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THE OXFORD HISTORY OF THE NOVEL IN ENGLISH

Volume Ten

The Novel in South and South East Asia since 1945

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Narrating the Global South Asian Diaspora

SUDESH MISHRA

SOUTH Asian novelists living in countries of the global north, who sometimes make the choice of returning to the global south, are increasingly concerned with the cultural, political, and aesthetic possibilities raised by migratory lives, practices, and subjects. This chapter examines the key novelists of the South Asian diaspora who have followed in the footsteps of the pioneering Indo-Trinidadian author, V. S. Naipaul. It accounts for the aesthetics of dwelling outside an imagined homeland, whether permanently or as sojourners, and the relations various characters keep to the idea of exile, travel, adaptation, and transculturation. For instance, in *Miguel Street* (1959), an early work by Naipaul, the young narrator memorializes a street, and street-dwellers, in Port of Spain, Trinidad, on the eve of his own departure for the global north on a scholarship. The work of mapping a lost world through acts of memory is a key feature of Naipaul's approach to an aesthetics concerned with the unsettling logic of mobility. If the early works of Naipaul laid down the groundwork for a nascent migratory aesthetics (with reference, however, to the forever north-bound aspirations of ex-labourers brought up in ex-colonies), the works of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and M. G. Vassanji added scintillating new layers to this initial groundwork. Rushdie, in particular, draws attention to the interwoven nature of private and public histories by imagining the lives of characters who shuttle between the great cities of the world, and shows how attempts to banish the past engender monstrous hauntings that signal the return of repressed memories. The past, as history, culture, and politics, trips up his characters at the most unlikely moments and places, as illustrated by the involuntary return of Saladin Chamcha's mother tongue in *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Vassanji, for his part, prefers the portable trope of the gunnysack, as referenced in his first novel, *The Gunny Sack* (1989), to frame notions of itinerancy that chart south–south movements (India–Africa) as well as south–north travels (Africa–America) over several generations. The gunnysack, indicative of a traveller's holdall, may imply transience certainly, but it also captures the portability of cultural forms that endow the alien context with a fleeting aura of

familiarity. With the rapid acceleration in the rate of global travel in the past fifty years, increasingly exemplified by references to detours rather than to radial flows between home and host countries, and with the entry of a new set of writers, there has been a visible upsurge in the number of novelists contributing to the migratory aesthetics of the diaspora. Notable among these are Bharati Mukherjee (Indian American), Hanif Kureishi (Pakistani British), Adib Khan (Bangladeshi Australian), Romesh Gunesekera (Sri Lankan British), Roma Tearne (Sri Lankan British), Monica Ali (Bangladeshi British), Jhumpa Lahiri (Indian British American), Akhil Sharma (Indian American), H. M. Naqvi (Pakistani American), and Sunjeev Sahota (Indian British).

Before discussing individual novels and novelists, it is important to note that the term migratory aesthetics is bound up with the experiences of populations existing in diaspora, that is to say, communities living in a more or less alienating host territory while maintaining links—cultural, familial, affective, economic, linguistic, culinary, sartorial, or religious—to the home territory. Diasporas are minority populations with a shared history living in a permanent condition of unsettlement. Although they may be ethnically defined, diasporas are often divided in class, gender, and other terms. So trans-shipped indentured workers, and their contemporary legatees, may not share the same life experiences as professional elites who emigrate voluntarily. Economic history constitutes a key element in discussing differences within a given diaspora. Moreover, the severity of a diaspora's unsettled condition varies depending on whether the diasporic individual belongs to the first, second, or third generation. It is not always the case that children born in the host country to migrant parents feel less estranged in their natal territory. While the second or third generation might be able to relate less self-consciously to the host context and can make claims to a country through *jus soli* (citizenship rights established through place of birth), the anxieties of a dislocated existence are sometimes passed down through the generations, culminating in feelings of rejection and acts of violence. Diasporas, however, do not have a monopoly on existential anxiety. The presence of diasporic bodies and practices can also upset the majority community's uncritical equation of the nation with itself. This sense of disquiet on the part of the dominant group is skilfully explored by the first of our novelists, Bharati Mukherjee.

