MONSTROUS INDIAN MASCULINITIES IN SHANI MOOTOO'S CEREUS BLOOMS AT NIGHT AND VALMIKI'S DAUGHTER, TYHAAN SHAH'S A SILENT LIFE, AND NARMALA SHEWCHARAN'S TOMORROW IS ANOTHER DAY.

Juan M. Salomé Villarini

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of:

Doctor of Philosophy

10/9/2018

Department of English
College of Humanities
University of Puerto Rico

Approved by:

[Signatures of Dr. Dannabang Kuwabong, Reader; Dr. Nicolas Faracas, Reader; Dr. Nalini Natarajan, Thesis Director]
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments iii

Abstract iv

Biographical Information v

I. Introduction 1

II. Chapter One- Chandin Ramchandin: The Monster in Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* 62

III. Chapter Two- Deviation, Convention, and Suicide in Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life* 109

IV. Chapter Three- The Violent and Corrosive Effect of Politics on Indian Masculinities and Gender Relations in *Tomorrow is Another Day* 166

V. Chapter Four- Double-consciousness and Heterosexuality as a Means to an End in Shani Mootoo’s *Valmiki’s Daughter* 209

VI. Conclusion 248

VII. Works Cited 254
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Nalini Natarajan for all of her support and patience throughout my project and for her invaluable input to the subject of this thesis. I would also like to express my gratitude to my Committee members, Dr. Dannabang Kuwabong and Dr. Nicholas Faracles for their guidance, knowledge, and expertise. I also want to extend my gratitude to all of the English Department professors of the Graduate Program of the University of Puerto Rico in Rio Piedras with whom I took courses for they made me the researcher I am today.
Abstract

The Caribbean Literature examined in this study is written by Indo-Caribbean women writers. My focus on the fiction of these female writers is centered on the way they represent an Indian masculinity which often deploys violence and domination to assert itself. The four novels addressed here form a historical continuum from the barracks to the late 20th century providing a landscape through which I map four socio-historical periods which I argue shape and produce the mutations in Indo-Caribbean masculinities present in each of these novels. Mainly, the effect of the whitening of Presbyterianism in Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the formation of post-indenture Indian communities in Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life*, the ethno-political violence in Narmala Shewcharan’s *Tomorrow is Another Day*, and the late 20th century rise of an Indian elite with heteronormative prerequisites in Shani Mootoo’s *Valmiki’s Daughter*. Throughout these novels there is a dialectic between monsterhood and victimhood. These two aspects of their identities are often parallel and simultaneously reflected in their social standing and behavior within their Indian communities and societies.
Biographical Information

Juan M. Salome Villarini was born in Manhattan, New York, and grew up in Ponce, Puerto Rico. While living in Boston, Massachusetts, he completed a Bachelor’s degree in Liberal Arts with a concentration in American Literature and Creative Writing from UMASS Boston, and later a Master’s Degree in English as a Second Language form the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico – Ponce Campus. Juan currently teaches at the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce.
Introduction:

Elements and Organization

In this dissertation I use the trope of the monster as a lens to examine the representation of violence in gender relations in Indo-Caribbean women’s fiction, particularly in the areas of masculinity performance. The texts chosen for this study are Shani Mootoo’s novels *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Valmiki’s Daughter*, Narmala Shewcharan’s *Tomorrow is Another Day*, and Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life*. Drawing on Frantz Fanon’s *White Skin, Black Masks*, I incorporate the trope of the monster, particularly William Shakespeare’s Caliban in *The Tempest* and Mary Shelley’s creature in *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* as symbols of how the colonial project creates pathological subjects among the colonized. Shakespeare’s Caliban and Mary Shelley’s creature in *Frankenstein* exemplify the initial dependency the colonized subject has upon the colonizer for the stability of his/her identity, the feeling of rejection that inevitably takes place, and the dilemma of what to do once the colonizer is gone.

In addition the trope of the monster is here used as a symbol of systemic European projects of cultural colonialization, and the subsequent monstrous and violent masculinities the colonial contact of Indian and European masculinities has produced in the Caribbean. “The term cultural colonialism refers to the extension of colonial state power through cultural knowledge, activities, and institutions (particularly education and media) or the systematic subordination of one conceptual framework or cultural identity over others” (Amsler 1). The “systemic subordination” of “cultural colonialism” not only devalues the culture, language, religion, and social practices of the colonized, but it devalues their concepts of masculinity and femininity which must be effaced and substituted by the corresponding European models (Amsler 1). The false superiority of the European colonizer is dependent on the constructed inferiority of the indentured
Indian laborer through the establishment of hierarchical difference founded on ideologies of the civilized vs. the uncivilized, and the refined gentleman vs. the savage or monster. Jeffrey J. Cohen describes this process in “Monster Culture” (3):

The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference:

The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate within. Any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual. (7)

The paradox I propose in the reading of these novels is that the monster does not predate colonial contact, it is the forced or voluntary process of undergoing “cultural colonialism”, which produces the monster (Amsler 1). In other words, one is not born a monster, one is made one. Cohen proposes “a method of reading cultures from the monsters they engender” (3). Following Cohen’s train of thought I argue a method of reading Indian and European cultures from the monstrous masculinities they engender.

For Cohen: As “a cultural body . . . “the monster is born . . . as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place” (4). Similarly, the violent and often misogynist nature of the Indian masculinities in the selected novels “is born” at the “cultural crossroad” of India’s ancient “martial history” depicted in “the epic wars in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata” (Natarajan xvi-xvii), and performed till today. Modern Indian misogyny is affected by colonial contact which begins during the British rule of India and mutates through the period of Indian indenture in the Caribbean which produces the toxic, violent masculinities represented in these novels (Cohen 3-4).
In this study I use the terms monstrous and toxic masculinities interchangeably, and I incorporate Terry A. Kupers’ definition of toxic masculinity to its analyses. “The term toxic masculinity is useful in discussions about gender and forms of masculinity because it delineates those aspects of hegemonic masculinity that are socially destructive, such as misogyny, homophobia, greed, and violent domination” which are all present in these novels (716).

The central theoretical lenses in this study include the apparently mutually exclusive binary concepts of the colonized versus the colonizer which intersect and become blurred in the process of European acculturation when the colonized victim transforms into the victimizer. Subsequently, the attempts of the Indian men in these novels to assimilate into English culture and distance themselves from their Indianness by emulating the colonizer, or in other instances, their search for the validation of their humanity produces in them an anxiety that never goes away, for they can never be viewed as English or as equal to the colonizer. The Indian always remains the colonized subaltern in contradiction to the English and the colonizer and the master.

Additionally, Gayatri Spivak’s theory of “othering”, is central to the analysis of Indo-Caribbean masculinity in this study. The male characters in the selected novels are often in the process of sublimating their Indian heritage under the heavy influence of British culture (241). For Spivak “othering” takes place when the colonizer:

Is actually engaged in consolidating the self of Europe by obliging the native to cathect the space of the Other on his home ground. He is worlding their own world, which is far from mere uninscribed earth, anew, by obliging them to domesticate the alien as Master. (Spivak, “The Rani” 253)
In Spivak’s view the colonizer names himself master by forcing the colonized to deny and substitute the local and what is native for what is alien. Eventually, once the acceptance of the “alien as master” becomes internalized by the colonized, the process now becomes a self-othering done by the colonized himself.

Correspondingly, Hommi Bhabha’s idea of the “fixity” of stereotypes of the colonized subject in colonial discourse expands the experience of “othering” through the stigma of the indentured Indian laborer in the Caribbean, which the characters in these novels attempt to rid themselves of, while simultaneously perpetuating the stigma (“The Other Question” 1). In “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism”, Bhabha describes the central role of the stereotype for the efficacy and perpetuation of a colonial discourse which creates a sense of “fixity”, a sense of immutability and permanence of the human nature of the colonial other (1).

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated ... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. (Bhabha, “The Other Question” 1)

Thus the “stereotype” and its “daemonic repetition” of the “disorder” and “degeneracy” of the colonized remains a fundamental “discursive strategy” in the post-
colonial period. Hence, it is clear why the stereotypes of the colonial subject such as “the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African” continue to be repeated in Caribbean literature. These stereotypes play a central role in the representation of masculinities and femininities in Indo-Caribbean women’s fiction to reveal and redress the violent, toxic, and domination driven masculinities that alternative masculinities may be constructed against.

Thus, I argue that in the novels: *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Valmiki’s Daughter*, *Tomorrow is Another Day*, and *A Silent Life*, Shani Mootoo, Narmala Shewcharan, and Ryhaan Shah, repeat, yet transform the “indenture-era stereotype of [the] jealous husband” in colonial discourse by representing male characters who although violent, struggle, though not always successfully, to eradicate the stereotype (Bahadur 194). In addition, these writers populate their narratives with alternative masculinities to those of the “indenture-era stereotype of [the] jealous husband” who murders, rapes, or mutilates his wife (194).

Similarly, I draw from Frantz Fanon’s psychological theories on how colonization and racism construct anxieties and psychological insecurities in the Antilleans. Though Fanon’s study focuses on African Caribbean populations, his conclusions are applicable to the experiences of Indo-Caribbean people. Thus, I interweave the experiences of the Indo-Caribbean male characters in these novels with Franz Fanon’s texts *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* by applying Fanon’s analysis of the Black Antillean experience to the Indian experience in the Caribbean. Central to Fanon’s work is the issue of denial of recognition by the colonizer and the struggle of the colonized to be recognized as intellectually and humanly equal to him (*Black Skin* 169).

Lack of recognition and subsequent rejection of the intellect and humanity of the colonized in the Caribbean has caused particular trauma among Afro-Caribbean and
Indo-Caribbean populations. In all of the novels addressed in this study the Indian male characters try to prove themselves as worthy of their societies, and to make themselves known, yet in one way or another, they all face rejection which catalyzes their violent behaviors and increases their alienation. “I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from an inborn complex, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known” (Fanon, *Black Skin* 87).

In fact, it is through violence that many of these characters make themselves known to their communities and families. The sense of inferiority that Fanon describes as “the internalization—or, better, the epidermalization—of this inferiority” (*Black Skin* 4), is evident in the Indian experience in the Caribbean as represented in Shani Mootoo’s character Chandin Ramchandin who wants to be recognized as something more than just a “short and darkly brown Indian-Lantanacamaran boy with blue-black hair”, but as an equal to his white mentor Reverend Thoroughly (*Cereus* 34). Chandin wants to transcend the stereotype of the Indian male physicality. He does not want to be “responsible” for his “body”, for his “race” or “for his ancestors”, he just wants “to be a man among other men” but he is not allowed to (Fanon, *Black Skin* 84-85).

In several ways the characters in Mootoo’s, Schewcharan’s and Shah’s novels live in what Fanon denominates as the “zone of nonbeing” (*Black Skin* 2). Their physical appearances and stigma of indenture inherited from their ancestors, places the male characters in these novels under the weight of a “crushing objecthood” (*Black Skin* 2), which they try to efface through embracing European culture. The idea that “the colonial world is a Manichean world” (*The Wretched* 41), is central to Fanon’s psychological analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks* because it is “a world divided into compartments” in
which one is either colonized or colonizer, victim or victimizer, but the colonized, as Fanon demonstrates, can never be redeemed in the eyes of the colonizer (Wretched 84).

Fanon’s solution to such a dilemma is neither to be what the colonizer objectifies him as, nor to replicate the behavior of the colonizer (The Wretched 5, 6). Even though the agonizing, “sterile and arid . . . zone of nonbeing” (Black Skin 2) that colonialism produces is also a situation which permits an “authentic upheaval” (2) from which an identity and manhood separate from the binary of the colonial Manichean world “can be born” (2), the nature of a colonial identity makes escaping the binary tremendously difficult. Consequently, the Indian men in these novels often replicate the violence traceable in pre-colonial Indian epics, now exacerbated by the violence of their colonial Caribbean experience, rather than breaking away from it.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the masculinities of the Indo-Caribbean males in the present study are read in a twofold manner. In the one hand, they are an inheritance from their past, upbringing, and colonial society. On the other hand, their masculinities are a conscious performance with means to an end, which range from a desire for recognition and to make themselves known, to domination of women, and attainment of social, economic and political power, among other things. Judith Butler writes that “gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous” (“Performative Acts” 520) but nevertheless become “a constructed identity,” and “a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (520), making of gender something we inherit through civilization yet something we manipulate for our benefit or self-destruction.

The complex knots of historical burdens, multiple oppressions and colonial psychopathologies generate male behaviors that are at one horrifying, fearful, pathetic,
and degenerate, yet demanding some understanding. Therefore, casting about for a literary trope that encompasses these behaviors, I chose monstrosity, for it addresses the destructive influences of European cultural colonization in the development of these violent and toxic masculinities, while at the same time encompasses the trauma and victimization that the colonized Indian man experienced through his “othering” and sub-alterity in the colonized space.

In the sections that follow I address the sources and nature of English colonial racism against Indians in the Caribbean within the plantation economy to the post-indenture periods. I tackle the history of Indian indenture and its connection to the violent and toxic nature of Indo-Caribbean masculinities evident in the novels analyzed here. Then I move to a brief discussion of Indo-Caribbean male writers on indentureship and how they portray Indo-Caribbean masculinity in their fiction, followed by contrasting the representation of Indo-Caribbean masculinity by their male writers with that of Indo-Caribbean female writers. Furthermore, I contrast the subcontinental patriarchal privileges most Indian men enjoyed before signing indentured contracts with the disadvantaged and emasculating position they were placed in, as indentured laborers in the Caribbean, to throw light upon the roots of the violence perpetrated by them in the Caribbean.

Colonialism dehumanizes Indian men in each of the novels. My central position maintains that regardless of the different historical scenarios Indian men in the Caribbean face, be it the indenture, post-indenture, or the post-colonialism period, they find themselves constantly attempting to validate their humanity through monstrous colonial structures. In the process they become mirror images of the “monster culture” of the colonizer (Cohen 3).
The Colonizing Trope of the Monster

Classifying people as monstrous because they are different or depart from what is deemed normal or natural is an ancient practice. Lindal Buchanan suggests “three frameworks for understanding monsters: providence, science, and maternal imagination” (241). “Providential interpretations of monsters predominated from the classical period until the end of the sixteenth century” and were “commonly attributed to god(s) and interpreted variously as signs of divine parentage”, punishment, or “reward” (241).

The scientific approach “for understanding monsters” (241) which has been the “dominant” view “since [European] Enlightenment” and which “evolved into the fields of genetics and embryology”, focuses on “the search for natural, rather than supernatural, causes of monstrous births” (Buchanan 241). The third framework “for understanding monsters” (241), “apparent from the classical period to the eighteenth century, attributes monsters to disordered “maternal imagination”” (241), which causes disruption of the “paternal image” the mother is expected to reproduce (241). The deviance of “maternal imagination” and its “intense thoughts and desires . . . physically mark[s] the fetus” in a monstrous way “during pregnancy” and “conception” (241).

The male dominant frameworks “for understanding monsters” that Buchanan describes are problematic for in them mothers are responsible for these “monstrous births” (242). But to blame women’s biological, psychological, or intellectual make-up for these monsters is specious, and is itself a monstrous argument to make. It preaches matrophobia and legitimizes male cruelty to women tantamount to a praxis of scapegoating. Richard Kearney in Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness, traces the “Western treatment” of the “scapegoating practice” from Ancient Greece to the present, and describes scapegoating as a process of isolating and eliminating otherness (26).
This sacrificial strategy furnishes communities with a binding identity, that is, with the basic sense of who is included (us) and who is excluded (them). So the price to be paid for the construction of the happy tribe is often the ostracizing of some outsider: the immolation of the ‘other’ on the altar of the ‘alien’. (26)

Kearney’s analyses demonstrate how ancient “figures of Otherness” such as the “figure of the ‘stranger’ – ranging from the ancient notion of ‘foreigner’ (xenos)” (3) have evolved and transformed into “the contemporary category of alien invader” (3) which drives the “practices of defining ourselves in terms of otherness” (3) and maintaining “the polarization between Us and Them” (5) which is evident in the Indian/African ethnic and racial binary in Guyana and Trinidad.

The words monster and monstrosity were also terms crucial for the justification and implementation of colonial rule in the Caribbean. These terms supported the binarisms of the civilized European versus the savage and cannibal “Other”. They aided the view of colonialism as a civilizing and normalizing project which would eradicate the “abnormality” of the inhabitants of the New World (Said 25, Foucault 56). In his 1974-1975 lectures on the Abnormal, Foucault complicates Buchanan’s view of the monster as a physical aberration resulting from faulty motherhood and monstrous births, and proposes the concept of the “human monster” which now violates both juridical and biological laws (Abnormal 56).

The frame of reference of the human monster is, of course, law. The notion of the monster is essentially a legal notion, in a broad sense, of course, since what defines the monster is the fact that its existence and form is not only a violation of the laws of society but also a violation of the laws of nature. (55-56)
Abnormality is established through the violation of scientific and legal laws which determine the presence of the “human monster”, and against which, what is normal, is measured and determined (Foucault 56). Foucault further defines “the monster” as:

The major model of every little deviation. It is the principle of intelligibility of all the forms that circulate as the small change of abnormality. The recurring problem of the nineteenth century is that of discovering the core of monstrosity hidden behind little abnormalities, deviances, and irregularities. (56)

This need to define what is abnormal to uphold what is normal is present in Fanon’s statement: “The colonial world is a Manichean world” driven by dichotomies such as normal and abnormal; white and black; good and evil; the European and the native; the colonizer and the colonized (Wretched 41). Consequently, in this “Manichean world”, “the relation between the colonizer and colonized [is] locked into a rigid hierarchy of difference deeply resistant to fair and equitable exchanges, whether economic, cultural or social” and has to be sustained through the construction of the colonized subject as a monstrous “Other” (Fanon 41, Ashcroft et al. 40, Said 25).

The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces. (Fanon, Wretched 41)
Regardless of access to English style education, legal marriage, and adoption of Christianity during the post-independence period in the Caribbean, the chasm between the colonized and the colonizer was not diminished. Instead, the postcolonial subject still felt the trauma of rejection by the European colonizer, being unable to be seen beyond the race stereotype that his body and skin represented. A sense of rejection and objectification which Fanon fully expresses in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> Look, a Negro!” It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile. “Look, a Negro!” It was true. It amused me. “Look, a Negro!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement. “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!”

Frightened! Frightened! (84)

Fanon is the victim of a “crushing objecthood”, his body is deemed monstrous through “the white man, who [has] woven” it “out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” which span back to first slaves brought to the Caribbean and which have already been internalized as facts by this child who declares: “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” Frightened! Frightened!” (84). And in a similar way the “crushing objecthood” of indenture lays on the shoulders of the Indo-Caribbean males in this study.

In the eyes of the child, Fanon is no longer a human being but an object which “triggers” the child’s “visual and visceral imagination” producing terror in him and making of Fanon’s body a signifier of all the stereotypes constructed into his “blackness”: the “tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships”, and violence (*Black Skin* 84-85). Although all Fanon “want[s] [is] to be a man among other men”, in the gaze of the child Fanon is negated this right because his body becomes a symbol of savagery and deviance, his black skin causes fear which makes him a monster in the eyes of the child (85).
This experience produces in Fanon a profound sense of rejection, he feels “completely dislocated,” and “unable to be abroad with the other, the white man” because he realizes he will never be just seen as “a man,” and “nothing but a man” but the history of his ancestors will always be read upon his skin (Wretched 85). In the Manichean colonial world dichotomy, the native as uncivilized and savage is at the lower end, and at the upper-end, the civilized European other. Understandably the colonized man sought a distance between himself and the so-called stereotype of savagery by emulating the so-called civilized European colonizer model.

Fanon is aware of the pathology of the European colonial mind set and the danger of replicating it. He advocates: “Let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth” (Wretched 313). In this study I examine the attempts by Indo-Caribbean men to create out of themselves, “whole” men by performing masculinities which nevertheless replicate the monstrosity of British colonization. In general, these men seek to re-humanize themselves through “assertive” performance masculinities dictated by European masculine paradigms (Coleman 82).

In Masculine Migrations: Reading the Postcolonial Male in ‘New Canadian Narratives, Coleman describes this type of “assertive masculinity” as driven by “discourses of phallocentrism . . . patriarchy” and “neo-imperialism” (83). Understandably, these masculinities are Eurocentric mimics constructed around “performances of domination” and do not constitute any redeeming alternative masculinities, rather they replicate ideologies of oppression that keep others down (Coleman 83).
Rejected Monsters:

Both William Shakespeare’s Caliban in *The Tempest*, and Victor Frankenstein’s “monster” in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (59), are rejected and victimized by their creators. The acts of their rejection traumatizes them, and generates in them tendencies to violent acts. I read these two literary characters as metaphors of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in the Caribbean. Shakespeare’s Caliban and Shelley’s Frankenstein are rejected as monstrous not only because of their physical appearances, but also cultural and genetic differences or lack thereof. Subsequently, nonhuman statuses are conferred on them, which makes it impossible for them to even slightly approximate Prospero’s or Victor Frankenstein’s definitions of civilized humanity.

Prospero describes Caliban as: “A freckled whelp hag-born—not honour’d with / A human shape” who was “littered” on the island like an animal by his mother Sycorax (1, 2, 418-420). In the Elizabethan social hierarchy, defined by the philosophy of the chain-of-being in Shakespeare’s England, God was at the top, followed by the King or the Queen, man, woman, and beast. Caliban is thus at the bottom of this hierarchy and his animal like description places him in direct opposition to Prospero’s civilized and enlightened nature. Paul Yachnin reads this oppositional characterization of Caliban and Prospero through the binary of “animality / humanity” (“The Tempest: Critical” 11).

The boundary between human and animal was more porous for Shakespeare and his contemporaries than it is for us. It was neither automatic nor obvious to them that women or non-Christians or people of lesser rank were human the way male members of the upper ranks were human. (Yachnin, “Shakespeare’s Public” 187)

What troubles Caliban the most is that he is not considered fully human. But somewhere between the two ends of the continuum of animal and human, the only
relationship he can then have with Prospero is that of slave and master. Caliban was probably content living on his island before Prospero’s arrival. He was not subordinated physically nor intellectually to anyone. Caliban admits to Prospero that initially “I loved thee” (1, 2, 337), when: “Thou strok’st me, and made much of me” (1, 2, 335), which moves Caliban to share with Prospero his knowledge of the island and its sights of which Caliban is very proud:

  Thou strok'st me, and made much of me...wouldst
  give me
  Water with berries in't; and teach me how
  To name the bigger light, and how the less,
  That burn by day and night: and then I loved thee,
  And showed thee all the qualities o'th'isle,
  The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile. (1, 2, 335-339)

  Contrary to the image of the savage and brute that both Prospero and Miranda express about Caliban, Caliban possesses knowledge of the “qualities” and resources of his isle, and has knowledge of nature which he inherited from his mother Sycorax. Caliban’s geological, geographical, and agricultural understanding of the “fresh springs,” the “brine-pits” and the “barren” and “fertile” places on the island are not to be viewed in modern scientific terms, but in terms of traditional environmental knowledge. In short, Caliban did not need the knowledge about his island from Prospero and Miranda for survival. On the contrary, they needed him for survival. It is due to Caliban’s traditional knowledge that shipwrecked Prospero and Miranda survive.

  Interestingly, “Prospero denies Caliban his rich traditional knowledge, deeming it no knowledge, yet appropriating it all the same” (Mahanta 208). Instead, Prospero expects Caliban to substitute the traditional ecological and cultural knowledge he learned
from his mother Sycorax, which defines Caliban’s “sense of identity”, with an abstract European worldview and language. The project of substitution renames and effaces Caliban’s identity with new terms: “To name the bigger light, and how the less, / That burn by day and night:” and consequently creates a nervous condition in Caliban (Mahanta 208; Tempest, 1, 2, 336-337).

It is Prospero’s language, knowledge, and civilization that erases Caliban’s sense of self, and enslaves and subordinates him. It is the so-called civilizing and liberating European culture with its language, customs, history, and knowledge which renders the colonized as inferior. Even when attained and mastered, this knowledge does not liberate, but places the colonized under a perpetual position of cultural inferiority; as Caliban begins to see himself through Prospero’s eyes.

A similar conundrum assails the unnamed creature in Shelley’s Frankenstein which begins with a feeling of rejection, and grows into a sense of betrayal and vengeance. Before acquiring language, Victor Frankenstein’ creation is aware of the negative reaction people have to his physical presence. Although the “monster” as Frankenstein calls him, does not fully understand why people scream, run away, or attack him when they see him (Shelley 59). Upon seeing for the first time a cottage, the monster relates:

Finding the door open, I entered. An old man sat in it, near a fire, over which he was preparing his breakfast. He turned on hearing a noise, and perceiving me, shrieked loudly, and quitting the hut, ran across the fields with a speed of which his debilitated form hardly appeared capable. His appearance, different from any I had ever before seen, and his flight somewhat surprised me. (Shelley 122)
The old man’s flight surprises him because he has not yet conceived of himself as a monster, because he looks different. It is not until Victor’s monster sees his reflection in the water and compares his physical appearance with that of the “cottagers” that he discovers his difference. This saddens him. Sadness is followed then by self-hatred after he reads Victor Frankenstein’s account of how he is created. The account uses the word “monster”, which then generates in the creature the feeling of inferiority. It is not until this point that Frankenstein’s creature sees himself through the eyes of his creator, and adopts the name “monster” (59).

I sickened as I read. ‘Hateful day when I received life!’ I exclaimed in agony. ‘Accursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance. (Shelley 155)

The feelings of inferiority and social rejection experienced by the monster are expressed in the way he calls himself a “filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance” (155). I compare the “monster’s” psycho-emotional and social monstrosity with the experience of the Indo-Caribbean male characters in this study. Caliban and Frankenstein’s monster are symbols of the products of colonial trauma, specifically the internalization of inferiority complexes and marginalization. When Caliban utters the statement: “For I am all the subjects that you have” (1. 2. 339-44), he internalizes the label of slave, which Prospero brands him with, and when Victor’s creature calls himself “the monster that I am” (Shelley 133), they both reach the threshold of mental colonization.

Being rejected because they are deemed inhuman fosters a sense of betrayal which prompts both Caliban and Frankenstein’s creature into action and to exercise
degrees of agency in revolts against their oppressors through acts of violence. Caliban manipulates Trinculo and Stefano, and together they plan to murder Prospero.

CALIBAN:

Why, as I told thee, ’tis a custom with him,
I'th’ afternoon to sleep. There thou mayst brain him,
Having first seized his books, or with a log,
Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,
Or cut his wezand with thy knife. (Shakespeare 3. 2. 87-91)

Similarly, the utter rejection the monster experiences throughout Shelley’s narrative finally drives the creature to confront his creator, Victor, about why he loathes his creation so much. In his way to find Victor Frankenstein, the monster encounters Victor’s brother William. William mocks the monster’s physical appearance, and driven by anger, yet unintentionally, the monster murders William. Later on, in his last attempt at being recognized as human, the monster requests Frankenstein to create a bride for him. Initially, Frankenstein agrees but later changes his mind, and destroys his unfinished creation before the monster’s own eyes. This last act of betrayal drives the monster to murder Victor’s best friend, Henry Clerval, and later Victor’s wife Elizabeth Lavenza.

Denial of their humanity and their rejection trigger a sense of betrayal and violent behavior in both Caliban and Frankenstein’s monster. Their humanity is denied by being viewed as physically and intellectually subhuman, but also by being considered as unqualified for, and therefore denied the right of having a normal sexuality. In Caliban’s case, he is intent on bringing “forth” a “brave brood” with Miranda, which he feels he has the natural right to do. However, in Prospero’s eyes Caliban has attempted “to violate / The honour” of Miranda, a racist accusation often leveled against non-white males who have sexual relations with a white woman. Thus, Caliban stands accused of violating
Miranda’s honor simply because he sexually desires her. Caliban is viewed as subhuman and thus his sexuality is beastialized and any sexual contact with Miranda is then construed as rape.

