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Critical Resistance to "National Allegory": An Exploration of New Urban Realism in Select Contemporary Novels of Indian English

Banani Ghosh

Junior Research Fellow, M.Phil.
Diamond Harbour Women's University, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal

Abstract

I want to study the representation of resistance in select contemporary Indian English novels. The "baggy nationalist allegory" that predominated the literary arena in the 1980s and 1990s, sees the abject beings as the passive recipient of society's injustices and not as a potential threat to the state power. This line of argument implicates a critical fissure in which the mainstream discourses exclude the abjects from the promising resistance discourse. It is also relevant to examine the "infrapolitics" i.e., everyday forms of resistance that go politically unnoticed due to its veiled nature. My paper addresses the need of taking into account the "little narratives" of resistance of those people who are vehemently rejected by mainstream society—the abjects of society.

Abjection plays a major role in the complex process of identity formation both at the micro level of individual personhood and at the macro level of society. In this context, it is relevant to examine the New Urban Realism which has emerged in the first decade of the 21st century. This new novelistic form aims to explore more limited regional and cultural narrative frameworks and tends to observe the underside of society to examine individuals and groups who resist to normative disciplinary power. This line of argument implies a shift from the original formulation of the concept of 'abjection' in *Powers of Horror*, which is primarily oriented towards the psychoanalytical, to a 'social' exploration.

My paper will focus on the novels which are produced during the twenty-first century, that is, from the year 2000 till the present time. Chiefly, the theoretical framework for this research would be based on various theorists of transgression and resistance like Foucault, James c. Scott, Michel de Certeau, and others. Theorists like Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler would be referred while examining the process of subjectification and abjection vis-à-vis gender identity and gender role, and for the exploration of the concept of realism in contemporary time, I would resort to Ulka Anjaria, Toral Gajarawala, Amardeep Singh and others.

Keywords: national allegory, abject, resistance, realism, postcolonial literature, 21st-century literature

By the turn of the century, a new novelistic genre has emerged which compellingly distinguishes itself from the great postcolonial novels of late 20th century. The new urban realism which has emerged in the first decade of the 21st century avoids the ambition of representing the totality of life in post-independence India which predominated the works of the great novelists in 1980s and 1990s. Instead, this genre tends to represent the "little narratives" of resistance of those people who are vehemently rejected by mainstream society—the abjects of society.

Post-independence Indian English writers encounter a dilemma concerning the representation of the Indian nation whose defining characteristics are its diversity, heterogeneity, and context-sensitivity[1]. The publication of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, seemingly, provides a new voice to express the modern Indian nation in its entirety. Amardeep Singh rightly observes, "a novel like Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) took its protagonist all over the Indian subcontinent and indexed a large number of important historical controversies in the interest of broad representation" (1-2). Further, the necessity of transcending the binaries of the private and the political, the spiritual and the material which are so characteristic of western structure of thought becomes significant as well. Hence, the Indian English novels tend to represent, through the form of allegory, the crisis of the post-independence, post-partition India as the lived experience of its characters. In his essay, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", Fredric Jameson talks about the way in which third world literature presents a political aspect in the form of national allegory through narratives which apparently appear to be private and subjective: "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (69).

In one of his essays, Amit Chaudhari recounts the "large, postmodernist Indian English novel" as following "mimesis of form, where the largeness of the book allegorizes the largeness of the country it represents" (114-115). Novels like Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993), and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) incline to this baggy nationalist allegory. But, the new urban realism in Indian fiction resists to this grand national narrative. Instead, they focus on a much more restricted regional and cultural narrative structures. Further, the avoidance of the fanciful elements such as the magic realism of Rushdie and the acceptance of "nuance, delicacy and inwardness" in place of "multiplicity and polyphony" become a chief characteristic of this genre (Chaudhuri 115). In other words, it gives precedence to the realistic delineation of a particular community (like the community of Parsi corpse bearers in *Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer* or the community of *hijras* in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*), a particular city (like Bombay in *The Boyfriend* or the fictional town Jarmuli in *Sleeping on Jupiter*), or perhaps a particular caste (like the Dalit in *Serious Men* or the Halwais in *The White tiger*). As Ulka Anjaria says,

> In India… following the metafictional political 'rowdyism' of Salman Rushdie…a range of novels over the course of the first decade of the twenty-first century… return to realism as a means of exposing contemporary political inequities… a mode that dialectically transcends early twentieth-century progressive writing and the self-conscious aesthetics of a Rushdean postmodernism in order to draw attention to social inequities in India today ("Realist Hieroglyphics" 114).