A pioneering female exponent of South Asian migratory aesthetics, Mukherjee explores how women reimagine their identities in the new social and legal context of North America. In the novel *Jasmine* (1989), she draws on a combination of chaos and contingency theories to come up with an intricate account of the migrant's lot. Narrated in the first person by a young woman hailing from the Punjab, and written in the hard-boiled and staccato style of her earlier short story collection, *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), the narrative captures the unforeseeable consequences of events shaping Jasmine's life in transit between countries, world-views, practices, and provisional identities. If Jasmine's story begins in India with an astrologer foretelling her kismet (fate) as a widowed and undocumented exile, thereby setting off the dynamic of preordination, it

culminates with her rejection of this same dynamic as expressed by her defiant whisper to the astrologer: 'Watch me re-position the stars' (Chapter 26). The realignment of stars may be simultaneously astral and American. Over the course of the story, Jasmine goes through several avatars (Jyoti, Jasmine, Kali, Jazzy, Jase, and Jane), each one predicated on the logic of metamorphosis-in-mobility, until she is rid of the ideology of duty, caregiving, spousal sacrifice (sati), memorialization, fidelity, and karma, opting instead for 'adventure, risk, transformation' (Chapter 26) and a vision of America where 'nothing lasts' (Chapter 23). Jasmine's espousal of an ephemeral existence based on compulsive transformations is one that she shares with undocumented migrants from the Caribbean, Mexico, Guatemala, and Vietnam. Mukherjee's characters are caught up in a socio-spatial context whose contours alter with each variable. Where Jasmine opts for a restless reinvention of the self without reference to a past, her adopted son from Vietnam settles for a split existence—American–Vietnamese—made up of recombined elements from old and new cultures. Eventually they both desert her partner, Bud, who, by admitting them into his life, succumbs to the self-estranging lures of foreignness. Mukherjee contributes innovatively to South Asian migratory aesthetics in chronicling the estrangement of the self in the presence of the ethnic Other, thereby attesting to the migrant's capacity to reinvigorate society through creative forms of tumult and upheaval.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), a *Bildungsroman* narrated in the first person by Karim, the son of an Indian emigrant to England and an Englishwoman from south London, Hanif Kureishi builds his migratory aesthetics on the presence within the same person of contradictory emotional and psychological impulses. The novel's first sentence testifies to young Karim's status as an 'almost' Englishman. He belongs and does not belong. It is this ambivalence, he claims, that makes him 'restless and easily bored' and fuels his desire 'to be somewhere else' (Chapter 1). The novel, then, is essentially an account of the narrator's existential disquiet which turns into a haunting chronicle of youth culture as it might have been in the late sixties and early seventies. Forever voyeuristic and experimental, Karim's rootless existence in London allows him to record the city's emergent trends, spiritual fads, conjugal fractures, class hierarchies, racial tensions, social pretensions, musical innovations, drug-induced ecstasies, carnal excesses, and theatrical antics. In a fundamental sense, Karim's desire to map out London in his meanderings is a direct response to his father's lifelong failure to achieve orientation in the city. Karim is ambivalent on almost every front. He is ambivalent about his Indian English heritage; he is sexually ambiguous, desiring both men and women; he is politically equivocal, courting the Left but enjoying the company of the well-heeled; he is ambivalent in a filial sense, preferring to lodge with his father's mistress rather than with his own mother; he is ideologically ambivalent, putting on a fake Indian accent while playing Mowgli; and he is ethically ambivalent, befriending Changez while having an affair with his wife, Jamila. Karim is not the only character to exude ambiguity. His father, Haroon, in his suburban role as a dispenser of Buddhist philosophy, also embraces it. Where he had previously

attempted to be rid of his Indian accent, Haroon was now 'putting it back in spadeloads' (Chapter 1). The link between ambivalence, performance, and mimicry is a critical aspect to the novel. Haroon draws on the stereotype of an Eastern mystic when holding court in Eva's house, publicly exaggerating the role he wants to shed in private. Kureishi's critique is comically double-edged, lampooning Haroon's recourse to mimicry as a ploy to gain admission into English society while satirizing the stereotypical expectations of that society. His friend Anwar is similarly contradictory, happy to ape the English by eating pork pies but going on a hunger strike to compel his daughter to marry a stranger. Both Haroon and Anwar cling to an imaginary home while recoiling from any idea of a return to a real India. They turn their lives into a performance in order to shuttle back and forth inside this ambivalent dynamic. Their children pick up their habits to mount a different performance. Jamila, for example, succumbs to her father's blackmail and weds Changez, the stranger from Calcutta. Yet, we are told, hers is a type of rebellion against rebellion in a rebellious age (Chapter 6). Ultimately, Jamila succumbs to tradition so as to undermine heterosexual patriarchy, Indian as well as English. She never consummates her marriage, has extramarital sex with Karim, begets a child with Simon, a radical lawyer, and eventually comes out as a lesbian. Karim, for his part, thinks of himself as an insider–outsider, an Englishman who can view England from the outside (Chapter 15). It is this insight that leads him to discontinue the search for identity, to conclude that he is an actor who exists only in performance. If the immigrant 'is the Everyman of the twentieth century' (Chapter 9), this Everyman's glass is forever half-empty and forever half-full. The performance of the migrant is half-fantasy because, paradoxically, it is half-real as well.

