if the Metis were really bad enough to deserve the brutal treatment that they got, he says clearly: "They weren't bad. They were—just there." (Laurence, "Diviners" 70). She also learns that their leader who was hanged had done no wrong. He was only resisting the colonizers because they were trying to usurp their property. "The Metis were losing the land—it was taken from them. All he wanted for them was to have their rights. The government hanged him for that." (107). In this way, Morag passes into a new awareness about the truth of her country's history that she wants to share with her readers. That is why she learns to sing and incorporate the songs of Jules in the national narrative, so that people understand how they were repressed and socially ostracized by her European ancestors.

The novel also provides details about the experiences of Morag's daughter Pique from Jules. People do not hesitate to tell Morag that her daughter is a child from a half-breed. Pique has to suffer the trauma of being a called a freak, who has no place in their society. She has no problems when she studies in England, because the schools there accommodate people from different countries of the world. But she is not accepted in her own country.

It is interesting that Morag has a steady companion in Royland, a water diviner, who is a steady influence on her thinking. He finds out underground sources of water because of his intuitive ability. His gift is beneficial to people because it helps them get access to sources of fresh water. Morag has another kind of gift: of writing. Whether or not it is useful like the gift of Reynold, one may not be able to say with certainty, but she wants to give it a try:

> At least Royland knew he had been a true diviner. There were the wells, proof positive. Water. Real wet water. There to be felt or tasted. Morag's magic tricks were of a different order. She would never know they actually worked or not, or to what extent. That wasn't given to her know. In a sense, it did not matter. The necessary doing of the thing—that mattered. (Laurence, "Diviners" 369)

Morag's gift is Laurence's gift too. That is why Greene states that in the novel, "Laurence gives voice to those who cannot speak for themselves—out casts, 'unmentionables', half-breeds and the poor…Most of Jules's family-Lazarus, Piquette, Val, Paul" (185). Laurence has taken the onus of mentioning not only the Scottish but the natives' history as well. By giving importance to the songs of Jules, she tells tales which otherwise would have died along with the people of the past. An extract of one of the songs of Jules goes:

> They say the dead don't always die;
> They say the truth outlives the lie-
> The night wind calls their voices there,
> The Metis men, like Jules Tonnerre. (Laurence, "Diviners" 283)

The Diviners thus marks a little advance on *Things Fall Apart* and *A Grain of Wheat* because its protagonist does not only expose the iniquity of the colonial system but also makes a plea for restoring the dignity of the colonized people, by making a them a part of the cultural plurality of her country, to make it into a multicultural country in the true sense of the word. In this respect, the novel is certainly an improvement on *Benang* too.

The foregoing analysis clearly shows the influence of the political and cultural beliefs of the novelists on characterization in their novels. Refuting the concept of character in the European modernist novel, Achebe draws his characters, especially Okonkwo, keeping in view the Igbo concept of the

relationship between the individual and his community. Though free to work towards realizing his potential, his efforts are subordinated to the needs of the society, which does not approve of any kind of excess. Because of this, apart from being a character, he symbolizes the best of Igbo culture.

Like him, all other characters are presented from the outside, with focus on their positive and negative qualities, and developed only to a level where they fit the picture of their society. This applies also to the characters that form part of the colonial encounter, except the British, who are shown as cruel exploiters.

In *A Grain of Whea*t, Ngugi draws characters to conform to the social epic mode, in which they are expected to fit the needs of the historical situation of the time. Although Mugo has admirable personal qualities, he does not, because his personal dreams collide with the demands of historical necessity, which makes him betray Kihika.

All other characters, presented in detail, are judged from this perspective. Kihika, a foil to Mugo, works and sacrifices his life for the freedom of his country. General R too is a fighter. Gikonyo violates the trust reposed in him and is guilty of betrayal, like Mugo. Karanja is condemned as a British stooge. Thompson is a tyrant though he pretends to be an idealist.

Like Achebe, Ngugi does not stop at describing characters from the outside, but dramatizes the wrestle of conflicting interests in their minds. He also gives enough space to female characters as alternative voices in the novel.

In Rao's *Kanthapura* too characterization is heavily influenced by the cultural traditions of the country, in which the approach, like that of Achebe, and unlike that of Ngugi, is heavily external. Everything about the characters is known from what is told about them and by what they do.

Since the novel is located in a village within a specific historical time, the village itself and its presiding deity are drawn in a manner that they look like characters in their own right. And the characters, identified by their

colourful epithets, represent all the major classes of the society. Gandhi is brought within the fictional space as a significant presence.

Moorthy as a young man has imbibed Gandhi's teachings and with his strong physical presence succeeds in making the villagers relent to his views. He is talked about in his absence and influences public action. He is particularly successful with women, who have a strong presence in the novel.

In *Benang* and *Ice Candy Man*, the protagonists are modelled to a great extent on their authors, and the approach towards characters is largely external. In *Benang*, according to the requirements of the novel, characters are colonials, officials, and sufferers. Since the colonials and officials form an evil nexus to either annihilate or assimilate the sufferers, including Harley, their portrayal brings out their thinking, policies, and inhuman procedures, and include A O Neville, Ernest Solomon Scat and their several assistants.

Harley emerges as a victim of the assimilationist programme of the colonials, and traces his parents and grandparents with the help of his uncles Willis and Jack. Many other minor characters that appear briefly in the novel are only victims, are ostracized and exploited, including women who are sexually abused to provide children to the colonials.

Ice Candy Man is rich in characters, both in terms of number and variety, and sufficiently individualized, because Lenny the protagonist describes them with her keen eye. Their other traits, including that of Lenny herself, are revealed in their actions. These characters include her servants, her friend Ayah, her family members and family friends.

Lenny herself is quite an engaging character, and emerges as an intelligent, witty, and humorous person as well as a kind of reflective consciousness, who comments critically on people, including leaders like Gandhi and Master Tara Singh, and also on violence reported to her by her servants, in which Muslims are the worst sufferers.

The Diviners, too, like *Ice Candy Man* is rich in characters who come to life under the retrospective gaze of Morag Gunn, but mostly externally. In the company of Royland, the water diviner and also as a writer, she comes off as a strong, mature, and just person, who learns over time to revise her opinion about her foster parents, Christie and Prin, who she did not like in the early years of her life.

The novel also provides a negative portrait of Morag's husband Brooks, whom she eventually divorces, and a positive one of her school friend Jules, even though a vagrant, who moves in and out of her life, as a suffering aboriginal. Pique, Morag's daughter from him, too keeps on flitting in and out of her life, but has to fight to gain her rightful place in her society

Chapter V

Narrative Technique: About Tellers and Other Voices

> Narration is an art, not a science, but this does not mean that we are necessarily doomed to fail when we attempt to formulate principles about it. There are systematic elements in every art and criticism of fiction can never avoid the responsibility of trying to explain technical successes and failures….. (Booth, "Rhetoric" 164)

The analysis of plots and characterization in the previous chapters has demonstrated how the novelists who form a part of this study have woven scenes and incidents into a well thought out arrangement, in which there are people involved in saying and doing things. This chapter shows that they also use somebody to tell the readers about all these things. That teller is the narrator.

Ronald Barthes has stated that tellers or narrators have always been there, in all ages and cultures, and in many generic forms, because weaving narratives has always been a significant human activity. He rightly observes that "Like life itself, [narrative] is there, international, trans historical, transcultural" (Barthes 273). But this chapter deals only with the teller in novels.

The presence of a narrator in a novel means that whatever happens in it is made available through the mediation of some person or, if it becomes necessary, through persons, which means through his or her or their perspective or perspectives, or angle or angles of vision, or point or points of view. The narrator could be compared to the director of a film who chooses how and in what manner the audience sees what is being presented on the screen.

In his analysis of the constitutive elements of a novel, Jeremy Hawthorn states that tellers or narrators are part of the larger field of choices that go by the name of narrative technique, which includes the "choice of narrator and

narrative situation" and elements like "selection and variation of perspective and voice (or point of view, implied narrative medium, linguistic register and techniques such as Free Indirect Discourse" (Hawthorn 82).

This description clarifies that the narrator is an important part of the narrative technique of the novel which, as Booth clarifies is the most rhetorical of art forms. In his own words,

> …the author cannot choose to avoid rhetoric; he can only choose the kind of rhetoric he will employ. He cannot choose whether or not to affect his readers' evaluations by his choice of narrative manner; he can only choose whether to do it well or poorly (Booth, "Rhetoric"149).

In other words, novelists have no option but to make proper choices to work out the appropriate effect they have in mind with regard to narrators.

So everything in a novel flows from the narrator chosen by the novelist, who also chooses what is to be narrated by him, which could mean even what is included in the plot, the kind of perspective in which he or she wants the readers to understand what is being presented, the choices he or she makes in the use of language, which includes the tone that shapes and even controls the response of the reader.

The earliest and the most common kind of teller or narrator who dominated novel writing in the West for nearly a century and a half is what David Lodge calls the "confiding, companionable, sententious authorial voice of classic fiction from Henry Fielding to George Eliot" (Lodge 10). Considering that novelists are not interested only in telling a story, of what happens to the people in it, but also in telling about the world they live in and also how they understand it, the novel builds into it a great deal of social, political, philosophical, and many other kinds of details. That is why Lodge states that this "authorial method is particularly suited to

incorporating this kind of encyclopedic knowledge and proverbial wisdom" (10).

Milan Kundera calls this knowledge "non-novelistic knowledge" that gets translated into the "language of the novel" (Kundera 36). That is why this method is used even now, by many contemporary novelists, especially by the postcolonial novelists like Achebe, who, as will be shown later, uses it to great effect in *Things Fall Apart*.

Various kinds of terms have been used for such a narrator. Hawthorn lists three possible variants: authorial, impersonal, and third-person. In authorial, readers tend to equate the authorial with the real blood and flesh writer, which invariably is not true. That is why Booth states that it is better to think of him as an implied author, one who is "distinct from the 'real man'—whatever we may take him to be—who creates a superior version of himself, a 'second self,' as he creates his work" (Booth, "Rhetoric" 151). Impersonal runs the risk of blurring the intimate contact between the narrator and the reader. Third-person sounds too remote, and is generally used only in contrast with the first-person narrators.

Whatever label might be used for such narrators, they generally are invested with God-like omniscience, though novelists may also restrict the reach of their knowledge. Those with complete omniscience not only tell what characters look like and do, but also tell what goes on in their minds. Thus they provide access to their thinking, their aspirations, dreams, fears, anxieties, in short everything that helps readers to make sense of their actions.

Precisely because of the stupendous reach of their knowledge, such narrators do not find place in most modernist novels, for claims to this kind of knowledge do not agree with the modernist temper. However, Lodge points out, by providing suitable illustrations from some modernist novels of E M Forester and Joseph Heller, that this form of narration can be used for creating an ironic effect.

Novels can also be narrated by one of its characters, who speak in his or her own voice about its other characters and even comments on their actions and thinking. Generally, they also participate in the action of the novel. They obviously have limited omniscience, in the sense that they cannot easily tell what is in the mind of other characters. But such narrators create an intimate contact with the readers and invariably reflect the views and opinions of the novelists.

The difference between the third person and first person narrators raises the question of the place of the narrator in the novel. The third-person narrator is generally outside the frame of the novel, even though such a narrator knows everything about everybody. However, in the early phase of the novel, the narrator would sometimes address the reader directly, but only for a short time or during short intervals, as Henry Fielding did, for example, in *Tom Jones*. Or when, they would sometimes use the direct address of "Dear Reader," to pass on some vital information to the readers.