With a similar need, Frankenstein’s monster begs his creator for a female companion: “You must create a female for me with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being” (Shelley 174). But Victor breaks his promise to the monster and destroys “the creature on whose future existence” the monster “depended for happiness”, fearing that if the monster has a mate the world could become populated with “a race of devils” (203). Thus the rejection and negation of their humanity cause trauma and anguish in both Caliban and Victor Frankenstein’s monster, eliciting from them acts of violence against and contempt for their so-called masters.

**Questioning the Humanity of the Indentured Indian Men in the Caribbean**

Shalini Puri argues that one of the aspects in which “indentured labor differed from slave labor” was that “indentured laborers were never considered property; their humanity was never in question” (171). Unlike enslaved Africans in the Caribbean, indentured Indians were allowed their culture, language, and religion while completing their contracts. Yet in the process of becoming integrated into Guyana’s and Trinidad’s societies, emancipated slaves and their descendants did not experience a comparable social rejection and othering to that which Indian indentured laborers and their descendants experienced in the Caribbean.

During the period of indenture and post-indenture in both Guyana and Trinidad, Indians were viewed as pariahs and outsiders to these societies, which vilified their language, their dress, and religion. “Hindu and Moslem ceremonies were described as 'degrading practices', 'vile customs', 'scandalous performances carried on by gangs of
semi-barbarians, ‘painted devilry’” (Brereton 187). In short, stereotypes which had the effect of dehumanizing Indians in the Caribbean.

Fanon presents us with the following question: “Is there in truth any difference between one racism and another? Do not all of them show the same collapse, the same bankruptcy of man?” (Black Skin 64). In 1840 John Scoble described the indentured Indian men brought to the Mauritius plantations as “ignorant and degraded beings” who had made the already “immoral . . . Negro in Mauritius” . . . “more so by his contact with the Coolies” (Emigration from India 7).

Stereotypes such as Scobles’s representation of “Coolies” in Mauritius were used as “discursive strategies” to establish the boundaries of power, and in whose hands power resided (Bhabha, “The Other Question” 1) “Power . . . is all about the ability to include and to exclude; it is about taking on the authority to decide who belongs and who does not belong to the social, the cultural, the national order” (Punter 111). Similarly, Spivak argues that power and domination inherent in colonial projects are dependent on “the fabrication of representations of historical reality” and on the representational act of “othering” the colonial subject as inhuman (“Rani of Simur” 271, 251).

Ashcroft defines Spivak’s representational process of “othering” as a “dialectical process because the colonizing Other is established at the same time as its colonized others are produced as subjects” (156). In other words, the image of the civilized master is only made visible through the presence of the savage native (Ashcroft 156). However, “for purposes of administration and the expansion of markets,” the colonial project intended to turn their colonies “into programmed near images of that very sovereign self” (Spivak 247). In India as well as in the Caribbean, this program of creating “near images of that very sovereign self” would eventually extend to the colonial subjects themselves. Belinda Edmondson describes this process as “the English project to create native ruling
classes in its nonwhite colonies” . . . in which nonwhite Caribbean men could renegotiate their status as (non)men into not merely men but gentlemen” (6).

During the indenture period in the Caribbean, Indian men had no space for renegotiating their status as “(non)men”, it was the colonial and plantation apparatus which determined what and who they were (6). Furthermore: “In the context of colonial production, the subaltern ha[d] no history and [could not] speak,” but rather was spoken for through its representation as nonhuman and incongruent with civilization (Spivak, “Can the Subaltern” 287). However, during the decades following the end of indenture in the Caribbean an educated Indian middle-class emerged.

Many Indo-Caribbean men, particularly those aspiring to become members of the new middle-class, sought to purge the identity colonialism had branded upon them. Ironically, these “nonwhite” Caribbean men who had been constructed within the context of colonialism as “(non)men”, sought “not merely” to become “men but gentlemen” by internalizing and emulating European cultural, political, and racial worldviews which replicated colonial monstrosity in the guise of achieving self-governance during the independence and nationalist periods in the Caribbean (Edmondson 6).

Now during the nationalist periods towards independence in the Caribbean, a small space seemed to have been opened for the small group of educated Indian middle-class for self-representation, self-determination, and self-governance on their own terms. But, as Ravindra K. Jain states:

This incipient middle-class elite [in Trinidad and Guyana] was fervently European in its attitudes, orientations, and aspirations; hence the emergence of what has been called the Afro-Saxon model of acculturation. Simultaneously, the seeds of racism . . . were deliberately sown in the already fertile soil of racist stereotypes. (155)
This is the historical, cultural, social, and political space that the Indo-Caribbean male characters in this study occupy. Within it, they attempt to undo the stamp of monstrous identity acquired under indenture. In search for recognition and confirmation from their societies and communities that they are no longer “at the boundary of what is and what is not acceptable, what is to be allowed to come to the warm hearth of society and what is to be consigned to the outer wilderness” so that they can be deemed deserving citizens of their nations (Punter 111).

The Historical Events that Transform Indo-Caribbean Masculinities in this Study

The four novels addressed in this analysis include Shani Mootoo’s novels Cereus Blooms at Night and Valmiki’s Daughter; Narmala Shewcharan’s Tomorrow is Another Day, and Ryhaan Shah’s A Silent Life. Together these novels form a continuum of the historical periods of Indian indenture in the Caribbean, and its aftermath. This study reviews the evolution of Indo-Trinidadian and Indo-Guyanese masculinities in these novels as historical and cultural processes shaped and propelled by the formation of East Indian communities in Trinidad and Guyana. These processes further influenced the formation of problematic masculinities among Indo-Guyanese and Indo-Trinidadian middle and upper-classes that nurtured their rise to economic and political power.

During the indenture and post-indenture periods in Trinidad and Guyana, East Indian men aspiring to break from the stigma of emasculation, engaged in “the English project to create native ruling classes”, hoping to become part of an upcoming Indo-Caribbean middle-class, and to remake themselves through becoming educated and through conversion to Christianity (Edmondson 6). In Naipaul’s The Mimic Man, Ralph Singh becomes a castaway in England after his political career in the “Caribbean island of Isabella” comes to an end (10).
Ralph Singh copes with the postcolonial trauma of displacement and rootlessness through writing his “memoirs” in an attempt to reconstruct the “shipwreck” of his identity (11, 12). “To be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, second-hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder” (Naipaul 124). In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mootoo addresses the origins of such “disorder”, the voyage and shipwreck produced by indenture in the Caribbean. The effacement of Indianness in favor of mimicking the English gentleman, as will be seen in Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*, produces mental disorder and trauma which unleashes the violent nature of Chandin Ramchandin’s masculinity.

Another historical force that shaped and determined the nature of Indo-Caribbean masculinities was the increasing involvement of working class as well as middle and upper-class Indo-Caribbean men in the political arenas of Trinidad and Guyana. The masculinity that emerges in *Cereus Blooms at Night* from Chandin Ramchandin’s mimicking of the Presbyterian whiteness embodied in Reverend Thoroughly becomes violent as a result of repeated rejection. In a similar way, the involvement in politics of the Indian men in *Tomorrow is Another Day* and *A Silent Life* are conducive to violence because they mimic the colonizer. This is particularly evident in Narmala Schewcharan’s, *Tomorrow is Another Day*, where ethno-political violence is a predominant theme, and were Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean negative othering are used to construct group solidarities.

In addition, the formation of Indo-Caribbean upper-class elites alongside peasant and working-class Indo-Caribbean communities in Trinidad and Guyana have had great influence in the formation of the monstrous masculinities depicted in Shani Mootoo’s *Valmiki’s Daughter* and Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life* correspondingly. Monstrosity in *Valmiki’s Daughter* and *A Silent Life* is associated with victimhood because the societies
in these novels construct Valmiki Krishnu’s sexuality and Nazeer Mohammed Raheem’s nonpatriarchal masculinity which is not driven by domination, as aberrant and shameful.

In Valmiki’s Daughter, Shani Mootoo gives the reader a close but brief glimpse of Trinidad’s elite Indian upper-class in the post-independence period. Membership to this upper-class elite requires its members to perform a heterosexual masculinity, which clashes with Valmiki Krishnu’s non-heterosexual masculinity, producing a double consciousness in which heterosexual masculinity and philandering become masks in a performance to avoid the sexual policing and violence of his homophobic society.

In Ryhaan Shah’s A Silent Life, the gender expectations of a peasant and working-class Muslim Indo-Guyanese patriarchal community frustrates and cripples Nani Hassan’s femininity and her desire to engage in politics. The community in A Silent Life also questions the nature of Nazeer Hassan’s masculinity which is passive and non-dominant, bruising his honor to the point that he chooses to commit suicide. The masculinities of these characters are performances which correspond to the particular historical circumstances mentioned above and are a response to the economic, political, and social changes occurring during these periods which spark the toxicity of their masculinities into life.

The Indian Male in Indo-Caribbean Literature by Men

The stereotype of the indentured Indian male and its descendants in the Caribbean has become fixed in canonical texts of Caribbean fiction written by male authors such as Wilson Harris’ The Far Journey of Oudin, Ismith Khan’s The Jumbie Bird, Moses Nagamootoo’s Hendree’s Cure, Sam Selvon’s A Brighter Sun, David Dabydeen’s The Counting House, and V. S. Naipaul’s A House for Mr. Biswas, which perpetuate the violent and misogynist representation of the indentured Indian in colonial discourse. In The Counting House David Dabydeen tells the story of Rohini and Vidia who marry and
eventually choose to migrate to Guiana in 1838. The couple becomes part of the first human cargo of indentured Indians to go to work at John Gladstone’s sugar plantation.

Initially in the narrative, Vidia’s wife, Rohini, shows a great deal of ambition fueled by her desire to move out of their in-laws, for she is being mistreated by them. Rohini’s anxious desire to be free from family oppression pushes Vidia to consider migration because he feels he is not properly providing for his wife nor protecting her, which threatens his honor and manhood. However, once indentured, it is Dabydeen’s Vidia who becomes consumed by greed:

> When he laid out the coins she [Rohini] felt a sudden compassion for the smallness of his fortune, the meagre piles of copper, which rose a mere few inches from the surface of the table. At the same time, she hated his ambitiousness, the foolishness of it. She remembered when they first saw the city of Calcutta, his eyes straining with greed for the bigness of the buildings, as if he wanted all of them to belong to him. (13)

Vidia is consumed by paranoia while he hides the jars full of coins in his yard. He tries to make sure no one sees him burying his treasure. Meanwhile, Rohimi prods Vidia like an ox to make him work harder. She threatens to leave him for a more entrepreneurial man although she claims she would never really do so. Dabydeen’s portrayals of Vidia and Rohini are basic replicas of the stereotypical accounts found in colonial documents. The prologue of his novel which begins with a quote by Gladstone stating that, “No account of coolie history can ever be complete for they are the scraps of history”, indicates Dabydeen’s refusal to fill in the gaps of history and to subvert those “scraps of history” and give these characters a sense of agency (1).

Likewise, in Samuel Selvon’s *A Brighter Sun* two young Indo-Caribbeans come together through an arranged marriage in 1939. Tiger and his wife Urmilla start their
newly married life in the village of Barataria in Trinidad. Like Dabydeen’s Vidia, Tiger greatly lacks any parental guidance about how to behave as a married man, except the behavior that Tiger observes his father display at home or what he sees other men do.

Tiger had never smoked. He had only seen his father and the others. But he had decided that he was not going to appear a small boy before his wife. Men smoked: he would smoke. He would drink rum, curse, swear, bully the life out of her if she did not obey him. Hadn’t he seen when his father did that? And didn’t he know what to do when they went to bed? But he refused to think much about later, in the bed. Unknowingness folded about him so he couldn’t breathe. (11)

What is refreshing about Selvon’s portrayal of Tiger is his representation of Tiger’s masculinity as non-essentialist. Tiger is not born [as no male is] with a genetic or instinctual wiring that provides him with the behavioral blueprint to perform violent hegemonic masculinity, nor what to do in bed. He may have some inkling about it, but rather than an essential quality, patriarchal masculinity is mostly a learned behavior through observation and imitation.

Tiger drinks rum because he sees his father and his father’s friends do so, and he wants to prove himself to them. The only emotion Tiger freely expresses is anger, and he incorporates violence into his gender relations because this is how he sees other men manifest their manhood. When Urmilla puts on make-up her friend Rita has made available to her, Tiger tells her: “You look like a whore in Port of Spain, with all that thing on your face. You shame me” (A Brighter 175). Her apologies only make Tiger angrier and “he kick[s] her across the face” and “he kick[s] her in her stomach” as she “double[s] up in agony” (176). Although Tiger replicates the toxic behavior and male violence that surrounds him, he nevertheless is a character undergoing a boyhood to
manhood bildungsroman, and emerges towards the end of the narrative with an alternative conception of masculinity in which “nor drinking rum, nor swearing, nor screwing a woman . . . didn’t prove you were a man” (112-113).

In Moses Nagamootoo’s post indenture narrative Hendree’s Cure, Naga is a Madrasi fisherman “still dependent on fishing, and he ha[s] his eyes on the big stakes that horse racing at Port Mourant and Georgetown was now raising. It was Basil ‘Steal’ Islam, the unlikeliest of his adopted sons, who help[s] him to this ambition” (43). Like Vidia, and Tiger, material ambition drives Naga, who eventually becomes relatively rich and very well-known at the horse races and his community in Guiana.

In the foreword to Hendree’s Cure Nagamootoo writes, “for the English planters” Madrasis “were the least desirable” laborers because “they were stereotyped as lazy” (xi) and as “preferring to make their living away from the states” (xi), and viewed as “aggressive and rebellious” (xi), as well as characterized by heavy drinking, drumming, and the worshipping of Mother Kali. It is this colonial script which becomes the blueprint for the construction of Nagamootoo’s characters.

As the drinking bout extended into the night, Alice came to Naga’s house to take her husband away. She was always fretting over his rum drinking.

“One day dis piss go kill you, Ramja pa,” she said addressing him as usual by the name of their eldest son. (38)

Naga’s wife Alice not only has to deal with Naga’s drinking and gambling but with his adulterous behavior: “later that night Naga, with his head full of rum, [leaves] for Rose Hall with his friend Gunn, and Hendree trailing like a shadow, to visit an outside favourite named Jessamie” (60). Similarly, Hendree who is Naga’s adopted son is described by Nagamootoo as someone “women might make passes” at. Yet, he is “more attracted to a quarter-bottle of rum and a few Light-house cigarettes” (111). Though
Nagamootoo’s intentions in *Hendree’s Cure* unquestionably are to honor his ancestors, the colonial construct of indentured Madrasis in Guiana as the wildest of the indentured Indians is perpetuated in Nagamootoo’s novel.

In Ismith Khan’s *The Jumbie Bird*, the reader encounters three generations of Indo-Trinidadians. As the novel’s narrative unfolds, grandfather Kale Khan, a Pathan Indian, fights to impress upon his grandson Jamini the dream of repatriation to the northern region of India known as Hindustan. Kale’s son Rahim has become a Trinidadian rather than an expatriate like his father. Rahim’s wife Meena makes fun of Kale Khan’s stubborn ways:

That old man still think the Sepoy barracks outside the door . . . still keeping himself in shape in case of a skirmish . . . he goin’ to kill himself sleeping in hard wood . . . But no one questioned Kale Khan: he hated beds, he hated women, he hated women’s hands touching his clothes, his food. He hated India from which he had fled, and he hated Trinidad to which he had come to find a new life. (Khan 2)

Kale Khan’s character has a symbolic connection to the historical event of May 10, 1857, when the mutiny of Sepoys of the East India Company’s army escalated into what is known as the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Kale Khan’s spirit is as rebellious as it was fifty years earlier. His characterization is drawn from the well of the stereotypes of Indian patriarchy. He takes into his hands the indoctrination of his grandson, because to him the “woman don’t know how to bring up Pathan child” (7). He worries that Jamini’s mother, Meena, will “make woman out of this boy” (7). Ismith Khan’s construction of Kale Khan is that of a violent and patriarchal colonial fossil, and of a pain ridden Pathan Indian whose world is strictly a men’s world and in which women are a nuisance.
Both Kale Khan’s estranged wife Binti, and his daughter in law Meena condemn Khan for having abandoned his own daughter. “The old man think girl children is too much trouble, and when he got ready to leave India he gave away the child” (10). Old Kale Khan never fulfills his dream of being repatriated to India, and dies like a warrior from his injuries from a stick-fight during a “Hussay” celebration (Khan 168, 170).

In Wilson Harris’s The Far Journey of Oudin, we see again replicated the simplified images of indentured Indian laborers and their descendants, as misogynist, drunken, violent, and greedy men. Nevertheless, Harris is able to establish through the narrative the roots of the dislocation and trauma which produce the toxic masculinities of his characters. One outstanding feature of the brothers Mohammed, Kaiser, Hassan, who are third generation Indo-Guyanese, is that they rebel against the patriarchal authority of their father, and betray the canons of kinship when they plot to change the legal will of their dying father and conspire to murder their half bother Oudin. In Harris’s portrayal, Mohammed, Kaiser, and Rajah are devoid of any cultural inheritance or values from their ancestral past. All they have left is their lust for money.

He had he long day. He come in this country with he daddy — we granddaddy that dead before we born – from India. And we got to forgive he for the strict unfathomable way he got of looking at we if he grieving for a language. Is ancient scorn and habit at the hard careless words we does use. But is who fault if the only language we got is a breaking-up or a making-up language? At least nobody pretending they is anybody high-schooled and polite ‘cept they got hard cash to rule. (The Far 155)

A central theme in Harris’s novel is the profound psychic and spiritual trauma caused by the legacy of indenture on these characters who are assailed by rootlessness, in
a cultural and moral limbo. Harris goes beyond merely echoing the stereotype of the indentured East Indian male into giving insights about the reasons why Mohammed, Kaiser, and Hassan are the way they are, and why they are monsters as well as victims. Of the Indo-Caribbean male authors here sampled, Wilson Harris seems to be the only one who gives in his narrative an analysis of the root causes for the traumatic and monstrous masculinity of his male characters rather than just a description of their behavior.

Earning money, acquiring material possessions, and the domination of all human and natural resources drives the masculinities of these characters. Mohammed is a landlord who has made his fortune at the expense of others, but falls prey to Ram the money-lender. While they are drinking at a rum-shop Mohammed admonishes his twin brother Kaiser:

You hiding youself in a shell like a hermit . . . and all you aiming at is working and making a pile of money. Take a care, Kaiser, tek a care. You know you could turn into a devil like Ram, and a stinking no-good carcass of a money-lender? O God you would hate youself then. (174)

“Hassan was the first of the brothers to die” when he “fell down with a stroke”, and “his corpse was fired on a pyre, in the ancient way of his ancestors” (166). While Kaiser and Mohammed are at the rum-shop, a fire ensues and Kaiser perishes in the blaze. Hassan’s and Kaiser’s ghosts meet within the ruins of the burnt rum-shop, and Hassan relates to Kaiser “the obstinate idea . . . to return to India to circulate his ashes on mother-soil” (181). Kaiser disagrees with Hassan’s idea: “If he returned he would be looked upon as an outcast and an untouchable ghost. What language had he save the darkest and frailest outline of an ancient style and tongue? Not a blasted thing more”
Even after death the transgenerational trauma of indentureship haunts these characters.

A final example of the stereotypical portrayal of the East Indian male by Indo Caribbean writers is V. S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Mohun Biswas hardly performs the crude behaviors of excessive drinking and violence often represented in the other texts mentioned above. Yet behind Mr. Biswas’s educated demeanor there is a misogynist and extremely ambitious individual who like his fictional and historical predecessors is still trying to achieve the unfulfilled dream set by colonial standards of becoming financially secure and free of debt, and attempting to become intellectually, culturally, and socially comparable to any English gentleman.

Mr. Biswas was forty-six, and had four children. He had no money. His wife Shama had no money. On the house in Sikkim Street Mr. Biswas owed, and had been owing for four years, three thousand dollars. The interest on this, at eight per cent, came to twenty dollars a month; the ground rent was ten dollars. Two children were at school. The two older children, on whom Mr. Biswas might have depended, were both abroad on scholarships. (5)

Naipaul’s Mr. Biswas never achieves his idealized masculinity which he aims at through British colonial education and attaining financial self-sustainability. Instead, Mr. Biswas feels emasculated by his financial dependence on his wife’s mother, Mrs. Tulsi, who is the matriarch of the Hanuman House. Mrs. Tulsi’s house is named after Hanuman—the simian companion of Rama, hero of the Ramayana, and in view of Naipaul’s literary genius, the naming of the house is probably not a coincidence.

According to Philip Lutgendorf when Hanuman was a child he attempted to swallow the sun. This attempt leaves him wounded, scarred, and with a protruding jaw.
The Sanskrit words Han ("killed" or "destroyed") and maana (pride), signifies "one whose pride was destroyed" (31). Unquestionably, after Mr. Biswas is confronted by Mrs. Tulsi about the note he writes to Shama: “I love you and want to talk to you” and the resulting forced marriage between Biswas and Shama, Mr. Biswas never regains autonomy of his life. Mr. Biswas’ marriage to Shana places him under the permanent financial shadow of Mrs. Tulsi. Thus, Mr. Biwas’s fear and contempt for Tulsi women rises from this inability to free himself from his financial dependency on the Tulsi empire.

The latter negative representations of Indo-Caribbean men is hence better understood if their actions are viewed as a desperate search for masculine respectability in their communities. Kenneth Ramchand asserts that “notions of masculinity in the island of Trinidad are historically linked with the figure of the bad-john. The term itself has early and strong associations with the yard, the ghetto and lower-class Afro-Trinidadian life” and refers to an often violent and rebellious masculinity which is desperately seeking affirmation (313).

In all the Lovelace novels the bad-john is the extreme case of the person wanting to be seen or acknowledged as a person. Lovelace’s revisionary treatment does not seek to excuse the violence of the bad-johns and their versions of masculinity, so much as to speculate imaginatively and compassionately about what lies beneath the surface manifestations. (“Calling All” 313)

Ramchand adds that in Seepersad Naipaul’s The Adventures of Gurudeva, both Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean masculinities share the common need for male reputation and respectability. Seepersad Naipaul’s Gurudeva and Earl Lovelasce’s Fisheye in The Dragon Can’t Dance are characters conceived 36 years apart but their
yearning to be respected if not dreaded, and to be renowned in their communities do not differ much.

Now at twenty-two, his whole ambition was to be noticed. It was not enough that he had made his presence felt and feared in the house. It was not enough that his father, his mother, his two elder brothers and their wives stood in awe of him. He wanted to be looked upon with awe by the whole village. He hankered to be popular, but to be popular in a spectacular way. He wanted people to point at him and whisper, “See that fellow going there? He is Gurudeva the bad-John! (S. Naipaul qtd. in Ramchand, “Calling All” 310)

The desire to be visible and important, and “to be popular in a spectacular way” is directly proportional to Gurudeva’s feeling of invisibility in colonial Trinidadian society. In Lovelace’s novel, Fisheye also procures the attention and respect of his community through making sure he is feared. Both of these characters reenact the terror of the physical and psychological violence prevalent in the plantation estates.

The truth was that he wanted nothing but to live, to be, to be somebody for people to recognize, so when they see him they would say: “That is Fisheye!” and give him his space; and when they see someone who concerned him, to say: “That is Fisheye woman! That is Fisheye friend,” and not to fuck around either of them to make him turn beast. (59)

In The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon views violence as an indispensable component of the process of decolonization (35). In a way then, Gurudeva’s and Fisheye’s performance of dominant, violent, and respectability-driven masculinities is an attempt to become visible. Unable to have any control over the “structural violence of colonialism” which produces the social injustice they live in, nor having any control over
the “cultural violence of colonialism” which negates their culture, the only agency left to
Gurudeva and Fisheye is to deploy the force of physical violence which they have
inherited and learned from their colonial past (Fanon 38-40). Thus, their identity and self-
respect is dependent on the performance of violent hyper-masculinities viewed as
evidence of success and honor. Niels Sampath describes this issue in *Crabs in a bucket*:

> Based on the Trinidadian urban and rural examples, the problem it seems,
is that ‘masculinity’ is based on local perceptions of ‘success’. Just as women are socially valued as ‘sex objects’, so men are valued as ‘success objects’ in a context of reputation. The two values appear to complement each other within a patriarchal paradigm. The question then becomes, how does one begin to escape that paradigm? (51)

In comparing the representations of Indian men in Indo-Caribbean fiction by men, with the representations of Indian men by Indo-Caribbean women writers in this study. I find that the characterization of masculinity by the male writers is heavily driven by their characters’ desire to achieve “local perceptions of success” in the eyes of other men in their community, and that their representation of masculinity and femininity does not necessarily “take place in relation to each other”, but rather women are accessories to their masculinities (Sampath 51; Ramchand, “Calling All” 310-311).

In addition, the characterization of masculinity in the novels written by Indo-
Caribbean male writers sampled above, compared to the four novels written by Indo-
Caribbean women in the following chapters, do not differ much in their replication of the colonial stereotype of the Indo-Caribbean male as concerned with reputation and respectability and being prone to violence, but rather the striking difference is that the Indo-Caribbean women writers are more successful in presenting in their narratives not just the troubling performance of their character’s masculinity, but also the social,
cultural, and political roots of the causes for such behavior, which are not as strongly
evident in the male authors’ characterizations and narratives. Also, unlike most of the
novels by Indo-Caribbean male writers mentioned here, the novels in this study have
female characters which are as fully developed as their male characters. Which resonates
with Kenneth Ramchand’s statement that masculinity and femininity “take place in
relation to each other” (“Calling All” 311-312).

However, to be fair, Sam Selvon and Wilson Harris do develop full Indo-
Caribbean women characters in their novels A Brighter Sun and The Far Journey of
Oudin. Jeremy Poynting argues that “male Indo-Caribbean writing about Indian women”,
particularly Sam Selvon’s A Brighter Sun and Wilson Harris’ The Far Journey of Oudin,
show more proximity to the real subject of Indian women, which Euro-Creole and Afro-
Creole authors could hardly have had. This insight, Poynting argues, has to do with
Harris’ and Selvon’s abilities to represent “the [Indian] male perception of [Indian]
female experience” which are particularly present in Harris’ portrayal of Beti in The Far
Journey of Oudin and Harris’ representation of the “oppressed spirit of an Indian country
girl” and her “inner yearnings for freedom of the spirit and self-dependence” which she
struggles to accomplish (Poynting 496).

In both novels there is a parallel growth of husband and wife, if Beti is seeking
self-independence”, so is Oudin attempting to overcome his mental and physical poverty
and oppression. In A Brighter Sun, Tiger is married to Urmilla, and he is at times violent
and abusive towards her:

“You never taste the weight of my foot, girl. Is time. I go learn you
respect. I go learn you respect. I go learn you who is man in this house.”

Urmilla cowered. “Oh God, I beg you pardon,” she sobbed and clasped
her hands to her bosom.
“Take that!” He kicked her across the face. “And that!” He kicked her in her stomach, and she doubled up in agony. He kicked her as she writhed on the floor, the rum spinning in his head and making him dizzy. (Selvon 176)

However, eventually as the title A Brighter Sun suggests, Tiger seems to transcend the oppressive nature of Indian tradition towards women, which he has learned from his father, and to replace it with a more egalitarian concept of gender relations.