In this context, it is relevant to examine the role of abjection in the creation of a stable national identity. The way in which we construct subjectivity has a culturally complex connection to abjection which concerns the impulse to reject what threatens the stability of the self. Abjection plays a major role in the complex process of identity formation both at the micro level of individual personhood and at the macro level of society. Significantly, a shift from the original formulation of the concept of 'abjection' in *Powers of Horror*, which is primarily oriented towards the psychoanalytical, to a 'social' exploration as implied by Imogen Tyler has been indicated here[2]. Moreover, due to the triple edict of "taboo, nonexistence, and silence"[3] that is imposed on them, much of the critical thought sees the abject beings as the passive recipient of society's injustices and not as a potential threat to the disciplinary and normalising state power. This line of argument implicates a critical fissure which excludes "the abjects" from the grand national allegory.

I

The new urban realism in Indian Fiction tends to observe the underside of society to examine individuals and groups who are rejected by mainstream society—abjects, in a sense. Take for example, the protagonist of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhuti Roy or that of *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga. Anjum is the protagonist of Roy's novel who is a transgender. Roy gives the *hijra* community a voice as well as an autonomous identity through the character of Anjum. The novel charts very delicately the initiation rituals into the *hijra* community and the laws of hijra "gharana" system. Anjum becomes a member of Khwabgah, the house of Delhi Gharana, and eventually Delhi's most famous *hijra*. Significantly, Roy upholds the rich tradition and culture of *hijra* gharanas which run counter to the heteronormative bourgeois culture of mainstream society. However, after experiencing the 2002 Gujarat riot Anjum moves out of Khwabgah and begins to live "like a tree" in a graveyard. This graveyard shack of Anjum which she named, quite ironically, *Jannat* becomes a refuge of the abjects—not only in terms of gender but in terms of caste, class, religion, and political affiliation. Parul Sehgal writes in *The Atlantic*,

> The queers, addicts, Muslims, orphans, and other casualties of the national project of making India great again find one another and form a raucous community of sorts… it commemorates their struggles and their triumphs, however tiny. You will encounter no victims in this book; the smallest characters are endowed with some spirit.

Regarding the subversive portrayal of society's abjects, Marthine Satris says, "Roy continues to embrace…the poor, the untouchable, the tribal, the gender nonconforming, the unmarried—anyone who questions or runs afoul of the mainstream" (14).

Similarly, in *The White Tiger*, the abjects are represented not as the passive recipient of society's injustices but as an autonomous subject capable of resistance. Born in a rural Indian village which he calls "the darkness", Balram, the protagonist of the novel, belongs to the community of the Halwais, the middling caste, who do not suffer untouchability but are destined to be the servant of the upper caste masters. It is interesting to note that while elucidating "the darkness" Adiga avoids "the slum's eye view"[4] (to quote Ashis Nandy) where the slum-dwellers are represented as living with "memories of a peasant or rural past" something like "a pastoral paradise" (5). The

people of "the darkness" have no memory other than those of servitude. Instead of celebrating the labour and simple life of the villagers, Adiga presents it as a "rooster coop" where an old woman could metaphorically turn into a witch for survival.