The first-person narrators are generally part of the narrative frame of the novel and a character within it. Such narrators may be personified by having a name or they may not have one. The conception and role of such narrators has changed from time to time. In earlier times, they formed an important part of the narrative, defining its course as well as its purpose. This would be done overtly or suggestively, but most often suggestively. Hints are dropped, every now and then, that he or she is the main voice of the novel and also of the novelist.

Narratives can also have shifting narrators. A narrative could start with an impersonal narrator or a narrator who speaks in his own voice, and then either of them introduces a narrator who tells a story in which there are characters, who have their own voices, who also may narrate. The outer narrator, the one who begins the narrative, is called a frame narrator. These kinds of narrators are common in *Panchatantra* and *Arabian Nights*. More sophisticated versions of such narrators figure in some of the novels of Henry James and Joseph Conrad.

In the twentieth century, the role of the first-person narrator has become much more complex than what it was earlier. For example, such narrators speak self-consciously about what they are doing, which includes the methods they are using in the making of the narrative and also stating the reasons for doing so. They are using their artistic work to reveal art and not to hide, and this particular technique is called foregrounding.

Another technique called defamiliarization makes "fresh, new, strange, different what is familiar and known. Through defamiliarization the writer modifies the reader's habitual perceptions by drawing attention to the artifice of the text" (Cuddon 214). Since attempts of the kind noted above are meant to draw the attention of the reader to make him conscious that the narrator is writing a novel which may or may not get finished, such novels are also called reflexive novels.

In another variant of such a novel, the narrator, generally a first-person personified narrator, not only narrates but also keeps on telling how he is creating the narrative, drawing attention to the artifice of what the readers are reading. Because of this, the nature of the fiction of which the narrators are a part changes: from fiction it changes into metafiction. And since they invariably also comment on the mode of writing/using history within this frame, it involves writing about the art of writing history, or historiography. Such fiction has grown right from the middle of the twentieth century, and the procedure has been designated by Linda Hutcheon "historiographic metafiction" (5). However, she associates it mostly with postmodern fiction. Salman Rushdie employs such a narrator in *Midnight's Children;* Kim Scott uses him in *Benang,* which forms a part of this study.

Although there is a difference between the third-person and first-person narrators, it is possible that by resorting to stylistic changes, the gulf between the two could collapse, that is, they could co-exist. These increased considerably in the twentieth century. In this style called the free indirect style, the third person narrator acts like a filter to render the thoughts and feelings of a character's consciousness, and invariably, the narration changes

from that of the third to first person. Since these come together without any signal, like quotation marks of an individual speech, this mode of narration is called free indirect style. Ngugi wa Thiong'o uses it in *A Grain of Wheat*, which is a part of this study.

The narrator cannot be thought of without the person to whom he narrates: the narratee. In the initial phase of the development of the novel, the narrators were very conscious of the presence of the narratees, who were supposed to be outside the text. "Dear Reader" was the frequently used expression for direct address to the reader, and much of what they had to say was by way of explaining significant details about the work itself or the expectations of the reader about the content of their narrative.

Narrators can and invariably do shift the business of telling about external actions to what is happening inside the mind of a character or characters. Taking cue from the psychologist William James, the novelists focus their attention on the inner selves of their characters, in contrast to their external selves, on their consciousness to create stream of consciousness novels. Such a novel, in the words of Robert Humphrey is one "in which the basic emphasis is placed on exploration of the pre speech levels of consciousness for the purpose, primarily, of revealing the psychic being of the characters" (Humphrey 255).

The job of rendering consciousness is performed by the authorial narrative method and has been used by novelists like Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. A more concentrated picture of this focus is the interior monologue which, in the words of Lodge, is like "monitoring an endless tape-recording of the subject's impressions, reflections, questions, memories and fantasies as they are triggered by physical sensations or the association of ideas" (Lodge 47). This is realized by mixing the traditional authorial method with free indirect style or discourse.

Another significant aspect of narration is the point of view, also called the "centre of consciousness" and "focalizer" in the narratology theory. In the early phase of the novel, the narrator invariably provided the point of view

from which the readers would respond to the characters and their actions. It can and does work even in contemporary times. Henry James added an element of complexity to this procedure by creating multiple points of view, because restricting the narrative to a single point of view may not convey the complexity of the experience at the heart of a novel: hence the need for more than one centre of consciousness.

In his *Craft of Fiction*, Percy Lubbock makes the Jamesian concept of multiple centres of consciousness into a significant aspect of the novelistic art and demonstrates how *Madame Bovary* is a superior work of art than many other novels of his times because Flaubert provides for different centres to understand the story of Emma. Taking a cue from this, Norman Friedman traces the evolution of the point of view to show how it has developed into a technique that has put novelistic theory on a sound footing (Friedman 108-137).

Achebe's motivation for writing *Things Fall Apart* has been widely documented by critics. The ones who figure in the volume edited by C L Innes and Bernth Lindfors maintains that he was provoked to respond to the work of Joyce Cary, particularly his novel *Mister Johnson*, to present Nigeria and its people from the point of view of an insider. The earlier chapters of the present study have already shown how this affected Achebe's handling of plot and characterization in the novel. But the most important element in securing this view is his excellent attempt at forging an appropriate forceful narrative voice, with which he transformed the Western medium of the novel to suit the needs of the African situation, as he understood it, for which Innes credits him with "the Africanization of the novel" (Lindfors 2).

By the time Achebe started writing his novel, the form of the novel in England and Europe had changed drastically from its earlier shape, most especially in the portrayal of characters and narrative procedures. But because of the special circumstances in which Achebe was moved to write his novel, he did not use any of the sophisticated procedures that had

evolved till then. This is clear from the very opening of the novel, in which the narrator presents Okonkwo, who, as has already been demonstrated in the chapter on characterization, is central to its conception.

The narrator, as he emerges from the opening paragraphs of the novel, combines in him a careful mix of what David Lodge calls the "voice of the epic bard" and "the confiding, companionable, sententious authorial voice of classic fiction from Henry Fielding to George Eliot" (Lodge 10), though Achebe eschews the use of the direct address to the reader, as is common in them.

In the opening paragraphs of the novel, the modalities of these procedures are quite evident. The narrator describes Okonkwo at considerable length: his wrestling prowess, his strong physical build, his facial features, his likes and his dislikes, and his particular dislike for unsuccessful men and his father. In all this, he comes off as an omniscient voice, who provides what Wayne Booth calls a "direct clarification of motives, of expectations, and of the relative importance of events" *(*Booth, "Rhetoric*"* 4), and which he labels "direct and authoritative rhetoric," (6) for providing guidance to the reader. Such a narrator could be an author-narrator, that is equating the author and narrator as one, or better still an "implied author," a variety of what Booth calls "literary masking," because, in his view "implied authors are usually far superior to the everyday lives, the *flesh-and-blood* author." (Booth, "Resurrection" 78).

It is plausible to think of the narrator in the novel as an implied author, because one can see clearly the personality of the narrator and what he does, which is to portray a society that has been maligned and disfigured. So Achebe casts the narrator as a person who has a sure grasp of the society that he is telling us about, with discriminating intelligence, for he has the ability to see it as objectively as one possibly can, with all its strengths and weaknesses, as he can also see it in the people who populate the novel.

It is pertinent that another distinction be understood carefully: between the implied author and the inferred author, as has been stressed by Ansgar F. Nunning. “The implied author is a creation by the author, which the reader may or may not gauge in practice, whereas an inferred author is a creation by the reader, which may or may not correspond to the implied author projected by the flesh-and- blood person who wrote the text” (Nunning 92).

The personality of the narrator in the novel is such that he fully represents what the novel intends to do, and the reader is made to accept what he tells us about the people and the incidents that figure in it. The more he speaks the more reliable he becomes for the reader, for he blends perfectly with the social scene, looks a perfect part of the people whom he describes and the actions they are involved with. So he comes to us already made by Achebe, leaving not much of a chance for us to infer on our own.

Whenever the narrator feels that an aspect of a character has to be stressed, he does not hesitate to create space for dramatization, wherein he withdraws to let the characters speak and act, so that the readers see for themselves what actually is happening. But soon after, the narrator, comments on what has passed between the characters and whether or not that is desirable. A short example from one of the early scenes will make it clear.

While describing the nature of the relationship between Okonkwo and his son Nwoye, which is one of the important strands of the plotline in the novel, the narrator states that Okonkwo was “fond of the boy” but “inwardly of course” (Achebe, “Things” 28). Then he provides a reason for this, that “to show affection was a sign of weakness” (28). This explains why Okonkwo is harsh towards his son and also towards Ikemefuna, who called him his father. This also becomes the cause of his anger, which makes him flout social norms. For example, he beats his wife during the “Week of Peace.” And even though his attention is drawn to this, while he is beating her, he does not stop, because, as the narrator says, “Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a

goddess."(28) Thus, with regard to characters, the narrator becomes the reader's guide to their complexities that account for their actions that are also dramatized. Such a pattern recurs quite frequently in the novel.

These examples bring out another role of the narrator in the novel, which is to create an elaborate social and moral fabric of the Igbo society as well as what its people understand as their political base: a regulatory mechanism for living their lives according to an arrangement that ensures peace and harmony in society. The narrator is a knowledgeable person who provides vital details about Igbo traditions and beliefs and demonstrates how disruptions in the social order occur because people violate them.

Judged from the standards of non-Igbo societies, they might appear primitive, even barbaric as the British colonizers called them, but for them they are workable and also valuable, because they provide them a solid basis for social harmony and peaceful existence. In weaving details that create this elaborate structure, which are steeped in the mythical lore of the Igbo society, the narrator also performs the role of the bards of yore, who celebrated the age-old beliefs and traditions of their society.

Another important thing related to them is that the social procedures that regulate the life of the Igbos, with their roots in accepted values and customs, gives the Igbos a distinct social identity as well as a sense of security. When the title of the novel draws attention to things falling apart, the implicit idea is that the colonial intrusion, which forms the second and third part of the novel, disrupts what the Igbos had believed for generations, and becomes the cause of their despair, which characterizes the mood of the later parts of the novel.

In an exhaustive essay on culture and despair, which he illustrates by analysing *Things Fall Apart*, Patrick Colm Hogan argues that colonialism breeds despair "because it destroys indigenous systems of work, law, politics, ritual, and thus shatters the people's practical identities" (Hogan

103). In the first part of the novel, the narrator comments on these systems of social intercourse; their systematic dismantling is dramatized in the second and third parts, where the British set up their own systems to replace theirs.

Another aspect of the personality of the narrator as it emerges from the overall frame of the novel is his discriminating ability to subject the known and the familiar to intense critical scrutiny. We have already shown how he assesses the character of Okonkwo and makes the readers aware of his lapses that eventually cause problems in his life. In a suggestive passage at the end of chapter seven, the narrator describes the state of mind of Nwoye during the night Okonkwo returns after cutting down Ikemefuna by taking us back to another night in the past when Nwoye visited the forest in the night:

> Nwoye had heard that twins were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest but he had never yet come across them. A vague chill had descended on him and his head had seemed to swell, like a solitary walker at night who passes an evil spirit on the way. Then something had given way inside him. It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father walked in that night after killing Ikemefuna". (Achebe "Things" 61-2)

This is a further confirmation of what the readers have known already from Ogbuefi Ezeudu, the oldest man in Umuofia, respected in the clan, who time and again tells Okonkwo about the evils that he commits of and on. He considers the practice of throwing of people who die during the Week of Peace in the forest as a "bad custom" that eventually breeds evil spirits (32).