**The Representation of Indo-Caribbean Masculinities by Indo-Caribbean Women Writers**

I have chosen to explore the representation of Indo-Caribbean masculinities by Indo-Caribbean women writers in these four novels because, to my knowledge, there is limited literary analysis available on how Indo-Caribbean women writers portray Indo-Caribbean men and Indo-Caribbean masculinities in their fiction. On the other end, there is ample literary analysis of the representation of Indo-Caribbean women in Caribbean literature by Indo-Caribbean women writers such as Brinda Mehta’s *Diasporic (Dis)locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Engage the Kala Pani*, in which Mehta maps the “enormous contribution to our understanding of the representation of Indian women in the Caribbean diaspora” by Indo-Caribbean women writers such as Lakshmi Persaud, Ramabai Espinet, Narmala Shewcharan, and Jan Shinebourne among others (Mehta 1). Mehta convincingly argues that:

The spatial transgressions by early immigrant women provided later generations of Indo-Caribbean women writers with the necessary point of motivation to initiate their own literary transgressions through orality and the written word as powerful media of self-representation. (4-5)
Mehta demonstrates how the Indo-Caribbean women writers above mentioned deconstruct the stereotypes of Indo-Caribbean women as solely docile contributors to the domestic sphere or as sexually unchaste, by representing Indian women as social and political agents in their communities. Mehta finds these representations in Lakshmi Persaud’s Sastra and Butterfly in the Wind, and in Ramabai Espinet’s Indian Cuisine where the domestic space of the kitchen becomes an arena for activism and social change. “The two writers”, Persaud and Espinet, “draw our attention to women’s access to kitchen space as a means of achieving culinary agency that provides women with a basis for cultural authority” (Mehta 107). In her analysis of Jan Shinebourne’s The Last Plantation and Narmala Shewcharan’s Tomorrow is Another Day, Mehta shows how these authors shatter the dichotomy and merge the boundaries between the domestic and public spaces. Shinebourne’s Nani and Shewcharan’s Kunti are both influential forces within the home, the market, the community, and the political sphere, pointing at the multifaceted nature of mothering which transcends biology, and encompasses both the public and private spheres.

Roseanne Kanhai’s Bindi: The Multifaceted Lives of Indo-Caribbean Women, maps the diverse ways in which Indo-Caribbean women have fashioned their Indo-Caribbean identities through clothing, religion, cuisine, literary self-representation, etc. About bindi as a symbol of an encompassing “discursive space” Kanhai writes:

This collection invokes the complexity and flexibility of the bindi as a discursive space registering the multifaceted ways in which Indo Caribbean women of different religious backgrounds have shaped their lives and come to understand themselves – and to be understood as ever-evolving hybrids of Eastern and Western influences within the Caribbean. (3)
Salomé’s *Bindi*, challenges the stereotype of Indo-Caribbean women as docile and relegated to the domestic sphere by presenting instances in which Indo-Caribbean women break with the expectations of tradition. Shaheeda Hosein writes about the “domestic lives of rural Indo-Trinidadian women in the first forty years of the twentieth century” and describes them as “unlikely matriarchs” who deploy a great degree of agency (101).

Another of *Bindi*’s contributors, Anita Baksh “examines Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Jan Shinebourne’s *The Last Plantation*, and Lakshmi Persaud’s *Butterfly in the Wind* and maps within these novels “the ways in which Indo-Caribbean women writers challenge hegemonic colonial and patriarchal domination and thus uncover marginal spaces in their fiction, in both form and content” (209).

Joy Mahabir and Mariam Pirbhai’s *Critical Perspectives on Indo-Caribbean Women’s Literature*, “is the first edited collection of critical essays centered on the novels and poetry produced by Indo-Caribbean women” including Niala Maharaj, Peggy Mohan, Narmala Shewcharan, Ryhaan Shah, Ramabai Espinet, Mahadai Das, Lakshmi Persaud, Joy Mahabir, Laure Moutoussamy, and Jan Shinebourne, among others (Mahabir et al. 43). Mahabir describes the focus of the literary analysis in this collection of essays as a search for ways in which these authors deconstruct the stereotypes of Indo-Caribbean women as compliant and malleable or unchaste, and how through their representation they give their female characters voice and agency within the constraints of their patriarchal societies and communities.

Those [female] characters who are shown to carry or demonstrate the potential for spiritual and physical fortitude are nonetheless typecast as mothers or wives bound within the confines of the plantation settlement or village life . . . [Indo-Caribbean] women writers rectify this typecasting by
endowing even their most victimized of characters with a voice. (Mahabir et.al 4)

Mahabir and Pirbhai view the Indo-Caribbean women writers addressed in Critical Perspectives on Indo-Caribbean Women’s Literature as literary activists who through their representations of Indo-Caribbean women in their fiction, redeem and refashion the historical image of indentured Indian women and their descendants in the Caribbean.

Literary activism is perhaps one of the most prominent features of Indo-Caribbean women’s writing. Indeed, as most of the essays in this collection reveal, the task of the Indo-Caribbean woman writer has been to foreground those aspects of ethnic Indian women’s experiences, past and present that remain social taboos, such as incest, marital rape, domestic violence and alcoholism. (Mahabir et al. 5)

These victimizing “aspects of ethnic Indian women’s experiences” such as “incest, marital rape, domestic violence and alcoholism” make Indo-Caribbean masculinities an inseparable analytical aspect of Indo-Caribbean feminism since it is at the hands of men that these women become victims (Mahabir et al. 5).

More recently, in 2016, Gabrielle Jamela Hosein and Lisa Outar have published Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments, in which they address “the emergence of Indo-Caribbean feminist perspectives” and map its evolution (11). In a chapter titled “Indo-Caribbean Masculinities and Indo Caribbean Feminisms: Where Are We Now?” Rhoda Reddock makes the following revealing assertion:

Over the last four decades, a significant body of feminist scholarship by and about Indo-Caribbean women has emerged yet a similar literature on Indo-Caribbean masculinity has not. The now classic essay by Neils
Salomé 40

Sampath (1993)—“An Evaluation of the ‘Creolisation’ of Trinidad East Indian Adolescent Masculinity”—with its application of Peter Wilson’s “reputation and respectability” framework to Indo-Trinadian male youth, is one important exception. (264)

Niels Sampath in “An Evaluation of the ‘Creolization’ of Trinidad East Indian Adolescent Masculinity” argues that “a secure reputation involving creolized behavior represents” both “Indian manhood’s power and macho security” for the Indo-Trinadian male youth in his study. Which he argues, is “relative to that afforded by the perceived respectable traditions of Trinidadian Hinduism as maintained by women in domestic ritual and practice” (245). Suggesting that “respectability” which is embodied in “those moral decisions and actions that are seen as positively influenced by European colonialism”, and “reputation” which is described as “a working-class, live-for-today enjoyment of the kind of hedonism that is deemed as worthless by the respectable sections of local society”, are not necessarily mutually exclusive concepts, but rather complementary performances used to accomplish desirable Indian masculinities (Sampath, “Crabs in a Bucket. . .” 49).

Sampath follows up his 1993 analysis of reputation and respectability, and masculinity in East Indian Trinidad with his 1997 essay “Crabs in a Bucket: Reforming Male Identities in Trinidad”, in which he states the following about Trinidad’s society:

The local analogy is made to crabs in a bucket: before any one individual can escape and because of the posturing going on within the bucket, that individual is dragged down by the others. Individuals in the 'bucket' of poverty and subservience in colonial or post-colonial society struggle to achieve the respectability that is assumed to exist outside their strata of society. As suggested above, going to church on Sunday is one way of
beginning this process. However, in the meantime they have to survive within the crowded and extroverted community. (49)

There is an inherent violence in Sampath’s “local analogy” of “crabs in a bucket” which exemplifies not only the violent and dominant masculinities addressed in this study but Indian gender relations in general. It is possible to look at Indian men and women as “crabs in a bucket” in which men find it necessary to exercise a hyper-masculinity and to be violent towards women in their belief that it is one of the prescribed roles of being a man. Furthermore, Sampath’s “crabs in a bucket” serves as a perfect analogy for the ethno-political and social class tension that also permeates the fiction in this study.

The Representation of Indo-Caribbean Masculinities by Shani Mootoo, Ryhaan Shah, and Narmala Shewcharan

As already mentioned, “over the last four decades, a significant body of feminist scholarship by and about Indo-Caribbean women has emerged yet a similar literature on Indo-Caribbean masculinity has not” (Reddock, Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought 264). However, one important contribution to the scholarship of Indo-Caribbean masculinity is Rhoda Reddock’s Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities, particularly Paula Morgan’s and Kenneth Ramchand’s chapters, although the specific issue of the representation of Indo-Caribbean masculinity by Indo-Caribbean female writers is not directly addressed in them.

The idea of exploring the representations of Indo-Caribbean masculinities by Indo-Caribbean women writers was sparked after reading Paula Morgan’s chapter “Under Women’s Eyes: Literary Constructs of Afro-Caribbean Masculinity”. Morgan asserts that “a characteristic which Caribbean women’s writing shares with the fictions of African-American and African women is its predominantly negative portrayal of men and male-female relationships” (290). She points at a tendency in Afro-Caribbean literature to
represent violent Afro-Caribbean masculinities driven by what Daniel Coleman denominates “performances of domination” (83).

In *Masculine Migrations: Reading the Postcolonial Male in ‘New Canadian’ Narratives*, Coleman describes the development of Afro-Caribbean “masculinities in migration” (3) in two short stories by Austin Clarke and in Dany Laferrière’s novel *How to Make Love to a Negro Without Getting Tired*. Coleman argues the enactment of “prescribed rituals of aggressive masculine performance” are a response to the “disenfranchisement” these characters feel within the “alienating, and even hostile, social circumstances” they encounter as immigrants in their new societies (82).

Another issue that has motivated my exploration of the representation of Indo-Caribbean masculinities by Indo-Caribbean women writers arises from the questions Morgan posits herself in “Under Women’s Eyes . . .” about the challenge that African, Afro-American, and Afro-Caribbean women writers face when portraying masculinity in their works of fiction. Morgan addresses the following questions in her analysis of the construction of Afro-Caribbean masculinity by African descent women writers:

Does gender create an alien and alienating barrier which cannot be breached? Are the portrayals of men merely superficial, displaying no in-depth understanding of the inner feeling of what it means to be a man? Do women possess the sensitivity and the intuitive understanding to get beyond the petty barriers to understand the other? Do differences in gender – and, for that matter, in race, class and sexual orientation – create islands in the imaginations which limit the perceiving eye/I to encountering the other only via stereotypes or external portraits of greater or lesser detail and accuracy? (291)
Thus, I decided to apply these questions to Indo-Caribbean women writers and explore the representation of Indo-Caribbean masculinity in the novels by Mootoo, Shewcharan, and Shah previously mentioned. I wonder if there is an inevitability to the use of stereotypes in fiction in general, but particularly in Caribbean fiction. Can stereotypical masculinities or femininities in colonial and postcolonial spaces in the Caribbean be subverted without repeating the stereotype itself? Morgan answers the questions she poses in “Under Women’s Eyes” in the following way. For Morgan: “There are undoubtedly female-authored Caribbean fictions which marginalize men or portray them in unfavorable stereotypical profiles” which might be said replicate the colonial stereotype of such males (303). However, she adds, “the fictions examined here do not support the assumption that gender is an alien and alienating barrier which cannot be breached” by female writers (303).

The works of fiction examined in Morgan’s Under Women’s Eyes include texts by Oliver Senior, Paule Marshall, Patricia Powell, and Merle Hodge among others. In stating that for these writers, gender is not “an alienating barrier which cannot be breached” while they represent masculinity in their fiction, Morgan seems to imply that their portrayal of men is compassionate. Or at least, that by not marginalizing or portraying “them in unfavorable stereotypical profiles”, they treat their male characters “as gendered beings” and view “the experiences of masculinity and manhood in the same way as women for the past four decades have done for femininity and womanhood” which addresses Caribbean masculinity and femininity as codependent performances (Morgan 303; Reddock, “Men as Gendered” 90).

In Violence in Caribbean Literature: Stories of Stones and Blood, Véronique Maisier reaches conclusions similar to those of Paula Morgan’s regarding the
representations of Afro-Caribbean masculinity in Francophone and Anglophone Afro-Caribbean literature:

One of the impressions gleaned from readings from texts written by male and female Caribbean authors is that Caribbean male protagonists tend to be fickle, unreliable individuals, and a source of misfortune for their female counterparts, while the Caribbean female characters faced with adversity stand as strong and independent figures. (57)

Maisier’s observation about a tendency to represent Afro-Caribbean masculinities in Caribbean literature in a negative way is similar to Morgan’s, however Maisier’s analysis introduces the element of the characterization of “Caribbean male protagonists” as “counterparts” to “Caribbean female characters” into the discussion of the representation of masculinity in Afro-Caribbean literature. In her analysis of Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea; Merle Hodge’s Crick Crack, Monkey; Gisèle Pineau’s The Drifting of Spirits; Patrick Chamoiseau’s Texaco; and Michelle Cliff’s Abeng, Maisier observes that there is a directly proportional correspondence between the violent and oppressive male character and the “strong and independent” female character who asserts her feminine agency regardless of male oppression (57).

Maisier also raises the issue of the purposes and benefits of “transmitting stereotypes” of “female representations in Caribbean literature” as well as “who is responsible for transmitting” them and “with what gains” and “who stands something to lose with the dissemination or elimination of such stereotypes? (57). In the context of the “fairly recently” male dominated literary activity of the Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean, Maisier describes stereotypes as a tool for “controlling discourse and opinions as they express assumed—and assumed indisputable—elements of knowledge, and take away agency from those who are the subjects of their hegemonic “stereotypical
statements”, presumably women (57). But in the hands of women writers, stereotypes can become elements in an anti-patriarchal narrative which imagines masculinities which are not destructive and oppressive, and rather than controlling the discourse opens it to alternative narratives of being men and women.

Hence, in Violence in Caribbean Literature, Maisier suggests that the stereotype of the “fickle, unreliable” and frequently abusive Afro-Caribbean male is a necessary evil for the portrayal of the Afro-Caribbean woman as “strong and independent” in Caribbean literature, and I argue as well, for the representation of alternative masculinities. As Kenneth Ramchand points out:

It would be impossible in any country [or its literature] to examine the construction of masculinity or femininity by itself since these take place in relation to each other, and it would be unsatisfactory to treat either as a new problem generated by the given moment. The case is more emphatic in Caribbean countries, which have a history of enslavement, indenture and colonialism. Here the constructions of both masculinity and femininity have been ordered by the imperatives of organized systems of oppression and exploitation. (“Calling All” 311-312)

If as Ramchand asserts, masculinity and femininity “take place in relation to each other”, then in the creative process of representing women in Caribbean literature, the portrayal of men cannot be ignored, in fact it is crucial (“Calling All” 311-312). As Maisier points out, masculinity and femininity in Caribbean literature often become directly proportional variables in the construction of positive images of Caribbean womanhood characterized by agency and strength, at the expense of a negative portrayal of the male characters, in narratives where women are protagonists and men the antagonists.
However, literary representations of Caribbean masculinities driven by violence and domination, as is evident in the novels addressed in this study, can be in themselves tools of deconstruction of stereotypical Caribbean masculinities when these are contrasted with performances of masculinities by male characters within the same narrative, which do not engage in dominant and violent behaviors. Thus, the stereotype of the monstrous masculinity some character(s) perform, becomes a warning of how not to behave, and the non-violent alternative masculinities become the examples to follow.

Sarah Frantz and Katharina Rennhak analyze in *Women Constructing Men: Female Novelists and Their Male Characters, 1750–2000*, the works of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Geoge Eliot, Louise Erdrich, and Virginia Woolf, among others. In their analysis of the male characters these writers construct, Frantz and Rennhak arrive to the conclusion that:

> When women construct and write about men in fictional worlds, not only do they analyze the causes and effects of patriarchy, as Woolf does in *A Room of One’s Own*, but they also construct their own realities, imagining alternative masculinities that are desirable from a woman’s perspective.

(2)

The representations of the masculinities found in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, *Valmiki’s Daughter*, *Tomorrow is Another Day*, and *A Silent Life* show the negative “effects of patriarchy” on the men in these novels, and how their colonial environments as well as their choices produce selfish, violent, dominating, and self-destructive masculinities. But these authors also imagine “alternative masculinities” which are testament in their narratives that colonialism alone is not responsible for the monstrous masculinities some of their characters perform, but that their goals to attain economic and
political power, and earn reputation and respectability through domination of others also
determines their negative actions.

**The Roots of Indo-Caribbean Masculinities**

The following section has two main goals. First, I trace the pre-indenture cultural
roots that defined the Indian masculinities of the first generations of Indian laborers
brought to the Caribbean plantations. I examine the cultural, historical, and mythical
aspects I consider foundational to the formation of Indian manhood among these laborers.

I argue that though Indian indentured laborers brought to the Caribbean belonged
to different castes, regions, and religions, they shared the myths and histories contained in
the ancient Sanskrit epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata which throughout time have
been influential in determining gender and social norms in India and the Indo-Caribbean
(Natarajan 2).

Although the Mahabharata and the Ramayana predate the arrival of Islam in
India, “in 1582 . . . the Mughal Emperor Akbar . . . charged the translation bureau with
rendering into Persian the sacred Hindu epic the Mahabharata” which was titled:
“Razmnama [or] (Book of War)” (Rice 124, 125). Rice argues that Emperor Akbhar
wished for copies of “the Persian translation of the Mahabharata to be circulated
throughout the empire … for more than private, royal consumption” (126). Hence, I
adopt Patricia Mohammed’s view that “Indian mythology influenced all Indians in
Trinidad [and the Caribbean] despite religious differences, and provided a secure base for
many aspects of what constituted Indian culture” (Gender Negotiations 137).

Second, I explore the nature of Indian gender relations and the status of Indian
men within their society, before and during the British occupation of India, when Indian
men had a dominant status over women, and compare it with the emasculated status that
Indian men were relegated to once they arrived at the Caribbean plantations. This loss of
status had traumatic effects on their masculinities and induced violent behaviors particularly against Indian women within and without the plantations, and constitute the traumatic precursors of the toxic masculinities represented in the novels in this study.

I begin with the “many waves of invasion North India was subjected to” and the retellings of these wars of conquest in the Hindu epics of the Mahabharata and Ramayana as detailed in Nalini Natarajan’s *The Unsafe Sex*. I follow this with the consequences of the arrival of the East Indian Company to India and the establishment of the Permanent Settlement, and how this influenced and complicated gender relations in India and remolded Indian masculinities. Then I look at how these Subcontinental Indian masculinities were affected by the migration and indenture period in the Caribbean, and how they further transformed during the post-indenture, and independence periods in Trinidad and Guyana, into the violent, toxic, and monstrous Indo-Caribbean masculinities in the post-colonial fiction analyzed here.

In *The Unsafe Sex*, Nalini Natarajan tracks “the cultural factors behind” the alarming predominance of sexual violence against women in 21st century India (x). “The use of rape as a weapon” against Indian women frequently takes place in public settings such as parks, malls, well-lit streets, and school buses, as in the 2012 Nirbhaya rape case, which took place inside a moving bus in Delhi (Natarajan xii). Natarajan proposes that “the binary within which women are viewed”, either chaste and pure within the seclusion of the home, or unchaste and tainted once they step into the public space, produces “public violence” against Indian women (x). Allegedly women seen in public spaces such as parks, malls, well-lit streets, train and bus stations, particularly at night, are seen by their male attackers as unchaste, and thus deserving the sexual violence they are victims off. “Put directly and simply, this is a binary which, ideally, places woman as a source of
dignity, safety, and even power within the home, and as a source of danger, shame, exploitable weakness and vulnerability, open to male attack, outside it” (Natarajan x).

In her analysis Natarajan focuses of “three kinds of public violence” in which “the use of rape as a weapon” is carried out (xii). “The first is the anonymous predator” who dwells in the city roaming public spaces; “the second is the assault of women as an assertion of territorial” and caste “supremacy, as in the plantation, or kingdoms of yore” carried out by the “upper-class predator” who views women as his property and feels entitled to use their bodies at his will (xv).

The third kind of “public violence” is “the mass rape of women during ethnic rioting in India—Hindu against Muslim and vice versa”, however the common thread in all of these “three kinds of public violence” against women is that “a more powerful group [men] uses the body of women to assert its power” over women and other men (Natarajan xiii). Why then have Indian women become the medium for Indian men to assert their power? Natarajan traces this to India’s Hindu martial traditions which are represented in the Hindu epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

The “assertion of territorial supremacy” and “power” through subordination and violence against Indian women are symptoms of the “patriarchal conjugal anxiety and militarization” that ensued from “the many waves of invasions north India was subjected to: beginning with the Aryan invasions, through the various invaders of the early millennia . . . to colonization by the British” (xxi). During these military invasions, the survival and “maintenance of cultural superiority and identity” rested on keeping women away from the enemy or the conquered. Therefore women became “the weak point in the maintenance of caste and race, as they [bore] children and [had], thereby the capacity to threaten these carefully constructed boundaries” (Natarajan xix). Under these martial
circumstances, the manhood of Indian warriors was in continuous siege since it depended on how safe their women were.

India’s histories of warfare, Natarajan argues, caused “Indian masculinity” to be “subjugated through war over the centuries on the other” producing the threat and anxiety of “losing control over women, either to subordinate or conquered groups” (xvii, xvi). Therefore, throughout India’s martial history Indian women found themselves under two equally dangerous situations that made them prone to violence: they were controlled and dominated by those protecting them, and under the threat of being abducted by their enemies. In these periods of war and conquest Indian women were tools “to preserve and rationalize” Aryan “superiority” and “emphasize and maintain their racial distance from the indigenous community” (Natarajan xx, 32).

However, the word Aryan in Sanskrit means a noble one, or one who does noble deeds. Thus, another way of understanding the role of Indian women in these martial periods of Indian history is to look at the wars in the Mahabharata and Ramayana as wars for power between branches of the nobility. A. L. Basham describes the basic plot of the Mahabharata as follows: “The five sons of Pandu are unjustly deprived of their ancestral kingdom by their wicked cousins, the Kauravas, and they regain it after a tremendous battle in which all their enemies and most of their friends are slain” (4). Either way, for the maintenance of racial purity or the “legitimacy of the lineages”, or both, “female subordination in the public space” and their expected submissiveness towards men were indispensable for the “masculinizing” of the Indian male ego (Natarajan xi, 3, 20). The opposite, a woman who was not “kept inside” but was strong, fierce, and ventured outside, had an emasculating effect on Indian men (20).

Regarding violence against women in India in the 21st century, Natarajan argues that the “age-old myths” in the Mahabharata and Ramayana have “become reinvented in
modern situations” and “brought to bear on the contemporary situation of women” in 21st century India (2). However, the fundamental gender and social conventions embodied in these “age-old myths” have not been rethought, but have remained static throughout the centuries. For example, the binary conception of the nature of women’s sexuality remains alive. On the one hand, the view is that if unchecked, women’s sexuality can be a destructive force that renders men vulnerable. While on the other hand, the view is that if subordinated and regulated properly, women’s sexuality would fulfill the great purpose of preserving Indian culture and the honor of Indian men. Thus, “the female binary” of the chaste woman whose sexuality is subordinated and regulated versus the unchaste woman whose sexuality is unchecked becomes the paradigm for praise or punishment.

One of the themes that permeates the Ramayana is dharma or social order and one’s duty to abide by it, and a woman’s duty to be chaste is inherent in its narrative. The alleged departure of modern Indian women’s behavior from dharma established by “age-old myths” seems then to be the justification of the perpetrators of sexual violence against women in today’s India (2). Yet, how can the ancient epics of the Mahabharata and Ramayana support and promote the violence against women in 21st century India?

Natarajan argues that:

Unlike in other cultures, where the break from ancient to modern is more abrupt. In India, through the constant retelling of epics, through the colonial relying on ancient texts for ‘truth’, to be promptly transferred into school and college textbooks, these aspects remain a part of everyday life.

(Natarajan 21)

Natarajan argues that “the duality within which women are placed—the good housewife within the home who is pure and vulnerable, and the bad, sluttish prostitute or woman of the streets outside the home” has its roots in Sita’s twofold description in the
Ramayana as a “simple and gentle ashram dweller” versus a “Sita who longs for excitement” (8, 13). While in the seclusion of the ashram, Sita is viewed as chaste, nonetheless, as soon as Sita begins to exhibit actions deemed masculine such as ambition, and desire for freedom and adventure she is viewed as unchaste (9). Seclusion of the ashram ensures a woman is protected. Outside of it, after re-entering into the public space of the forest, she becomes prey to male sexual desires.

“Sita’s thrust for the pleasure of acquisition” is represented in her desire to have the “golden deer” she sees in the forest, which in turn drives Rama to go hunting for it, and to leave Sita alone in the forest. Although Ravana abducts Sita and she is his prey, it is her “misbehavior” which is seen as causing the circumstances that prompt her abduction and put both her husband and herself in danger (Natarajan 7, 9). Even though she is the victim, the view that Sita’s “desire and longing for excitement” (8) is to blame for her being abducted by Ravana, is still present in modern times, although codified into new types of transgressions such women’s desire for mobility, becoming educated and Westernized, and their advancing into the professional world. Questions like: What was she doing there at night? Was she drinking? Or why was she dressed like that? Remain common phrases used to discredit and re-victimize women who have been sufferers of sexual violence.

The East India Company, Militarization, and the Permanent Settlement in India

In 19th century India “militarization accelerated . . . as the East India Company mobilized a ‘native’ army” which by 1803 had 260,000 soldiers for the purpose of protecting the interest of the company in the Indian subcontinent (Dalrymple 2). The army gave Indian men “steady jobs and thus devalued women” because the intrinsic role women played in the economic sustainability of the family lost importance (Natarajan 40). Before Indian men had the option of earning their living as soldiers, agriculture was
the predominant way of making a living for Indian families. Consequently, with their husbands away in the army, many wives were “left behind in the village” to fend for themselves and their children, increasing their vulnerability (Natarajan 40).

The enrollment of Indian men in the army had debilitating effects on their wives’ livelihood. Many became further impoverished by the absence of their husbands, and forced to venture into the “public space” of the cities and markets which had “become more masculinized” by the presence of the army and thus more dangerous (40). Another economic change which seemed to benefit men but negatively affected the wellbeing and social status of women in India, took place nearing the end of the eighteenth century.

The Permanent Settlement was introduced in 1797 Bengal and it required that landlords pay the British government fixed taxes on land revenue. The Zamindaris or landlords in Bengal passed down the burden of these taxes to the peasants who farmed their lands, whom now had become more like tenants. The Ryotwari Settlement was established in 1820 Bombay and Madras and although there was no Zamidar intermediaries, the imposition of taxes on land revenue was even higher (Husain & Sarwar 16-17).

Under these “new economic policies of tax collection” the Indian peasantry became severely oppressed and impoverished leading to peasant revolts under both types of settlement (Natarajan 41). Unlike the previous land revenue agreements with Indian rulers which took into consideration effects of droughts and natural disasters on harvest low yield. With the British Permanent and Ryotwari Settlements, peasants were fully accountable for owed taxes regardless of any climatic disadvantages they encountered (Husain & Sarwar 16-17). Indian women became the last rung of the ladder in this economic framework because in the first place they had no land property rights, and
second because they were used by men buried in debt as a sort of collateral to pay their debts:

Now, women’s dowries were expected to save their husbands from the destitution that a bad harvest may bring, should they be unable to meet revenue demands. While earlier, women’s dowries, as *stridhan* (inherited wealth for women), were their own, now they were tied into the ruthless colonial economy. (Natarajan 40)

This position of Indian women as a commodity that could be sold for the payment of a debt placed them at the lowest, and most vulnerable and degrading position so far here discussed. “As men become martial, economic beings, using women’s wealth to become so,” during the 19th century, “women become, at one stroke, a liability and vulnerable” (Natarajan 44). The increasing defenselessness and lack of safety of Indian women becomes in this period directly proportional to the “increasing masculinization of peasant society” in India “as men both entered the army and became cogs in the wheel of a colonial economy ruled by revenue and taxation”, which produced a “militarization” of the public space in which acts of violence against Indian women increased (44).

“The public space of the field where they once worked in equality with men is now a world of soldiers” which further limits any safe space Indian women can inhabit to the home, if any (Natarajan 44). “The fields were they grew their crops are now the property of their husbands to be exchanged for solvent status in the tax collector’s logs” which places Indian women in 19th century India in the position of chattel (44).