The White Tiger tells the tale of a lower caste/class individual who resists to his fate of a servant by resorting to unconventional mode of careerism. It is interesting to note that through the story of Balram, Adiga resists to delineate an allegory of the rural Indian space. Balram becomes a "social entrepreneur" by abjecting and not representing the rural space to which he socially and culturally belongs by birth. Despite the knowledge that his deed would destroy his entire family back in village he does not seem to suffer from moral dilemma or confusion. In a way, his uprootedness, indifference and alienation from the rural India help him to break through the "rooster coop". Both Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) and Balram resort to fierce crime as a revolt against conditions of repression. But, unlike Raskolnikov, Balram gets away with the crime and becomes a successful entrepreneur. As Ulka Anjaria says:

> By writing a protagonist who is a wily subaltern rebel effecting his upward mobility through an unsavory violent act, and by rendering visible spaces such as the squalid servants' quarters in the basements of shining new apartment complexes, *The White Tiger* offers a sharp critique of the discourse of India's economic success ("Realist Hieroglyphics" 116).

Adiga, instead of sympathizing with the people of "the darkness", represents them as capable of breaking through the oppressive social system. Whereas, the portrayals of Ishvar, Narayan, and Omprakash, the Dalit characters of Rohinton Mistry's 1995 novel, *A Fine Balance*, represent the sentimental manner of depicting the Dalit characters where they suffer passively and hardly resist. In a similar vein, in the 1997 novel of Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, the character of Velutha becomes a scapegoat on the altar of corrupt social system. He suffers passively and meets a tragic end. The love between Ammu, the touchable, and Velutha, the untouchable, occupies a central space in the narrative of *The God of Small Things.* Velutha tries to transcend the repression of a stratified society and for that he is brutally murdered by the state power, the police. Further, it is important to note that the narrative of Velutha is subsumed by the narratives of other characters like Baby Kochamma. While, Balram is "a subaltern rebel" who narrates his own life story through a series of letters to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao.

II

Nevertheless, it is also significant to note that the new urban realism tends to portray everyday forms of resistance that go politically unnoticed due to its veiled nature. According to James C. Scott, all the marginalised people exert strategies of resistance that go politically unobserved by superior power, which he terms "infrapolitics"[5]. People under domination or persons employed in the service of elite masters (like Balram in *The White Tiger* or Ayyan Mani in *Serious Men*) cannot be properly understood merely by their explicit public actions which may appear acquiescent. In other words, though on the surface the subaltern people might appear to be passive and consenting, on the subterranean level they might engage actively in subtle forms of resistance in their everyday lives. In one of his interviews, James C. Scott aptly states, "It seems to me that the historians, by paying attention to formal organization and public demonstrations, have missed most acts of resistance throughout history". Anna Johansson and Stellan

Vinthagen, in their book *Conceptualising 'Everyday Resistance'* (2019) have argued that everyday resistance due to its disguised nature is often inadequately understood as a form of politics and its possibility underestimated.

The "everyday tactics of resistance", as propounded by Michel de Certeau, "happen at the micro level as temporary and creative manipulations of events, spaces, practices, symbols and materialities in order to turn them into opportunities" (Johansson and Vinthagen 40). In the context of the resistance of ordinary people in their everyday lives, he conceptualizes and differentiates between "strategy" and "tactics" where the former refers to the normative disciplines of the hegemony and the latter to the everyday forms of resistance of ordinary people. Anna Johansson and Stellan Vinthagen argue that in his works Certeau "focuses on specific and small mundane acts by ordinary people (i.e., everyday resistance), where they make creative use (tactics) of what is given and designed by hegemonic power (strategy)" (40).

It should be kept in mind that the subordinate people could not always afford to engage in public and collective resistance like strike action or *gherao* due to the fear of repressive state apparatus[6]. Take for instance, Velutha, the dalit character of *The God of Small Things*, who suffers at the hand of Baby Kochamma, the upper caste master, because she thinks that Velutha has participated in a protest march by the communist party which humiliated her by forcing her to wave a red flag while repeating the party slogan. After this incident Baby Kochamma "focused all her fury at her public humiliation on Velutha" (Roy 153). That is why many a times the resistance of the subaltern people is deliberately disguised or hidden.