Kureishi's novel is narrated from the perspective of a London-born child of an immigrant South Asian father. In his novel *Seasonal Adjustments* (1994), Adib Khan assumes the standpoint of a first-generation South Asian emigrant to Australia. The first-person narrator, Iqbal Chaudhary, hails from Bangladesh, a nation forged from the ashes of a brutal civil war with Pakistan, who weds an Anglo Australian woman with whom he has a young daughter, Nadine. When his marriage falls apart, Iqbal returns with his daughter to Bangladesh after an interlude of eighteen years. At the heart of Khan's brand of migratory aesthetics is what might be labelled the pleasure of dissatisfaction as betokened by Iqbal's hyper-conscious sense of being 'a free floater' (Chapter 10) who straddles two cultures, Australian and Bangladeshi, while renouncing any expression of conformity or incorporation they demand of him. Consequently, though the novel is set between the contending claims of home and host country, East and West, Islam and Christianity, Iqbal adopts the view that he is a variable deprived of a constant against which to measure national, cultural, individual, and territorial roots (Chapter 1). Concluding that he is a composite person made up 'of all those contradictory characteristics which are far stronger than any racial or religious differences' (Chapter 6), he defines his condition as that of someone perched on a wall that divides two occupied spatial zones:

'There are people down below on either side, oblivious of each other's presence. It is not in my power to come down [...] I see so much more than they can' (Chapter 6).

This insight into his condition allows him to anticipate a future composed of a union of unconnected traditions, as embodied by his culturally hybrid daughter. Iqbal is sufficiently sagacious to understand that his plight is not confined to first-generation migrants from culturally incompatible domains. Since they share the same territorial space with non-migrant settlers, the latter are also exposed to hybrid influences. One of the most poignant passages in the novel concerns the letter Iqbal receives from his wife in Tuscany, which echoes his own sense of self-estrangement and nostalgia for a spouse's familiar imperfections, thereby suggesting the possibility of a rapprochement between the couple. Khan's novel affords a sustained glimpse into a transnational future shaped by the 'bumbling agents of change who [...] unwittingly seek to impose their hybrid perceptions on closeted cultures' (Chapter 9). (Khan's work is also discussed in Chapter 4.)

In contrast, Romesh Gunesekera's *The Match* (2006) dispenses with the home and host country binary in its exploration of migratory detours and related forms of alienation and attachment. The novel's protagonist, Sunny Fernando, grows up in Manila in the 1970s after his father moves to the Philippines from Ceylon following the suicide of his musically gifted mother. He feels out-of-joint in Manila and holds his father responsible for his mother's death. Sunny relocates to London but fails to rid himself of his sense of disjointedness: 'Sometimes he felt like a rudderless boat heading nowhere with no one aboard' ('Chin Music 1973'). Unable to decipher his past, to grasp its implications for his life, he stumbles at his various attempts 'to find the world' ('Chin Music 1973'). Eventually, he takes up photography with the aim of capturing absent mental images and alternative existences, and travels to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in quest of answers, but he does not find his world there ('Ground Glass 1994'). Sunny's return to London, to his partner Clara and their son Mikey, is expressed in terms of a cricket analogy where a second chance at life is likened to a second innings in the sport. It is at this point that Gunesekera reveals his approach to South Asian migratory aesthetics as Sunny learns to glean hope-in-love and love-in-hope. Instead of home or host territory, it is family that becomes the defining ground for the diaspora. Finally, Sunny realizes that his life is not a self-sufficient frame independent of other frames, living or dead, but rather that 'each frame in his life was stitched to another' ('Chowkidar 2002'). While his own childhood has unravelled because of his mother's suicide, Sunny resolves not to squander a second innings.

In contrast to *The Match*, which is only peripherally concerned with the civil war in Sri Lanka, Roma Tearne's *Mosquito* (2007) is set in the heart of the raging civil strife between Sri Lanka's minority Tamil and majority Singhalese communities. The novel explores the intersection of the private, the aesthetic, the racial, and the public dimensions of assorted lives. Theo Samarajeeva is a novelist who has returned to war-torn Sri Lanka after the murder of his Italian spouse in London. He opts for a reclusive life on the coast,