**Indian Male Status in India versus in the Caribbean Plantations**

The social and economic dislocations the profitable trade of the East India Company produced in 19th century India were devastating. The increased militarization produced by the East India Company together with the drastic economic changes such as
the introduction of the Permanent and Ryotwari Settlements made of “rural India in the
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries . . . the scene of epic uprooting” (Bahadur 25).

The practice of imperial capitalism destroyed traditional livelihoods, plunging weavers into unemployment by flooding India with factory-made textiles from England. At the same time, colonialism created new routes for moving across the subcontinent: by the mid-1800s, the British had recruited 10,000 sepoys for their army from the district that included Bhurahupur alone. In times of famine, peasants tramped the roads in search of work, sometimes all the way to growing metropolises such as Calcutta in the Bengal presidency. India suffered twenty-four famines in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, more than enough to cause sustained, large-scale displacement. (25)

This chaotic state of economic oppression and famine in India made many desperate Indian men and women choose to migrate as indentured laborers to the Caribbean plantations, in an attempt to escape their misery. Migration to Guyana and Trinidad and the new social order of the plantation apparatus, within which Indian men had no power, canceled the previous gender relations scheme in India where women were subordinated and the worth of many Indian women had become the amount of a dowry.

From the beginning, in all the colonies that turned to indenture to rescue their plantations from ruin after slaves were freed, men enormously outnumbered women. This gave women some sexual leverage. They could take new partners, and frequently, they did. Theirs was often a tale of leaving their country, then leaving their men. Even before leaving their country, many had left their men. (26)
In the plantation framework the public and private spaces that were clearly demarcated in India, were mostly conflated and often violated. The plantations and the fields had become neutral public domain shared by plantation managers, overseers, and Indian men and women. In addition, the barracks where the indentured laborers slept, allowed no privacy to them. Therefore, the private sphere of the home were patriarchal power was enshrined in India, had disappeared for indentured laborers residing in the plantations. “The single-story barracks . . . were partitioned into small rooms. In each room lived one family, however large, or a group of single men. Because the partitions didn’t reach the roof, every sound was communal” which made now all of their inhabitable spaces, the fields and the barracks, public (Bahadur 83).

Thus, Indian women had no reprieve from “public violence” in the plantations (Natarajan xii). Their behavior was constantly judged by Indian men through the chaste/unchaste binary lens, complicated by the fact of being sexually desired by both Indian male laborers and European plantation management. As Sunita Chatterjee reveals, the overcrowding and lack of privacy in the barracks was exacerbated by the lower ratio of Indian women to men, for women accounted for 35% to 40% of the contracted laborers brought to Trinidad and Guyana during the period between 1845 and 1917, which increased Indian women’s vulnerability by becoming even more coveted sexual objects (124).

However, the low ratio of women, and the private sphere of the home turned public in the barracks are only two of the aspects of the sexual and physical violence against Indian women in the plantations. I also interpret the violence against Indian women in the barracks and Caribbean plantations as an extension of the “martialization of public space” (Natarajan xx). Just as “Indian masculinity” was “subjugated” or made vulnerable “through war over the centuries” of Indian “martial history”, the “public
space” of the Caribbean plantation becomes a “battlefield” in which once again the “possibility of losing control over women” is reenacted (xvii, xviii, xvi).

In the Caribbean plantations the economic, legal, ritual, and religious sanctioned power Indian men had over women in India was shattered. Although in the plantation setup Indian women seemed to have greater sexual agency, and a certain degree of economic freedom since they earned wages, the sexual and physical violence they had been subjected to in India continued unabated, and in equally horrific ways (Reddock, “Freedom Denied” 79; Mohammed, Gender Negotiations 49).

Throughout the sugar colonies, disputes over women led to horrific and frequently fatal violence. In Suriname, a man who chopped off his wife’s arms accused her of adultery. Amazingly, she survived to tell her side of the story: her husband had sent her to live with the other man, in order to clear his debts. (Bahadur 109).

The simplistic binary of the “immorality of women and jealousy of men” is insufficient to explain the violence against Indian women in Caribbean plantations (Chatterjee 237). Jealousy is actually a symptom of the disease, the root of the violence resides in the founding and validating principle of Indian masculinity central to the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, the control of women’s sexuality. As Natarajan establishes in The Unsafe Sex: In India “the violence” against Indian women was “always endemic to and hidden in Indian society under the posture of tradition, culture, piety, rectitude, and dharma” which justified and structured the violence (129). In the plantations the great lack of control Indian men had over Indian women’s sexuality produced a breakdown of “the patriarchal male psyche” and the rise of unchecked violent, and monstrous masculinities (xvi).
In her study of indentured Indian women in Trinidad and Guyana between 1845 and 1917, Sunita Chatterjee found that “wife murders” were tied to the “psychological implications of plantation indentured life” since “most of the violent murders reported took place on plantations rather than in Indian villages” (249). Another important point made by Chatterjee is that “in almost all cases of ‘wife murders’ that are discussed” in her study, “men killed those [women] who ‘deserted’ them” (249, 250). Mohammed asserts that Indian “women were considered not only impure, but existing only through men” (Gender Negotiations 21). Which describes the subordinated status Indian women were forced into, but even more revealing, it describes the vulnerability of Indian men’s masculinity for it depended solely on women “existing only through” them (21).

After indenture contracts were fulfilled Indian laborers who remained in Trinidad and Guyana sought to become self-sufficient through agriculture, “although most laborers continued to offer their labor partially to plantations after the expiration of their indentures” (Chatterjee 174). Women had a crucial role in keeping alive sources of economic revenue that were not completely dependent on the plantation such as “subsistence production of garden vegetables, cultivation of rice, renting lands for cane farming, cacao production, tending cattle, selling produce to the local markets, and in the thriftily run household” (Chatterjee 174). It was these modes of sustainability which made the establishment and survival of Indian rural villages in Trinidad and Guyana possible.

If the economic sustainability of post-indenture Indian villages in the Caribbean was centered on agriculture and the increasing possibility of owning land, the blueprint for the social cohesion of these communities was driven by religious codes, for Muslim Indians the Koran, and for Hindus, The Ramayana. Patricia Mohammed states that “Indian mythology influenced all Indians in Trinidad despite religious differences, and
provided a secure base for many aspects of what constituted Indian culture” (Mohammed, *Gender Negotiations* 19).

A “constitutive aspect of the Hindu diaspora was the adoption of the *Ramayana* as the key religious text” which Bhikhu Parekh argues became the religious and moral axis of the Indian diaspora because its themes of “exile, suffering, struggle and eventual return”, and because it was simple yet oriented for moral instruction, with clearly defined binaries of good and evil, and chaste and unchaste behaviors, and because the *Ramayana* clearly highlighted the Brahmin and patriarchal principles of dharma: the duty of the eldest son, and the chastity and submissiveness expected of wives which were compulsory in Indian family, social interactions, and gender relations (Cohen 64; Parekh 613-614). The story of Rama and Sita has been central to the transmission of these expected duties of Indian women in the Caribbean.

The *Ramayana* relates the story of Rama, the eldest son of King Ayodhya. An envious stepmother, who covets the throne for her own son, causes Rama to spend 14 years in exile in the forest accompanied only by his loyal brother Laksmana and his devoted wife Sita, married to him at age six. Sita is kidnapped by Ravana (Rawan), the demonic king of Lanka. Despite Rawan's clever advances, Sita maintains fidelity to Rama.

(Mohammed, *Gender Negotiations* 146)

Just as in 21st century India *The Mahabharata and Ramayana* “proliferate through family storytelling, *Ramkathas, Ramleelas, Krishnaleelas*, bhajans, village plays, puppet shows, wandering bards, and TV shows”, in the Caribbean the festivals of Diwali and Ramleela, and the retelling of the mythology of Sita “as the ideal woman, possessing virtues of female love and devotion” perpetuate and reinforce the “role model to all
Hindu women on how they should behave in their daily lives” (Natarajan 2; Mohammed, *Gender Negotiations* 146)

Presumably, the gradual post-indenture “transition in status” of Indian women in the Caribbean from semi-independent “wage earner[s] to unpaid workers at home”, and “from a producer to a reproducer” during the late 19th century and early 20th century in Guyana and Trinidad was bounded within the principles of *The Ramayana* mentioned above (Mohapatra 246). The public space and private space which had been conflated within the plantation during the indentured period, began once again to become strictly demarcated, with women once again expected to be “unpaid workers at home” (246).

The exploration of the *Ramayana and Mahabharata*, and of India’s “martial history” in search for the “cultural factors behind” the pre-colonial, British colonial, and indenture roots, of the physical and sexual violence Indian women underwent throughout these periods, shows that in general terms (although it varies within individuals), the masculinities of Indian male perpetrators of violence against Indian women were constituted, dependent, and only validated if the role of Indian women in relation to them was that of submission and subordination (Natarajan xvii).

Any other role played by Indian women in relation to them became a threat to their manhood which needed to be eliminated. As clearly stated in Natarajan’s *The Unsafe Sex*, the vulnerability, insecurity, and domination dependency of such masculinities, which makes them toxic, violent, dangerous, and monstrous, are still alive in the 21st century.

As I move through the texts in this study, I look at the postcolonial context within which each of the Indo-Caribbean characters is enmeshed, keeping in mind “the patriarchal male psyche” they have inherited (Natarajan xvi). And inserting into this Indian patriarchal inheritance, the new postcolonial challenges which influence and
transform the nature of the masculinities of these characters, and which in turn result in violence towards women. In *Cereus Blooms at Night* we see the violent effects colonial education and adoption of White Presbyterianism to accomplish European acculturation, combined with rejection, have on Chandin Ramchandin’s manhood.

In *Tomorrow is Another Day* we witness the negative effects which becoming involved in politics has on Jagru Persaud and Lal Panday, and the monstrosity ethnic politics cause throughout the novel. In *Valmiki’s Daughter* we encounter the pressure of performing heterosexual masculinity, or of passing as heterosexual in the homophobic Trinidadian society in the novel and the physical and mental violence homophobia produces. In *A Silent Life* we are faced with the effects that failure to fulfill the gender role expectations of the Muslim Indian community they live in has on the mental health of Baby Hazzan and Nazeer Mohammed. All of these aspects mentioned above increase the violence men deploy against women in the novels. In addition, because these novels take place either in Trinidad or Guyana, the ethnic tension between Indian and African populations, particularly in *Tomorrow is Another Day* and *A Silent Life*, turns the public space of the market and the city into a warzone, a battlefield where violence is rampant and were women become the most vulnerable members of these societies.

Finally, in analyzing these texts my goal is to map and understand the roots of the toxic, violent, sexist, and monstrous Indian masculinities represented in these novels, while acknowledging the alternative Indo-Caribbean masculinities these authors advocate.
Shani Mootoo was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1957. Her parents Indra and Ramesh Mootoo returned to their native Trinidad when she was only three months old. She grew up and lived in San Fernando, one of the larger cities on Trinidad’s southwestern coast, until she migrated to Vancouver at the age of 24. Shani Mootoo is a novelist, poet, visual artist, and videographer, and her first book, *Out on Main Street*, a collection of short stories, was published by Press Gang in 1992. Four years later, Press Gang published her first novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night*.

In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mala Ramchandin loses her mental faculties due to the severe trauma a series of devastating events in her life produce. Her mother Sarah attempts to elope with her lover Lavinia, and take both her daughters with them. However, they are caught in the act, and Mala and her sister Asha are left behind with their father Chandin Ramchandin. Both Mala and Asha fall prey to sexual and physical abuse at the hands of their father, and Mala feels that this is her fault since they would have been able to leave the house unnoticed had she not gone back to the house. “Just as they entered the buggy Pohpoh remembered her bag with all the seeds and the shells and the cereus cutting. “My bag, my bag. I have to get my bag” (*Cereus* 62).

Eventually her sister Asha flees her home’s abusive environment but Mala remains and continues to be sexually and physically abused by her father. It is difficult to explain why she stays under such appalling circumstances. Unless it is because she feels she deserves to be punished for her fateful decision on the day she returns to get her bag.
The episode which finally un hinges Mala’s psyche occurs when her father Chandin, raging with jealousy, tries to kill her lover Ambrose. In a desperate attempt to protect Ambrose, Mala overtakes her father and in the process kills him. As a result, Ambrose is horrified by what he witnesses and disappears from her life. Mala is eventually brought to “the alms house in Paradise to receive proper care and attention until the end of her days” and it is there she meets the narrator of the novel nurse Tyler (Cereus 8).

I chose *Cereus Blooms at Night* as the analytical axis of this study, and as the subject of its first chapter because it provides a historical and psychological background of the traumatic effects that migration, indenture, and cultural colonialism have had on Indian masculinities in the Caribbean. In Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Chandin Ramchandin operates as a symbol of the individual identity trauma and cultural dislocation suffered by the children of indentured laborers who grew up in, or within the scenario of plantation barracks in Trinidad.

In essence, their Indian identity was placed in opposition and constructed as incompatible with Euro-Canadian and Judeo-Christian cultural and racial identity, and thus they were expected to reject their Indianness in order to embrace their new Western Christian identity. I locate the genesis of monsterhood within this primary paradox. “Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: "In reality, who am I?" (Fanon, *Wretched* 250).

In 1868 the Canadian Presbyterian Mission to the Indians, founded by the Revd John Morton, had only one school. In 1889, only 21 years later, they had 37 and by 1900 they had 60. They had founded a theological college
in 1892 — only 24 years later after that first school, followed two years later by a teachers training college and four years later by a secondary school for boys, Naparima College. (O’Callaghan 1)

Of course the negative effects of being uprooted from home and placed in a boarding school varied from individual to individual, however in Chandin Ramchandin’s case it causes him to despise his parents and the barracks he grows up in, and ultimately himself. Chandin “had been born just before they left India” and grows up in the “two-room ajoupa quarters in the barracks” with his indentured parents, “old man Ramchandin” and his mother “Janika” (Cereus 27, 29). “After work, rocking himself in the burlap hammock”, Chandin’s father worries “about the future of his only child” and spends his time “turning mathematical estimations” of how much would it cost “to send Chandin to a college in the capital, or even abroad to study a profession” (26).

However, his worries are put to rest by “Reverend and Mrs. Ernest Thoroughly, Christian missionaries form the Shivering Northern Wetlands”, who offer to adopt Chandin and provide for him and his education (29). Chandin leaves his parents’ “two-room ajoupa quarters in the barracks” and moves in with the Thoroughlys into a house with “chandeliers” which “mesmerize” him, and “upholstered” chairs and a “living room . . . with two large windows through which scented breezes from undulating fields of sugar cane [sail] in from the valleys below” (31, 32). His removal from the poverty of the barracks into the opulence of the Thoroughly’s house is the first of a series of dislocations from his origins that Chandin undergoes.

The news of Chandin’s adoption by the Thoroughlys spreads fast, and his future seems bright to the “immigrant workers throughout barracks across the width and breadth
Salomé

of Lantanacamara” (27). They believe “Chandin Ramchandin will be the first one of all we to get profession. The first Indian child in Lantanacamara to get a tittle” (29). However, adopting Chandin is not a benevolent action by Reverend Thoroughly. Chandin is adopted in order to become an evangelizing tool of the Presbyterian mission to the Indian population. Reverend Thoroughly’s plan is to make Chandin a “Christian teacher, theologian and missionary whose success in the field would be due, certainly to the blessings of God, but also to the novel idea that people were most likely to be swayed by one of their own kind” (30). Thus, Chandin is not adopted out of love, but he is just a human subject in Reverend Thoroughly’s social experiment. The knowledge of the real reason he has been adopted becomes another painful dislocation of Chandin’s psyche.

Following certain events in Chandin’s stay at the Thoroughly’s, Chandin undergoes a mental and psychological degradation caused by a combination of a series of rejections such as his unrequited love for Lavinia, Reverend Thoroughly’s dismissal of Chandin as a worthy suitor of his daughter’s affection, and Chandin’s wife’s elopement with Lavinia. I argue these rejections combined with the fact that Chandin grows up in the sexually and physically violent environment of the plantation barracks triggers a dehumanizing trauma which drives him to rape his two pre-pubescent daughters Asha and Pohpoh. This chapter attempts to explore the events that trigger Chandin Ramchandin’s degradation and induce him to commit the monstrous act of incestuous rape.

**Criticism and Theory:**

In her reading of *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Emy Koopman argues “that the incest” in the novel “is at least partly the result of the dynamics of being colonized and “othered” which Chandin Ranchandin undergoes (2). To understand Chandin’s behavior, I
identify certain triggers, latent and immediate. I use Neil Sampath’s reconfiguration of P. J. Wilson’s concepts of “reputation and respectability” (*Crab Antics* 37) which Sampath applied to “a fieldwork study in a rural Hindu East Indian village in Trinidad” (“Crabs in a Bucket” 50). Sampath describes the dialectic relation of Wilson’s reputation and respectability as follows:

*Respectability* involves those moral decisions and actions that are seen as positively influenced by European colonialism and the local pyramidal social structure based on class and colour. *Respectability* is a concept reflected by the norms of local genteel femininity: church-going and being ‘well-behaved’. Reputation is a working-class, live-for today enjoyment of the kind of hedonism that is deemed as worthless by the respectable sections of local society. (“Crabs in a Bucket” 49)

Instead of viewing “reputation and respectability” as two different and contradictory points of view about the nature of social life structure in the Caribbean, Sampath makes “reputation and respectability” two complementary concepts, which he argues, become paired in the creolized masculinities of young rural Indian males encountered in his field study (49). As it will be seen, Chandin goes through the conduits of education and Christianity in search of respectability but doing so does not bring the recognition he desires.

Based on the Trinidadian urban and rural examples, the problem it seems, is that ‘masculinity’ is based on local perceptions of ‘success’. Just as women are socially valued as ‘sex objects’, so men are valued as ‘success objects’ in a context of reputation. The two values appear to complement
each other within a patriarchal paradigm. The question then becomes, how does one begin to escape that paradigm? (“Crabs in a Bucket” 51)

In the context of modernity, Sampath proposes a creolization of Indian masculinity in which embracing “reputation” gives Indian males the freedom to “mix in the wider society” while keeping intact their “Indian domestic patriarchal power”, thus maintaining a balance between Indian honor and Creole reputation, reversing the idea that “behavior that enhances reputation is the anti-thesis of respectability” (50). For this, Indian women do not benefit in this situation. Instead they are “reduced or at least unenhanced” to maintain Indian honor (Sampath, “An evaluation” 247).

This frustrates Chandin because the object of desire in his life is Lavinia Thoroughly, who is beyond his reach across the racial divide. Instead, Chandin is compelled to choose Sarah as his wife, but subsequently loses her to Lavinia, as both women exercise their sexual freedom in their lesbian relationship. The inner shame at being rejected by the Thoroughlys, and the external shame that his wife Sarah prefers a woman to him, are too much to handle. Chandin’s attempts to sustain his male honor, particularly in his subordinate status to the white males, are doubly undermined by these two incidents, practically leaving him without any degree of reputation or respectability.

In Sampath’s model Indian males benefit from combining “reputation and respectability” in the creolization of their masculinity because it allows them to remain respectable through loyalty to Hindu tradition while also allowing them to be “valued as ‘success objects’ in a context of reputation” in which “women are socially valued as ‘sex objects’ and thus their conquest proof of the status of such reputation (“Crabs in a Bucket” 51). Therefore, the strongest trigger of Chandi Ramchandin’s atrocious behavior
is his inability to build respectability and reputation through marriage to Lavinia, and his loss of Sarah, which drives him to deliver sexual and physical violence against his daughters in an attempt to exercise domestic reputation.

The latent triggers, although not the most critical, is Reverend Thoroughly’s indifference towards Chandin’s success in achieving social respectability through his education and adoption of Presbyterianism. After being adopted by the Reverend, Chandin learns and follows the social norms, dress codes, and etiquette of the Presbyterian whites he wants to become one with; he even becomes a fairly good cricket player. “Chandin, what splendid batmanship, my boy! Inspired, simply inspired” (Cereus 39). However, regardless of his accomplishments, Chandin is rejected as an eternal outsider to the white world of the Thoroughlys.

What most hurts Chandin is that Reverend Thoroughly rejects him as a possible suitor of his daughter Lavinia because being adopted technically makes Chandin, Lavinia’s sibling. “Look here. You are to be a brother to Lavinia and nothing more. A brother. She is your sister and you her brother . . . you must not have desire for your sister Lavinia” (Cereus 37). Even though Chandin has done all in his hands to achieve “whiteness” through education, becoming Presbyterian, and undergoing European acculturation, it is his body, his brown skin which makes him an impossible suitor for Lavinia. Instead Lavinia is to be engaged to “a marvelous gentleman by every standard . . . to inherit a rather large estate . . . a medical student” who is nevertheless her cousin “Fenton Thoroughly” (45).
Reverend Thoroughly’s rejection and indifference further trigger an issue with his racial self-esteem. I use here the concept of “whiteness” proposed by Tate and Law because it embodies the impossibility to evade the “epidermalization” of racism in the Caribbean (Fanon, *Black Skin 4*). Although “whiteness is related to class, social standing and economic power, and these are as significant for racial categorization as skin color, if not more so”, escaping the racism attached to skin color in the Caribbean is impossible (Tate and Law 89).

In the Anglophone Caribbean there has been a move away from a clearly demarcated phenotype based on European norms as the basis of a judgement of whiteness. The white norm now can also be light or light-brown, as long as this is allied with wealth. So while whiteness might be mobile in terms of the bodies that can occupy that space, it still relates to the distribution of wealth, opportunity and prestige, notwithstanding poor white populations. (Tate and Law 89)

However, Chandin Ramchandin is still living on the brink of the indenture period in Trinidad and cannot escape the inferiority and subordinated position his “short and darkly brown Indian Lantanacamaran” body places him within. Fanon’s, analysis in *The Man of Color and the White Woman* terms the possession, physically and legally, of a “white woman” as a marker of non-white men’s humanity. This explains Chandin’s crisis of masculinity in *Cereus Blooms at Night*. “I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine” (Fanon, *Black Skin 45*). To use Fanon’s words, in Chandin Ramchandin “surges this desire to be suddenly white” accompanied with the
parallel desire to stop being Indian (*Black Skin* 45). The dislocation of his psyche is such that in the end he is neither white nor Indian, but a man who exhibits a dehumanized and consequently pernicious manhood.

**A Monstrous Indian Masculinity in Shani Mootoo’s Literary Oeuvre**

The rest of this chapter is divided in three sections. The next section briefly explores the overriding theme of a monstrous Indian masculinity in Shani Mootoo’s works of fiction. Then I return to Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* focusing on the incidents in the text which progressively produce Chandi Ramchandin’s degeneration and dehumanization, which are foreshadowed by Chandin’s embarrassment towards his parents’ indenture status and his desire to distance himself from their Indianness. The final section of this chapter explores Shani Mootoo’s representation of Nurse Tyler as an alternative masculinity to Chandin Ramchandin’s madness propelled manhood.

When women construct and write about men in fictional worlds, not only do they analyze the causes and effects of patriarchy, as Woolf does in *A Room of One’s Own*, but they also construct their own realities, imagining alternative masculinities that are desirable from a woman’s perspective. (Frantz & Rennhak 2)

Nurse Tyler, takes “courses abroad, in the Shivering Northern Wetlands” and becomes “the only Lantanacamaran man ever to have trained in the profession of nursing” (*Cereus* 6). Tyler, the narrator of Mootoo’s story, and the one who sets the “story down” in “printed word”, confronts rejection, his manhood is undermined, and is also treated as “an outsider” by the Lantanacamaran people. However, unlike Chandin, Tyler does not recur to violence to avenge these feelings (4). Perhaps it is because the fulfilment of Tyler’s life expectations come from within while Chandin’s depend on the recognition of
others. “What I really wanted was to make one old person smile or feel that she or he was of some value” while Chandin expects the devotion of women in his life (6).

The assumption and execution by Indo-Caribbean men of a monstrous masculinity is a traceable theme in Shani Mootoo’s early fiction. In her short story *A Garden of Her Own*, which is one of the nine stories collected in *Out on Main Street*, Mootoo creates a sense of impending danger within the walls of the apartment where Vijai lives with “the husband” (15-16). In this cramped “bachelor apartment” Vijai lives with a steadily escalating sense of foreboding that her actions may have the “potential for blame”, and that anything she does may raise the wrath of “the husband” (15-16).

Vijai’s use of the definite article “the” rather than the possessive adjective “my”, to refer to the man she is married to, gives the phrase “the husband” a cold, detached connotation which is stripped from any kind of affection, but retains the connotation of the authority and ownership “the husband” has over her (15-16). This feeling of evil to come is strongly evident when at “five-thirty, Saturday morning” Vijai debates if she should get out of bed and face “the husband”, or if she should remain in bed, which either way may have negative consequences (15). If the following quote was read without context, the reader might be inclined to imagine that it is a scene from a horror story or film in which a monster, a serial killer, or a rapist is about to pounce on its victim.

Then there was a space empty of his sounds. The silence made the walls of her stomach contract like a closed-up accordion. Her body remained rigid. Her heart sounded as if it had moved right up into her ears, thundering methodically, and that was all that she could hear. She struggled with herself
to be calm so that she could know where he was and what he was doing (17).

Vijai’s sense of fearful entrapment within her marriage and the cramping walls of the “bachelor apartment” she inhabits with “the husband” is accentuated by her growing expectation of harm coming her way (11). Even when “the husband” directs Vijai “to the edge of his bed” their sexual contact is devoid of tenderness (11, 17). Instead of an act which brings to completion their marriage, their sexual intercourse is an act of ownership, a forceful taking of her person as “her body is crushed under his as he slams himself against her, from behind, grunting” like an animal or a monster, and “she holds her breath, taut against his weight and the pain, but she will not disturb his moment” or is it rape? (23).

The theme of a violent Indo-Caribbean masculinity is also evident in Lemon Scent, the second short story in the Out on Main Street collection. Kamini is viewed by her husband “as his prized exquisite accomplishment, envy of his men friends” which he “must not lose” (26). For her husband, Kamini is a possession, a commodity, a trophy which heightens his reputation, however, his social life revolves around “those men he works with and parties with” and not Kamini whom he keeps secluded at home (30). On the nights Kamini’s husband is out with “those men”, Anita spends evenings with Kamini and eventually they become lovers (30).

Suspecting Kamini and Anita are having an affair, her husband whispers to Kamini: “If I ever find out that you two have slept together I will kill you both” (Mootoo, Out on Main 28). Kamini’s husband is concerned about his reputation and standing before his “men friends” which would be tarnished if he loses Kamini: “his prized exquisite
accomplishment” (26). The theme of the Indian wife in middle and upper-class Indo-Caribbean society as a commodity, as a trophy, as an enhancement to prestige, yet often dismissed and unimportant to their husbands, except for the heightening of their status, is an element of the domineering and menacing masculinity which permeates Mootoo’s work.

In Mootoo’s novel *He Drown She in the Sea*, attorney general Shem Bihar, a. k. a. Boss, as everyone, including his wife, calls him, is married to Rose Bihar. Rose is “written about often in the women’s section of the paper as the prime example for all women in the Caribbean”, hailed as the woman “other women should strive to be like . . . a mother whose children c[o]me first and who [stands] behind her husband, no matter what”, which Rose Bihar does for many years. Yet eventually Rose who mostly serves the role of a societal staple for her husband, decides to leave him and goes to Canada to become reacquainted with a childhood friend with whom she has fallen in love (252). However, when her husband becomes aware of her intentions her husband’s violent nature flares:

He take out a thick-thick bundle of dollar bills from his pocket and throw it at her, shouting that he himself would pay her passage. But when she say all right, she want to leave, he get vex, he start to cry, to beg, he shout, he threaten to take his own life, and Madam say okay, okay, she not going anywhere (295).