The new urban realism of Indian fiction takes into account the uncharted "little narratives" of resistance performed by those individuals who are not integrated into the mainstream society and culture. The 2010 novel of Manu Joseph, *Serious Men*, deals with such an innovative and creative way of resistance. The novel centres around Ayyan Mani, thirty-nine years old Dalit assistant to a Brahmin astronomer at the fictitious "Institute of Theory and Research in Mumbai", and his will to transgress the social boundaries imposed on individuals belonging to the community of lower caste/class people. Ayyan Mani lives with his wife, Oja, and his ten-year-old son, Adi, in BBD chawl, a housing tenement for the working class built in the British era which later transformed into a jail for the freedom fighters: the chawls "stood like grey ruins…A million clothes hung from the grilles of small dark windows…a small dark room on an endless corridor of gloom" (Joseph 6), the narrator describes. On the one hand, the novel offers a vivid description of the chawl with its dehumanising effect on its residents. On the other, Joseph does not sympathize with the residents of the chawl, but represents them as autonomous individuals with agency, capable of disturbing the stability of bourgeois consciousness. "Indian writers in English usually take a very sympathetic and compassionate view of the poor, and I find that fake and condescending", says Joseph in one of his interviews.

Through his fabrication of an outrageous lie regarding his son, Ayyan Mani resists to the structural exploitation of the subaltern people. It is important to note that Ayyan understands most of the activities related to advanced scientific research that go on in the centre and can describe them lucidly to the people belonging to the lower strata of society like the peon. This exemplifies his intelligence and his capability to be more than just an assistant, doing mediocre manual work. As a matter of fact, Ayyan's only son,

Adi, is not ingenious or quick-witted and he is almost entirely deaf in his left ear which point to the difficulty that Adi would face in order to survive in a caste conscious Indian society. As a consequence, Ayyan deceptively presents his son as a mathematical genius and, interestingly, much of the elements of this lie, he gathers during his work at the research centre and by overhearing the conversations of the Brahmin scientists. As Kanak Yadav markedly observes,

> [Ayyan Mani] attempts to transcend his humble circumstances by duping the general public into believing his ten-year-old son, Adi, to be a "Dalit genius". In order to propagate this blatant lie, Ayyan Mani plays devious games and fosters strategic alliances, while also framing the media, (mis)using caste politics, and triggering mob violence to punish the "casteist" mindset of his employers (2).

It should be kept in mind that much of the resistance of Ayyan Mani emerges from his lived experience as a Dalit chawl dweller. Moreover, this deceitful act of Ayyan Mani is an attempt to transcend his socio-material circumstances and subvert the caste hierarchies that is still prevalent in modern Indian society. In an interview, Manu Joseph states, "Ayyan is still an underdog but that is due to his circumstances, not due to his intellect or aspirations".

In order to resist to the hierarchical structure of Hindu caste system which did not allow his forefathers to enter a school and make a decent living, Ayyan Mani renounces the Hindu gods and converts to Navayana Buddhism, a new form of socially engaged Buddhism propagated by Ambedkar in the later part of the 20th century. He broods, "[t]he Brahmins ruined my life even before I was born. My grandfather was not allowed to enter his village school. They beat him up when he tried once. If he had gone to school, my life would have been better" (Joseph 22). Moreover, even after much insistence, Ayyan Mani does not allow his wife to keep an idol of Ganesha in their home, which according to Oja is the "real god", and throws the idols away on his way to office whenever Oja manages to sneak in one into their one-room home. Interestingly, Ayyan Mani even compares the holy Sanskrit epic, *Mahabharata* to an American comic book, *Superman*. Regarding the moral teaching of his son, Ayyan Mani contemplates, "Superman was good, but Mahabharata was deeper, it had complexity. It made the good choose the wrong path, and there were demons who were fundamentally nice persons, and there were gods who ravished bathing girls" (Joseph 51). In this way, Joseph uses satirical linguistic strategies throughout the novel to render subversive agency to a Dalit protagonist.