but his secluded existence is interrupted by the presence of a beautiful and traumatized young girl, Nulani Mendis. Nulani's father, it turns out, was immolated by unidentified assailants because he was thought to be sympathetic towards Tamils. Theo finds that Nulani has a talent for painting and affords her the encouragement, materials, and space to nurture her gift. As their intimacy grows, Theo rediscovers a lost sense of orientation and rootedness, but he is abducted on the night he and Nulani consummate their love. Theo is accused of writing compassionately about Tamils by his Singhalese abductors, who torture him for months. He is abducted and brutalized a second time by Tamil guerrillas for the crime of being Singhalese. So, as reason's representative, he turns into a victim of exchangeable forms of violent irrationality. When his Tamil captor is killed, Theo returns to his coastal house, but Nulani has vanished. His manservant, Sugi, it turns out, has taken Nulani to Colombo where she finds refuge with Theo's lifelong friend, Rohan, and his Italian wife, Giulia. They put Nulani on a flight to Britain and, sensing an imminent danger to their own lives, flee to Venice just before their house in Colombo is razed to the ground. Tearne's general strategy is to use erroneous information and tactical coincidence to set her characters adrift, with the aim of bringing them together later in the story. Her brand of migratory aesthetics puts emphasis on therapeutic forms of aesthetic expression. If large-scale civil strife disrupts her characters' lives, dismantling their sense of home and familiar ground, it is aesthetic expression that engenders the possibility of a rapprochement with their inner selves, with one another, and with a non-territorial notion of home. Perhaps tellingly, it is the lack of a creative life that transforms the former LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) soldier Vikram into a murderer and marks him for a violet death. Rohan, in any case, turns from generating abstract art to painting formless figures and ghosts. Nulani embraces abstract art but continues to incorporate the past, its suffering, claustrophobia, and anxiety into her work, while Theo's new novel pays homage to love elegiacally. It is art that brings together Rohan and Nulani in a shared exhibition and alerts Theo's agent to the fact that Nulani is the painter described in his new work. The four characters are finally united in Venice.

If, in her representation of Nulani, Tearne is concerned with how women achieve relative autonomy and self-expression through exposure to diasporic individuals and practices, it is a concern shared by Monica Ali. Ali's debut novel, *Brick Lane* (2003), set among the Bangladeshi diaspora in England, is narrated in the intimate third person—in other words, the narrator's perspective merges, in a form of narrative focalization, with that of other characters. The novel explores the migrant's dilemma by switching perspectives in accordance with a character's gender, class, belief, generation, and ethnicity. Ali's characters are generally driven by a consuming need to find their place in a world where the realities of dislocation bring into focus lives that depart from the practices and values of a dominant and imagined Anglo Saxon community. Ali constructs her migratory aesthetics around a community caught up in the contested politics of their hybrid lives. She focuses primarily on Nazneen, a village girl from Bangladesh, who yields to an

arranged marriage and is taken by her husband, Chanu, to England. Through an exploration of these two characters and their interlocutors, Ali illustrates the overlap of the material and ideological conditions of the migrant's existence. The central motif driving the story involves the relationship between fate and agency inasmuch as agency might be an aspect of fate or fate of agency. Ali chronicles Nazneen's growing awareness of her own consciousness in relation to the fate–agency equation. Whereas her sister, Hasina, defies fate by eloping with a boy, and is condemned to dwell in one abject condition after another in Bangladesh, Nazneen chooses to bear stoically what cannot be changed. Gradually, however, as she is exposed to her husband's half-real insights, to figure skaters on television, and to the cosmopolitan lifestyle of the city, she turns herself into an object of reflection: 'She looked and she saw that she was trapped inside this body, inside this room, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity' (Chapter 3). Where previously all possibilities were predetermined by fate, Nazneen learns to consider herself a subject possessed of agency. In this respect, she is alert to the semblance of truth in Mrs Azad's remark that the migrant expects everything to change without having 'to change one thing' (Chapter 5). As the enormity of Chanu's failure in life becomes evident with each passing year, Nazneen starts to exercise her doubtful agency. She takes on sewing work, starts an affair with a young activist, and entertains the possibility that 'clothes, not fate, made her life' (Chapter 13). She is galvanized by her elder daughter, Shahana, who remains uninspired by the culture of Bangladesh and displays no anxiety about being English. Consequently, when Chanu announces that they will return permanently to Bangladesh, Nazneen abandons her steadfast reliance on the maxim '[w]hat would be would be' (Chapter 18). She fearlessly breaks off her affair with Karim, who she realizes has no place in the world, declines to take her daughters to Bangladesh, and becomes a self-employed designer in a women's collective inspired by her friend Razia. In the manner of the white girl in boots and denim whose confident gait she apes (Chapter 20), Nazneen is able, by the novel's end, to lead herself towards the metaphorical ice rink of her own hopes and ambitions.