Shem Bihar’s manipulation tactics which ricochet from anger, to tears, to supplication, and back to threats are not sincere but driven by his fear of losing standing and power within the upper-class society he belongs to. “You have no shame? He is a gardener. You gone crazy? You need to check your head. You want to bring shame on us?”
Rose is disgusted by her husband’s hypocrisy, who has brought shame on her and their daughter by his repeated unfaithfulness. “Shame? Who brought shame on this family? Not you? You are the one who is out almost every night with some woman hanging from your elbow” (295). This toxic and violent Indo-Caribbean masculinity in Mootoo’s fiction, which is based on keeping an untarnished male respectability at all costs, is a symptom of Mootoo’s representation of middle and upper-class Indo-Caribbean masculinity and society and Indian men aspiring to become members of it.

Notoriously unfaithful to his wife, Shem Bihar is willing to kill his wife Rose and her friend Harry to avoid the dishonor and humiliation that being left by his wife will bring upon him. In Shem Bihar, Mootoo embodies a vulnerable, fragile, hollow, cowardly, and spoiled false masculinity which pretends superiority but cannot subsist without his wife’s performing her role of submission and devotion towards him.

Look here, you playing with your life if you think you going to make a fool out of me. You want to bring shame on us? You forget who have the police and the law on his side. You wouldn’t live a day to shame me, you hear? And that yard boy—no place is far enough for him to hide from the kind of people who loyal to me. Hear me good: I will not let you or him destroy my family name (297).

Shem Bihar deploys a vicious, calculating, and murderous masculinity; he stops at nothing to protect his honor. Rose’s only chance to escape her husband’s tyranny is to fake her death, and so she stages her drowning in the ocean. Only death could liberate her from her husband’s ownership and allow her to have a “fresh start” with her childhood friend Harry St. George. “Oh God, get help, Piyari, get help quickly. Oh God! A riptide.
Madam got caught in a riptide. She just went under. She hasn’t come back up” (300, 314). Eventually, Harry and Rose end up together, but not without a great deal of pain and danger.

In this brief examination of Mootoo’s work there is a consistent presence of the representation of men for whom the domination and control of the sexuality of women is directly proportional to the reputation and respectability of their manhood. However, the presence of independent Indian women who are in control of their sexuality is also evident in this fiction. The dilemmas of Mootoo’s female characters mentioned in this section are reminiscent of those of indentured Indian women, for just like their ancestors, these Indian women dangerously resist and fight “to maintain their relative degree of autonomy which in the last instance” is “in many ways wrested from them” in Mootoo’s fiction (Reddock, “Freedom Denied” 79).

**The Monster in Cereus Blooms at Night**

Although it is her first novel, it is in Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* that we find the condensation, and the most grotesque and violent representation of the monstrous masculinity which infuses her representation of the Indo-Caribbean male. Although Chandin Ramchandin’s behavior cannot be called anything but atrocious, we encounter in *Cereus Blooms at Night* a detailed historical background which helps the reader predict the sources and circumstances which trigger Chandin’s behavior. To begin with, Chandin grows up in the plantation barracks where his parents are laborers, and were historically sexual and physical violence was prevalent against Indian women, although this issue is not addressed in the narrative. Chandin “had been born just before [his parents] left India”, therefore the gender relations between his parents could presumably have mirrored
the traditional patriarchal expectations in India of women’s subordination to men (26). There is one instance in the narrative to support this view.

When Reverend Thoroughly arrives at the Chandin quarters in his “horse and buggy” to pay them a visit, Chandin’s mother “quickly [pulls] her orhanie over her head and nose and mouth, and [hurries] around to the front” (27). Women’s veiling is associated with their seclusion from other men, and shows female modesty and decorum, and it is done to uphold family honor, particularly that of men, by “desexualizing the female body and removing women from public view as objects of temptation for men” (Mohammed, “Gender Relations” 393-394). Growing up in a household where his mother was expected to uphold family honor through her behavior must have influenced Chandin’s view of the role of women in relation to men.

However, unlike his father, it is Chandin’s mother whose actions show resistance to the project of cultural domination by the whites. Thus, veiling can also be a strategy of subversion, and indirect resistance, and false subservience to authority. Another aspect of Chandin’s upbringing that is suspect is the way Chandin is viewed and treated by his father. When “old man Ramchandin” hears “the crunch of gravel and the ruckus of a horse and buggy maneuvering the dusty path” he wakes up from his daydreaming and faces: “The harsh reality of his two-room ajoupa quarters in the barracks. His two thin cows were yet to be tied up for the approaching night. He was exhausted. He could have told Chandin to tie up the cows but he considered the task too menial for the gold bead of his life” (27).

“Old man Ramchandin” wants something better for his son. He does not want his son to live the same life of servitude. He believes, therefore, that educating “Chandin out
of the fields” approximates his son to a Brahminical status which will in turn liberate him from “his inherited karmic destiny as a servant laborer” which the old man thought he could leave behind through “the long journey across two oceans” (26, 27). The fact that Chandin’s childhood and early adolescence are spent in the barracks where social and gender relations, and sexuality itself were expressed through violence can be seen as potential precursors of Chandin violent sexual behavior as an adult, which become complicated with adoption and relocation from the barracks and the deracination he undergoes through Presbyterianism.

Chandin Ramchandin is undeniably “a moral monster” in all the sense of the term (Foucault 81); he rapes both his pre-pubescent daughters after his wife Sarah abandons him to elope with her lover Lavinia. Pohpoh’s and Asha’s rapes take place within the illusory safety and privacy of their house. Yet, these are known facts to the complicit Indian community. Though aware Chandin has been raping his daughters for a long time, they do not come to Asha’s or Mala’s rescue. In fact, nor does Reverend Thoroughly and his Presbyterian followers, some of whom are members of Chandin’s Indian community. Mootoo points at the hypocrisy and narrow thinking of the community in the following quote:

Living had become a matter of habit for Chandin Ramchandin. He began his day as usual walking from house to house calling out, “Madam! Madam! Boss! You need help today?” He had learned to avoid some houses. Their inhabitants would come out wielding a broom, shouting to him to get away, that they did not want the likes of him around their children. While many shunned him there were those who took pity, for he was
once the much respected teacher of the Gospel, and such a man would take
to the bottle and to his own child, they reasoned, only if he suffered some
madness. And they further reasoned, what man would not suffer a rage
akin to insanity if his own wife, with a devilish mind of her own, left her
husband and children. Whether they disliked him or tolerated his exist-
ence, to everyone Chandin was Sir. (195)

The community in the novel blames Sarah and Lavinia for what has happened to
Pohpoh and Asha, and justifies Chandin’s behavior as a natural result of his humiliation.
Mootoo echoes the prevalent theme in the fiction of Indo-Caribbean women such as
Ramabai Espinet and Lakshmi Persaud among others, of the condemnation of complicit
silence which often accompanies sexual violence against women in the Caribbean.

In Persaud’s Raise the Lantern High, as a child Vasti Nadir witnesses the rape of
one of her schoolmates. “When I left childhood behind, the memory of the rape I had wit-
nessed became an invisible companion, bringing constant distress to my adult life. There
was no one with whom I could share this experience . . .” (3). In Espinet’s The Swinging
Bridge, Mona Singh witnesses how her uncle Baddall sexually assaults her mother. “I
hated Muddie for letting Uncle Baddall touch her. Would she tell Da-Da? She should tell
Da-Da, and he should curse Uncle Baddall upside down . . . But I knew that Muddie
would say nothing; nobody in our family ever said anything about anything” (38).

An early indication of Chandin’s progressive self-loathing is that he feels
ashamed by his mother’s presence when the Reverend arrives at his father’s quarters to
finalize his adoption. Chandin is mortified by “his mother, smelling of coals and charred
eggplant and a sweat that embarrasse[s] him with its pungency of heated mustard seed”
(Cereus 27). The rejection of his own mother marks the beginning of Chandin’s scorn towards all Indian, including women, and his eventual desire for a white woman, Lavinia.

After Chandin “left the barracks he was not inclined to return” and “he hardly saw his father but his mother went to church services at least once a week, especially to see him sitting up there in the front” (29). This must have been very difficult for her since Chandin sat in those occasions “right next to the Reverend’s wife” now Chandin’s adoptive mother (29). Seeing his mother at church makes Chandin hope his mother might embrace Christianity. However, “the few times he [goes] to the barracks to visit” Chandin realizes this will not be so. “When he [inquires] after the foot long brass crucifix the Reverend had given her to put above the doorway, she shyly [says] that she had wrapped it carefully in a clean white cloth and put it away” (30).

In contrast Chandin notices “the number of statues of Hindu gods and goddesses lining the walls [has] increased since his move to the Reverend’s house” which makes him realize his mother has “not really converted to Christianity” and that she never will (30, 31). So these episodes seal his alienation from his mother, a further distancing from the emotional life of Indo-Caribbean women.

During the last few times he visits his parents at the barracks the “faint cloud of pooja smoke” that usually permeates “his parents’ hair and clothes” while performing their “Hindu prayers”, revives Chandin’s repulsion towards his parents Indianness, and triggers the memory of “the odor of coals and spices that used to emanate from his mother’s body” and his embarrassment returns. Eventually, because of “his parents’ reluctance to embrace the smarter-looking, smarter-acting Reverend’s religion”, Chandin stops altogether visiting them (30). By completely severing his ties with his parents,
Chandin tries to establish an identity that is not hyphenated to Hinduism or his parents’ Indian identity, for his goal is to fully break away from his roots.

The Mission never acted as if they despised the language and culture of Indians. On the contrary, they made use of Hindi to approach the Indians in the first place; they translated parts of the Bible into Hindi, and turned Christian hymns into bhajans; they sought out parallels between Hinduism and Christianity as a way of making Christianity go down better. But the economic and social advantages of learning English and turning Christian, were obvious and strong, and once the bait was taken the Christian Indian found himself being pulled a little faster than he might have wanted to travel. (Ramchand, “Foreword” iii)

This subtle undermining of Hindu culture was perhaps more effective since the colonizing process happened under the guise of benevolence. Thus, Christian superiority becomes internalized, and Chandin comes face to face with the apparent “economic and social advantages of learning English and turning Christian” when he moves to the Thorougly’s house, with its “upholsterd” chairs and mesmerizing “chandeliers” with shimmering “leaf-shaped glass pendants”, and its “fine cabinets, carved chairs and side tables and lamps with fancy shades” (Ramchand, “Foreword” iii; Cereus 31). “In his innocence” Chandin seems to conflate “the Reverend’s faith” with the Reverend’s “taste” and economic status, and seems to think he will be able to achieve one through the other (31).

This is why Chandin sees “his people’s lack of these [material] things” as the “result of apathy and a poverty of ambition” on their part. Seemingly unaware that the posi-
tion of “his people” is predetermined by a colonial hierarchy in which Indian laborers occupy the last place and must remain there to secure the economic and racial status quo in Lantanacamara (*Cereus* 31). Thus, surrounded by the material lavishness of the Thor-oughly’s house, Chandi’s alienation from his origins increases, for he now feels an “immense distaste for his background and the people in it” which inevitably ends up being directed at himself for he cannot escape his Indianness, and the stereotypes that are read into his “darkly-brown Indian” body (32, 34).

**The Fact of Indianness**

In *The Fact of Blackness*, Fanon describes how his humanity is reduced to a body, an object dehumanized because of skin. A body which becomes a symbol of his race, his African ancestors, and the colonial discourse of savagery, hyper-sexuality, “cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships”, all constructed around the black body to dehumanize it (*Black Skin* 84-85). When the child in France exclaims: “Look, a Negro”, Fanon’s anguish comes foremost from not being recognized as a human being, but rather his body becomes a text upon which the child which ratifies his racist preconceptions: “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened! Frightened! Frightened!” (Fanon, *Black Skin* 84). Fanon’s experience of been objectified by the child’s gaze forces him to contemplate if not internalize how “the white man’s eyes” conceives him (83). In other words, Fanon is forced to see himself through the eyes of the white man.

“Look, a Negro!” It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.

“Look, a Negro!” It was true. It amused me.
“Look, a Negro!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.

“Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” Frightened! Frightened!
Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible. (Fanon, *Black Skin* 84)

Fanon had encountered racism after leaving Martinique to “join the Free French” to fight against the “Nazi occupation of France”, however the climax of his encounter with racism takes place in Lyon, France where he goes to study medicine and psychiatry in 1946 (Hill 93). *Black Skin, White Masks* was publish in Paris in 1952. The realization of how he was seen by white society in France manifested in the gaze of “the handsome little boy” forces Fanon to look at himself in the mirror and bring to terms his identity and self-perception with the racial identity imposed on him by the child’s frightened reaction towards him (*Black Skin* 86). “The handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother’s arms: Mama, the nigger’s going to eat me up” (86). Thus, Fanon is faced with reconsidering his dislocated identity which the racial objectification on his skin has caused, and forced to shoulder his own “body” that has been “given back to” him “sprawled out, distorted, recolored,” and “clad in mourning” in order to reconfigure himself (86).

Fanon knows the racist world he has encountered in France is not going to change anytime soon, rather the change must take place from within first. “I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from an *inborn complex*, to assert myself as a BLACK
MAN. Since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known” (*Black Skin* 87). Fanon knows he cannot escape his body, what is written on it, what other people read off it. However, he refuses to accept the way he is perceived by the white man, and therefore seeks: “to make [himself] known” which implies to remake himself in his own terms (87).

Just as Fanon is crushed by the othering, objectification, and negative response to his blackness, Chandin Ramchandin is crushed by the objecthood of his Indianness, which constructs him as an outsider to his society, as backwards, as a heathen who needs to be saved instead of being an evangelizing tool. A society in which his darkly-brown skin color and physiognomy makes him unsuitable to seek the affection of a white woman. Fanon’s experience in *The Fact of Blackness* shows the dislocation his identity undergoes when he is forced to see himself through “the white mans’ eyes” (*Black Skin* 83):

> And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man’s eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. (83)

However Fanon is successful in alleviating the weight of the “crushing objecthood” of being seen as “an object in the midst of other objects” because he seeks to reinvent himself out of the insanity of the colonial Manichean paradigm refusing to be “a prisoner of history” by “introducing invention into” his own “existence” which Fanon can
only do after accepting that “the fact of blackness” is permanently inscribed on his body, and out of that realization, a new identity can be born (Black Skin 179). However, Chandin is incapable escaping the “Manichean world of colonialism” and its oppositional binary of colonized and colonizer and remains in an identity limbo.

His “darkly-brown Indian” body tells him he is Indian, that he looks like “the other boys in his class and from the barracks in the fields” which he hatefully acknowledges but never accepts (Cereus 34). Instead of embracing his Indianness as Fanon embraces his blackness, Chandin falls prey to self-hatred and an impossible desire to efface the colonial indenture discourse which is written upon his “short and darkly brown Indian” body and his “blue-black hair” (34). Chandin begins “to hate his looks, the color of his skin, the texture of his hair” and “his accent”, all which he views as permanent obstacles to becoming recognized as a one of the Thoroughlys.

This racial self-loathing becomes another of the triggers that further dehumanize Chandin’s identity and unleash his sexual pathology. Desperate before his inability to escape his body, Chandin anxiously concentrates his efforts on changing “what he ha[s] the power to change” and begins to closely observe and imitate Reverend Thoroughly’s behavior and manners (34).

Chandin took note of the Reverend’s rigid, austere posture, so unlike his own father’s propensity to bend or twist or fold his body whichever way the dictates of comfort tipped him. He practiced sitting upright, with his back unswayed and his legs planted firmly on the ground or crossed severely at the knees. Other times he diligently studied and imitated the Reverend’s pensive stroking of his chin or tapping of his fingers against a
book. When he walked, even though he had, by the age of fourteen, reached his full height and was quite short, he made strides as wide as the towering Reverend’s, and he clasped his hands, similarly, in a little entwined knot behind his back. (Cereus 34)

Chandin not only tries to copy Reverend Thoroughly’s demeanor and behavior, but he also tries to command the same authority the Reverend projects. Thoroughly is a patriarch who dominates his wife, his daughter, his congregation and students at the seminary, and that is the aura Chandin also wants to cast. Chandin believes that doing so will allow him to earn the admiration, recognition, and respect that the Reverend is the object off. At the same time, Chandin’s desire to emulate Reverend Thoroughly is fueled by his fear that he might someday by “informed that he [is] to be sent back, a failure, to the cane fields, to live forever in the midst of his parent’s shame and disappointment” (36). Therefore, being up to the mark of Reverend Thoroughly and being in his favor is indispensable for Chandin.

Chandin went everywhere with his new family. When they travelled to other towns and held church meetings under tents, he sat on the stage among the other Wetlander missionaries and was often the center of attention. He was introduced as the Reverend’s son, and his story, already well known to every laborer, was expounded as a tangible benefit of conversion. (Cereus 30)

However, Chandin’s realization that he is always going to be an outsider to the white Presbyterian community he has been transplanted onto, starts to bitterly become
clear to him. Although “Chandin seemed to be well liked by the taller, fair, heavily ac-
cented men . . . he wondered constantly whether it was because he was the Reverend’s
adopted son . . . or because he was of the race that it was their mission to Christianize”
(38). Chandin’s isolation now that he has no contact with his parents at the barracks, con-
tinues to increase when he moves “into quarters at the seminary some miles away” from
the Thoroughly’s home (38).

Chandin was the only person of Indian descent at the seminary. He was in
fact the only non-white person there. He and seventeen other men lived to-
gether in the institutions dormitories. The others had all come from the
Shivering Northern Wetlands. (Cereus 38)

The fact of Chandin’s Indianness becomes particularly inescapable and burden-
some at the seminary where his non-white body is in direct contrast with the other seven-
ten white bodies. Chandin Ramchandin, cannot escape the unspoken message his “short
and darkly-brown” body blares out to anyone who looks at him. “I am my body, at least
wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is . . . a
provisional sketch of my total being” and the “Wetlanders” at the seminary do not go be-
yond the “provisional sketch” that his brown body provides, because for them Chandin
remains an outsider, and “other” to their whiteness (Merleau-Ponty 231).

Even after Chandin has “proven himself in school and in the seminary” and “cop-
ied their manners and dressed like them in the white shirts and trousers the Wetlanders
[consider] the height of tropical fashion”, the first response Chandin elicits of the students
at the seminary is that he is “the only non-white person there” from “the race that [is]
their mission to Christianize” (Cereus 34, 39, 38).
Chandin has been weathering the effects of his uprooting from his family, identity dislocation, and self-loathing for a long time. This building up loneliness and self-rejection is made worst when Reverend Thoroughly rejects Chandin as a possible suitor of his daughter Lavinia because Chandin is considered her stepbrother. “Look here. You are to be a brother to Lavinia and nothing more. A brother. She is your sister and you her brother . . . you must not have desire for your sister Lavinia” (Cereus 37). The Reverend’s argument that they are step-siblings and that it would be an abomination for Chandin to seek Lavinia’s affection, shatters his world, causes him physical and emotional pain.

After receiving the news and leaving the Reverend’s study, he stays “outside holding his stomach, which ha[s] turned into a hard knot. It cramp[s] unbearably and he [is] unable to stop an onslaught of hot tears” (37). Yet, Chandin concludes after his pain subsides that “his love for Lavinia would never die . . . He would hide it away so well that no one would be able to trace it” (38). And so time goes by, Chandin graduates from high school and the seminary, all along keeping his feelings for Lavinia bottled up.

Often they all congregated in the Thoroughly’s garden for tea or croquet, and Chandin watched them flutter around Lavinia. She flirted back good-naturedly but if she paid special attention to anyone, is was to him. He might have been honored yet he knew all too well that it was their supposed sibling relationship that brought her to him with giggles and little whispered confidences about this or that seminarian. (Cereus 39)
Chandin is now a man and believes he has accomplished a degree of prestige, respectability, and “whiteness . . . related to class” and “social standing” through his education and attending the seminary (Tate and Law 89). He is also convinced that he must once and for all make his feelings for Lavinia be known to her before “someone with more aplomb . . . step[s] in and steal[s] her away” (Cereus 39). So Chandin declares his love to her: “Lavinia, listen to me please. I think only of you. I have only ever thought of you. I must tell you that I love no one quite as much as I have always loved you” (41).

Lavinia’s response is clear and devastating: “No! No! No! This is ridiculous . . . Don’t speak a word of this to anyone, Chandin. Please. I disapprove and do not consent” (41). Shortly after their conversation, Lavinia and her parents leave for the “Shivering Northern Wetlands” to visit their relatives and Chandin spends the “holidays . . . miserably” alone (38, 42). Chandin’s feelings of rejection are further compounded when he realizes the Reverend has rejected him as Lavinia’s suitor because of his race, and not because he is her so-called step-brother.

When the Thoroughlys return from their trip to the “Wetlands”, Lavinia stays “on in the Wetlands” and shortly after Chandin learns that Lavinia is to be engaged to “a marvelous gentleman by every standard” who is “to inherit a rather large estate . . . a medical student” who is nevertheless her cousin “Fenton Thoroughly” (45, 48). The hypocrisy of the situation does not escape Chandin, who “uncaring . . . that his disappointment would be visible”, faces the Reverend and blurts: “Her cousin! She is in love with her cousin? I don’t understand” (44). The Reverend’s two-facedness generates in Chandin a profound resentment and distrust towards the person that until now had been his role model, and this further alienates Chandin from any sense of being part of any group, or of belonging
anywhere. Furthermore, the confirmation that being Indian is the obstacle that makes him unsuitable to deserve the right to court Lavinia becomes the penultimate trigger to his soon to arrive madness.

**The Indian Man and the White Woman**

When Chandin realizes Lavinia is out of his reach and that she is going to marry her white cousin “Fenton Thoroughly”, Chandin renounces to his dream of marrying her. However, Chandin has learned through his upbringing in the barracks and his observations of the Thoroughly’s household that marriage is part of being a man, and a wife is a necessary acquisition to have a respectable image. Before being rejected, for Chandin of the Reverend’s white daughter had been one of the “greatest . . . benefits” of “being the adopted son of the Reverend”, a benefit he felt authorized to take advantage off (*Cereus* 31). Nevertheless, Chandin marrying Lavinia would have been a very rare occurrence during the indenture and early post-indenture period in the novel. A period during which interracial marriages between Indian and African descent people were discouraged, not to mention an Indian man marrying a white Canadian woman, which would have been unthinkable.

I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white. Now—and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged—who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man.

I am a white man.

Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization. . . .
I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine. (Fanon, *Black Skin* 45)

However, since Chandin cannot have the woman of his dreams, he settles for the next best thing he can think off. “I too have been thinking about marriage. I wanted to ask your permission also” . . . “You?” the Reverend is surprised by Chandin’s request (*Cereus* 45).

“I, I, it’s time for me also, I have been thinking of Sarah. Sarah, you know Sarah.” Chandin wanted nothing more than to collapse in the security of a woman, a woman from his background, and Sarah was the most likely possibility” (45). Up to this point Chandin had been seeking security in Lavinia’s recognition of his worth as a man, and without it Chandin now feels vulnerable. Mootoo’s representation of Chandin as needing “to collapse in the security of a woman” hints at Chandin’s dependency on a woman’s admiration and approval for his self-worth (45).

Sarah had been the “only other girl in the school” and “the only person in the school whom Lavinia was close to” which made Chandin envious, and made him “wonder what attributes she had that he lacked” (32, 33). However, Chandin was not the only Indian boy attracted to Lavinia. The other Indian boys at the “mission school” were also “absorbed by her presence” but unlike Chandin, they “decided that a girl like her” with “fair skin” and “white hair” “would fall in love only with a boy like herself” and so they desist in trying to attract her attention. The other Indian boys at the mission schools do not despise themselves for Lavinia’s lack of interest in them, but Chandin does, which
makes him “hate his looks, the color of his skin” and makes him wish he was not himself (
*Cereus* 33).

Again I bring Fanon’s experience into the analysis of Chandin Ramchandin’s character because regardless of the pain resulting from colonial racism that Fanon conveys in *Black Skin, White Masks*, he does not turn against or wish to efface his blackness, but rather Fanon embraces it. Chandin does not embrace his Indianness but instead he lets the “flames of anger and self-loathing” consume him, and continues “to experience his being through others”, through the eyes of the white Presbyterians for whom he will always be an outsider (*Cereus* 33; *Black Skin* 82). And so Chandin marries Sarah, and they conceive two daughters Asha and Pohpoh.

However, Chandin is “a dispassionate husband to Sarah though he enjoy[s] observing his two daughters, albeit from a distance” (*Cereus* 49). Even though Chandin has a family and lives in his own “two-storey house” which he built in a “section of Paradise called Hill Side”, Chandin is irreversibly distraught and “feels impotent to reverse the path his life ha[s] taken” (49, 50). After his marriage to Sarah, “Chandin’s relationship with Reverend and Mrs. Thoroughly’s slowly change[s]” for he no longer idealizes them, and although Chandin continues to be “composed and diligent” while “performing his duties as Reverend Thoroughly’s interpreter and field assistant”, Chandin begins to sink into a deep disappointment, which develops into a smoldering regret, eventually turning into manic rage (49). “He often felt chained to both the church and the Thoroughly’s, and impotent to reverse the path his life had taken since the day the Reverend made that trip to his parent’s quarters” (49).
The uprooting from his native environment and the subsequent identity dislocation produced by it, together with the repeated rejections and feeling of being an outsider had taken a toll on Chandin’s mental health. The recent news that Lavinia’s engagement has been broken produces a “curdling cynicism” in Chandin. “As long as she stayed in the Wetlands”, Chandin thought, “he would be able to keep at bay his unquenchable desire for her and his ferocious hatred, not of her but of the effect she wielded” (Cereus 49). Chandin’s “unquenchable desire” is not driven by love but a state of dissatisfaction with his masculinity that can only be channeled through violence (49). Chandin claims his “ferocious hatred” is not directed at Lavinia herself, but it nevertheless is directed at the female power embodied in her sexuality which he is incapable of controlling (49).

Eventually, Lavinia returns to Lantanacamara after her prolonged stay at the Wetlands and her friendship with Sarah is rekindled. During her frequent visits to the Chandin’s house, Lavinia develops close ties with Sarah’s daughter Asha and Pohpoh. Chandin once again attempts to close the gap between him and Lavinia but she only spends “some token minutes with him” and when Chandin complains “to Sarah that Lavinia [is] losing interest in him even as his brother” Lavinia begins to avoid Chandin’s presence altogether (56).

As time goes by, Sarah and Lavinia fall in love and “they no longer [try] to conceal their closeness from Pohpoh and Asha” (56). Chandin becomes increasingly suspicious of the intimacy between his wife and Lavinia. One day at the beach while taking a picture of his family and Lavinia, Chandin notices how “Lavinia place[s] herself behind [Sarah], and he [sees Sarah] press herself against Lavinia. Through the lens [Chandin]
watche[s] carefully and [sees] Lavinia’s hands rest tenderly on [Sarah’s] waist” (*Cereus* 58).

Chandin confronts his wife Sarah about her affection towards Lavinia, and the two women “have no choice but to make a decision” and plan to elope and take the children with them overseas (59). “There were already two trunks atop the buggy, strapped down with thick leather belts” when Chandin unexpectedly returns to the house, walks “up the front stairs . . . across the verandah”, opens “the front door”, walks “through the drawing room” and notices “the pictures missing from the walls . . . that the curtains [are] drawn, that the house [is] uncommonly tidy” and Chandin realizes what is going on (63).

Mootoo embodies in Chandin’s character the vulnerable nature of an Indian masculinity which is forged upon the domination of women, and when unsuccessful can only resort to violence. Chandin might have undergone education and learned the teachings of Christianity, but these cannot erase his upbringing and growing up in the barracks out of which his “patriarchal male psyche” has been forged (Natarajan xvi). Thus, Chandin is not just an incestuous rapist, but he becomes a “*monstrum*”, in other words, "that which warns", “that which reveals," the burden that the inheritance of an Indian “patriarchal male psyche” becomes for him, and for Indian men in general (Cohen 4; Natarajan xvi).