Significantly, Makarand R. Paranjape, in his article, "Caste of Indian English Novel" (1991), talks about the ambivalent ways in which Indian English narratives involve with the concept of caste and argues that the mainstream discourse either ignores the caste conscious mindset of bourgeois people or represents it in a normalised way without questioning its constructed nature: "In a majority of Indian English novels, caste and community are merely incidental, often never even mentioned or discussed" (Paranjape 2300). Hence, it can be said that the unconventional subaltern protagonists of Manu Joseph and Aravind Adiga resist to this very ambiguous nature of Indian English fiction regarding the representation of marginalised subjects. Both Balram Halwai and Ayyan Mani refuse to be passive victims of structural exploitation that is still prevalent in postcolonial Indian society and by taking control of their circumstances, they actively endeavour to subvert the fate of subalterns in a corrupt Indian society.

Additionally, in her essay, "Casteless Modernities", Toral J. Gajarawala says, "[t]he confluence of a secular politics with the privileging of national over local rests on a postcasteist assumption and has contributed to… a 'casteless' Anglophone sphere" (139). She, further, talks about the ways in which the concept of caste, even when it finds some space within the literary arena of Indian English, is often represented in a "depoliticized" way. In that essay, she also examines the 1935 novel of Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable*, and argues how Mulk Raj Anand "glorifies and beautifies the labor of latrine cleaning and directs Bakha towards modernity via the innovation of the flush toilet and Gandhian reconciliation" (135). Moreover, it should not be overlooked that many post-independence Indian novels refrain from resisting to the structural suppression of subaltern people and those which actually resist, do so at the cost of the lives of the Dalits. As it is discussed before, in her 1997 novel, *God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy renders an aesthetic resolution to the caste question through the death of a Dalit subject, Velutha. Whereas, in the 2004 novel of Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, a Dalit character, Fakir, sacrifices his life to save the American scientist, Piyali Roy, from a cyclone. Significantly, the new urban realism of Indian English fiction resists to this romanticization and idealization of the lives and hard labour of subaltern subjects and subverts the tendency of Indian English fiction to dignify the historic hereditary occupation of Dalit community without questioning the politics behind it.

III

However, it is also important to foreground that there are ways of living and thinking that are transgressive just because of the fact that they are not simply products of mainstream culture. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler talks about the subversive power of drag performances as it questions the prevalent tendency of the masses to derive "a judgement about stable anatomy from the clothes that cover and articulate the body" (xxii). By providing a voice to those individuals who refuse to be "docile bodies"[7], the new novelistic genre which has emerged at the turn of the century, resists to the process of normalization and subjectification[8]. In this context, the 2012 novel of Cyrus Mistry, *Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer*, should be discussed. Set in pre-independence time, the novel sheds light upon the nearly invisible caste of corpse bearers in the Parsi community of Bombay, the Khandhias. Following the Zoroastrian tradition, the corpse bearers carry the dead body to the Tower of Silence or Parsi dakhma to be consumed by carrion birds like vultures. Moreover, they are also responsible for protecting the purity of the living from contamination by the corpses because in Zoroastrianism all dead matters are considered *nasu*[9], i.e., impure and polluting. The novel centres around Phiroze Elchidana, the son of a revered high priest of a fire temple, and his act of resistance to the oppressive hierarchical power structure of society. Phiroze falls in love with Sepideh, the daughter of a Khandhia, and marries her on a condition. Despite the knowledge of ostracization and hardship endured by khandhias, Phiroze willingly renounces his higher caste status and becomes a Khandhia himself. The close proximity of the Khandhias to death, renders them untouchable within their own Parsi community. The novel depicts vividly one such incident where Elchidana's leg accidentally brushed against a devout mourner's oscillating shoe and the humiliation that followed: "In a ferocious dumb charade the man was urging me to keep my distance, to take my unholy self out of his sight, disappear from the very face of the earth…" (Mistry 35).