Jhumpa Lahiri shares Ali's concern with how gender roles and expectations are altered as a consequence of migration to a new cultural context. Born in Britain (as Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri) to Bengali parents, Lahiri's family moved to the United States when she was two years old. The Hart-Celler Act of 1965 made it easier for skilled migrants to gain residence in the United States and Lahiri's family took advantage of this shift in policy. She grew up in Rhode Island and completed her postgraduate studies at Boston University. Her narratives, which include the short story collections *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), are generally concerned with middle-class Bengalis whose lives connect the disparate cultural worlds of the United States and India. The politics of cultural names is pivotal to her approach to diasporic mobility. Her novel *The Namesake* (2004), for example, takes as its key concern names and acts of naming as they relate to migratory cultural cross-overs or, more pertinently, to the attractions and repulsions that

exemplify characters caught up in the dynamic of being translated-in-transition. In this scheme, the prospect of subscribing to an idealized national world-view, whether of the host or the home country, remains a possibility and an impossibility at the same time. It is this paradox that connects her to V. S. Naipaul's insightful notion, in *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), of the migrant's condition as 'familiar temporariness' (Chapter 4) or as temporary familiarity. Lahiri's exploration of the condition occurs in the context of the Bengali diaspora that emerged in the United States after 1965. She focuses, in particular, on the expectations and experiences of the Ganguli family from Calcutta. After his close encounter with death in a railway accident in Bengal, Ashoke Ganguli emigrates to New England, becomes a professor of engineering, weds a girl from Calcutta called Ashima (which means 'without borders' in Bengali), and has two children—Gogol and Sonia.

In examining the circumstances surrounding the naming of the novel's protagonist, Gogol Ganguli, Lahiri delves into a type of dissociation anxiety connected to proper nouns. (This anxiety may be defined as a character's mistaken identification of the proper noun with their person and with related national-cultural values.) Names are small but significant reminders of a particular national culture. It turns out that Ashoke survives the train crash because he has been reading Nikolai Gogol's 'The Overcoat'. When the grandmother in Calcutta charged with naming their son is unable to do so, Ashoke and Ashima turn Gogol's pet name into his public name, thereby precluding the possibility of his entry into a national-cultural narrative. Gogol detests his name because it is 'neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian' (Chapter 4). Lahiri's main purpose in the novel is to explore the interior and exterior lives of characters who straddle two generations by putting them in situations where they have to negotiate the fluid and unbridgeable gap presented to them by various forms of dissociation anxiety. If the proper name becomes a site of partial recognition (where one is neither fully assimilated nor fully renounced), then the same enigma extends to one's relationship to home or host contexts, to irreconcilable culinary practices, to incompatible notions of domesticity, family, duty, and leisure. Lahiri's exploration of the dilemma faced by the American children of Bengali immigrants is not dissimilar to that faced by the London-born Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and the London-born Shahana in *Brick Lane*. In a crucial way, Lahiri uses Gogol's dissociation anxiety as a stone cast in a pond, creating expanding ripples which affect other characters who suffer from similar disquiets. Through his relationship with Maxine, the daughter of a wealthy New York family, Gogol makes a bid to assimilate into the American national-cultural story, but finds that it is a form of 'dependence' based on a self-willed 'exile from his own life' (Chapter 6). Maxine, on the other hand, 'never wished she were anyone other than herself, raised in any other place, in any other way' (Chapter 6). Gogol fares no better in India and describes his holidays in Calcutta as 'disorienting expeditions' (Chapter 6), and the homebound flight, signalling his re-entry into a Western mode of existence, fills him with a sense of 'relief' not loss

(Chapter 4). His mother, Ashima, by contrast, arrives in America with solid roots in the Bengali national-cultural value system and finds it difficult to adjust to life in the United States. She compares the life of a foreigner to 'lifelong pregnancy' because it resembles 'a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts' (Chapter 3). Nevertheless, Ashima and Ashoke succeed in creating a household that alternates between their own Bengali life-worlds, exemplified by Indian visitors and return visits to India, and those of their Boston-born children who have embraced American diet, values, and practices, including Christmas. Ultimately, it is this alternating mode of existence that causes a reversal in Ashima's sense of alienation. By the novel's end, having made the decision to sell her house and live between India and America, she discovers that Calcutta 'once home [. . .] is now in its own way foreign' (Chapter 12). In the relationship between Gogol and Moushumi, the American daughter of the Bengali friends of Ashima and Ashoke, Lahiri attempts to find a solution for dissociation anxiety. The general idea is that two individuals suffering from the same disquiet might be able to neutralize each other's anxieties by coming up with another way of being in the world. After failed cross-cultural relationships, these American children of Bengali parents yield to an arrangement initiated by their mothers and eventually marry, but the marriage does not last. A core reason is that, for Moushumi, marrying Gogol is a rebellion against her earlier acts of rebellion. Her rejection of the Indian national-cultural narrative has ended badly; therefore, by courting Gogol, she is in 'breach of her own instinctive will' (Chapter 10). She violates her own subjective law and gains pleasure from this perverse form of violation. One violation, however, induces another as Gogol turns into the object of her disquiet. In the end, the relationship is doomed. Moushumi is unfaithful to Gogol and they divorce. While the story never provides us with any real remedy, Gogol does come to terms with his name, and therefore with mixed national-cultural narratives, when he finally sits down to read the story by his namesake which saved his father's life.