The four of them Lavinia, Sarah and the two girls would have been gone when Chandin arrived, but Pohpoh had forgotten “her bag with all the seeds and the shells and the cereus cutting” and had gone back inside the house (*Cereus* 63). Pohpoh could not get out of the house in time, for Chandin got a hold of her. In the confusion that arose with “everyone shouting at once” Pohpoh could hear her sister Asha, who was still at the
buggy, calling for her: “No! No! No! Pohpoh! Pohpoh, Pohpoh. I want Pohpoh” and so Lavinia and Sarah release Asha and both girls are left behind with their father (63).

He stood on the verandah in his Wetlandish whites, and not until the sound of the horse and buggy had completely died out did he move. He kicked the banister again and again, first with his right foot, then with his left. He hobbled into the house. The two children huddled on the verandah floor, unsure and terrified. (Cereus 63)

Chandin’s monsterhood is graphed in different ways: one is his violent destruction of the domestic. Chandin’s response to the powerlessness he feels is to destroy the domain of the home which Sarah has abandoned. Chandin feels mocked by the contents of the house now that his wife is no longer secluded and controlled among them, so he destroys the kitchen sending its “pots and pans and cutlery crashing to the floor, clanging and spinning”, leaving “plates and cups and glasses shattered all over the kitchen floor” and then he moves “through the house smashing ornaments” and “into his bedroom, kicking and banging the walls” (64).

Then full of rage, Chandin “rifle[s] through the photographs, pitching some on the floor”, and “those of his wife or Lavinia Thoroughly he crumple[s] into a ball, then [spits] on, all the while crying and making growling sounds”, and then throws “the crumpled photographs into the kitchen sink” and sets them on fire (64). Chandin has lost complete control of the objects of desire that had barely held his manhood together until this point. Burning their pictures symbolizes and foreshadows the violent feelings he will have from now on towards women, expressed through sexual violence towards his daughters.
“The story of Chandin Ramchandin’s wife and Reverend and Mrs. Ernest Thor-
oughly’s daughter spread[s] across the island with the swiftness of a brush fire” and the
reputation and respectability of Chandin’s manhood is forever tainted (Cereus 64). Chan-
din takes “up the bottle” and never returns to “the school house or the church again” (65).
Chandin’s alienation had begun after leaving the barracks, and had progressively in-
creased while living with the Thoroughlys, then moving into the seminary quarters as
“the only non-white person” (38).

But now that the Thoroughlys “mortified” by the scandal had “let go of their ties
to him”, and Sarah and Lavinia, were gone, Chandin becomes utterly alienated from the
entire Lantancamaran community and “expecting one or both” Lavinia or Sarah to “re-
turn to try and nab the children”, he “fence[s] off his house crudely with chicken wire and
stay[s] indoors” with his daughters whom he does not leave “out of his sight” (65). At
this stage of Chandin’s dehumanized identity, women, particularly his daughters, become
just bodies, just sexual objects he can possess. Natarajan describes “three kinds of public
violence” towards 21st century Indian women in which “rape” is used “as a weapon”; one
of them is violating the “body of women to assert . . . power” or in Chandin’s case, to
give vent to his powerlessness in an Indian community which sanctions the degradation
of Indian women and looks the other way (xii).

One night he turned, his back to Asha, and in a fitful, nightmarish sleep,
mistook Pohpoh for Sarah. He put his arms around her and slowly began
to touch her. Pohpoh opened her eyes. Frightened and confused by this
strange, insistent probing, she barely breathed, pretending to be fast
asleep. She tried to shrink away from under his hand. Suddenly, awakening fully, he sat up. Then he brought his body heavily on top of hers and slammed his hand over her mouth. She opened her eyes and stared back at him in terror. A sweat covered his face and neck, and dripped on her. Glaring and breathing heavily like a mad dog, he pinned her hands to the bed and forced her legs apart. (*Cereus* 65-66)

Chandin has become a “mad dog” breathing heavily on top of his daughter, forcing her “legs apart”, he has now degenerated into an incestuous rapist, a monster (66). The horror and monstrosity of Chandin’s behavior intensifies when it becomes clear that raping his daughters is not an isolated incident, but an atrocity that becomes routine. “The following night he sent the two children to sleep in their own room, but they both came to know that he would call for one or the other to pass at least part of the night in his bed” (66).

Chandin’s vicious behavior can be seen in part as the result of the trauma of his repeated rejections and self-loathing. Yet, Chandin’s inability to reconfigure his manhood by accepting that Sarah and Lavinia are entitled to free will, and that they have the right to choose a different course of action which does not include him is one of the sources of his monstrosity. His inability to go beyond the Indian “patriarchal male psyche” which dominates his identity leaves rape as the only badge of honor he has left (Natarajan xvi). Chandin appropriates his daughters:

[Does] not let them out of his sight. He [stands] guard as they [shower] in the outdoor bathroom. He [waits] for them not far from the latrine. For the
first few weeks after the shattering of his world, he [sleeps] in his bed with a child on either side. *(Cereus 65)*

In his the madness, keeping his daughters as sex-objects gives Chandin a horrible sense of power and control, and allows him a measure of revenge against Lavinia and Sarah. Since they were first raped by Chandin, Mala (Pohpoh) has tried to protect her sister Asha from further attacks by being the one who goes to her father’s bed at night..

She pulled Asha closer to her and squeezed her, trying to save her by obliterating her” . . . ‘Asha’, he called out from the drawing room” . . .

‘Stay!’ Pohpoh snapped. ‘Don’t move. I’ll go. Shhh, he too drunk. He’ll never know the difference. Go to sleep. You close your eyes and go to sleep, Asha baby. Nothing will happen to you, I promise. *(67)*

Eventually, Asha “run[s] away from home when she is in her late teens” and “never returns home again” *(193)*. Many years go by and Mala continues to be trapped in the role of the dominated wife that Chandin Ramchandin’s depraved manhood craves, and she continues playing the role of a housewife tending to the home, cooking, and washing Chandin’s clothes *(193)*. Naturally, the question arises of why does Mala Ramchandin remain under the same roof with her father instead of trying to escape his denigrating abuse? There are several possible reasons why she has remained with her father for all these years.

In the first place her father is extremely violent, but more important Mala had become a victim of physical and sexual violence at a very young age which resulted in her isolation and consequent dependence on Chandin. Furthermore, to whom would Mala ask for help in an Indian community which “took pity” of Chandin Ramchandin “for what
man would not suffer a rage akin to insanity if his own wife, with a devilish mind of her own, left her husband and children” which they reasoned justified Chandin’s behavior? (Cereus 195).

It was clear to Mala that “her father was still a menace and tyrant. Everyone knew that” and “she wondered if Ambrose had ever figured out that her father pretended she was the wife who had many years ago run out on him” (196). Ambrose was Mala’s childhood friend, “the closest friend she ever had,” and he “was returning to town” after studying abroad in the “Shivering Northern Wetlands” (192). When they were children Mala had allowed Ambrose to touch “her body” and “kiss her mouth” and now that they were adults and had found each other again, they would again in time come close to each other (193). Jealousy, one of the stereotypical characteristics colonial discourse branded on Indian men in the plantations, brings out in Chandin a murderous anger.

That night Mala complied with Chandin Ramchandin’s expectations that she lie down with him. She let him more easily than ordinarily lay his coarse hands on her belly, for she was in possession of a joy and hope that allowed her to block the whole thing out. She thought of Ambrose . . .

(Cereus 194)

One fateful day, Chandin returns home with his head full of rum and sees Ambrose descending the stairs at the end of “the longest day Ambrose had spent with Mala since his return to Latanacamara” (219). “What the ass . . .?” he mumbled. A man tiefing my baby? He brave to even try. I ent go let nobody tief my woman again. I go kill he, if it come to that. I go kill meself too. I sharpenin’ cutlass tonight” (220). Chandin’s violent reaction and the way he “move[s] through the kitchen like a hurricane” revives Mala’s
memory “of her father when he discovered her mother gone” but this time the violence is directed at her (Cereus 221). “Please, Papa, please don’t hurt me, don’t hurt me. I beg forgiveness. Have mercy, Papa” (221). But instead he pushes her “to the sink” and shoves “her face down into the basin” and rapes her (221).

He yanked out his penis, hardened weapon-like by anger. He used his knees to pry her legs open and his feet to kick and keep them apart. With his large fat fingers he parted her buttocks as she sobbed and whispered, ‘Have mercy, Lord, I beg, I beg’, He rammed himself in and out of her. He reached around and squeezed her breasts, frantically pumping them to mimic the violent thrusting of his penis (221).

Chandin Ramchandin’s body is rendered monstrous, “weapon-like”, hardened by anger, however, this brutal violence is propelled by Chandin’s deep rooted sense of vulnerability and insecurity. The trauma of rejection he felt when Lavinia and Sarah left is renewed by Ambrose’s presence, but foremost what triggers Chandin’s violence is that if Mala is taken away from him, he will no longer have in his possession sex-object that renders him a man. Often, a rapist is seen as a heartless monster, and as a criminal rather than an emotionally and psychologically unstable person. “Rape is, in fact, not an expression of sexual desire as much as it is an expression of other, nonsexual needs. Rape is never the result simply of sexual arousal that has no other opportunity for gratification” but instead rape is a reflection of the perpetrator’s “psychological dysfunction” (Groth 5).

The rapist is, in fact, a person who has serious psychological difficulties which handicap him in his relationships to other people and which he discharges, when he is under stress, through sexual acting-out. His most
prominent defect is the absence of any close, emotionally intimate relationship with other persons, male or female. He shows little capacity for warmth, trust, compassion, or empathy, and his relationships with others are devoid of mutuality, reciprocity, and a genuine sense of sharing.

(Groth 6)

Against all odds, Mala survives night after night making “sure her father ha[s] succumbed completely to the sleep of his cheap alcohol” to then remove “his thick hand from her belly” and slip “out of bed”? (Cereus 194). In order not to become insane Mala must dissociate herself from her body and compartmentalize her identity into an older Mala and a young Pohpoh. “Mala wished that she could go back in time and be a friend to this Pohpoh. She would storm into the house and, with one flick of her wrists, banish her father into a pit of pain and suffering from which there would be no escape” (142). Nevertheless, wishing is not enough, and the repeated physical and sexual abuse, drives Mala Ramchandin to the brink of insanity, forcing her to escape to an alternative reality.

The “protracted period of sexual and physical abuse at the hands of her father” traumatizes Mala Ramchandin in a profound way and eventually drives her to attack and kill her father when he threatens to hurt Ambrose, the only man she has truly and fully ever been a woman with. “When they were in school together they had been inseparable, and he was the only one of the male species—besides Chandin Ramchandin, her father—who had ever touched her body, kissed her mouth” (193). Chandin believes he has been the only one to be intimate with his daughter and when he returns from the rum shop to find Ambrose in the house with his daughter, “Chandin grasps[s] the handle of a cleaver
firmly with his hands and lift[s] it high above his head, arcing his body back for leverage” as “Ambrose scuttle[s] backwards in disbelief” (Cereus 227). Having lost her sister Asha, her mother Sarah, and her aunt Lavinia so long ago, she cannot afford now to lose the last person capable of imparting a sense of dignity into her life, so Mala attacks her father.

She lunged forward, grabbed Chandin by the knees and with a might that frightened even Ambrose, jerked his feet out from under him. Chandin fell on his back, still holding the cleaver. Mala dived across the floor, seized the handle and struggled to wrench it from her Reverend’s hand. He clenched her hair at the top of her head, tightened his fist and pulled and pulled . . . Mala’s fury was so uncontrollable she didn’t notice her hair being ripped out. She forced her face toward the hand holding the cleaver and sunk her teeth deep into Chandin’s wrist. Chandin released his grip on her hair and curled his body in sudden agony. Mala had drawn blood.

(227)

For the first time in the narrative Mala defends herself in a violent manner. In the past she had succumbed to her father’s physical and emotional abuse but when Chandin threatens to kill Ambrose, who represents the only glimpse at womanhood she has ever had, Mala is no longer able to hold back the accumulated hurt of all those years of abuse. Consequently, Mala’s logical response is, for once and for all, to eliminate the deadly threat she has been living with since childhood. In the process Ambrose had “yanked open the door” which had “hit Chandin’s head with enough force to stupefy him” (229). After panic stricken Ambrose leaves Mala alone with her father in the house, Mala takes
“a deep breath and pushe[s] with all her power. The door hit[s] Chandin’s head and [swings] back shut. She [takes] a deep breath and repeat[s] the act until she [is] ex-hausted” (Cereus 229). After Mala drags the motionless body of her father into “the sew-ing room” she locks the door and leans “against it with relief” (229). Nevertheless, she has lost Ambrose who she will not see until decades later when she is admitted at “the alms house in Paradise” (229). Soon after her father’s death and Ambrose’s disappear-ance from her life, Mala retreats into the shelter and sanctuary of silence and a close com-munion with nature.

Chandin Ramchandin’s hideous behavior leaves the reader little or no space for compassion towards him. There is no justification for the dreadful acts Mala’s father has perpetrated against both his daughters. But it is advisable to view Shani Mootoo’s, Chand-in, not only as a single character, but as a symbol and representation of the toxic aspects of the Indian masculinities that resulted from the inheritance of an Indian patriarchal psyche combined with the pathological effects of British colonialism in India, and migration to and indenture in the Caribbean which Chandin Ramchandin’s ancestors and himself undergo in Cereus Blooms at Night.

Most mental disorders are a result of multiple factors such as biological, psycho-logical, environmental, and cultural factors, rather than resulting from one single factor. Issues such as Chandin’s ethnic self-hatred, the separation from his parents during his unrealized adolescence, his educational and religious indoctrination, the social, psycho-logical, moral, and intellectual rejection carried out by his adoptive father Reverend Thoroughly, and Sarah’s and Lavinia’s romantic rejections, all converge and influence Chandin’s degradation into an incestuous monster.
However, the single most decisive element producing Chandin’s monstrosity is his inability to decolonize his mind and identity, and to refashion his emasculated manhood without replicating the violence inherent in colonialism. Instead, Chandin’s mechanism of defense is to enact a toxic, hyper-masculinity which degenerates into monstrosity. The objectification he has undergone as an Indian specimen used in Reverend Thoroughly’s proselytizing experiment dehumanizes him. In turn, his daughters Mala and Asha become physical objects upon which he takes revenge against Sarah, Lavinia, Reverend Thoroughly, and himself.

Uprooted, displaced, and dissociated from any desire to renegotiate his identity, “living [becomes] a matter of habit for Chandin Ramchandin” and rape and drinking rum the only way to soothe the alienation that makes him rage (Cereus 195). Even more, Chandin is unable to understand why Reverend Thoroughly rejects him after he has re-fashioned himself in the image of the Reverend. It is clear that Chandin has difficulty understanding the fixity of racism, and mutually exclusiveness of the worlds of the colonized and colonizer which dominates the colonial society he is enmeshed in. A lack of understanding which allows Chandin to entertain the illusion that he can be considered an equal to the colonizer, to the Thoroughlys and the white Presbyterian society they belong to.

Fanon is firm in his belief that being “sealed away in the materialized Tower of the Past” is to remain alienated: “In no way do I have to dedicate myself to reviving a black civilization unjustly ignored. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to sing the past to the detriment of my present and my future” (Black Skin 176). However, Fanon’s intention is not to efface his past for he has acknowledged the colonial
subject position imposed on him which degrades his skin, and which in turn he rejects in order to construct his own identity in his own terms. Perhaps Chandin Ramchandin’s greatest mistake is that he does not realize that “dignity is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilization: it is not about assuming the attitudes of the master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table” (Sardar, Foreword 2008 ed. Black Skin). Dignity is accomplished through the painful process of recognizing one’s colonial legacy and subjectivity in order to undergo the difficult process of deconstructing and re-fashioning it.

**A Redeemed Masculinity in Shani Motoo’s Cereus Blooms at Night**

Patricia Powell writes that “patriarchy has not only eclipsed the feminine from the masculine, leaving men severely imbalanced, but it has also deprived women of their unique voice and strength and courage and power” (3). In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mootoo illustrates how Chandin Ramchandin’s frustrated manhood becomes monstrous because it is founded and dependent on the colonial legacy of dispossession, domination, and control. When Chandin is unable to fulfill the domination and control of his sexual objects, Lavinia and Sarah, which could have brought respectability to his masculinity, rape becomes his tool to assert power.

However, in *Cereus Blooms at Night* Mootoo redeems Indian masculinity by representing in Nurse Tyler’s character a manhood that is not self-serving through domination and control of others, but rather a manhood which is driven by a desire to serve others, and not to possess but to understand others (*Cereus* 11). When Tyler meets Mala Ramchandin “the urge to touch her” overcomes him; “this one touch turned her from the incarnation of fearful tales into a living human being, an elderly person such as those I
had dedicated my life to serving” (11). Unlike Chandin’s groping of Mala’s which brutalizes and objectifies her body, when Tyler’s touches Mala’s body he restores her humanity.

Tyler, “the only Lantanacamaran man ever to have trained in the profession of nursing . . . in the Northern Shivering Wetlands” is an outsider to the Paradise community (Mootoo 6). His masculinity is considered unconventional, deviant, and in some cases repugnant, by the nurses and male workers at “the alms house in Paradise” (Cereus 8).

I was assigned—only once, thankfully—to assist Toby with fixing a leak on the roof. (I will refrain from dwelling on the verbal rocks he tossed in my direction and say only that he made no effort to hide disdain for my ways. At the end of the ordeal he told me plainly that he was going to leave the job if he was ever put to work with this pansy again.) (10)

There is an inherent difference between Chandin’s and Tyler’s manhood, and it is not their sexuality. For Chandin his manhood is dependent on extrinsic feedback, the source of its respectability and reputation originates from the outside, primarily by being accepted as a member of the “Shivering Northern Wetlands” missionary community, and to be viewed as a peer and not as one “of the race that it was their mission to Christianize” (Cereus 38). Chandin not only wants to eat at the master’s table, he wants to be indistinguishable from the master.

On the other hand, Tyler’s masculinity, which has nothing to do with his sexual preference, although it becomes devalued because of it, is driven by an intrinsic force, by his desire to serve and understand others, “to make at least one old person smile or feel that she or he [is] of some value” (Cereus 6). Tyler is familiar with rejection, he knows
what “being an outsider” is all about (6). His sexuality is viewed as monstrous and his masculinity is devalued as feminine. Therefore, Tyler knows he will not receive approval or acceptance from the Paradise community, nor does he expect it. However, Tyler does not become bitter or violent like Chandin. Instead of looking for recognition or approval from others as Chandin does, Tyler looks within himself, rather than without, for the essence to build his dignity and self-esteem.

But, eh-heh, Mr. Tyler! Where you going dress up so?”

“You are referring to the addition of my neckerchief?”

“Eh-heh!” And she turned to the others and said, “But it’s nice, eh? You really know how to look good. What material is it?”

“It is nothing fancy, just a light cotton’ kerchief against the cold.”

“But it suit you well. It is a nice color! I will have to consult you sometime, yes!”

They nodded among themselves, making additional comments, all in the same condescending tone. (Cereus 15)

Tyler has been experiencing this kind of treatment since he was a child. At the age of 10 he “heard the name Chandin Ramchandin” for “the first time” when Nana, his grandmother, told him Chadin’s story in an attempt to answer a question he asked her: “Nana, can your Pappy be your Pappy and your Grandpappy at the same time? (Cereus 24-25). It is at this point in the narrative that Mootoo intertwines Chandin’s and Tyler’s stories, and that as a 10 year old child, Tyler begins to question if his masculinity and sexuality are a perversion:
Over the years I pondered the gender and sex roles that seemed available to people, and the rules that went with them. After much reflection I have come to discern that my desire to leave the shores of Lantanacamara had much to do with wanting to study abroad, but far more with wanting to be somewhere where my “perversion”, which I tried diligently as I could to shake, might be either invisible or of no consequence to people . . . I was preoccupied with trying to understand what was natural and what perverse, and who said so and why. Chandin Ramchandin played a part in confusing me about these roles, for it was a long time before I could differentiate his perversion and what others called mine. (Cereus 48)

Both Chandin’s and Tyler’s masculinities are viewed as deviant by the Lantanacamara community, however it is Tyler’s masculinity and his sexuality which are viewed as abominable while Chandin’s sexually predatory behavior is justified. Through her representation of Chandin and Tyler’s masculinities, Mootoo critiques the hypocrisy of a society which accepts Chandin’s heterosexuality even when he is an incestuous rapist, while it demonizes Tyler’s homosexuality. Tyler’s grandmother “Cigarette smoking Nana” views her “Peculiar Grandson” Tyler as “not turning out to be boyly enough for her church-going satisfaction” and it takes Tyler a long time to “differentiate between [Chandin’s] perversion and what others called [his]” (24, 48). Mootoo questions which of these two masculinities is really the one perverted.

Chandin Ramchandin’s heterosexual masculinity which views his daughters, particularly Mala, as chattel, when he exclaims “no man, no woman, no damn body go tief
me property again” when he realizes Ambrose and Mala are in love (*Cereus* 220). OrTyler’s masculinity which is also viewed as monstrous and aberrant by the Christian community and by the nurses and workers at the “alms house in Paradise”, but who actually presents us with an alternative way of being a man, without the need to dominate, possess, or control others, and without a pathological need of external recognition to have self-esteem (8).

We may conclude that any sexuality, any masculinity, and any femininity can be perverse and violent when it is driven, constructed, a defined upon the possession, control, and domination of another human being’s body, mind, and sexuality. In *Cereus Blooms at Night* it is the colonial norm of patriarchal heterosexuality which is psychically monstrous leading to a real monstrosity in those victimized by it.
Deviation, Convention, and Suicide in Ryhaan Shah’s A Silent Life

The shaping of post-indenture Indian communities in Guyana and Trinidad was accomplished through the reconfiguration and reinstitution of two of the cornerstones of Indian-culture, the family and marriage which are guiding institutions for the Indian-Muslims in A Silent Life. This chapter focuses on the hegemonic and patriarchal nature of gender role-expectations in the Indian-Muslim community in Ryhaan Shah’s A Silent Life, and the detrimental effects it has on the identities of Nazeer Mohammed Raheem and his wife Nani Hassan.

Throughout this study I look at violent, toxic, and sometimes monstrous manifestations and mutations of Indo-Caribbean masculinities and the historical events that have produced them. I view the hegemonic social environment of the post-indenture Indian communities which were established in Trinidad and Guyana, as social arenas within which violent and oppressive masculinities were reproduced because patriarchy and the domination of women were expected of men in such communities, while in a parallel fashion Indian women were expected to complement the reconstitution of patriarchy with a submissive femininity.

Patricia Mohammed offers a useful theoretical framework in Gender Negotiations Among Indians in Trinidad 1917-1947 which can be used as a lens to analyze gender-role expectations in A Silent Life. “What essentially took place in the resettlement of a community of Indians in Trinidad was a negotiation between Indian men and women of a new set of gender arrangements, and thus a negotiation with patriarchy itself” (12). In Mohammed’s theoretical account Indian women had an active participation in the
decision making process of the roles men and women were to perform in these budding Indian communities.

Women were not indifferent to the re-establishment of their familiar culture. They colluded with men to a large extent, building institutions and re-establishing norms which appeared to other groups in the society to be particularly oppressive to themselves. For instance, child marriages were arranged by both parents, mothers-in-law controlled their daughters-in-law, and sons were still given the best opportunities for advancement in the family. (Gender Negotiations 12)

Central to these “gender negotiations” between Indian men and women was the clear definition and enforcement of “the roles allocated to each sex” which were considered “important to [the] survival of the ethnic group” in societies of competing racial groups like Guyana and Trinidad (9). Therefore, “the home, the village, the community - the space allocated to women, became an important focus of Indian cultural activity and the redefinition of an Indian culture” as well as an effort “to re-establish a system of sexual power relations which clearly reinforced the traditional patriarchal order – male dominance and female subservience” (11, 80). As it will be seen, in A Silent Life Baby Hassan and her husband Mohammed Raheem Nazeer transgress the gender roles allocated to them, which threatens the identity of their community, and results in backlash against them.

The Indian Muslim Community in Ryhaan Shaah’s A Silent Life

In their 2008 essay: 170th Anniversary of the Arrival of the First East Indian Muslims in British Guiana, Chickrie and Khanam mention that: “With the exception of
two articles published by R. Chickrie, "Muslims in Guyana" (1999) and "The Afghan Muslims of Guyana and Suriname" (2003), very little has been written on Guyanese Muslims” however in 2016, Chickrie and Khanam published their essay: *Hindustani Muslims in Guyana: Tradition Conflict and Change, 1838 to the Present*, which is included in the book *Indentured Muslims in the Diaspora* edited by Hassankhan, Vahed, and Roopnarine.

Chickrie and Khanan also establish that the “historical analyses” about Indian indenture in Guyana (“170th Anniversary” 127):

> Have tended to treat all East Indian immigrant workers. . . broadly as a homogeneous group, that is, as East Indian Hindus, and have neglected to distinguish East Indians on the basis of their religions” and the fact that “East Indian Muslims. . . were among the initial recruits brought to British Guiana. (127)

Chickrie and Khanam show that “the first Hindustani Muslims” to arrive in Guyana where among “the first batch of 424 East Indian indentured servants” whom “arrived in the Whitby (with 267 passengers) and the Hesperus (with 157) on May 5, 1838” (“Hindustani Muslims” 109). Inspection of “the two ships’ logs” by the authors reveals that “more than 90 passengers, or 21 percent, were Muslim” (Chickrie and Khanam, "Hindustani Muslims” 109). Trinidadian scholar Patricia Mohammed observes that “the Muslim migrants who came from India to the Caribbean practiced a tradition of Islam syncretized in part with aspects of Hindu culture” (*Caribbean Religions* 395).

Mohammed, who “was born into a Muslim household” and was “educated in Muslim primary schools until the age of ten” and “for a large part” of her “youthful
life . . . interacted with Islam” while growing up in Trinidad explains that Islam during 18th and 19th century India constructed women as “incapable and unfit for public duties” and that all aspects of women’s sexuality needed to be controlled. This view Mohammed argues, (Caribbean Religions 395):

Supported the practice of purdah in which women were kept in seclusion, separate and apart from men, and out of the reach of the public gaze. All of their movements and activities, before and after marriage, were constantly monitored. (395)

However, Chickrie and Khanam report that “the Muslim family did not practice purdah in Guyana;” for the “living conditions” in the barracks did not allow privacy, and “Muslim women toiling on the plantations had no choice but to share common working space with men” (“Hindustani Muslims” pp. 117-118). Indian men’s inability to enforce the basic purdah tenets of segregation, seclusion, and control of women’s sexuality in the plantations resulted in a great deal of violence against Indian women. In 1930’s “Trinidad, the majority” of men “especially the religious leaders who were Brahmins, promoted the Brahminic ideologies regarding women, that of purdah and seclusion, limited access to education, child marriage and so on” (Mohammed, Gender Negotiations 1, 23, 90). Mohammed also describes post-indenture “gender relations within the Muslim community” in the Caribbean as follows (Caribbean Religions 393):

Patriarchy was reasserted in the establishment of the village panchayats (council of five elders), where imams (Islamic community leaders) acted as the makers and enforcers of law along with pundits (Hindu community) . . . Ethnic and cultural similarities among all Indians in the
Caribbean provided a common base for them, and notions of gender were widely shared by both Hindu and Muslim Indians. (394)

Gaiutra Bahadur indicates that “as late as 1950, 44 percent of Indians in Guyana still lived in plantations” as opposed to Trinidad where “half had moved off them by 1890” (Coolie Woman 206). Furthermore, Bahadur reports that in Guyana:

The patriarchal institutions restored with the shift from the plantation included child and arranged marriages; the joint family, with daughters-in-law the lowest in the hierarchy of extended relatives living together; temples and mosques; and the panchayat or council of (male) village elders. (206)

However, the process of reinstating the “patriarchal institutions” within Indian villages in Guyana which Bahadur enumerates above probably began before “the shift from the plantation” (Coolie Woman 206). Garner asserts that by 1881, there was “an Indian agro-proletariat” in Guyana, of which 32% already resided in villages (Guyana 1838-1985 59).