However, it should be noted that despite its depiction of the misery and ostracization of the secluded community of corpse bearers, the novel "isn't a victim's story…", as Nandini Nair observes. Phiroze participates in a protest and leads a strike to demand better working condition and better wages for the Khandhias and he emerges victorious. "Mistry is able to wind together Gandhi's movement for independence alongside that of the khandhia community's," Mahvesh Murad observes, "Phiroze leads the khandias in what Mistry writes of as the only khandhia strike ever heard of, with the corpse bearers demanding better working conditions and compensation". Moreover, in the larger context, his marriage to a daughter of Khandhia undermines the stable identity of a community based on the rigid caste system. The marriage between the son of a priest and the daughter of a corpse bearer indicates towards social fluidity. Notably, Farida, their daughter, transcends the barriers of social segregation and symbolizes integration in an overtly stratified social system. While, history has overlooked this isolated corpse bearing caste, Cyrus Mistry aspires to reclaim their tradition and provide a visible space to them. The careful delineations of the rites and rituals of the Khandhias along with their contribution to the society at large protect this miniscule community from obliteration.

Nevertheless, the narratives of the new novelistic genre represent a shift of emphasize that has happened in contemporary time. Rather than focusing on how modern subjects are constituted within productive disciplinary and normalizing power relations in which they are trapped, the narratives seek to concentrate on how individuals 'create' themselves as emancipatory subjects through their everyday forms of resistance to mainstream social norms and realise themselves in the process. Like the 2001 novel of Anita Nair, *Ladies Coupe*, portrays the journey of Akhila from a woman who is always the aunt, the daughter, the provider to an emancipatory subject. She embarks on a journey alone to Kanyakumari and on the way meets five other women whose life stories help Akhila to forsake the constrained life of a single Indian woman. Hailed from different sections of society these women confer their subjective ways of resistance to the heteropatriarchal system of a postcolonial society. As Sucheta Mallick Choudhuri observes, "Most of the narratives are in the form of confessionals, in which women reveal conscious or subconscious strategies they have adopted to subvert forms of patriarchal oppression" (155). Moreover, Anita Nair foregrounds the character of Akhila through her everyday forms of resistance which intends to provide an individual characteristic to her. Though belonging to a Tamil Brahmin family for whom eating non-vegetarian food is considered to be a sin, Akhila secretly eats eggs. Rather than blindly following the religious customs and practices, she questions the validity of it in contemporary time.

IV

Moreover, the articulation of subversion in the narratives could be a possible mode of resistance to disciplinary forms of normalization. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality,* Foucault says that only one kind of sexuality that is acknowledged in the social and domestic sphere is the utilitarian and fertile one: "the parents' bedroom" (3). Those gender roles and identities that do not conform to the prevailing social norms of the bourgeois society face abjection. R. Raj Rao is one such writer who manages to establish a queer space within the contemporary literary arena. His 2003 novel, *The Boyfriend,* is recognised by some critics as one of the first queer novels that emerges out

of Indian context. The novel foregrounds the hidden gay subculture of Bombay through the life of Yudi, a Brahmin journalist in his forties, and his complex relationship to Milind, a nineteen-year-old semi-literate Dalit boy. Further, Rao weaves the queer life of Yudi into the Bombay city space and represents it as a locus of transgression. "Apart from the revision of cultural myths," as Sandip Bakshi observes, "Rao mobilizes several other elements of resistance to heterosexist and nationalist narratives. The hijras… whose identities have often been erased by master narratives of the nation, are represented as an integral part of the queer subculture in Bombay" (46).

In a similar vein, the 2002 novel of Manju Kapur, *A Married Woman*, deals with homosexual desires of Astha, a middle class married woman with two children and her perilous relationship to Pipeelika, the Muslim widow of a political activist. While, the 2015 novel of Anuradha Roy, *Sleeping on Jupiter*, explores some of the social taboos of postcolonial India—sexual exploitation of a child by a religious guru, same-sex attraction of a temple guide, sexual desires in an old woman. The fictional temple town, Jarmuli, becomes a space of subversion where the traumas, the untold truths, the non-normative desires of individuals find expression. Moreover, the same sex desires of a temple guide, Badal, for Raghu who works at a sea side tea shop is dealt with much care and sensitivity in the novel. It can be said that with the turn of the millennium the writers of the new genre aspire to resist to the prevalence of heteronormativity in postcolonial Indian English fiction. According to Sandeep Bakshi, the decriminalization of homosexuality in India is a step forward to the process of decolonization. However, the meta narrative of queer studies, in some ways, fails to take into account the stratification which is typical of post-colonial Indian society: "In this regard, prior to or post-2009, opposition to the prevalent homophobic discourse, national or cultural, constitutes what I term 'fractured resistance' when it does not adequately address the problematic severances based upon class, caste, gender and sexuality within the postcolonial nation" (38).