At times, the narrator expresses his opinions on the Igbo practices through the thinking of other characters. When Okonkwo's bullet hits and kills a boy and in obedience to the established practice, he has to leave his place and stay for seven long years in the place where his mother came from,

Obierika is not sure of the fairness of this punishment, which is further strengthened by his connecting it with how he wrongly threw his wife's twin children in the forest.

Though the last two sections of the novel are a compressed dramatization of the slow but steady intrusion of the British into the Igbo society, the leading characters are clear in their understanding of how they had succeeded in whatever they did to gain control over their lives and disrupt their socially recognizable roles and rules of living. They are aware and the narrator brings it our clearly that they themselves are partly to blame for this.

In this manner, the narrator not only clarifies how Igbo society was like a well-regulated society, but also makes the readers aware of how some of their practices were inhuman and evil and how because of this, some, if not all, joined the missionaries and helped them to gain foothold in their society.

Because of the multiple functions that the narrator performs and the manner in which readers make sense of them, Nahem Yousaf calls the mode of presentation in the novel "critical realism," in which the narrator acts like a "teller/observer/and commentator/investigator," (Yousaf 37) all rolled into one.

Creating such a narrator in the novel, who earns the readers' trust, is Achebe's solid achievement, for in many ways he makes him do much more than what the early practitioners of the novel in the West had made him do. Achebe's narrator goes beyond the call of telling and commenting on people and situations. He also performs the role of an educator and thus also a source of inspiration for the readers to change things. What Booth states in the context of George Eliot, is true of Achebe too: "that openly expressed authorial rhetoric can in itself be a major aesthetic creation" (Booth, "Resurrection" 76).

Achebe's mode of narration and the personality of the narrator also help in strengthening the ethical dimension of fiction, which is of special value for countries that have gone through the sordid experience of colonial bondage. The solid presence of the narrator also helps prevent what Nunning calls the "boundless relativism of interpretation," (Nunning 92) which has been made attractive by the novelists that work within the frame of postmodernism. This further consolidates the ethical dimension of Achebe's novel.

Gikandi opens his book on Ngugi with an insightful observation: that Ngugi's novels are "experiments in narrative form, experiments driven by the author's search for an appropriate style for representing an increasingly complex social formation" (Gikandi 1). Because of this, the narrative style of *A Grain of Wheat* is different from that of his two earlier novels. In fact, this difference is there also in their plot-making and characterization, which has already been dealt with in the chapters related to them.

Narrative in this novel is complex and different in shape from the two earlier ones because of the issue that is at its centre: the imminent freedom of Kenya from the colonial control and its implications for the new nation. Ngugi views it as a moment of triumph, but also tries to suggest that there is no agreement about the manner in which it has come about, which has a strong bearing on the social formation in the country.

The method that Ngugi has chosen for narrating this has won him praise from several critics. Patrick Williams states that the novel makes a "sophisticated use of narrative form and time" (Williams 57). One strand of the narrative in the present is interwoven with the narratives of different characters with different time-frames, made possible through flashbacks, till the two culminate at the end. Because of this, the narrative looks like a "communal narrative" (58).

This feature is also mentioned by Richard Lane, when he says that the novel's narratology "functions to build a form of community writing," which suggests that the struggle for independence is both "complex and

contradictory, liberating and imprisoning" (Lane 48). The same opinion is expressed by Abdulrazak Gurnah, when he writes that "the time of rejoicing and optimism is also edged with suppressed anxieties and guilts, the people are troubled by what it means to be free" (*A Grain of Wheat* xi).

Because of this, the narrative in the novel is different from the one in *Things Fall Apart*, in which the implied narrator is clear about and in control of what he is meant to do. He represents the viewpoint of the entire community about what it is like and how it works. That provides unity and stability to the narrative and also to the novel. Even the colonial intrusion that follows is clearly etched.

In Ngugi's novel, as has already been pointed out, competing views on the vital issue of freedom and the promise it holds for people breeds fears and anxieties. In this respect, it bears close resemblance to *The Diviners*, where the colonial and aboriginal narratives vie with each other for space. There is, of course, a difference between the two novels, because the latter pleads for including the aboriginal in the already existing national narrative. In *The Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi contests the leader-centred nationalist with another one in which the nationalist is seen from the below, in which the primary actors are labourers and farmers.

A close analysis of the early chapters of the novel help in understanding the main features of the narrative method used by Ngugi to create the kind of complexity for which it has been praised. The very opening chapter starts with a description of what Mugo feels like on a particular day, which testifies to the narrator's power of minute observation to create a highly concentrated picture of the working of his inner mind. This clarifies that the narrator is a third-person narrator who is invested with the kind of omniscience that can bring out what is in the mind of characters. But it is done with such finesse, that Mugo looks like speaking on his own. The narrative filter is so fine that it produces this illusion in a sentence like this: "How time drags, everything repeats itself, Mugo thought; the day ahead

would be just like yesterday and the day before" ((Ngugi, "A Grain" 2). In this sentence, "Mugo thought" sounds almost like an authorial afterthought.

The narrator is also knowledgeable, for he provides all the relevant details about the village Thabai: its geography, its history over time that is relevant to the action of the novel, including its colonial history, the Emergency, the forest fighters, who caused suffering to the villagers because they were charged by the authorities for protecting them. In fact, he also explains the evolution of the Movement that made it possible. There are details about the role of Waiyaki, Harry Thuku, and Jomo Kenyatta, and then the takeover of the Movement by Kihika, who pleaded for a big shift in the mode of fighting the British, by abandoning the method of writing to the white man and using force to attack him.

After telling the readers how Mugo had lost his parents and was compelled to live with a cruel distant aunt, the narrator comes out with a strong judgmental statement: "The world had conspired against him, first to deprive him of his father and mother, and then to make him dependent on an ageing harridan" (Ngugi, "A Grain" 7). Because of this, his "one desire was to kill his aunt" (7). And then, the readers witness that for a split second the distinction between the third-person and the first person narrator is blurred, the voice of the narrator and of Mugo come together, to heighten the intensity of Mugo's desire to murder his aunt. The passage regarding this reads:

> One evening the mad thought possessed him. He raged within. Tonight Waitherero was sober. He would not use an axe or a panga. He would get her by the neck, strangle her with his naked hands. Give me the strength; give me the strength, God. He watched her struggle, like a fly in spider's hands…." (Ngugi, "A Grain" 7-8)

In between the sentences in the past tense, he pushes in a sentence: "Give me the strength; give me the strength, God." These obviously cannot be the words of the narrator. They are of Mugo, but they are not within quote

marks. This is an example of the free indirect style. When these are followed by "he watched her struggle, like a fly in spider's hands," it is easy to visualize that Mugo is doing it. During some of the most crucial moments, Ngugi resorts to this device to add to the effectiveness of the narrator's job.

The narrator also helps readers to understand that Mugo is a complex character and capable of harmful actions. The dream in which he murders his aunt is a kind of foreshadowing of his act of betrayal. Anybody who comes in the way of his dream has to go. His attachment to the soil is the basis of his dream of peaceful private living, which is disrupted when "Kihika had come into his life" (8). The narrator sharpens the readers' curiosity about this intrusion. In later parts of the novel, the narrator elaborates on Mugo's dream by putting on more flesh on the skeletal frame given here, and also about the vehement hatred it produces in him, because Kihika disrupts his plan.

Most of the time the narrator is an implied author, but at several places he turns into a storyteller of the old times who speaks to live audiences. In chapter 2, the narrator tells the exploits of Waiyaki and how he was buried alive with his head facing into the centre of the earth. And then follows a passage that reads:

> Then nobody noticed it; but looking back **we** can see that Waiyaki's blood contained within it a seed; a grain, which gave birth to a movement whose main strength thereafter, sprang from a bond with the soil. (Ngugi, "A Grain" 12)

In this passage, "we," that has been made bold for drawing attention, clearly suggests that the words are addressed not just to the readers but also to some audience in front of him or known to him, and he is a part of the group. Although the readers may not know who they are, but given the context in which the word occurs, they certainly seem to be to his compatriots. After

this, the narrator goes back to his old mode in which he carries forward the account of how other leaders were dealt with by the British. This conflation of the reader and the imagined group happens quite often, which stresses that the narrator is like a bard, who is telling a story to his people. The narrative is truly about the whole community.

As the narrative moves forward to depict more of colonial oppression, the frequency of such address increases considerably. In chapter six, the narrator resorts to this, but replaces the word "we" by "our."

> The situation in Kenya was then like this: the state of emergency had officially ended (almost a year before) but Jomo Kenyatta and his five compatriots of the Kapenguria trial were still detained in prison. Also the many wounds which our people had suffered were too fresh for the eye to look at, or the hand to touch. (Ngugi, "A Grain" 63)

Thus we see so far that in the first two chapters all the significant points related to the functioning of the narrator are highlighted. But because Ngugi is dealing with a subject in which there are different ways of understanding the turn of events, this kind of narrator is not adequate. So within this main frame of the narrator, which makes his narration a kind of frame narrative, Ngugi builds many other smaller narratives, by dwelling on some of the main people involved in the fight against the British, along with the evolving narrative of Mugo's past activities and his eventual acceptance of his wrongdoing.

The unfolding of Mugo's life produces layers of irony, because everyone praises his steely determination and his phenomenal capacity to bear suffering. Much of this irony is generated by pitting this eulogistic strain against the dream-like memory-recall of his act of betrayal. Soon after the act, of which he has a vague memory, he turns into a stone and virtually loses his capacity to feel pleasure or pain. But because his private dreams

keep on bothering him, he also has visions of being a kind of messiah, specially chosen to lead his people. These messianic dreams are also ironical, because they clash with what he really is.

Apart from this, the novelist provides a lot of space within the novel to the intricate lives of Gikonyo, Mumbi, Kihika, and Karanja. In most of the scenes related to them, the narrator almost withdraws to let the drama of their lives unfold through the dramatic mode and also by using interior monologues. These scenes clarify their attitude towards the Movement and its goals, and thus create scope for building variations on the theme of freedom and its implications. Kihika becomes the new leader of a group of firebrand fighters, the Mau Mau, who were neglected by the mainstream narrative of independence. In contrast to him is Karanja, who imitates his masters to cause pain to his own people.

Much of what these characters are involved with is made possible by shifts in the narrative from the present to the past through flashbacks, which help in understanding the key issue of historical consciousness. The characters attempt to make connections between their past and the present to bring out the complexities and contradictions in whatever is happening in their country. Commenting on this, Lane states that this becomes the "mechanism by which the individual and historical consciousness intersect" and then he also clarifies that a "purely abstract historical consciousness can be one in which general nationalistic phrases abound, yet do not touch the people, whereas a purely personal reminiscence, divorced from society, can lead to a situation as Mugo's solipsism" (54).

The narrative does not allow these exclusive positions, because the characters have questions and comments and also anxieties about what is going to happen after the euphoria about the celebrations of Uhuru die down. They relate to them as well as to the country. Kihika and the other characters are not only shown making history but also worried about its outcome. And all that is the major achievement of the novel's narrative management.

The last pages of *Kanthapura* provide a vital detail about its narrator Achakka, which has also a bearing on the nature of its narrative, when she says: "The Dasara will make it a year and two months since all this happened and yet things here are as in Kanthapura" (Rao, *Kanthapura* 255). The narrator is out of Kanthapura because of what happened there over a year ago. So whatever is told by her in the novel is in the form of a retrospective narration, an account of events and incidents that have already happened. Such an account is the result of a meditative mood, with even a touch of nostalgia, which may not be there in the one that describes things as they unfold.