Lahiri's second novel, *The Lowland* (2013), traces the impact of the Naxalite movement (a Maoist uprising dedicated to the violent liberation of an exploited Indian peasantry) on two intelligent and inseparable Bengali brothers growing up in the volatile political environment of Calcutta in the late sixties. The younger of the two, Udayan, joins the Naxalite revolt and participates in the murder of a policeman, which leads to his own death at the hands of the paramilitary forces. The elder and less mercurial brother, Subhash, chooses the life of a scientist in the United States, but is haunted by his brother's death. He marries Udayan's pregnant wife, Gauri, to save her from being socially ostracized as a young Indian widow, and takes her to Rhode Island. An intellectually driven Gauri, bound to the memory of Udayan, is unable to love Subhash or Udayan's child, Bela, and abandons them in pursuit of an academic career. Bela grows up an only child and lives a nomadic existence based on subsistence forms of labour. She discovers that Subhash is not her biological father, but her love for him intensifies because of his acts of sacrifice and devotion. In contrast, she rejects Gauri outright when she returns to

Rhode Island after a lapse of decades. The novel charts the changes occurring in one family as a consequence of political, educational, and historical motivations and desires. If Udayan's life is cut short by his misplaced eagerness to liberate the oppressed, he is also the one who cannot see the connection between the personal and the political. He expects women to serve him in their capacity as mothers or wives as he pursues his political objectives. Subhash, on the other hand, jettisons Indian patriarchal practices and becomes a responsible single parent when Gauri deserts him and Bela. He slowly, yet radically, changes his world-view over the course of a lifetime and is rewarded by the love of three women: Bela, Bela's daughter, Meghna, and his second wife, Elise.

In contrast to Lahiri, Akhil Sharma does not limit himself to the cultural anxieties of high-achieving Indians who migrate voluntarily to the United States. He is also concerned with examining the damage done to family life in the home country which compels the victims, for reasons of safety, to send their children abroad. Set in New Delhi, Sharma's debut novel, *An Obedient Father* (2000), is a disturbing account, narrated in the first person, of a corrupt junior school administrator who brutally rapes his adolescent daughter. The novel is a ruthless study of the intersection between criminal activity, national politics, monstrous sexuality, and religious hypocrisy—and the harrowing normalization of these interlinked vices in the life-worlds of the global south. Sharma's protagonist is a layered, almost indecipherable character, whose half-attempts to free his conscience from his depravities and from risky political entanglements are in tension with his instinctive grasp of the ethical life. Ram Karan's inability to earn forgiveness or redemption, and his acceptance of the dietary death sentence passed on him by his violated daughter (she deliberately feeds him health-destroying meals), lead to the conclusion that the only hope for his offspring is to flee India—a conclusion that is played out in his granddaughter's departure for the United States at the novel's end. Sharma presents a merciless portrait of a man, family, city, and country in the grip of moral ruin and the complex set of interlocking factors that drive individuals to seek alternative lives.

Sharma's second novel, *Family Life* (2014), is a *Bildungsroman*, narrated in the first person, chronicling the lives of Indian migrants to the United States. The story begins with the narrator, Ajay, describing his last months in Delhi before leaving India, along with his brother and mother, to join their father in the United States. Sharma's migratory aesthetics is informed by the push and pull factors at the heart of the migrant's desire for the American Dream. The push factor, in the case of the father, is self-loathing and national indifference while the pull factor is the attraction of residing in a country that pays in dollars and where science has the glamour of magic. The exaggerated expectations of America, and the narrator's initial delight in piped hot water, carpeted rooms, elevators, traffic lights, and well-stocked libraries, is punctured when his academically gifted brother, Birju, nearly drowns in a swimming pool and is brain-damaged for life. Thus the American Dream turns into a veritable nightmare as life starts to revolve around caring for the incapacitated Birju. Merging tragic desperation with desperate witticisms,

Sharma captures the intensity of the emotional challenges faced by the shattered family and their manner of coping with the tragedy. The father takes to drinking, the mother starts relying on religious charlatans and dubious miracle-workers while the narrator absurdly as well as poignantly exaggerates his brother's accomplishments to his friends. The family's unwavering devotion to Birju draws admiration from other migrants, but this quickly evaporates when the father's alcoholism is made public. In the middle of this tumultuous domesticity, the narrator manages to succeed academically and, after graduating with a degree in econometrics from Princeton University, becomes a highly successful investment banker. Ajay provides his parents with financial security and liberates them from the care of their unfortunate son while discovering personal happiness with Hema. Eventually, for the narrator at least, the American Nightmare turns into an imperfect American Dream. (In this conclusion Sharma's novel contrasts with the ironic vision of material success presented in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), in which the activities of the American valuation firm Underwood Samson are depicted as a form of venture-capitalist fundamentalism.)