Further, it is important to note that the contemporary Indian English fiction emphasizes the *need* to acknowledge the little narratives of those individuals and communities who deviate from the mainstream culture. Julia Kristeva has referred to the role of abjection in the construction of identity both at subjective as well as at societal level. Taking a step forward, the new urban realism foregrounds the *necessity* of facing the abject in order to realize the self. In the 2004 novel of Rupa Bajwa, *The Sari Shop*, Ramchand started to question his own existence after confronting the abject state of Kamla. Further, the writers of the new genre propagate a new attitude to the present with "holding possibilities" (Anjaria, "Notes" 57). It can be said that by giving a voice to the abject, by making them the protagonists of their narratives, the novelists of 21st century are actually resisting to the national allegory of the previous century where the "little narratives" of resistance by marginalised subjects are largely subsumed by the meta narrative of nationalism.

Regarding the emergence of the new trend of realism in 21st century, Ulka Anjaria says, "…the first decade-and-a-half of the 21st century has witnessed…what might be seen as a return to realism, not simply as a resistance or conservative response to…new culture of heterogeneity and digitization but as a new way of imagining literary and political futures…" ("Twenty-First-Century Realism" 2). In the postcolonial Indian context, to a certain extent, the realist elements of the fiction incline towards aestheticized

verisimilitude and aspire to address the tension between contemporary socio-political situation and the postmodern epistemological uncertainty. Hence, it can be propounded that the new urban realism shepherds "a particular *perspective* on literary futures" (3).

Notes

[1]A. K. Ramanujan elaborates on the concept of "context sensitivity" in his 1989 essay, "Is there an Indian way of thinking? An informal essay".

[2]The concept of "social abjection" is developed by the sociologist Imogen Tyler in her 2013 book *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain.* Her adaptation of Kristevan abjection is social, political, and historical in nature. Moreover, Tyler theorizes "abjection" as a social force which works through "a cultural political economy of disgust". According to her, social abjection helps in the formation of a stable identity of a society or a nation through "including forms of exclusion". For revising the psychoanalytical concept of abjection and developing the theory of "social abjection" she draws on the works of Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, George Bataille, Judith Butler, Frantz fanon, Ranjana Khanna, Ann Laura Stoler, and others.

[3]Foucault, Michel. *The Will to Knowledge.* Penguin Books, 1998, 5. Print.

[4]In the introduction to his 1998 book, *The Secret Politics of our Desire*, Ashis Nandy has used this phrase in reference to Indian popular cinemas. He says, "…both cinema and the slum in India showed the same impassioned negotiation with everyday survival, combined with the same intense effort to forget that negotiation, the same mix of the comic and the tragic, spiced with elements borrowed indiscriminately from the classical and the folk, the East and the West".

[5]Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcript.* New Haven and London: Yale University press, 1990. Print.

[6]First introduced by French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, the concept of Repressive State Apparatus refers to the "hard power" in present-day political narrative. In other words, it refers to a form of power that functions through violence and compulsion. The Repressive State Apparatus is mainly constituted of the judiciary, the police, the army, and the custodial structure. This concept is often accompanied by another concept of Althusser which refers to the "soft power" i.e., the Ideological State Apparatus.

[7]The term "docile bodies" is cultivated by Michel Foucault in his 1975 book *Discipline and Punish*. Disciplinary power employs the norm to correct behaviour and transform individuals into docile bodies who are measured and ranked by their relationship to the norm where the norm is a means of exercising domination.

[8]A complex process as it is, subjectification captures the operation of modern power and focuses on the creation of subjects through its practices. Subjectification creates the modern soul in order to mould it to the social, economic, and procreative norms.

[9]In Zoroastrianism, *nasu* refers to the demon of corpse who pollutes everything that comes in contact with the dead body.

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