Though it is true that both varieties of narration are fictional constructs, the differences between the two are significant. In the retrospective account, the teller confirms that whatever has happened is worthy of attention; the role of memory and imagination is also more prominent in it than what it is in the other kind of narration. That is why K R Rao states that the narrator in *Kanthapura* "recaptures an experience which is unforgettable, because it represents a shared human experience representing the tragedy and the glory of the whole race." And because memory plays a vital role in this recapitulation, the novel "employs a wide range of mnemonic devices; flashback, dream condensation and free association…" (Rao, *The Fiction of Raja Rao* 5).

This kind of account is also more ordered than the other accounts because the narrator invariably chooses only those incidents and happenings from what has happened in the past that she thinks need inclusion, as part of an imagined shape. In a way, it can be said that nothing in this account is expendable. All the events and happenings that find place in it have to have some purpose. Another detail revealed about the narrator is that the narrator is not somebody who is describing things from the outside, but one who is a part of what has happened, and, therefore, a participant-narrator.

The narrator bears a name, Achakka. She also knows people around her exactly in the manner in which they are known by everybody else, with all

the colourful epithets that are attached to them, of places where they live, the jobs they do, or just because of their nicknames. That is how she approximates the grandmother mentioned by Rao in his Foreword, a woman who is knowledgeable and experienced.

The very opening of the narration establishes that the narrator is very knowledgeable. She knows the history and topography of the village, and is deeply respectful of its main deity Kenchamma and the myths connected with her. Not just that. The manner in which she seeks the help of the goddess for everything that the villagers do for their living establishes the centrality of religion in their lives and their world-view. In this respect, she also looks like the one that is fully conversant with the Indian narrative tradition, which combines 'itihasa', 'purana', and 'kavya'. That is, she knows history, myths and legends, and combines them into an artistic form.

The form, as it emerges from the narrative, is not like the crystalline forms of the western kind, but of the eastern one of the 'puranic' kind. And this as M K Naik states is a "blend of narration, description, philosophical reflection and religious teaching" and the style that fits it is "simple, flowing, and digressive," in which "exaggeration is the keynote of most accounts of happenings and miracles" (Naik 65). The narrator not only tells what happened, but invariably comments on what has happened, which provides her the opportunity of bringing into the narrative a huge mass of details related to religion and philosophy.

A careful look at the nature of the narrative clarifies that the narrative style of *Kanthapura* is a combination of the western and eastern narrative styles. It has the surface realism of the western novel because a substantial part of its content is in the verisimilar mode, which includes all the scenes of colonial brutality and much of the organizational activities of the villagers who have turned into non-violent fighters. But because the religious ambience of Kanthapura, so painstakingly evoked by the narrator, provides the operational base of its people, it is understandable that religion and mythical beliefs guide their actions as well.

So the well-thought form that is associated with a narrative that has been constructed retrospectively changes in the context of the east-west amalgam that Rao has chosen for the novel. In fact, the novel is Rao's technical triumph, for it is a carefully crafted novel that also looks like a Purana, a form that is true to the traditions of the place, full of mythical lore and digressions, which gives the impression that it has the looseness of the local variety of narratives.

The narrator fits the requirements for such a narrative, for besides being knowledgeable and with a religious bent of mind, she blends perfectly with the overall atmosphere of the place. In this respect, she comes very close to the implied author narrator of *Things Fall Apart.* But there is also a difference between the two. Achebe's narrator is knowledgeable and wise and very conversant also with the mythical traditions of his society, but he is not a participant in the activities of the society. But in *Kanthapura*, the narrator is a part of her people and she draws attention to this time and again. She even tells about the location of her house in the village.

On page 2, when she tells about the redness of the Kenchamma Hill, she says, "If not, tell me, sister, why should it be…." When she describes the village, she says "Our village had four and twenty houses" (Rao, *Kanthapura* 3). And when she tells about its different sections, she says, "Our village had a Pariah quarter, too" (6). And when she tells about the Brahmin quarter, she says: "The Brahmin Street started just on the opposite side, and my own house was the first one the right" (9). Repeated attention to this is meant to improve the reliability of the narrator and the authenticity of what is being told, confirming also the narrative's connection with the oral tradition of the Puranic kind. The entire narrative acquires the form of a katha.

The narrator's intimacy with her people and their solid religious base lets her report how the story of Gandhi's mission in the country is in the form of a katha in which he is sent like an avatar to lift the country out of its colonial subjugation. The three-eyed Siva is made into the three-eyed Swaraj, of

"Self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity, Khaddar" (14). Jayaramachar begins it, but soon after, Achakka tells it on her own, as she had heard from him, which helps her to pass on some of the key teachings of Gandhi to her people: to fight for a cause, but not to harm anybody; that all are equal before God, no matter from what religion or caste they are; and to pursue the quest for Truth.

The narration provides adequate space for Moorthy because he is the one who galvanizes the people to fight colonial oppression in the manner of Gandhi. But to make him acceptable to his people, the narrator ensures that his conversion to Gandhian ways is rendered as powerfully as she can. So she tells that he has a vision of the Mahatma, "mighty and God-beaming" (47). When he actually hears him talk about truth, love, and God, "tears came to his eyes, and he wept softly, and with weeping came peace" (48) and he became his servant and accepted to serve the "dumb millions of the villages" (49).

So the narrator becomes an instrument of the change that eventually takes place in the people of Kanthapura. Readers learn from her how there is opposition to Moorthy's views from Brahmin orthodoxy, who fear that the idea of treating the Brahmins and the pariahs would lead to caste pollution, but very cleverly she also suggests that there is an economic angle to it. The person who opposes it vigorously Bhatta does it to protect his economic interests.

The narrator also brings out another significant aspect of the colonial scenario, that many of the ills in the society cannot be ascribed to the colonizers. In fact, the thrust of the Gandhi campaign is addressed to issues of "political slavery, economic exploitation, and social backwardness" that are fostered by "autochonous forces," (Mercanti 76). In this respect, Rao is like other novelists like Achebe, Ngugi, and Scott, who confirm that their own people are responsible for their troubles. They collaborate with the colonizers to oppress their own people. In Kanthapura, some people even praise the British for securing the dharma of the natives!

Considering that Achakka as a narrator is part of the village society who gives all the details about how the conditions changed in Kanthapura dramatically and virtually all the people in the village embraced the Gandhian ways, it seems legitimate to assume that she is the authorial voice and represents what Rao wanted his readers to know about the impact of the Gandhian thinking on the people of the times. Many critics of Rao have implicitly accepted that, but there are dissenting voices too.

In her interesting and persuasively argued thesis, Chitra Sankaran presents a different view on this. She states that Rao has created a rustic and unsophisticated narrator only as a "deliberate ruse" to "draw our attention from the many sophisticated techniques used" by him (Sankaran 45). She goes to the extent of saying that the early critics of Rao, such as C D Narsimahiah, MK Naik, and KK Sharma have missed how Rao uses her both as a character and also as his voice.

Achakka's persona of an artless village grandmother is an appropriate one for being Rao's authorial voice, but apart from this, she is also what she calls an "independent character," and in this role, she imbues her narration with subtle irony and a sophisticated wit quite beyond the scope of Achakka" (46). For example, what Achakka tells about Bhatta has a streak of fine irony in it:

> Money meant Bhatta—always smiling, always ready, always friendly. Bhatta was a fine fellow for all that. With his smiles and his holy ashes, we said one day he would own the whole village. I swear he would have done had not the stream run the way it did. (Rao, *Kanthapura* 30)

Achakka's cultural literacy, which is reflected in her knowledge of gods and goddesses and the great epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, and her passion for kathas and other religious observances and rituals can easily be associated with an artless village grandmother, for these are transmitted to people orally or through regular practice. On occasions, though, she also makes comments that one may not easily associate with such a person.

At several places in the narrative, Achakka builds into its theme some ideas that are too subtle and need discrimination of a high order. For example, she touches upon the idea of pilgrimage, which is normally associated with religious rituals, but she gives a new meaning to the idea of who a true pilgrim can be and illustrates it by giving an example which is quite understandable. The question is occasioned by Bhatta's going to Kashi on a pilgrimage. Knowing what Bhatta is like, she says a sinner like Bhatta may go on a pilgrimage, but he cannot be called a true pilgrim. A visit to a holy place does not make one a true pilgrim. She believes that people who follow Gandhian ways of truth and righteousness are true pilgrims. In fact, all Gandhi men are true pilgrims.

When Achakka comes to know that Moorthy has become a follower of Jawaharlal, she still believes that sticking to Gandhi's ways is desirable, because then alone can one be a true pilgrim. This new spin on the traditional idea of a pilgrim and pilgrimage is something new and calls for understanding of a high order.

Whether we accept Achakka as a character who is much more than a mere voice, the fact remains that as a narrator, she provides a comprehensive picture of a society under transition caused by the awakening produced by the ideas of Gandhi. Her narration not only brings to life a significant political moment in India's freedom struggle in which people dedicate themselves to the cause of their liberation from colonial control, but also one that has significance for the transformation of the society as well.

The narrative in *Benang* bears a strong similarity with the narrative in the *Ice Candy Man*. Both novels aim at presenting an alternative history, but the motivation and manner of the novelists are different. Both, of course, are the result of a sense of dissatisfaction with the version of history that is known. Scott is extremely unhappy with the false narrative of the colonization of Australia that the colonizers had passed on as truth, which had virtually erased the fate meted out by them to the original inhabitants of the place. Sidhwa too is peeved by the accounts of the partition of India by

the British and Indian historians, because she considers it unfair towards Pakistani leaders. In spite of this commonality, the two novelists approach their task differently. In *Benang*, the act of presenting an alternative view of history is its main concern and has been treated quite comprehensively, but in *The Ice Candy Man*, it forms only one of its several concerns. Because of this, there are differences in the narrative tone as well.

Interestingly, both novels use first-person narrators, but there are differences in this respect too. Since Sidhwa's narrator Lenny is a polio-stricken girl, she cannot narrate everything that is contained in the novel on her own. So the novelist has to use different mechanisms to enlarge the narrative. Because Scott's narrator Harley is a victim of the policy of assimilation used by the colonizers, which he successfully uncovers, he is a more complex character than Lenny. Scott too has to bring in many inter-texts and other smaller narratives within the overall frame of Harley' account, which gives the narrative the amplitude and depth required, by the novelty of its theme.

The very opening chapter of the novel brings out some of the key features of the narrative and its narrator. The narrator is an individual, and he starts by saying "I know I make uncomfortable…" (Scot, *Benang* 9), but soon after, he tells the readers, that he does not speak only for himself, but for many others of his tribe. The "I" changes into "we," the single into the collective. It is almost like what Ngugi does in *A Grain of Wheat*, though there are differences in this too.

Unlike the narrator in *Benang*, the narrator in Ngugi's novel is a third-person narrator, who time and again speaks for the entire community. This gives a bardic quality to both the narratives, for the narrator—whether a first-person or a third-person one—constantly speaks for the entire people. In *Benang*, the narrator stresses the bardic quality of his narrative also by conflating the activities of singing and writing. He would have preferred singing to writing because it is easier, but he still attempts writing, so that he can reach a larger audience.