In contrast, H. M. Naqvi's debut novel, *Home Boy* (2009), chronicles the gradual unfolding of an American Nightmare. *Home Boy* is a scintillating argot-peppered tale about being a brown person in New York before and after Al-Qaeda's destruction of the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. Related in the first person by the expatriate Chuck, the narrative revolves around Chuck, AC, and Jimbo, three friends of Pakistani origin who take to the city, and its cosmopolitan lifestyle and spaces, as if they were home-grown New Yorkers. To frame his aesthetics of migratory lives, Naqvi draws on the familiar projection of New York as a transnational metropolis and builds a compelling portrait of how the three friends lay claim to the city and are, in turn, claimed by it. In deference to New York, they start to call themselves 'Metrostanis' (Chapter 5). The experience of being an 'original settler' (Chapter 2), of spontaneous immersion in the spirit of the city, becomes impossible after the events of 9/11. Even as AC rails against terrorists who 'fucked up *my* city' (Chapter 2), the three friends are gratuitously mistaken for Arabs and kicked out of their favourite watering-hole. It is at this point that the novel loses its itinerant and alcohol-induced hedonism and the mood turns from sanguine to sour. As an irrational paranoia grips New York, they drive to Connecticut in search of their missing friend, Mohammed Shah, but find that they have become the objects of racial paranoia. They are apprehended by the FBI on trumped-up charges and their rights violated in detention. In prison, Chuck comes to the realization 'that just like three black men were gangbangers, and three Jews a conspiracy, three Muslims had become a sleeper cell' (Chapter 10). The narrator's psychological condition deteriorates to the point that he suffers a nervous breakdown, and attempts to take his own life. He tells his mother that he wants to return home and comments poignantly: 'The city's changed [. . .] I'm afraid all the time. I feel like a marked man. I feel like an animal' (Chapter 18). As Chuck heads for the airport to catch the Karachi-bound flight, he comes across an obituary in a newspaper which describes, with unintended yet searing irony, how Mohammed Shah, in whose house the three friends were apprehended, was one of the casualties of the attack on the Twin Towers.

Sunjeev Sahota's debut novel, *Ours Are the Streets* (2011), also attempts to grasp the effects of 9/11 on national, global, and diasporic politics. Sahota's characters, however, are a far cry from Lahiri's comfortable high-achievers. His diaspora is peopled by taxi drivers, undocumented desperadoes, and underpaid menial workers. Related in the first person by Imtiaz Raina, *Ours Are the Streets* describes a young Englishman's psychic alienation from secular Western values and his growing attachment to radical Islam. The Sheffield-born offspring of Pakistani immigrants, Imtiaz courts and marries Becka, a white English girl who converts to Islam because of her love for him. Poorly educated, Imtiaz has a child with Becka, but is unable to find employment through his own lack of initiative and effort. He resorts to driving the occasional taxicab to earn money. When his father, who has worked thankless years driving taxicabs and routinely absorbs abuse from migrant-baiting passengers, dies suddenly, Imtiaz begins to question his family's purpose in Britain. The novel's account of the relationship between a taxi-driving father and his radicalized son is in some respects reminiscent of Hanif Kureishi's short story 'My Son the Fanatic'.

Imtiaz's moment of reckoning comes when he journeys to Pakistan for his father's funeral, encounters his extended family, and acquires a sense of belonging. Instead of being 'stuck in the middle of everything' (*Ours Are the Streets*), he chooses Pakistan over Britain, radical Islam over English secularism. Through his cousin Charag, he becomes acquainted with the reactionary Aaqil and Faisal and together they travel to Afghanistan to join a terrorist cell run by Abu Bhai. In the course of their sojourn in Afghanistan, they are trained as killers. Faisal blows himself up while targeting American occupiers in Afghanistan and Aaqil attacks the British Embassy in Pakistan. Imtiaz and Charag are sent to England with instructions to target shopping centres, but the level-headed Charag opts out. As Imtiaz confronts the conflict between his love for an estranged Becka and his resolve to stay true to his pledge to Abu Bhai, he descends into a state of paranoiac derangement and imagines that his shadowy alter ego, Tarun, is pursuing him. By the novel's end, Imtiaz has a slim hold on reality and sanity. Desperate for comfort and guidance, he invokes the memory of his deceased father as he sets out on his murderous mission. Sahota's novel affords a harrowing insight into reactionary types of migratory consciousness based on the failure of hybridity, creative ambivalence, and shared if ambiguous forms of modernity.