By 1881, the 81,000 Indo-Guyanese were distributed as follows: 52,418 (64.7 per cent) on the plantations, 25,923 (32 per cent) in villages, and 2,588 (3.3 per cent) in towns. The urbanization of the Indo-Guyanese was slow but steady over the second half of the nineteenth century, with six per cent resident in towns by 1891 (see table 2). The majority of urban Indians were traders, shop owners, hucksters or professionals. Those working on the estates comprised an ‘agro-proletariat’, while those who
had left them to pursue farming made up a rice-growing peasantry also providing vegetables for the local market. (Garner, ch.3)

Odeen Ishmael reports that “in 1885 the Government appointed a Commission headed by the Attorney General, J. W. Carrington, to determine how a land settlement scheme could be established for Indians” in Guyana “in compensation for their return passages to India” (272). “In 1898 . . . an abandoned sugar plantation on the west bank of the Mahaica River, . . . the Helena” had “1,206 persons . . . in possession of land in the settlement” (Ishmael 272). Followed by the “Whim settlement . . . in September 1899” with “574 persons” living in the settlement, and “a third settlement . . . was established at Bush Lot in West Berbice” (Ishmael 273).

This Indian labor force, composed of urban Indians, and particularly those living on the plantations and the villages, became a “force “of “activism” and “resistance” for whom labor strikes were “a means of expression” (Garner ch. 3). The “Man Power Citizens' Association (MPCA)” union “led by Ayube Mohamed Edun” which was the “first organized leadership for the sugar workers” in Guyana was established in 1937 (Ishmael 353). “Eleanor Sewdin who was vice-president” of the MPCA “in 1939 and treasurer in 1940 . . . was the first woman to hold such a high position in a national labor organization” in Guyana (354).

The latter historical background of gender relations, Indian activism, and the emergence of the labor movement which rose during the post-indenture period in Guyana permeates the first part of the narrative in A Silent Life and the life of Shah’s characters Nazeer Mohammed Raheem and his wife Nani Hassan. In her analysis of the “jahaji-bhain principle as a socio-political praxis” Pirbhai argues that Shah, “does not overtly
model the character of Nani on any singular figure in history, but Nani’s involvement in the labor movement of this period can be said to have a historical corollary in Nelly Sudeen” which presumably is the same person as Eleanor Sewdin (Pirbhai, “Recasting” 38, 39; Ishmael 106). Moreover, Pirbhai describes Shah’s A Silent Life as a text which:

Stands out for its singular representation of the jahaji-bhain’s history of grassroots activism in the post-indenture period. “A Silent Life” Pirbhai adds, “is not only the first work by a Guyanese woman writer to provide a Muslim female perspective but also to focus on an older generation of women’s contributions to agricultural labor reform. (“Recasting” 39)

Shah also represents in A Silent Life the strict nature of male-dominated Muslim Indian communities during this period in Guyana and voices the “Muslim female perspective” of the obstacles within a panchayat ruled society these women had to overcome in order to contribute to the “agricultural labor reform” of the time, for which as Baby Hassan does, they probably paid a high price (Pirbhai, Critical Perspectives 39).

**Baby Hassan: the Sadarine**

Baby’s and Nazeer’s tragic lives in A Silent Life take place roughly between 1917-1947, when as Mohammed argues “the resettlement of a community of Indians in Trinidad” and Guyana was accomplished through “a negotiation between Indian men and women of a new set of gender arrangements, and thus a negotiation with patriarchy itself” in which the subordination of women and their relegation to the domestic sphere of the home were emphasized (Gender Negotiations 12). Therefore, in theory, the limited agency the period of indenture afforded Indian women through their ability to earn wages and be more mobile and independent, is heavily overturned by the establishment of these
patriarchal communities. The backlash Baby Hassan experiences while engaged in her grass-roots activities can be read in the context of this post-indenture process of Indian community “resettlement” (Mohammed, *Gender Negotiations* 12).

Baby Hassan’s agency and leadership closely resembles the *sadarines* active in Berbice, Guyana plantations and community between 1838-1920 (Roopnarine, “East Indian Women” 173). Lomarsh Roopnarine’s research demonstrates that Indian women had “leadership roles” during their “indentured servitude in British Guiana” and that their contributions were crucial to labor management in the plantations and social cohesion in Indian communities (174).

Like Indian men, Indian women were also placed into their own weeding gang or category on the plantations, and even though their supervisors were men, women held intermediary leadership positions. Indian women were *sadarines* or headwomen on the plantations. These women became *sadarines* not because of high caste status but because of their experience and skills relating to plantation labor. They were most likely to have finished at least five years of indentured servitude and had learned the fundamentals of indenture. These female leaders certainly knew how to read and write (Hindi and English) since these were prerequisites for intermediary positions of leadership during indenture. They used these skills to communicate and interact with their European supervisors and other indentured women under their command.
The sadarines were essentially go-betweens, and their leadership responsibilities revolved around service rather than eloquence. (“East Indian Women” 180)

In Guyana the end of indenture “spurred East Indian resettlement to the rural areas and the purchase of cultivatable land” in order to get “away from the estates to create their own independent settlements” particularly for rice cultivation (Solowsky 46). In A Silent Life, Baby Hassan, plays the role of a sadarine, who knows how to read and write, and works as an intermediary between her community and the plantation owners (180). Roopnarine adds that “the reputation of the sadarines was also recognized and used in other leadership roles not directly related to plantation work. The sadarines were also community leaders dealing with and assisting in financial matters” (181).

Baby promises to help a woman with “four children” whom she has to mind now” that her husband has “dropped dead” (A Silent 183). Baby agrees to speak to “Massah Jessop” the manager and ask for financial help until the widow can go back to work: “I knew you would help me out, Sister Baby. You are a good woman. God bless you” (184). But this is the last act of kindness Baby does for her community before tragedy upends her life.

**Theoretical Tools of Analysis**

The following section discusses the analytical lenses I use to read A Silent Life. My focus is on how Nazeer Mohammed Raheem and his wife Nani Hassan, as well as Nani’s granddaughter Aleyah pay a high price for challenging “the traditional patriarchal order—male dominance and female subservience” which governs their community (Mohammed, Gender Negotiations 11). There is an obvious exercise of “collusion”
between men and women, as well as between men, and between women to make sure that members of their Indian-Muslim community perform the hegemonic gender roles expected of them (11).

For R. W. Connell hegemonic masculinity “is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same” but “rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable” (Connell, Masculinities 76). In A Silent Life patriarchal masculinity “occupies the hegemonic position” of gender relations and it can only be fully accomplished by men through the domination of women. However, in this scenario Baby Hassan becomes an antagonist to patriarchy and the expected subordination of women in the community of the novel for she does not comply with its patriarchal order (76).

Throughout this study I look at gender as a “performative act”, as an “identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts”, but often such a “performative act” is carried out in response too, if not in protest against the preconceived gender behavior we are imposed from birth based on our biological sex, in which case the “performative act” becomes the act of “undoing gender”, an act of escaping from the limits of the scripts we are expected to perform, or just the act of being who we really are (Butler, “Performative Acts” 519, Butler, Undoing 1).

Sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one’s personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life. Other times, the experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim. (1)
As Butler points out, “undoing gender” can be liberating, however it can also destroy us when our difference is constructed as monstrous in the eyes of our society (1). Bartky asserts that “we are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine. Femininity is an artifice, an achievement” of the fulfillment of a social contract so that a patriarchal social order may be sustained (“Foucault and Femininity” 95). Masculinity is no less “an artifice, an achievement” of the expected roles of men in patriarchal societies of being providers, warriors, leaders, protectors of their families, and dominators of their women. However the roles of a subordinate femininity and a dominating masculinity are not always achieved (95). Thus, I use the term gender transgression: “behaviors that are viewed as contravening gender norms or as “wrong” ways of doing gender” to designate the instances in *A Silent Life* in which Baby and Nazeer do not abide by the gender norms of their society (Ansara and Quick).

**Ryhaan Shah’s Novels and Political and Social Writing**

This section engages with Ryhaan Shah’s political and social writings in the *Guyana Times* and the two novels that followed her 2005 novel *A Silent Life* which won the 2007 Guyana Prize for Literature for Best First Book. Throughout her three novels, *A Silent Life* (2005), *Weaving Water* in (2013); and *A Death in the Family* in (2014) we find the recurring theme of the effects patriarchal Indian masculinity has upon the identity of her male and female characters, and the tension it produces in their gender relations, families, and communities.

Within these scenarios Shah positions female characters which deploy their agency regardless of the patriarchal oppression that surrounds them, driven by *shakti* or the power of the feminine. Often her female characters are reminiscent of divine feminine
figures in Hindu mythology such as Parvati, Sita, Kali, Durga, or Mahadevi (Kingsley 35). In addition, politics plays a central role in the plots and life experiences of her characters in these three novels.

In her essay, *From Shinebourne to Gunraj: Tracing the Emerging Tradition of Indo-Guyanese Women's Fiction*, Mariam Pirbhai refers to Jan Shinebourne, Narmala Shewcharan, Oonya Kempadoo, Ryhaan Shah, Marina Budhos and Andrea Gunraj as “the relatively nascent” tradition of “Indo-Guyanese” women writers, and describes their fiction as sharing an “emphasis on contemporary Guyanese social and political history, one that generally moves from the late 1920s to 1980s, or from the post-indenture to the post-independence period” (Pirbhai 22).

Ryhaan Shah was born in Berbice, Guyana, and is currently the acting president of the Guyana Indian Indentureship Abolition Association (GIIAA). Shah is also a political columnist in the *Guyana Times* and these aspects of her political and journalistic life are reflected in her writing. Shah’s discontent with the Guyanese political systems and atmosphere is evident in her 2017 column in the *Guyana Times*, titled “Why we must speak” written during the incumbency of the APNU-Alliance for Change party.

It is more than just a democratic right. The right to speak embraces every reason: from the basic need to explain, inform and communicate to that of demanding rights and justice; and to expressing creativity through art forms.

There is a situation in Guyana, however, where the Indian Guyanese voice is expected to be silent; and communication, discussion and debate from our perspective are often viewed as racist and
supremacist. An environment that discourages open debate – especially in a country where the racial divide is an overarching issue that affects our politics and society as a whole – can only be to everyone’s detriment.

The African Guyanese leadership has been speaking continually about the many wrongs done to their people by the PPP/C Administration. Facts and data do not matter in what is more of an emotional reaction to perceived wrongs. The omission in their narrative of the atrocities perpetrated on PPP supporters, Indian Guyanese – which include arson, rape, robbery, assault and murder – does appear to justify the violations, or dismiss them as a matter of no consequence. (“Why We Must”)

The issues of racial divide and ethno-political violence in Guyana are also present in Shah’s novels, and parallel to these issues runs the theme of the precarious position of Indian women within this ethnic and political context in her novels. The following excerpt of Shah’s column in the Guyana Times titled “Respect for All Women” published on May 14th, 2017, clearly states her feminist views about the prevalent inequality suffered by “women and girls the world over” and although written twelve years after the publication of A Silent Life, the excerpt below serves as a perfect prelude to the nature of the gender relations which are present in the novel (“Respect for All”):

Women and girls the world over face many of the same issues: lack of access to education and employment; unequal pay for equal work; domestic and political violence; issues about reproductive rights; and a general bias and inequality in the workplace and society.
In Guyana, with our various ethnic and religious groups, there are even more political, cultural and religious values that have to be considered within the feminist whole. (“Respect for All”)

Shah declares in “Respect for All” that Caribbean feminisms must incorporate the different circumstances of “rural women” and “urban or professional women” into its analyses and proposals for gender equality, for rural and urban women’s experiences and challenges are not the same. Shah also acknowledges the high incidence of domestic violence in Guyana and the Caribbean, but is concerned that “racial/political violence” is not given the same attention.

Racial and political violence in Guyana, Shah observes, is not only “men-to-men” but “Indian Guyanese women are assaulted, robbed and raped by African Guyanese men, and African Guyanese women play their part in beating and humiliating Indian Guyanese women” (“Respect for All”). Shah’s crucial observation is that Guyanese society is so irreversibly divided along racial and political lines that “there is no sisterhood that provides empathy, support or protection, and the women’s movement continues to be secondary to the overarching issue of the country’s racial/political divide” (“Respect for All”).

As Pirbhai points out, Ryhaan Shah is among those Indo-Guyanese women writers who have “reconceptualized” the “jahaji-bhain principle” as a form of “a socio-political praxis” and as “the platform for a cross-racial feminist alliance against gender, class, and other forms of oppression in contemporary Caribbean societies” which are evident in Shah’s writing and the actions of her Indian female characters (Pirbhai, “Recasting” 38).
**Ryhaan Shah’s *Weaving Water***

In her second novel, *Weaving Water*, Ryhaan Shah tells the story of Rampat and Parvati, a married couple who migrate to Guyana is the “SS. Ganges” to work as indentured laborers. Parvati is childless but during the treacherous sea voyage another woman on the ship gives birth to a girl (*Weaving* 16). “The S.S. Ganges was the last ship to bring Indian indentured laborers to British Guiana”, arriving “in Georgetown on April 18, 1917” (Shah, “Last Ship”).

The ship itself had thrashed about like a birthing woman, his jahajis had said while they sat and waited there outside the cabin door, waited for the birth of the child. They had known already that the baby would be a girl and that she would take her mother (*Weaving* 16). Parvati had shown “no signs of bearing” children through the years she had been married to Rampat, so when they saw the “beautiful” orphaned baby girl before them, they felt she was as a “blessing to the world” and to themselves (15, 16). So, they named the baby girl Neela and raised her as their own child. Neela’s birth aboard the ship, however, had been surround by mystery and foreboding. While Neela’s mother Taijnie was giving birth on the ship, a violent storm was lashing at “them with fury” (15, 86). However, Rampat’s jahajis:

> Had known it all, even that the waves would lay themselves down, and that the wild storm they had met coming around the bottom of Africa would still itself, would become spent and weary as the moment of the birth approached, at the precise moment when the girl would start to make her way into the world. (15)
The mysterious aura of being a child born during the crossing of the kala pani, combined with Billa telling “the story of Ganga Mai . . . brought from the heavens” by the “prayers of the sage Bhagiratha . . . to purify the earth”, surrounds Neela’s character throughout the novel (Weaving 33). “There was that day in the backdam when Neela was still small when Billa had plunged into the punt trench and rescued her from the children. How cruel they were, taunting her and telling her she was a water mama” (83. Every night since she was a child, Neela [had] “left the house during the dead of night, left to step off the edge of the earth” into the dark “channel” and had swum until sunrise, when she had returned home (75).

Evidently, Neela’s “birth from the belly of the sea”, and that it had cost “a life for a life”, and that her “navel string . . . was cast away on wild waters to circle the world forever without hope of ever being recovered, of ever being grounded in the earth” infuses her character with supernatural qualities. Neela is also becomes a foreshadowing sign of the bloody clash between Indians and Africans which takes place towards the end of the narrative. While the “the jahaji-bhain principle . . . anchored in a collective ethos that has formed the basis of the diapora’s spiritual and material fortitude” is evident in Shah’s Weaving Water, the novel also addresses the issue of ethnic division which if not addressed on time, will bring catastrophic results in the novel (Pirbhai, “Recasting” 38).

Neela is the misunderstood messenger in the shape of a devi who warns but is not heard (Weaving 132). The jahajis in the ship “had muttered” that Neela’s “fate was bound up with dark days, with dark days ahead” (127). Billa, “a dark little . . . South Indian man . . . with “hair that was curled close to his head, wore rings in his ears, and had muscles that were packed down tightly into powerful and arms and shoulders” had been
the only passenger in the ship to see newborn Neela for what she really was, “a devi”, a goddess “who was sent to help them survive all that lay ahead” (Weaving 31, 132). The storm at sea and Neela’s birth on board the ship had been a prelude to the “dark days” Billa and Rampat were to experience in the plantations (127).

The storm of ethnic violence which takes place in Weaving Water is foreshadowed through the conflict between, Billa and Sampson. Billa had become Rampat’s protector “during their first days in the cane fields when” inexperienced Rampat “had been unable to make anything but tiny baby cuts in the bark” of the cane stalks (33). Billa had also:

Shielded Rampat in those early days from the whip by keeping an eye out for the driver, a large African called Sampson, a son of slaves who delighted in pushing and shoving and whipping the Indian indentures for anything, anything at all. (33)

At one point in the narrative Billa and Sampson face each other in a fight which breaks “out after years of them circling and watching each other in the canefields” (Weaving 50). “The smaller Billa [dances] around the giant, and Sampson, his movements heavy and cumbrous, [finds] his opponent twinkling away behind him again and again as he struggle[s] to swing his body around to face him” (52). Billa tricks Sampson into throwing a punch into empty air, throwing Sampson off balance, and making the giant fall amid a cloud of dust. Before Sampson can get up, Billa’s jahajis erupt in applause and Billa is declared the winner.

Soon after the fight, Billa and Sampson become close friends who play dominoes and drink rum together. Billa’s friendship becomes solace to Sampson who lives alone
and continuously yearns for his mother and grandmother who disappeared when
Sampson was young. In one of these occasions Billa brings Neela with him and she
listens while Sampson remembers how “people used to come from all over to get her to
fix up their lives for them. They wanted to find love, make babies, make somebody sick,
make somebody well” and so people sought his mother’s knowledge of healing (Weaving
66). Sampson tells Neela that he “was only twelve” when his mother “went away one
night and didn’t come back” and that “the old people” who knew his mother “swear she
went into the canal that night and swam away to be with her own people, the water
people” (66).

In the novel, Shah does not fully explain why Neela routinely slips into the canal
“during the dead of the night” and soundlessly swims, “barely” disturbing “the
smoothness of the water”, but Shah hints at a connection between Sampson’s mother
swimming into the canal “to be with her own kind . . . the water people” and Neela’s
ritual of going into the canal when no one can see her. Neela’s father Rampat cannot
forget his daughter’s gesture the “first time at the water’s edge” when as a little child “she
lifted her dimpled hands and beckoned to the sea” (Weaving 12, 67, 75). Neela, who was
born at sea, also seems to yearn for her people, and for her past, seems to also feel a sense
of belonging elsewhere, as Sampson’s mother does. Thus, Shah establishes common
ground between these two characters of Indian and African descent through their
yearning for their origins and their ancestors in continents across the ocean. In doing so,
Shah emphasizes the similarities between the African and Indian experiences of bondage
in the Caribbean.
Salomé’s and Billa’s conciliation after their fight marks a period of relative peace and harmony in the narrative in which racial issues are minimal if not absent in the novel. Shah hints here at the period of “Plural Society which lasted from emancipation until the 1930s when mass agitation for self-government and political independence was initiated”; a period in which the political goals of African and Indians in the novel were mutual and shared, and the hateful and violent ethnopolitical division between them had not yet been established (Danns 68).

However, there is a drastic and violent change in race relations in the novel, and the troubled times foreshadowed by Neela’s birth aboard the S.S Ganges as the storm raged. The incident that sets the violence in motion involves Sampson’s son Martin, “a smartly dressed . . . young African” who “lived in the city where he was a teacher at one of the big schools”, who approaches a group of men who had stopped playing dominoes and were listening to Billa retell the story of his fight with Sampson (Weaving 55). Billa describes the rage in Martin’s words as “a natural force, like high winds and a storm the way it rolled in and cut everything dead, and the words were hurled at Billa as he was telling how he had thrown Sampson and pinned him down” (55).

You lil coolie man could even beat Sampson? That’s a lie! You could ever beat Sampson, eh? Eh? . . . He pulled himself up to his full height. He looked around at all of them, at all the Indians who were standing around watching the game, he looked at all of them and spat at the ground. ‘You lil coolies come here and think that you’re better than anybody else, eh? You build your lil houses and your lil shops and make your lil money and you think that that makes you better than us, eh? (55)
This tense confrontation disturbs all who witness it, particularly Billa who realizes the “stranger” who “shook his finger in” his “face” is Sampson’s son, who only came short of physically attacking him, because Sampson “drew himself up and planted his feet on the earth and bellowed at the sky” and “stopped the young man and his rage” (Shah, *Weaving* 55, 56). After this point in the novel a sense of foreboding steadily escalates, which also coincides with an increasing talk about politics in the novel, “about all the politicians were saying, about all the promises they were making about home rule, about getting independence so that everyone would have a better, brighter future” (*Weaving* 115).

However, patriarchy becomes grafted onto politics and thus becomes a destructive force because its main goal becomes domination, and consequently, who is the best man to do so, the Indian or the African politician turns out to be the final divisive point in the novel. Billa tells his son Krish: that “what Jagan and Burnham are fighting for” is “to free us from that past, form all that history and bring us to a shining world” (184). Billa also tells his son “that he would live a free man in a free country, and that Jagan and Burnham were going to make it happen” (*Weaving* 184). But what Billa does not tell his son Krish is that Jagan and Burnham “had gone their separate ways” and “that there was going to be trouble, big trouble because of it” (184).

When the “political talk” in the novel conflates the issues of race, the colonial past, and rights to belong to, and to rule the land, the ethnic clashes begin, and what had been a peaceful coexistence of Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese people in their respective villages, becomes a savage class of masculinities. (*Weaving* 115). Mohammed’s concept of competing patriarchies is evident in *Weaving Water* and
exemplifies how white, Afro-creole, and Indian patriarchies and their corresponding masculinities become violently through politics in the narrative.

Indian men who were now the spokesperson, pundits and priests of the Indian community were contesting with the other competing patriarchies existing in the new society - predominantly those of the elite white and dominant African groups. Indian males fitted into the lowest rung of this patriarchal ladder and it was important and perhaps 'natural' to them to reconstitute the internal boundaries of their community, ensuring that patriarchal power was regained. (Mohammed, “Gender as a Primary” 32).

Politics becomes a tool through which the patriarchal power exercised in either African or Indian communities in the novel can be extended into the nation as a whole and upon other ethnic groups. In the Amerindian language Guiana means: land of many waters. The novel’s title: Weaving Water, can be read as a yearning for bringing together as one the suffering and difficulties that both Africans and Indians, among others, underwent throughout their migrations, bondage, and survival in Guyana.

In The Sociology of Slavery Orlando Patterson writes about “the formation of strong bonds of friendship between all the slaves on the slave ship” and how “these friends became known in the West Indies as ‘shipmates’” and how “their love and affection for each other was proverbial” (150). This “love and affection for each other” and the sense of brotherhood and sisterhood that Patterson describes is remarkably like Mariam Pirbhai’s definition of the concept of jajahi-bhai (ship-brother) or jahaji-hood” (“Recasting” 25).
The point of no return in the novel, what makes it “too late to pull everything back and make the world safe again” is Forbes Burnham’s statement at the rally that Africans “were the rightful, the natural inheritors of the land” (Weaving 189, 192). Whatever traces of brotherhood and sisterhood developed out of the traumatic experiences of African and Indian migration to the Caribbean shared at the beginning of the narrative, boil down into hatred.

**Ryhaan Shah’s *A Death in the Family* (2014)**

The narrative of *A Death in the Family*, develops around the death of Mohammed Ahmad Ally, a business man who is remembered by his son Khalil as a man who had “followed all the traditions his [own] father had taught him without question. ‘Tried and true,’ he always said. ‘Tried and true. No need to reinvent the wheel, eh?’” (Ch. 1). During the celebration of Mohammed Ahmad Ally’s religious rites and burial, Ally’s business associates as well as Ally’s family come together under the same roof, but the quality and nature of the stories they tell about Mohammed Ahmad Ally are different.

The people “crowded into the deadhouse” who knew his public and professional life express that “Mohammed Ahmad Ally had lived a good and honest life . . . that his life could be held to the closest scrutiny and could not be faulted, could not be found wanting” and give testimony of “his goodness and mercy” (*A Death*, Ch. 1).

In the public arena of his life Ally was admired and revered but within the walls of his home he was feared. Shah gives us in this novel a more personal and familial scenario in which Mohahhed Ahmad Ally, the patriarch, is honored in the public and professional sector, but within the private scenario of the home, his children describe him as a tyrant who seems to have traumatized the identities of his sons and daughters in
different but equally devastating ways. Ahmad Ally’s son Khalil remembers with bitterness how his father repeated to all his children the motto: “‘Make me proud; make me proud’, for that was their primary duty as children, as his children” (A Death, Ch. 1). The troubled relationships that Khalil and his sisters Maryam and Khadijah, had with their father becomes evident when Khalil pulls open the drapes on the windows of the room where his father’s dead body lies on a bed: “The light glared and fell on their father’s face, fell on every fold and wrinkle and made it gaunt and skeletal” (Ch. 1). “Khalil [holds] Maryam’s face and turn[s] it towards the bed” and tells his sister: “Look at him! Look at him! He’s dead, Maryam. He can’t get at us any more” (Ch. 1).

Mohammed Ahmad Ally’s death makes his children and relatives come face to face with each other and the trauma Ally’s patriarchal rule has caused in all of them. Yet, they in their hearts they now treasure his disciplined life with them. In retrospect Ally’s children come to value their father’s nurturing of them to be the best they can be. When Ally’s wife dies “after birthing their last child, their second daughter, Khadijah or Dee, as she now call[s] herself”, Ally continues raising his children on his own, never getting married again (Ch. 1).

Poor Maryam, poor Khalil, Dee thought. They never could deal with Pa. No one could, not even her if the truth be told. Even when he gave up his quarrel with her and came to their home to meet Raj and to see their newborn baby girl, their Asha, she had not brought up the silence of the years that had gone before, the silence of the years since her marriage, or the hurt he had caused her by not coming to her wedding. She had let it go, and had managed to smile and talk as if nothing had happened. And what
would she have said to him, anyway? That he was old-fashioned, a bigot, narrow-minded, foolish? She could never have said such things to him, and Raj [her husband] was always there to remind her that she should be patient with him, that he needed time to adjust his thinking, and that it was a lot to ask of someone who had expected his life to continue unchallenged and unchanged by what he saw as new-fangled ways. (*A Death*, Ch. 3)

*A Death in the Family* deals with the clash between Indian Muslim traditions which the older generation abides by, in contrast with the influence of modernity upon the more Westernized new generation in the novel. Ally “he kept to the old ways and followed all the traditions his father had taught him without question. ‘Tried and true,’ he always said. ‘Tried and true. No need to reinvent the wheel, eh?’” and therefore Ally is opposed to all that is “progressive” and “modern” for it might corrupt all that “had been taught to him” and all he had wanted was to teach to his children and that they embrace this traditions as well (Ch. 1).

Ally “never turned his back on all that he had been taught, on all the [Muslim] traditions and customs. He always kept to his prayers and to his belief in the world” and it is after his death and while they speak in behalf of their father at his funeral, that Mohammed Ahmad Ally’s children realize that behind the strict, iron-fisted upbringing of their father, there was an attempt to instill in them traditions which Ally believed wholeheartedly to be truth and good. “‘He was a good Muslim. Because of his faith he never thought to question the traditions and the beliefs that he learned from his father. Those were the rock on which he built his life, and ours’” (Ch. 5).
In Ally’s character Shah represents two issues, the hurt the inflexibility of imposed tradition may cause, while in the other hand, the genuine yet blind believe Mohammed Ahmad Ally had that tradition was not to be questioned, but just passed down. Maryam, is the eldest of the children, and is ten when her mother dies; she “barely remember[s] her . . . face”, and has “to look at old photographs to help her see it clearly” (A Death, Ch. 5). Therefore neither Maryam nor Khalil or Dee ever have a mother figure in the house which makes the tyrannical presence of their father in their lives the more weighty and one-sided.