Singing and writing may seem like any other activity that a person might choose to get involved with, but in *Benang*, they are of special importance, because Harley has a strange feeling that he is almost weightless, that he floats and drifts over his people. Actually, this is Scott's way of suggesting that given what he has been made into by his grandfather, his feelings of weightlessness signal what Victoria Reeve calls his "disconnection with his people, family, culture, and society" and points out that it is only when he sings and writes that he comes closest to earth and succeeds in reconnecting with all of them (Reeve 2).

Harley's choice of writing provides him another advantage, which the readers understand fully much later, when they come to know that all of Harley's people—which includes his family and members of his community—knew how to write. Because of this, Nadine Attwell remarks, and quite rightly, that "in *Benang*, writing is a medium through which to reconnect with family, to reunite community; this orientation to writing is a significant part of the inheritance Harley's family bequeaths him" (Attwell 3). And it is by writing that Harley not only finds his true self but also finds his lost links with his family and his ancestors.

Unlike *Ice Candy Man* and *A Grain of Wheat*, with which *Benang* shares some similarities, which have already been pointed out, it has a retrospective narrative, like the one in *Kanthapura*, but there is still a difference between the two narrators. As a participant narrator, Achakka can easily recollect and narrate what she had witnessed in the past, and because of that she narrates whatever had happened with assurance, but Harley does not know all that he eventually narrates. He has to toil hard and dig deep into materials of various kinds to piece together his narrative. Even after that, it is not totally within his grasp and he has to depend on the help of his uncles and some other people. Harley also hints that what he wants to recapture is far from pleasant, which is symbolically suggested by what he calls the scent of anger, anxiety, and betrayal.

Before the chapter is over, the readers also learn another significant detail about the narrator and his intended narrative, which makes him and his narrative different from all other narrators and narratives analyzed in this study. The moment, he utters the words quoted below, he draws the attention of the reader to the very process of writing his account; he also shares with the reader that he is conscious of what he is doing:

> But I anticipate myself. I do not wish this to be a story of me—other than in the healing—but of before me. I wish to write nothing more than a simple family history, the most local of histories. And to make certain things clear. (Scot, *Benang* 12)

Two important clarifications are made here. One, although the account, as the readers eventually know in the course of the movement of the narrative, is rooted in Harley's dissatisfaction with the account already known, he thinks that for him recounting will prove a source of healing, and confirming in the process that narrating in itself is quite enabling.

Because Harley also draws the reader's attention to the very process of his writing the account, he destroys the illusion of reality normally associated with fiction, and thus confirms the artifice of his writing. This tendency of drawing attention to the very process of writing makes the novel into a work of metafiction. And since the writing involves writing history, attention of the readers is also drawn to the writing of history in the fictional mode. Thus the novel approximates the narrative form of what Linda Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction.

Because of this, Harley comes off as a self-conscious narrator, who MH Abrams defines as one "who shatters any illusion that he or she is telling something that has actually happened by revealing to the reader that the narration is a work of fictional art" (Abrams 243-44). In this respect, he is unlike the other narrators discussed in this study and the novel acquires the stylistic features of a postmodern novel. More evidence in the chapter entitled "funerals" confirms how Harley is conscious of his intended readers

and how he speaks to them directly: "I appreciate your concern, and that you remain with this shifty, snaking narrative. I am grateful, more grateful than you know, believe me" (Scot, *Benang* 24). The narrator thanks his readers for staying with him and listening to whatever he has to tell. He also characterizes his narrative as a shifty, snaking narrative, because of being bumpy, and with turns and twists.

In the very next chapter 'Success' Harley tells something more about the nature of his narrative and one can easily make out that he is talking to the reader: "Tap tap…. I hesitate to mention it; in the context of this story it may seem so dreadfully *symbolic*. But what can I do? It is the truth…" (26). Consistently, Harley tries to win the confidence of the reader and also caution him about the implications of what he has to say.

Since Harley begins by exploring his own history, the narrative picks details of the time that he spent in the company of his grandfather who brought him up in the absence of his father. The narrative also becomes a search for his true self because he had been changed from an aboriginal into a white being, to fit the part of the civilized society of the colonials. The narrative thus turns into a slow unravelling of the manner in which he has been transformed, and mentions the sources that helped him to uncover the process in which it happened: photographs, letters, certificates of birth and marriages, police reports, newspaper clippings, the various admixtures of blood: full blood, half-caste, quadroon, octroon, and then the whole process of transmutations, which eventually make him "the product of a long and considered process" (30).

Since the activity of effecting changes in the makeup of a person sound almost unbelievable, Harley has to work hard to convince the readers of the credibility of what he has to tell. So he addresses the readers time and again, as he does soon after by stating that "Following my grandfather's dictum, as with such an inheritance I am bound to, I will provide documents where I can. Let me assure you that I have been diligent" (30). He is thus a compulsive self-conscious narrator.

When he provides the details of how he actually had been subjected to a process because of which his grandfather became his creator, in pursuit of a well-conceived and carefully executed policy, that had been formulated by his cousin, Arthur Neville, he registers his anger, and once again, takes the reader into confidence by using the old practice of a direct address: "My grandfather was a shrewd man. A rat-cunning mind, dear reader, mark my words" (45). And then, he pours forth the real tragedy of the aborigines spelled by James Segal, the Travelling Inspector of Aborigines: "let them multiply in wretched camps … let them be useless and untaught, keep them out of sight; or absorb them into our population" (48). The absorption was to make them into white beings, which also involved changing the colour of their mind.

Scott's narrative is complex also because he mixes real characters with the invented ones. This admixture becomes necessary because of the nature of the historical experience that is at its centre, and is almost like what it is in the *Ice Candy Man* in which the portrayal of the major leaders is based on the actual historical ones. In *Benang*, the process of assimilating the aborigines into the white race was a part of the official policy, which is now known, because it figures in official and semi-official sources. Because of this, Scott brings into the narrative quite a number of such sources in their original form or in a slightly modified form—from published books, speeches, interviews, official correspondence, letters, etc. which have been recorded by Scott in his long list of Acknowledgments at the end of the novel (499-501). Since they have been woven into the texture of the narrative, the narrative acquires a high degree of intertextuality.

Since the narrative slowly moves from the account of Harley into the account of his parents and grandparents and the people with whom they were associated, it reads like a piece of detection in which he works like a detective, looks carefully at all kinds of evidence, using even a magnifying glass to make sure that he is looking at the right documents and images. Because the course of this investigation does not run smooth, he is sometimes not sure if he is following the right track, as is clear from this

admission on his part: “Once again, I am confusing things, not following an appropriate sequence” (99). This not only brings out the difficulty of reconstructing the past into a coherent and readable narrative, but also points to the efforts that one has to make to create one.

In spite of his best efforts, Harley’s account does not go too far back into time. For knowing about his network of relatives, including his parents and grandparents, Harley has to take help from his uncles Jack and Will. Through them, he learns about the troubles that the aborigines had to face because of the oppressive colonial control. Like the land on which they lived, the colonials consider them treacherous, therefore to be “tamed, subdued, harnessed, made to work. Something to be improved to fit our ways” (119). By slow degrees, Harley meets all his people, his parents, uncles aunts, cousins and grandparents and many others who were with them; he also shows how some of them disappeared from the families because, like him, they were taken away to be made into new beings. All these details give his narrative extraordinary breadth and a poignant quality.

Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man*, like Rao’s *Kanthapura,* has a first-person narrator with a name, but there are pronounced differences between the two. Achakka is an old, wise, knowledgeable, and experienced woman who recalls a significant moment in the history of her country, which has a bearing on the lives of her countrymen and women as well as on her own. Sidhwa’s Lenny is a child with a physical infirmity, who is confined to her home most of the time, with an array of servants around her, who describes whatever falls within the range of her experience, but is largely unaffected physically by the violent things that she hears and witnesses, because she belongs to the Parsee community, and different from the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, who were directly involved in and affected by the violence that accompanied the partition of the subcontinent into two independent countries.

Another difference between the two is that Achakka recaptures what has already happened, while Lenny describes events and incidents as they

happen. Since she is part of the time in motion, she also grows from a precocious child into an experienced girl, capable of commenting on what she sees herself and what she hears from others. She also shows signs of maturity, of a sensitive being, who reacts strongly to what she finds unpleasant and ugly, and has also a rich fund of humour.

Almost all the reviewers and critics of Sidhwa's work have commented on the strong personal angle to Lenny's make up, both as a sick child belonging to a Parsee community and also the experiences that fall within her range as a young girl. Nevertheless, it is equally true, as Sidhwa has said in several of her interviews, that she has used her purposefully to dramatize her views about key figures in the history of the subcontinent around the time of its partition.

Before explaining and commenting on the manner in which Lenny functions as a narrator it is important to bear in mind that the novel is much more than an attempt at presenting an alternative view of the partition of the Indian subcontinent. Ambreen Hai, who has explored the feminist angle of the novel in great depth, remarks that the novel "locates itself as the nexus of a number of intersecting contemporary concerns: gender, violence, nationalism, cross-class representation, and ethnicity" (Hai 388). The discussion that follows is confined only to the role of the narrator in realizing the alternative view of the partition, which is limited to the people involved in it and the violence that it bred largely because of the manner in which the British worked out the partition details.

In the first few chapters of the novel, Sidhwa ensures that Lenny comes off as a child whose "world is compressed" and whose "mind is blocked by gloom" (Sidhwa 1), because it senses sadness around her. She sportingly puts up with the humorous taunts of her elders about her polio-stricken condition. She is also capable of making sharp humorous comments like "having polio in infancy is like being born under a lucky star" (10). Her melancholy disposition and her sense of humour characterize her as a narrator. She also understands how Parsees have "been careful to adopt a

discreet and politically naïve profile" (16) and declares "her first personal involvement with Indian politics: the Quit-India sentiment that has fired the imagination of a subject people…" (17).

Sidhwa uses Lenny to tell events and happenings that lead to the actual partition of the subcontinent and its aftereffects on the people of the two countries. Since like Sidhwa, she is a Parsee, she seems ideally positioned to contest the Indian and Pakistani discourses, which are grounded in religious identity, and to offer a neutral perspective that is different from the ones based on religion.

For this purpose, the novelist clarifies right in the beginning that Lenny has extraordinary abilities and sensitivities. She has a nose that inhales and "distils insights" (19). She can "intuit the meaning and purpose of things" (19). She can detect subtle exchange of signals and "connect with the pain of others" (21). She also experiences a chilling horror that "no one is concerned by what's happening" (22). Readers are prepared to accept what she sees and says as being useful and reliable.

In the celebrations about the victory of the British in the World War in 1944, the neutrality of the Parsees and of Lenny is also established. Although the Parsees debate the possibilities of the emergence of new zones of power by visualizing two or three possibilities, they decide that they "will abide by the rules of their land" (39). That is how they survived to do well in the past and would like to do the same in the changed times: "As long as we conduct our lives quietly, as long as we present no threat to anybody, we will prosper right here" (40).

Being confined to her home, the novelist has to devise various kinds of strategies to enable her to function as a narrator. One of them is to keep her surrounded by a number of characters who belong to different religions and have different opinions on what they see happening around them. Quite early in the novel, the Ice-candy-man is seen giving her "news of the world" (28) and details about the activities of Indian leaders like Bose, Nehru, and Gandhi. And this continues throughout the novel.