Sahota's second novel, *The Year of the Runaways* (2015), is a powerful account of the interwoven lives of four young South Asians—Tochi, Avtar, Randeep, and Narinder—who leave India for dissimilar reasons. By caste, Tochi is a lowly *chamar*, a leather-worker, whose entire family is murdered by high-caste Hindus with ties to the right-wing Maheshwar Sena. A scarred survivor of his family's slaughter, Tochi works tirelessly as

a labourer and saves enough money to pay smugglers to transport him to Europe. His primary motive for leaving India is existential trauma rather than acute economic hardship; he wants 'to be allowed a say in his life' (Chapter 2) instead of settling for a preordained slot in a caste-divided world. Tochi ends up in Sheffield, England, working on the same building site as Avtar and Randeep, among other faujis (soldiers) or scooters (undocumented workers), and they share a common household. Avtar's mobility is due in the main to the fraught economic situation of his family. His father's store is not doing well and, to make matters worse, he is sacked from his job as a bus conductor when the owner makes him a scapegoat. As the elder of two brothers, Avtar recognizes his responsibility to his family. He sells one of his kidneys for organ transplant and borrows from a local moneylender to pay for a study visa to Britain. His real intention, however, is to work to pay off the loan while keeping his family afloat. Randeep, for his part, hails from a well-to-do family thrown into financial and aspirational turmoil when the father's mental illness causes him to lose his job as a senior government manager. Brother to three sisters, one of whom is Avtar's lover, Randeep finds work at a call centre, but his studies suffer as a result. In his desperate need for emotional solace, he nearly rapes his girlfriend and is expelled from college. At this point he has the good fortune to run into the England-born Narinder who is seeking to enter into a 'visa marriage' with a boy wanting to move to England. Narinder's motives are dense and layered. Haunted by an earlier refusal to enter into a 'visa marriage' with a man who subsequently died inside a smuggler's truck, she is on a quest for redemption and absolution. On the other hand, she appears to be escaping her family and a patriarchal exchange system (driven by the twin motors of honour and duty) where women are the currency. Narinder marries Randeep and ends up living alone in a flat in Sheffield paid for by him. Sahota's migratory aesthetics is built around the complex commerce of the material, the social, the gastronomic, the ethical, and the religious elements of his characters' lives. In a world where competitive casual work is the driving factor, especially for undocumented workers, every bond, whether social, ethical, or spiritual, is forged or frays, loosens or deepens depending on the shifting material circumstances of the moment.

The Year of the Runaways bursts all sorts of hackneyed ideological bubbles. If Avtar rubbishes Gurpreet's assertion that familial love drives them abroad by pointing to the abhorrent ideology of duty that shackles Indians (Chapter 1), he also displays little patience for the wistful sentimentality of documented Indians who reject England: 'What decadence this belonging rubbish was, what time the rich must have if they could sit around and weave great worries out of such threadbare things' (Chapter 7). Avtar's point is that underpaid illegal workers do not have time to indulge in cultural or identity politics. In Sahota's novel, great tragedies, such as the gruesome murder of Tochi's family, remain repressively present within the victim, while little tragedies, such as Tochi's usurpation of Avtar's position in the restaurant, assume grand and violent proportions. Even so, the novel never envisages an arena where one might be able to

disentangle right from wrong, filth from cleanliness, veracity from falsehoods, true love from visa partners, and god from nullity. The relationship between Tochi and Narinder is the most important one in the novel. If, through forms of genuine empathy and tactile intimacy, Narinder incorporates Tochi into a common humanity, Tochi teaches Narinder the emptiness of a god that is morally impervious to injustice. Their love, although unconsummated, allows them to overcome personal hurts and to rebuild their lives. Tochi starts a family in his dream world of Kanyakumari, while Narinder chooses the life of a single woman free from patriarchal chains and obligations.

In their approach to migratory aesthetics, South Asian novelists of the diaspora range over a broad spectrum of themes and concerns. Several writers—in particular Mukherjee, Kureishi, Khan, Gunesekera, Tearne, Ali, and Lahiri—focus on identity politics and associated motifs of self-invention, split existence, hybrid values, provisional refuge, dynamic ambivalence, free-floating selves, interdependent lives, non-territorial or aesthetic homes, anti-patriarchal agency, and dissociation anxiety. In spite of the periodic disquiet experienced by their characters as a result of dwelling in the diaspora, the outlook of these authors remains generally sanguine. For the most part, they believe that the multiple cultural inheritances of diasporic individuals and communities produce new ways of being in the world where neither the home nor the host territory has a clear determining influence. Having grown up in a world reshaped by the collapse of ethical and familial norms, by the politics of state and non-state terrorisms, and by the export of illegal drudgery, the newer generation of South Asian novelists, exemplified by Sharma, Naqvi, and Sahota, tends to be more sceptical of familial cohesion, identity politics, and migratory daydreams. They dismiss the celebration of ambivalence as a middle-class luxury, or create characters who renounce their hybrid selves. They also show how a single momentous event such as a terror attack demolishes cosmopolitan principles by scapegoating the very people who live by them.