Lenny's servants and the admirers of her Ayah, who are her constant companions, function like a chorus, to provide her news and also comments on the troubled times, which she endorses most of the time. And this happens quite often in the course of the novel. In chapter 9, Sharbat Khan tells the Ayah about the Hindu-Muslim trouble in Calcutta and Delhi (75) and also in the old parts of their own city (76). The Masseur, in chapter 11, speaks sharply about the intrigues of the Congress party and the harm it could cause in their part of the country (91). Again, in chapter 15, the Masseur and his other companions discuss how Nehru's personal relationship with Mountbatten and his wife puts him in an advantageous position over that of Jinnah (131).

The second strategy is to let Lenny be a part of an intensely dramatic scene where a political issue is being discussed from various angles. To make the readers conscious of her presence as a narrator, Lenny is made to butt in off and on to make a comment or express an opinion on what is being discussed, so that the readers know where she stands in what is being discussed. For example, in chapter 5 in which the Parsees discuss their future in the divided subcontinent, Lenny approves of the stand that they take of staying in Lahore with whoever becomes the new ruler.

Similarly, in another scene of a party in Lenny's home, where the only British in the novel, Inspector General Rogers, has a furious argument with the Sikh guest of her parents, readers get a brief glimpse of the British opinion about the Indians. He says that in their absence the Indians would be at each other's throat and that all is not well with the Congress leaders and the leaders of the League. When Rogers says that "the Akalis are a bloody bunch of murdering fanatics," Lenny disapproves of it by saying "Even I can tell it's a tactless thing to say" (63). But because she does not say anything about the confrontation between the leaders of the two parties, in which he speaks sympathetically about Jinnah, it can easily be inferred that she is with Jinnah.

It is also important to mention here that Sidhwa's novel has hardly any British presence in it, except that of Rogers, which makes it different from the novels of Achebe, Ngugi, and Rao. It is because her concern is not to dwell as much on the confrontation between the colonizers and the colonized as it is on how the partition happened and what it resulted in. For this purpose, the British figure only in discussions of her servants. The main focus is on the leaders who accepted it and the violence that it resulted in the new countries.

To enlarge the scope of the narrative, so that it can cover communal tensions between the Sikhs and Muslims because of the trouble brewing in the country, Sidhwa uses another strategy: of arranging Lenny's visits outside Lahore to Pir Pindo, with Iman Din. In the first visit, the relationship between the two is quite cordial. The Sikhs and the Muslims think that the trouble will not spread to the villages where the two communities speak of their common ancestry and their resolve not to fight each other (54-57).

During her second visit, the situation is totally different. The Granthi who sounded so optimistic earlier is now in the throes of despair, because the Sikhs are now under the influence of the Akalis, "the Troublemakers," as he calls them (107). And a few days later, Lenny hears that Muslims are leaving the villages. In Pir Pindo, the Gurkha soldiers urge them to leave for Pakistan in their trucks. In spite of this, some Muslim families stay back.

Since Lenny cannot go again to the village to tell us what happened to the families who stayed back, Sidhwa uses Lenny's narrative as a variety of a frame account that accommodates the account of Ranna, her acquaintance from the village, who narrates what happens there in his own voice. His account is the most brutal part of the narrative, for it reeks of devastating violence. With flowing hair and swords and stein guns, the Sikhs swoop on the hapless Muslims. All the entreaties by them to their killers only inflame them. Ranna too is hurt badly and left to die by the killers. But he survives miraculously to tell the tale.

At three crucial moments in the novel, Lenny narrates her experience with top leaders of the country, who are involved in the fight against the British. They are on a visit to Lahore. During the first one she meets Gandhi. Interestingly, he does not talk politics but speaks to women about how to improve their sluggish stomachs, which she finds distasteful. She also considers him a toss-up "between a clown and a demon" (87). The entire episode results in a one-sided, negative portrait of a leader, and when seen in relation to what else is spoken about him by the people close to Lenny, it is clear that Lenny thoroughly dislikes him.

In comparison, Jinnah is presented as a secular, lovable person. She hears Jinnah speak in the Constituent Assembly about his assurance to people of all religions that they can follow their rituals and practices without any interference from the state (144). This is further elaborated in chapter 20, where she builds a comparison between the two, in which Jinnah comes off as a sombre, dedicated being who has faith in "constitutional means" and "tall standards of upright justice" (160).

When Lenny's mother draws her attention to Jinnah's wife, who died of a broken heart, she at once says that Jinnah too died of a broken heart. The words that follow this are too direct and border on propaganda on his behalf. It looks like Lenny has been overtaken by Siddhwa:

> And today, forty years later, in films of Gandhi's and Mountbatten's lives, in books by British and Indian scholars, Jinnah, who for a decade was known as "Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity," is caricatured, and portrayed as a monster". (Sidhwa 160)

She follows this by quoting the words of Sarojini Naidu, who praised Jinnah for his wisdom and his "splendid idealism" (161).

Lenny is also a witness to the presence of Master Tara Sigh in Lahore and hears him deliver an inflammatory speech, which is a direct incitement to

violence against the Muslims. As expected, it does lead to violence. Sikhs run after the Muslims and the Muslims roar after them with slogans. In no time, Lahore burns like a "gigantic fireworks display" (137). And in the evening "the moonlight settles like a layer of ashes over Lahore" (137).

This short analysis makes it clear that Sidhwa weaves a complex narrative management for the novel, mostly because Lenny stays home most of the time. Because of the multiple ways in which the narrative unfolds, it acquires mass and variety, and accommodates diverse reactions to what happened before and after the partition of the country. Though Lenny is chosen as a narrator because of being a neutral person, her pose of neutrality, especially with regard to the leaders, does not work. Her "ethnic neutrality" does not guarantee the objectivity of her account, as she is a Pakistani and as such cannot claim what Hai calls "nationalist neutrality" (389).

The narrative in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* has the form of a personal quest that it shares with a novel like *Benang*, but the two differ because of their different motivations. Harley explores his past because happenings during his young days had changed his life drastically and made him into a being different from what he had been. Morag Gunn goes back into her past, because she had wilfully erased and also rejected a part of it. Both these quests, however, take the two into their familial past as well as their national past, which have different implications for them.

Harley's narrative, which he has to labour hard to create, lays bare the sordid story of the colonial policy of liquidation and assimilation of the local people by the colonizers. Morag discovers the truth about her parents, her Canadian ancestry, and the unfair treatment that her ancestors had meted out to the original inhabitants of the country. It is also important to note that the nature of the quest in them differs because the narrative operates differently. Harley's moves continuously back into time, but Morag's narrative moves constantly between the past and the present and the two, as will be shown a little later, influence each other in complicated ways.

Like the *Ice Candy Man*, which deals with several concerns simultaneously, *The Diviners* too is a multi-dimensional work. Laurence's fellow novelist, Margaret Atwood, comments on this aspect of the novel by stating that "*The Diviners* is a large and complex book, an orchestration of themes as well as a collection of stories. It's about Canada as well as Manawaka, about the need to give shape to our own legends; to rediscover what really is ours, what is here*"* (389). Though both the novels share the multiplicity of concerns in them, they differ in their tone. *Ice Candy Man* combines seriousness with plenty of humour; *The Diviners* is characterized by seriousness and somber reflection.

The protagonists of the two novels also differ as narrators. Since Lenny is incapacitated by her polio, Sidhwa has to devise varied narrative mechanisms to enlarge the narrative frame of the novel to suit its requirements. Though Morag is physically fit, still Laurence uses many narrative devices in the novel because of the diversity of themes that it embraces. In an interview with David Ameson and Dennis Cooley, she has admitted how because of this she had to work out an appropriate narrative form for the novel: "But in a structural sense in *The Diviners* I felt a great need to use a variety of techniques, simply to try to get across a whole lot of different things" (qtd. in Hildegard Kuester 85).

Kuester has pointed out that complexity in the novel's structure rests on "the co-presence of a spectrum of narrative voices and focalizers. On another level, various generic forms such as oral narratives and a number of intertextual elements … convey the author's idea of multifariousness" (85). In this respect, *The Diviners* comes close to the narrative structure of *A Grain of Wheat,* in which the frame narrative of the third-person narrator often slips into the first-person mode and accommodates several small personal narratives as well, necessitated by the thematic complexity of the novel.

Two significant motifs shape the narrative in *The Diviners.* One is that of Morag being a writer, confirming, as in *Benang* too, that writing is enabling.

It helps in understanding the truth about relationships and connections of all varieties. As a writer Morag is like her water-diviner friend Royland, who intuitively finds the sources of water that meets several human needs. As an "artist-diviner," as Greene calls her, she "fathoms life, time and the passing of generations; and through her understanding of the past, gains equanimity about the future" (Greene 185).

This is further reinforced by the symbolic use of the river in the narrative, suggested by the title of the very opening chapter of the novel: 'River of Now and Then.' It not only binds the present and the past, which is also reflected in the shifts of time between the two, but also binds the beginning and the ending of the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Morag is fascinated by the sight of the water in the river, "which flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction" (Laurence "Diviners" 3). At the end of the novel, too, Morag looks at the river, and the flow of the currents and finds that "the river, as often here, seemed to be flowing both ways" (370). This provides circularity to the narrative, and a suitable end to the writing of Morag.

The very opening chapter of the novel exemplifies some key features of the narrative of the novel. The first one is the frequent shifts in the narrative from the third-person to the first person. On the second page of the novel, Morag talks in her own person: "I've got too much work in hand to fret over Pique…" (4) After a few lines, the narration shifts to the third person: "Morag read Pique's letter again, made coffee, and sat looking out at the river…." On the same page, after three more short paragraphs, readers again get an interesting sentence directly from Morag; though this time it is italicized: "*I used to think words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even miracle. But no, only occasionally*" (4).

After this, the narrative changes in its orientation, because the readers are provided a series of verbal snapshots, that is, a description of photos that Morag says "never agreed to get lost" (5). Instead of visualizing the past in

a sequentially arranged narrative, Morag sees it pictorially, in the form of snapshots, which she values "not for what they show but for what is hidden in them" (6), drawing attention of the reader to remember that the pictures have not just to be seen, but also to be pondered over.

The first one is of Morag's parents—Colon Gunn and Louisa—when she is still in her mother's womb like "a little fish, connected unthinkingly with life" (6). In the second one, she is a small child with the dog Snap sleeping at the foot of her bed. This is followed by her comment that she is not sure if it is true or not. More snapshots follow that provide more details about her childhood with her parents and how both her parents fell "sick together in the same bed" (11). Interestingly, all the activities in the snapshots are described in the present tense, and there is a constant shifting of the first and third person narration.

These are followed by another device that Laurence names 'memory bank movie,' in which she employs third-person narration, but with a great deal of dramatization. In this Morag argues with Mrs. Pearl that she wants to see her parents, but is not allowed to do so. Eventually, she is put in the care of Logans. Then follows the part of the memory in the first person, in which Morag reflects on the passing away of her parents, and her rage over what had happened. This is followed by a somber reflection, in which she asks their forgiveness for having forgotten them, and then a touching admission: "I remember their deaths, but not their lives. Yet they're inside me, flowing unknown in my blood and moving unrecognized in my skull" (15). Laurence's skill consists in creating an appropriate transition from the snapshots to the memory bank by creating space for short reflections that follow each of the snapshots, putting the reader in a mood where a direct flow of memories seems quite natural.

In the chapter following this, the narrative moves into the present, where she is in conversation with Royland and worried about her daughter Pique, but soon after he leaves, she, once again, gets into the mood of seeing her past once again, from the point, where it had ended in chapter one. A series of

memory bank movies follow, each with a small subtitle, indicating its content, and all in the manner of a selective recall. All these deal with her life with Christie and Prin, about Christie's work, which she does not like, and her brief sittings with him. It is here that Laurence adds one more device to enlarge the narrative of the novel and also provide access to the national history of Canada. Christie tells tales to Morag about her ancestor of Piper Gunn and also of his women.

After this, the pattern continues: the narrative shifts to the present, which is followed by another memory bank movie. In between, there are also short comments, by Morag in the first person that are related to the issues related to recalling the past. For example, at the end of the memory bank here, she comes out with an important observation about the fluidity of what happens in human lives:

> Whatever is happening to Pique is not what I think is happening, whatever that may be. What happened to me wasn't what anyone else thought was happening, and maybe not even what I thought was happening at the time….
> (Laurence, "Diviners" 49)

The past, in short, is constantly being recalled and revised. Morag's own exercise of recall is also an act of revision.

Through the mechanism already discussed, more tales of Christie, and more memories of Morag in his company also accommodate her meeting with Jules Tonnerre, the metis, who becomes her lover and friend, and falsities about what happened to them in the past come within the fold of the narrative. These are followed by tales about the original inhabitants of Canada. In this constant shifting of the past and the present, the narrative also incorporates her life with her husband Brooks, the oppression she suffers at his hands, and how she makes a concerted effort to become a writer.

Although a part of the narrative thrust of the novel brings out the hardships that the metis suffer in their own country and how they are looked down upon by the people who came from other countries to settle in Canada, and how they keep their history alive by writing songs, and although Morag is friendly towards Jules and has a daughter from him, the relationship between the two does not promise integration of the two communities. As a young girl, Morag is drawn towards him and even makes love to him, but she does not admit this relationship to her husband. And this has been pointed out by Kuester too; Jules is presented in an indirect manner. "When he is introduced into the narrative for the first time, Morag merely refers to Jules as "him." (Kuester 124). This form of indirect presentation continues even later. More significantly, Morag is not by his side at the time of his death.

The narrative also brings out the pain that Morag's daughter has to suffer because of being called a half-breed in her own country. In England, where she attended school for some time, she did not have to face problems because of her mixed blood. Since the narrative provides space for the songs of Jules and Morag expects her daughter to write something about her father too, the narrative pleads for the co-existence of the aborigines with the settlers as a true basis for the multiculturalism of Canada.

The multiple concerns of the novel, that have been stressed by Laurence herself, and are quite attractive, have not been worked out here in their wholeness. The main focus of this discussion has been to discuss the devices that she uses to make her narrative rich and variegated and purposeful. And these, as has been pointed out, are the well-directed shifts in the narrative from the past to the present, and back, and the use of snapshots and memory bank movies, with changes in their time frames, and the frequent interchange between the first and third person narrators. Interspersed in the narrative are tales of Christie and of Jules that expand the history of the major community of settlers and the aborigines, and also provide for some oral history spelled in their songs.

This wide array of narrative devices gives the overall narrative a rich intertextual coloration. Since the major voice of the narrative accommodates other smaller voices too, it also has the texture of polyphony, and because Morag often talks about the manner in which recollections work, it acquires a metafictional tinge, too. Above all, the narrative provides Morag a deep insight into human character. She recognizes Christie as her father and also the claims of the metis to be a part of the country that she finally calls her own.

The analysis of the narrative in the novels confirms the firm choices that novelists make in their novels. Although Achebe uses the mode of the Western realistic novel, he employs a forceful narrative voice to Africanize it. The confident, authorial, omniscient voice turns into a bardic voice, and the author-narrator into an implied narrator, who is also an educator.

With his bardic voice, enriched by his use of local idioms and phrases, the narrator presents an authentic picture of the social and moral fabric of the Igbo society. Wherever necessary, he creates space for dramatization, and subjects the values of the society to a critical scrutiny and clarifies that Igbo's themselves are partly responsible for the success of the colonial masters.

Unlike Achebe's controlled and stable narrative, Ngugi's narrative is almost like a communal narrative, which brings out the complex and contradictory nature of the experience at its heart: the rise of resistance against the British, and what it means to be free from colonial control.

Because of this, in the main narrative, the implied author occasionally turns into a storyteller of old times, who is a participant in their activities, indicated by the switch of the individual narrative voice to "we." To bring out the contradictions and ironies in the changed situation of the people, Ngugi makes use of multiple devices, such as, free indirect style, interior monologues, flashbacks, and a constant shift in the narrative between the past and the present.

Like the narrative in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the narrative in In *Kanthapura* too is in the hands of a wise and knowledgeable person, with the difference that she bears a name and lives amidst her people. The tone of the narrative is also different, because it is a retrospective one. Her use of the knowledge of the place and people, and their legends and myths, and the oral orientation of the narrative gives it a mythical frame, although its base is the surface realism of the Western kind.

It is within this frame that Gandhi too is mythicized and his non-violent resistance of the British in India, which is promoted and sustained in the village by Moorthy, is etched as a glorious moment in India's history. But like the narrative in Achebe, Ngugi, and Scott, Rao's narrative too stresses that the ills of the society, which includes the complicity of the locals with the British, are of their own making.

Benang and *Ice Candy Man* are attempts at presenting alternative histories and build narratives that are very different from each other, even though both use first-person mode of narration. In *Benang*, the narrator, Harley, a victim of colonial assimilationist policy, exposes the false official history about the colonial operation towards the aborigines and constructs the real version of the events and happenings, a huge sprawling narrative that is simultaneously personal, familial, and communal.

Harley is a complex narrator. Like Ngugi's narrative voice, he often changes from an individual into a participant in a group, indicated by shifts from "I" to "we," which gives the narrative a bardic quality, suggested also in his emphasis on singing and writing as modes of communal bonding. Harley is also a self-conscious narrator, because he allows the reader to see the artifice in his historical reconstruction, the hard work he has to put in, and the numerous inter-texts that he has to bring in within the narrative, which makes it the lone example of historiographic metafiction in this study.

Ice Candy Man, like *Benang* and *Kanthapura* is a first-person narrative, but its narrator Lenny is not a victim like Harley or old and wise like Achakka, but a sick child, who grows during the course of the novel, surrounded by

her servants. Though witty and humorous, she is also extraordinarily sensitive to human pain and suffering.

Lenny watches reports and comments on people and situations. This fills the narrative with details related to the life of Parsees, their attitude of neutrality towards the impending partition of the country, the leaders Gandhi, Nehru, Tara Singh and Jinnah, and the scenes of violence in Lahore. Details of tension between the Hindus and Muslims are brought within the narrative through her visits to a village with her servant, and that of violence between the two communities through her servants and the narrative of Ranna. But Lenny's neutrality for contesting the unfair Indian and imperial accounts of the partition does not look convincing.

The Diviners is like *Benang* because both are narratives of personal quest of writer artists, and though Morag is not a victim like Harley, their quest leads them to their familial and national past. Morag revises her own past, exposes the injustice meted out to metis, and stresses the need for cultural plurality of her country. Like the *Ice Candy Man*, *The Diviners* embraces multiple concerns, but their narrative tone is different.

Like the narrative in Ngugi's *Grain*, the narrative in *The Diviners* moves between the past and the present, and also from the first-person to the third-person, but the motivation underlying them is different. The image of the river in the beginning and the end of the narrative in the latter gives it a circularity that is also symbolic. In between, it works through verbal snapshots and memory banks with inbuilt transitions, which makes it innovative and complex.

CONCLUSION

The main argument of the present study, as has been stated earlier, is that the politics in the postcolonial novels does not lie only in the political theme that they embody, which has been commented upon by many critics but also in the fictional choices that the novelists make to render them artistically pleasing and effective, a theme that has not been explored in its comprehensiveness that it richly deserves.

The exposition of this concept in Chapter II of this study examined it in its historical perspective to show that all the novelists who form a part of this study suggest the desirability of such an exploration. So six novels from six different parts of the world were systematically analyzed in a comparative frame to discuss in depth the fictional choices exercised by them.

The political element in these novels is related mainly to the idea of power: how power is used for controlling others and how this leads to resistance among the others against the wielders of power, what is usually dealt with under the colonizer-colonized connection. The complexities involved in this are seen differently by the novelists, because of their political vision and their cultural moorings. To pass on this understanding in their novels, they use their fictional tools in a variety of ways, which gives their work a distinctive character. These include their plot-making, their creation of characters, and their overall narrative management and the use of narrative voice(s).

Before providing a compact summing up of the main findings of the comparative analysis of these elements in the novels discussed in the main body of the present work, the comparison has also helped in reaching some significant critical observations on the corpus of the given novels.

The novels in the group are of two varieties, in the main. Some, like the novels by Achebe, Ngugi, Rao, and Sidhwa are novels in which the colonials established colonies away from their home to rule the native subjects, which defines the power equation between the colonizers and the colonized in one

specific way. The novels of Scott and Laurence are of a different kind, because in them the colonials settled in these places. Because of this the power equation between the colonizers and the colonized changes drastically, creating a whole new set of complications.

All the novelists, though, retrieve the past of their countries in their novels, but there are differences in the time-span they choose to deal with. This is because they have a definite purpose for doing so, which defines the intention of the novels, and, in turn, has a bearing on the fictional style they eventually choose for them. Achebe, for example, recreates the past of the Igbo society in its wholeness, till the time the British make successful inroads in his country. Ngugi relooks at the past of his country from the times of the British oppression in his country to its imminent freedom from colonial control. Rao captures the time of the rise of Gandhian resistance against the British. Scott goes right from the present to the time when the colonizers settled in Australia. Sidhwa rewrites the history of the partition of India. And Laurence goes back to the times when people from Europe came to settle in Canada.

Apart from providing variety in the choice of time periods from the past, the novelists show strong awareness of the problems of historical reconstruction, some implicitly, as in Achebe and Ngugi, and some more self-consciously, as in Scott and Laurence. A common thread that runs in virtually all the novels is the awareness of the novelists that they can and should contest the imperial accounts of history, whether of historians or of novelists. That is why historiographic contest and alternative and revisionist histories dominate the fictional space of the novels, though in varied proportions.

All the novelists have used the western form of the novel, of its earliest realistic shape, but some have used modernist and postmodernist elements as well. Wherever they had access to established local tradition of oral narratives, they have used elements from them too, creating variations of this intermixture, as in Achebe and Rao, reflected not only in their plot making and characterization, but also in their narrative procedures as well.

A major element in the fictional style of novelists is plot-making. The novelists show considerable variety in the distribution of space and time in them, reflected in their varied arrangements of scenes and episodes to suit their specific purpose.

Achebe stands apart from all other novelists because in his novel he retrieves his country's past to challenge the false picture of the primitivism of the Igbo society that the colonials had projected in their fictional and non-fictional writings, and also to provide his understanding of how the British made inroads into his society.

For this purpose, unlike other novelists in this study, Achebe uses two different kinds of plot in his novel. In the first part, the plot is in the form of an aggregation of scenes and episodes that present a wholesome picture of the social and cultural aspects of the Igbo society, which are linked by the person of Okonkwo. In contrast to this, in the second and third parts the plot consists of fast-moving interlinked scenes which deal with the coming of the British and also dramatize how the tribe really falls apart, partly because of the British treachery and partly because of its own failings.

Compared with Achebe's novel, Ngugi's is much more complex and problematic because of its multiple concerns. It starts when the country is about to gain independence, but moves back in time to dramatize the brutality of the British control of the country and people's resistance to it. So the plot has a retrospective flavour to it, moves between the past and the present and also gets enmeshed with private histories as well.

Within this arrangement, the plot develops three major strands: of bringing out Mugo from his seclusion and a slow uncovering of how he betrayed Kihika, the Mau Mau leader; of the exploitative British presence in the country; and of the pressure of public events on private lives, which leads to betrayals. Cumulatively, the plot contests imperial historiography, like what Achebe did in his novel, but Ngugi contests aspects of nationalist historiography as well, by showing that the resistance movement was led by the forest fighters.

The historiographic contest is at the core of the plots of *Benang* and *Ice Candy Man* too. The plot in *Benang* is arranged almost like the journey of its protagonist Harley, which unwinds slowly to build within it a large number of short and long scenes that bring out how the colonial project in Australia was worse than what it was in other colonies.

The plot identifies the perpetrators of this project, who figure in its evolving action. The natives had to be shunted into ghettos, ostracized and brutalized, and some had to be assimilated by changing the colour of their bodies and minds. Harley uncovers not only the manner in which he was changed from what he originally was, but also the kind of fate his family and his community had to suffer. The plot is interspersed with varied official documents and letters, which expose the false official narrative that had been created to suppress the oppressive programme of the colonials.

In *Ice Candy Man*, Sidhwa contests the accounts of the Indian partition provided by the British and Indian writers and historians, because in her view, these were unfair to Pakistani leaders. For this, she arranges the plot around a neutral protagonist from the community of Parsees, Lenny, who is an invalid child.

For this historiographic intervention, Sidhwa creates a compact and crowded plot, chockfull of events and happenings around the sick Lenny, first to locate her in her Parsee setting and then to bring in known Indian leaders, like Gandhi and the Sikh leader Tara Singh within its fold to show how in comparison with them, Jinnah is more gentlemanly, honest and well meaning. Since Lenny cannot move out often, scenes are woven around Lenny's servants and Ayah's friends that report scenes of violence. One long scene of brutal violence against the Muslims is brought within the frame of the plot by the narrative of Ranna.

The plot in *The Diviners* is complex and multi-layered, almost like what it is in *Benang*, though arranged differently. The scenes and happenings that move from the present to the past are mixed with happenings in Morag's life in her present. In this exercise, Morag also comments on a vital truth about

the past itself: that it is not fixed, but gets revised every time one goes back to it.

The arrangement of the plot in the novel is in the nature of a massive revisionary exercise, in which Morag revises her relationship with her foster parents, sees fault lines in the history of her ancestors, and understands fully the untruths in the historical narrative of the country in which the metis were not only subjected to exploitation, but also excluded from it. So Morag learns that for a truthful picture of her multicultural country, she has to accommodate the songs of metis in the national narrative.

Unlike all these novels in the study, Rao's *Kanthapura* recreates only a significant moment in India's past through the medium of a rich cultural memory. In line with the traditional mode of oral stories in the epic manner, Rao writes a novel in which episodes and scenes follow each other without any specific linkages. And like in a harikatha, it brings in the person of Gandhi into it like an avatar born to kill the British demon.

Within the frame of these scenes and episodes that constitute its plot, Gandhi is represented by Moorthy. The plot dwells on how he influences the villagers to follow Gandhian ideals and how some people, for personal and political reasons, oppose this. Eventually, Moorthy's influence prevails and the villagers, especially its brave women, fight their oppressors without resorting to retaliatory violence, and lose their homes.

With regard to characterization, the novelists show a strong imprint of their cultural base. Achebe, for example, refutes the concept of character of the European modernist novel in which the protagonists live on the fringes of their society and creates characters that conform to the Igbo belief of the relationship between the individual and his community. Though Okonkwo is free to work towards realizing his potential, his efforts are subordinated to the needs of the society, which do not approve of any kind of excess. So he is both a living being as well a symbol of the Igbo ideal of what a person should be like.

Achebe presents all his characters in the manner of a traditional novelist, from the outside, focusing on their positive and negative qualities, to fit the picture of the Igbo society that he wants the readers to know and appreciate. They are developed only to the level where they fit this picture and are thus like figures in a carpet. Only the British are drawn as cruel and deceitful.

Ngugi draws characters to conform to the social epic mode, in which they are defined in terms of their ability to meet the demands of the historical situation they are born into. Mugo is a failure, because he lets his personal dreams come in the way of the demands of historical necessity, for which he is eventually punished by his people. As a foil to him, Kihika is a hero, who sacrifices his life for the freedom of his country. So is General R. Gikonyo violates the trust reposed in him and is guilty of betrayal, like Mugo. Karanja is an object of condemnation because of being a British stooge. Thompson is a tyrant masquerading as an idealist.

What distinguishes Ngugi's characterization from that of Achebe as well of Rao and Sidhwa is that he is not content with describing characters from the outside, but wants to provide access to their minds to experience their conflicts as well. He also gives a fairly decent space to female characters, who represent alternative voices in the novel.

In Rao's novel too characterization is heavily influenced by the cultural traditions of the country, in which the approach, like that of Achebe, and unlike that of Ngugi, is heavily external. Everything about the characters is known from what is told about them. Since the novel is principally about a village cast within a specific historical time, the village itself and its presiding deity are drawn like characters. The human characters, identified by their peculiar epithets, represent all the major classes of the society. Gandhi is brought within the fictional space as a significant presence.

As an ardent follower of Gandhi, Moorthy is drawn as a young man who has imbibed his teachings, and acquired a strong physical presence. He succeeds in converting the villagers to his views, though there are some dissenting voices too. Even when he is away in the city or in prison, he continues to be

spoken about and influences people action. He is particularly successful with women, who have a strong and powerful presence in the novel.

In *Benang* and *Ice Candy Man*, characters come alive from the perceptions of their protagonists, so the approach towards characters is largely external. In *Benang*, as per the requirements of the novel, there are three kinds of characters: colonials, officials, and the sufferers. Since the colonials and the officials form an evil nexus to either annihilate or assimilate the sufferers, including the protagonist Harley, their portrayal highlights their thinking, policies, and inhuman procedures.

Harley emerges as a victim of the assimilationist programme of the colonials, and it is through him that readers get to see his parents and grandparents, in which he is helped by his uncles Willis and Jack. Many other minor characters who appear briefly in the novel are only victim figures, ostracized and exploited.

Ice Candy Man is rich in characters; both in terms of number and variety, and almost all of them are sufficiently individualized. Since Lenny is the protagonist and the narrator, she performs the job of describing them. Their other traits, including of Lenny herself, readers learn from their actions. These include her servants and her friend Ayah, who suffers in the aftermath of the partition, and is eventually sent out of the country.

Lenny is quite an engaging character. She emerges as an intelligent, witty, humorous person, and also a kind of reflective consciousness, capable of commenting on what she sees and even critical of what she does not like. The political theme in the novel is also realized through her because her portrayal of Gandhi and Master Tara Singh is negative and she sees positive qualities only in Jinnah. She makes good use of her servants to know about the political condition of the country and also scenes of violence. That brings quite a number of victims within the fold of the novel.

The Diviners, too, like *Ice Candy Man* is rich in characters who come to life under the retrospective gaze of Morag Gunn, who is a writer and under the

influence of Royland, the water diviner. Her foster parents are Christie and Prin, who she did not like when she was small, but later she changes her opinion about them.

The novel also provides a negative portrait of Morag's husband Brooks, whom she eventually divorces, because he treats her like a child who lacks social manners. Jules, who she knew during school as the spurned native, becomes her friend and the father of her daughter Pique. She learns to respect his presence and his ancestors, who had been exploited by her own ancestors.

The novels show considerable variety in their narrative management as well. Although Achebe uses the mode of the Western realistic novel, he employs a forceful narrative voice to Africanize it. The confident, authorial, omniscient voice is raised to the level of a bardic voice, made visible by the use of local idioms and phrases. Wherever necessary, the narrator creates space for dramatization, and subjects the values of the society to a critical scrutiny and clarifies that Igbo's themselves are partly responsible for the success of the colonials. Unlike the Western narrators of this kind, Achebe's narrator is also an educator.

Unlike Achebe's controlled and stable narrative, Ngugi's narrative is almost like a communal narrative, but complex and contradictory, because of the nature of the experience at its heart: the rise of resistance against the British, and what it means to be free from colonial control. Because of this, in the main narrative, the implied author occasionally turns into a storyteller of old times, a part of his people, indicated by the switch of the narrative voice to "we." To bring out the contradictions and ironies in the changed situation of the people, Ngugi makes use of several devices, such as, free indirect style, interior monologues, flashbacks, and constant shifts in the narrative between the past and the present.

Like the narrative in Achebe's novel, the narrative in Rao's novel too is in the control of a wise and knowledgeable person, with the difference that she bears a name and lives amidst her people. The tone of the narrative is also

different, because it is a retrospective one. Her use of the knowledge of the place and people, and their legends and myths, and the oral orientation of the narrative gives the entire narrative a mythical cast, although its base is the surface realism of the Western kind.

It is within this frame that Gandhi too is mythicized and his non-violent resistance of the British in India, which is promoted and sustained in the village by Moorthy, is etched as a glorious moment in India's history. But like the narrative in Achebe, Ngugi, and Scott, Rao's narrative too stresses that the ills of the society, which includes the complicity of the locals with the British, are of their own making.

Benang and *Ice Candy Man* are attempts at presenting alternative histories and build narratives that are very different from each other, even though both use first-person mode of narration. In *Benang*, the victim narrator, Harley, exposes the false official history about the colonial operation towards the aborigines and constructs the real version of the events and happenings, a huge sprawling narrative that is simultaneously personal, familial, as well as communal.

Harley is a complex narrator. Like Ngugi's narrative voice, he often changes from an individual into a participant in a group, indicated by constant shifts from "I" to "we," which gives the narrative a bardic quality, suggested also in his emphasis on singing and writing as modes of communal bonding. Harley is also a self-conscious narrator, because he allows the readers to see the artifice in his historical reconstruction, the hard work he has to put in, and the numerous inter-texts that he has to bring in within the narrative, which makes it the lone example of historiographic metafiction in this study.

Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*, like *Benang*, and *Kanthapura*, is a first person narrative, but its narrator Lenny is not a victim like Harley or old and wise like Achakka, but a sick child, who grows during the course of the novel, surrounded by her servants. Though witty and humorous, she is also extraordinarily sensitive to human pain and suffering.

Lenny watches, reports and comments on people and situations. This fills the narrative with details related to the life of Parsees, their attitude of neutrality towards the impending partition of the country, the leaders Gandhi, Nehru, Tara Singh and Jinnah, and the scenes of violence in Lahore. Details of tension between the Hindus and Muslims are brought within the narrative through her visits to a village with her servant, and that of violence between the two communities through her servants and the narrative of Ranna. But Lenny's neutrality for contesting the unfair Indian and imperial accounts of the partition does not look convincing.

The Diviners is like *Benang* because both are narratives of personal quest, of writer artists, and though Morag is not a victim like Harley, their quest leads them to their familial and national past. Morag revises her own past, exposes the injustice meted out to metis, and stresses the need for cultural plurality of her country. Like the *Ice candy Man*, *The Diviners* embraces multiple concerns, but their narrative tone is different.

Like the narrative in Ngugi's *Grain*, the narrative in *The Diviners* moves between the past and the present, and also from the first-person to the third-person, but the motivation underlying them is different. The image of the river in the beginning and the end of the narrative in the latter gives it a circularity that is quite symbolic. In between, it is spiced with innovative verbal snapshots and memory banks with inbuilt transitions.