What Maryam remembers most is how her mother faded way. “She had watched it happen, had watched her mother melt away, simply melt away because of her many, many tears” and had seen how “depression” made her mother unable to leave her after she had given birth to Khadijah (Ch. 5). Of the three children, Maryam is the one that most adheres to the old traditions her father so much believes is in.

The marriage had been agreed on years before, when Maryam was nothing but a baby. Old man Nasr and their father were businessmen together and friends, and something had been said, some words had been spoken about the baby girl being a nice match for Farouk who was then just a baby himself. (Ch.1).

Maryam marries, yet she is unhappy, her dream to attend university and earn an education crushed. Khalil and Khadijah move to the United States and there live the lives they could not have if they stayed in Guyana. Khalil, becomes “a New York attorney” and Khadijah becomes “a businesswoman who own[s] a string of pharmacies in New York with her Indian-born husband” (Ch. 1). Being a Muslim, Khadijah’s marriage to a
Hindu is heavily criticized by her father, but with the arrival of grandchildren, Mohammed Ahmad Ally’s grudge softens. Ally adheres to his belief in patriarchal Muslim tradition as the way things should be till his death, and it is his children who in greater or lesser degrees confront their fears of him, and with difficulty and pain, shape their lives through a more modern and Western worldview.

However, the possibility of challenging or not having to comply with the Indian Muslim tradition Ahmad Ally’s children are faced with is more feasible during the period of “Burnham’s many excesses” and “rigged elections that kept him in power” between 1968 to 1985 which Shah makes allusion to in the novel. However during the time Mohammed Ahmad Ally was a child, as his son Khalil realizes, being anchored to the past, rather than taking risks and establishing new patterns, would have been the only to survive the unknown.

His father’s certainty, all the surety with which he lived his life, with which he took all his decisions were not learnt from taking risks, from making mistakes and learning from them, but from following the pattern set for him by his father who had learned it all from his own father. In that way, all the things of old, ideas even from ancient times, lived on into each new day, and he remembered thinking that it must be fear that did it, fear of the unknown, and of the whole new world that had made his grandfather and his own father cling so steadfastly to the old ways. His grandfather had adventured, it was true, but it was the very anchoring to the known, to the past that had made him daring, even brave. (A Death, Ch. 1).
The historical context above, brings us to Shah’s first novel, *A Silent Life* which takes place in early the post indenture period in Guyana where the formation of Hindu and Muslim Indian communities was flourishing and the cohesion and social order of these communities depended on “anchoring to the known, to the past” Indian patriarchal tradition which dictated the nature of Indian gender relations and gender roles expectations of men and women in such communities.

**Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life***

The sociohistorical process in which the issue of Indian masculinities is placed in *A Silent Life* is the formation of Indian communities in Guyana in the early post-indenture period. From an economic point of view, this process required, when possible, the acquisition of land and establishing a self-sustainable agriculture. From a social and religious point of view, the creation of post-indenture Indian communities relied on the preservation of Indian culture which included reinstating the tenets of Indian marriage, and the gender roles expected of Indian men in women within it, which were defined through the reconstitution of Indian patriarchy in these communities (Mohammed, *Gender Negotiations* 11). In my reading of *A Silent Life* I trace Baby Hassan’s and her husband Nazeer Mohammed Raheem’s gender transgressions of the patriarchal social order in their community which dictates “male dominance and female subservience” (11).

Often monstrosity is not physical but is embodied in and constructed through difference in behavior. Through “difference . . . the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond” which contravenes, challenges, and threatens the "order of things", in this case, the traditional Indian Muslim gender roles that give the community its identity (Cohen 6, 11). When Baby and Nazeer reverse the “male dominance and female
subservience” roles expected of them, the threat to the social patriarchal order they pose has to be eliminated (*Gender Negotiations* 11).

In the following sections I delve into the lives of Nazeer Mohammed Raheem and Nani Hassan focusing on the actions their community views as gender transgressions within the early post-indenture period in which they are located. I then move into Aleyah’s story and how the legacy of her grandmother’s political grassroots activity inspires her yet drives her to infringe gender boundaries in similar ways as her Nani which also undo her emotional state of mind. The penultimate section addresses Aleyah’s husband Dean and looks at how non-fulfilled professional expectations of becoming head of a bank, break and depress him.

Baby, also known as Nani to her granddaughter Aleyah, is a third-generation descendant of Indian indentured laborers, who learns to read at an early age encouraged by “Pandit Seecharran” (*Shah, A Silent* 181). This becomes the earliest of the gender transgressions in the novel for Baby’s education is frowned upon buy her parents and community, and seen as dangerous. As a young girl, Baby eavesdrops on a conversation “between her parents” and later recollects what they had said to each other about her becoming educated and “filling her head with all sorts of ideas about the plantation masters and slavery and indentureship and so on” (*A Silent* 181).

My father said it could lead to now good because these were big men’s affairs, not the kinds of things the pandit should be putting into a little girl’s head. But Ma just waved this away and said that it was all fairy stories to me anyway, and that the pandit was teaching me to read big books. ‘There was no harm in that, Ahmad,’ she told him. But Pa was still
worried and said that all that reading could fill me up with all kinds of ideas, and when my mother said, ‘They might be good ones’, my father shrugged and walked away. (A Silent 181)

When “Pandit Seecharran” dies Baby is “still small” and her father hopes Baby will “become content like Khadijah who help[s] Ma with the housework and the kitchen garden and [has] learned to sew and cook” and Baby does learn these things, but through “Pandit Seecharran’s” teachings Baby has crossed an intellectual threshold from which there is no point of return (182):

I found all kinds of things to read too. I read the newspapers every day. I read the words and filled in the blank spaces with all that Pandit Seecharran had told me. I knew the truth of things. Once you see that, how can you turn your back on it? (182)

Therefore, a further gender transgression in the eyes of her community is that Baby Hassan grows up to become a woman who has her own ideas, a woman who rejects tradition and the way an Indian-Muslim woman is expected to behave in her post-indenture Guyana community. In the same way, the man she chooses to marry, Nazeer Mohammed Raheem is an atypical man who departs from the patriarchal and domination driven masculinity which is expected of him. Nazeer is a dreamer who never fulfills his dreams and promises to wife and children.

“Oh, the stories he [Nazeer] told and the promises he built up in the air for me and my mother: the house he would build, the cars we would drive, the pretty clothes we would wear. It was always going to happen tomorrow” (43). “But it never happened”, the dreams Nazeer builds and the promises he makes never come to fruition, which makes...
Baby’s criticism of Nazeer become increasingly harsher and more bitter through the years.

You’re just playing at life, . . . But life is more serious than all this catch-hand business you are doing, you have a wife and child and a home to look after and all day you’re just running off your mouth about all this junk you’re trying to push off on people. (A Silent 43)

Nazeer is passive and willing to do his wife’s bidding for he cherishes her independent identity. Consequently, the combination of Nazeer’s non-hegemonic manhood and Nani’s subversive womanhood, and the resulting non-normative gender relations within their marriage are viewed as aberrant and daring contradictions to “the roles allocated to each sex . . . important to survival of the ethnic group” and the cohesion and stability of their community (Mohammed, Gender Negotiations 9).

Hassan, Nani, and their granddaughter Aleyah gender violations “threaten to smash the distinctions” between masculinity and femininity and the roles that are delimited for each gender (Cohen 6). Another gender violation that Nani commits is her involvement in politics which is seen by her community as doing “man’s work” (A Silent 24). Nani becomes a grass-roots leader in the male dominated arena of politics where she is not welcomed, and this indiscretion of hers is dealt with a strong backlash. Hassan and Nani are viewed as rejecting their responsibility towards their community of upholding patriarchal tradition. Their behavior is abnormal and dangerous because it threatens the hierarchy of gender relations in which men dominate and women obey.

This refusal to participate in the classificatory "order of things" is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally
incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic
structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between
forms that threatens to smash distinctions. (Cohen 6).

Shah challenges the idea of femininity and masculinity as mutually exclusive
categories through her characterization of Baby and Nazeer. Hassan’s masculinity is a
“disturbing hybrid” which combines passivity and a lack of aspiration which is
uncharacteristic of the patriarchal man while Nani’s and Aleyah’s “disturbing hybrid
femininities” are closer to the aggressiveness that is expected of men. These gender
contradictions unsettle the “order of things” and the permanence of the Indian culture in
the community, and thus need to be contained or eliminated (Cohen 6).

While Nazeer Mohammed Raheem is expected to perform the “hegemonic
masculinity” of dominance predominant in his community, his wife is expected to exhibit
an “emphasized femininity” which is defined around compliance with . . . subordination
to men . . . and oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men” (Connell,
*Gender and Power* 183, 187). However, neither of them are naturally inclined to act out
these functionally interdependent gender roles which are the only scripts they can play to
be socially accepted by their community.

Throughout this study I look at gender as a “performative act”, as an “identity
instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*”, but often such a “performative act” is
carried out in response too, if not in protest against the preconceived gender behavior we
are imposed from birth based on our biological sex, in which case the “performative act”
becomes the act of “undoing gender”, an act of escaping from the limits of the scripts we
are expected to perform, or just the act of being who we really are (Butler, “Performative Acts” 519; Butler, Undoing 1).

Sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one’s personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life. Other times, the experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim. (Undoing 1)

For Nazeer, Nani, and Aleyah the former happens and their personhood is undone; both Nani and her granddaughter Aleyah suffer mental breakdowns and Nazeer commits suicide, and it is only Aleyah, who is able to retrace her steps and reconfigure her identity without the patriarchal confines of her expected role within marriage, the nuclear family, and her career. In A Silent Life, the patriarchal “normative conception of gender” these characters are faced with negates their identities and therefore produces madness in them (1).

Nani Hassan and her granddaughter Aleyah become “madwomen in the attic” along the lines of Jean Rhy’s Antoinette, because their voices are marginalized and silenced within a male dominated society (Gilbert & Gubar xv). However, Shah does not limit to her female characters the madness the imposition of a “normative conception of gender” produces, but shows through the mental afflictions of both Nazeer Raheem Mohammed, and Aleyah’s husband Mohammed Dean Yacoob that “a normative conception” of masculinity can marginalize and traumatize men as well (Undoing 1).
Nazeer and Nani

Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life* revolves around the tragic story of two indentured laborers, Baby (Nani) Hassan and Nazeer Mohammed Raheem, who after completing their indentured contracts in Guyana get married, get “a bit of land from the estate” and “buil[d] a little house and [plant] a garden” with the help of their parents who gave them “some money to make a start” (182). The events that lead to the final gender clash between Nazeer’s masculinity and Baby’s femininity, which reaches its climax with Nazeer’s suicide, begins when a worker’s strike takes place: “A big strike. I forget now what it was about—better pay, something. But they shot people with long guns. Shot people in the back. Some died. And I could not stand by and be silent.” (182). This labor strike and the violent way the colonial authorities suppress it, fuels Baby to become a political activist.

Initially, Nazeer supports Baby’s political engagement and becomes the mouthpiece of the speeches and ideas Baby conceives. But when their community finds out he is just a puppet and they realize the ideas he speaks about in the labor movement rallies are not his own, but his wife’s, Nazeer is ridiculed by the men in his community who call him “Baby’s boy” because he follows his wife’s commands and for them this is unacceptable (28). This reversal of roles becomes a particularly dangerous crossing of the normative barrier of the patriarchal social order. The gender ideology of separate spheres in which intellect and the public space is masculine while women are relegated to the domestic space is disrupted by Nani.

All they know is that their women know their place and don’t look to make themselves headmen. They understand it to be so from the gods. In
the Bible and the Koran and the Gita, it’s the men who preach and do battle and the women—they keep to their own things. (28)

Therefore, the men in his community devalue Nazeer’s manhood and see him as weak. However, Nazeer’s character embodies an alternative masculinity in *A Silent Life* of a man who is neither threatened by his wife’s intellect nor needs to control it, but rather is willing to support her grassroots activism and her involvement in the labor movement in the novel. Nazeer is a man whose manhood is not defined by the domination of others, but who is willing to take the back seat and let Baby Hassan’s leadership and knowledge shine. However, there is no space for such a manhood in his community and the mockery of his peers takes a toll on him.

“‘No, Baby,” he says. If you ever stop-up your words they’ll choke you. You aren’t like the other women round here who just keep to their skirts and their kitchens. I like the fire in you, it’s true, but I can’t be who you want. (28)

Nazeer can no longer pretend while “out there at the head, marching with the leaders” that he is the true organizer of the marches he is participating in, nor can he pretend to be an intellectual like his wife Baby who can explain concepts like “dialectic materialism” and “socialism” before a crowd if asked to do so (24, 25). Therefore, the inevitable happens and “from the back of the crowd, a voice asks, “Hey, Nazeer, boy, tell us how we are going to make this happen? “Yes, man,” another voice joins in. “What’s all this dialectic whatsit you talking about?” (25).

Unfortunately, is incapable of answering these questions and his honor, reputation, and respectability are shattered. In the eyes of the community, another of
Nazeer’s gender transgressions is to pretend to be a leader and an intellectual through appropriating Baby’s knowledge. The truth, however, is that “he liked the crowds; he thought it was all a stage, a real-life dance to the chants of the workers. He really enjoyed himself” and was not aware of the consequences of his venture (A Silent 24). In Baby’s case, she transgresses the way she is expected to do gender by rejecting the submissive and complying femininity she is expected to perform as a wife, and taking the masculine role of a politician. But even worst, Baby is seen as bringing shame upon her husband, as dishonoring him by “forgetting her place” and by making her husband “look so small” (26).

However, as a couple, Baby and Nazeer have complementary identities: Nazeer “is not an old fashioned man and he likes that [Baby] reads and has ideas of her own” which pleases her, and while Nazeer “[doesn’t] understand a word she [is] saying”, Nazeer does not feel unsettled by her knowledge or shows any inclination to limit her intellectual growth (49). It is true that they are different: Nazeer “just want[s] to enjoy” the world, while Baby “wants to change” it which makes their goals in life completely different, but not necessarily irreconcilable. However, the main oppressive force in the novel which does not permit them to be themselves is the community and its inflexible, entrenched, and unchangeable expectations of what a woman and a man ought to be in relation to each other.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was originally formulated in tandem with a concept of hegemonic femininity—soon renamed “emphasized femininity” to acknowledge the asymmetrical position of masculinities and femininities in a patriarchal gender order. . . Gender is
always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in
contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of
femininity. (Connell and Messerschmidt 848)

In the society of the novel Indian womanhood is conceived “through the eyes of
the male and defined only in terms of a relationship to the male” and is here we find
another critical dislocation of the gender order in the novel, for Baby does not exist for
the sake of her husband, but has an independent identity and reason for being. Nazeer’s
masculinity and Baby’s femininity are not “relational”, and do not complement each
other, but rather cancel each other out in the male-controlled context of their community
where women as well as men work together to uphold patriarchy. In Aunt Khadijah and
Aunt Shamroon’s exchange of memories of how Nazeer and Baby meet we see how
women in the novel are as influential as men, in enforcing and perpetuating normative
gender roles in their Muslim community (848).

Oh, the ideas she had, that one! It was socialism this and socialism that, as
if anybody round here could understand any of that, or cared! She would
pull up herself so high, you remember, Sham, and mouth off these
important sounding words. (A Silent 18).

The conversation between Aunt Shamroon’s and Aunt Khadijah shows their
disapproval of Baby, but also of Nazeer whom they saw as an worthy suitor of Baby
since “all Nazeer ever wanted to do was dance”, and shows they view Baby’s femininity
and Nazeer’s masculinity as questionable and incompatible with the requirements for
belonging and being accepted in their community. However, both Shamroon and
Khadijah betray a degree of envy for the romantic nature of Baby’s and Nazeer’s first encounter.

I tell you, Sham, it was that very spark that caught Nazeer’s eye. I was there that day at the fair. Baby was no more than sixteen and she was like a jewel; she had Ma’s fine bones and Pa’s heavy black hair. Nazeer was there, on stage, dancing, his feet twinkling like diamonds to the music and setting all the little bells around his ankles jingling. I can still hear that silver sound rising up to the sky that night. The Farmer’s Fair was always held on a full-moon night’ . . . His chest was bare and he wore billowing pyjamas held by sequin braids at his waist and ankles. His feet were painted with bright reds and ochres. He wore rings in his ears and on his fingers. He looked like a movie star and he used all the sinuous movements of neck and eyes and fingers that were part of the poetry of the dances we saw in Indian movies. (*A Silent* 19)

Shah’s representation of Nazeer’s and Baby’s identities is non-traditional. Baby is a learned and outspoken leader while Nazeer wears “billowing pyjamas held by sequin braids at his waist and ankles” as he dances on the stage (19). In doing so, and bringing these two characters together in marriage, she creates a tension within the domestic and public domains that Baby and Nazeer inhabit, which defies the traditions passed down from ancestral India. Although Aunt Khadijah and Aunt Shamroon appreciate the sensuality of Nazeer’s dance, nonetheless, their view it is all Nazeer can do, and that it is not of value for Baby’s future. Many years later, Baby’s granddaughter Aleyah appropriates the story she was told about how Nazeer and Baby met, and while in London
looking at rainfall through her window, Aleyah imagines the following scene about her grandparents.

“Yes. You go and see him. He’s got a job for you.”

“No. Baby. I’m my own man. No one will ever throw it in my face that I can’t mind my own family, you hear?

You’ll go. We can’t live on your pride.”

Nazeer looks hard at her, then turns abruptly and goes back out to the yard. He stands in the mud, shuts his eyes and throws his head back, opening his face to the steady wash of rain. He stretches his arms out wide and I imagine him asking the gods, like a doomed prophet, why he has been forsaken. He stands like this for minutes while, inside the room, Baby raps at the window, calling him back inside. But he cannot hear her. Then she stops suddenly and brings her hand to her mouth, watching in wonderment as her husband lifts one leg high, gracefully bending the knee, imitating the posture of a dancing Hindu god. He draws in his arms and lets the thumb and forefinger of each hand touch ever so slightly, the gesture of wisdom used in classical Kathak dances. (A Silent 112)

Aleyah’s imagination transforms her grandfather Nazeer into a symbol of the Mughal Empire period in India, roughly from 1526-1837, when the Muslim and Hindu cultures came together and fed from each other, and Kathak was an art form through which Indian and Muslim cultures became confluent. But I want to argue that Shah also uses Kathak to symbolize an ancient period of Indian consciousness and culture in which “the asymmetrical position of masculinities and femininities” was not as toxic and
mutually exclusive as in the post-indenture period of the novel (Connell and Messerschmidt 848).

Kathak, the classical dance of North India, is a twentieth-century dance with roots reaching back to at least the thirteenth century . . . a syncretic dance, a fusion of performance practice not only from past centuries but from a variety of North Indian sources. [Kathak incorporates] the synthesis of male and female practices, and Muslim and Hindu contexts. (Walker 8, 131)

Purnima Shah, is a classical dancer/performer specializing in Bharatanatyam and Kathak dance styles. In her view Kathak dancers transcend gender binaries, merge them, and transgress them. “A single Kathak performer portrays all the characters within the selected episode, enacting one, impersonating another, effortlessly switching gender portrayal as the roles appear in the narrative without any extraneous use of costumes, makeup, props, or technical effect” (P. Shah 3).

The representation of Nazeer as a male dancer might be a deceiving aspect in A Silent Life because it might seem as further effeminizing Nazeer’s manhood, but Nazeer’s characterization as a Kathak renders him a symbol of Indian knowledge more ancient and perhaps more relevant than the Western knowledge about “Dialectic Materialism”, “power” and “ownership” that his wife Baby possesses (A Silent, 24, 25). Nazeer, the Kathak dancer, also operates as a symbol of a masculinity which predates the traumatic effects of British occupation of India and of indenture in the Caribbean, and thus, a manhood within which masculinity and femininity were not mutually exclusive but complementary.
I read Nazeer’s character through the lens of Kathak, as a symbol of an Indian Muslim alternative masculinity that attempts to transcend the gender dualism imposed by the colonial patriarchal society which Nazeer lives in, but which he fails to transcend. The imposition of gender dualism which negates the “fluidity of gender performance” embodied in Kathak causes trauma because it negates the feminine side of Nazeer’s masculinity as well as the masculine side of Baby’s femininity, since the patriarchal ideology of their community dictates that masculinity and femininity must be mutually exclusive (P. Shah 2).

During a brief period of the narrative, husband and wife collaborate in the organization of marches, meetings, and speeches, and Nazeer’s artistic inclination and Baby’s intellectual nature complement each other and are able to coexist. I argue that in this period of the narrative, Nazeer and Baby perform the philosophy of Kathak in which gender is fluid and responds to “a duality within oneness” which inhabits, incorporates, and fuses both femininity and masculinity, into one performance, “effortlessly switching gender portrayal as the roles appear”, but the possibility of a “fluidity of gender performance” proves too much of a threat to the Muslim community in the novel (P. Shah 2).

Eventually both their lives are silenced. Nani is reminded that “all you’d ever need to know [is] how to make children and look after your husband and do housework” for, as Nazeer later forced to accept, “its’s the men who preach and do battle and the women—they keep to their own things” (A Silent 28, 29). In a 21st century context, Muslim scholar and activist Jasmin Zine advocates for “rewriting the script” that shapes her subjectivity as a Muslim woman (Zine 169):
As a Muslim woman, I find that my identity and subjectivity are shaped by dual and competing discourses. For example, patriarchal and fundamentalist discourses circumscribe the social engagement and public life of Muslim women according to narrow, gendered parameters in which women occupy limited public roles. (Zine 169)

In *A Silent Life*, Baby Hassan attempts to “rewrite the script” she has been imposed as an Indian-Muslim woman, a script which “denies” her “the agency and political maturity to define” her “own sense of identity within the broad parameters of Islam” and her community (169). Shah challenges the “fundamentalist discourse” which “circumscribe[s] . . . the public life of Muslim women” (169), in the novel through her characterization of Baby Hassan, who wants “to change the world” and “turn everything on its head” (*A Silent* 28), and through her fight for “agricultural labor reform” to help the peasant community in the novel (Pirbhai, “Recasting” 39). But Shah, also establishes that the rewriting of the “patriarchal and fundamentalist discourse” Baby Hassan is against, comes with a price. A fundamental theme in *A Silent Life* is the psychologically damaging and spirit-crushing effects the strict gender policing of Nazeer’s and Baby’s community has on both of them.

As noted before, there is a point in the narrative where Nazeer accepts and supports Baby’s independent womanhood, a time when his naïveté of the consequences of transgressing gender allows him to collude with his wife in her political activities, but after Nazeer is exposed as a fraud and ridiculed before his community, Nazeer’s manhood becomes vulnerable, and its honor can only be regained through Baby’s
subordination. I argue it is at this point that Nazeer embraces patriarchy as the blue-print for reconstructing his humiliated masculinity.

When it is evident Nazeer is just a mouthpiece, but not the source of knowledge he speaks, “something [breaks]”, something comes undone “when they found out he [doesn’t] . . . know all the things that [Baby] [knows]” . . . “something [breaks]” while the crowd “watch[es] [Nazeer] stumble and mumble and try to duck away from the questions they [throw] at his head” and at that point Nazeer withdraws from the world and “lock[s] himself up” in his “bedroom” (*A Silent* 24, 25). The ridicule Nazeer experiences before his community produces not only emotional but physical trauma in him. He stops dancing, and his hair which was:

So black, with waves so high they could have sunk the Titanic self” have turned “white-white . . . and his shoulders that used to stretch out so wide when he danced [are] all shrunk down, and he [looks] about ready to curl up and die. In one night, my father turned into and old man. (25)

Baby also retreats to her home and stops her grass-root activities altogether. However, although both Nazeer and Baby’s identities are crushed by the criticism and social pressure they are objects off, there is a crucial difference between the traumas it has produced on both of their identities. Baby’s identity as a woman still stands on its own; her femininity stands on independent grounds from that of her husband’s masculinity which has now been rendered toxic and self-destructive due to his emasculation. Consequently, whatever honor is left to his manhood, it is now dependent on the submission and domination of his wife, which he did not need before. Contrary to Baby’s identity, the strength and authenticity of Nazeer’s masculinity relies now upon
Baby’s performance of a chaste and docile femininity which she has never accepted and does not want to perform.

For a while the gender tension between Baby and Nazeer is lessened with Baby being away from politics and quietly fulfilling her duties as a wife, while Nazeer isolates himself from everything and everyone. However, after “years and years” of “living quiet-quiet” and after “years and years” since anyone heard her “voice coming out so big-big through the loudspeaker”, Nani once again feels the rushing need to return to her grassroots activism (*A Silent* 183).

What sparks her return is the pleading of a “dark . . . small” widow wearing a “Madras kerchief on her head” who has come to her house to ask her to speak to “Massa Jessop” so he can give her “a lil something to get” her by, until “the baby is bigger” and she can return to work. (83, 184). Baby promises the widow she will help her, and Nazeer realizes what has happened in the kitchen.

“So it starts again?
“What?” Baby asks. Her voice cuts his off, sharp and abrupt.
“The whole business. You know what I mean.”
“No. I don’t.”
“So, what she coming back for tomorrow? What you will give her? A drink of water and send her home to her hungry children? I know you better than that.
“Good. Then you don’t need to ask any more questions.”
“Yes, I know what you’ll do and I’m not going to stand by and watch. Not this time.”

“They had to cut him down and laid him out on the bed”, after his daughter Shabhan found him hanging from a beam in the bedroom. Baby then delves into a prolonged silence and “stare[s] into space, to the place where they found the body hanging” (49). She “rock[s] herself—back and forth, back and forth . . . whispering prayers . . . her eyes . . . turned in on themselves” inhabiting her own thoughts (50). The full tragedy of Nazeer’s suicide is revealed towards the end of the narrative when Baby confesses to her granddaughter Aleyah that she herself gave Nazeer the rope with which he hung himself.

Clearly there is no space in the community of A Silent Life for a masculinity like Nazeer’s or a femininity like Baby’s. Nazeer’s alternative way of being a man in the initial part of the novel becomes a monstrous masculinity in the end because the historical period in which his character exists, coincides with the creation of Indian communities in early post-indenture Guyana, when manhood in these communities equaled the subordination of women.

The transformation of a man who just wanted “to enjoy” the world into a man who chooses suicide because he is unable to dominate his wife shows the pernicious influence his patriarchal community has had on him (28). Nazeer’s honor was not solely dependent on his wife being submissive and obedient in the early part of the narrative. However, towards the end of the narrative Nazeer begins to believe “that the honor of men is vested in women's virtue”, he also realizes Baby will not worship or obey him, but
rather that she is devoted to her cause of helping others (Mohammed, Gender Negotiations 9).

Aleyah’s Archeology of Memory in Ryhaan Shah’s A Silent Life

The details of Baby’s and Nazeer’s stories are gathered from various sources by Aleyah, who is the novel’s main narrator. Aleyah’s mother, Shabban, is one of the sources of these stories. “The trouble with Ma, your Nani. She wanted to change the world, well, change this little corner of it. She wanted to save everybody from illness and poorness, even death if she could” (A Silent 22). Sometimes Aleyah gathers the details of her recollection from her “Great Aunt Shamroom” who has a critical tone characteristic of the comments men and women in the community make about Baby’s insubordinate womanhood.

How many times I told her to leave those books alone, even up to her wedding day when she looked so pretty like a rose. But she would just laugh at me and say that Nazeer likes to listen to her reading, that he is not an old-fashioned man and he likes that she reads and has ideas of her own. (49)

Often, while narrating Nazeer’s and Baby’s stories, Aleyah adds her own imaginings to the incomplete versions of the stories she listens too, and her imaginings, these dreamlike thoughts often involve conversations between Baby and Nazeer. Aleyah tries to make whole her incomplete recollections of the past by inserting her own imaginings to fill the blank spaces. This combination of fact and daydream weaves the texture of the narrative in A Silent Life. Towards the end of the novel Aleyah remarks that: “The past is always here. It shapes us, walks with us” but the enactment of memory
for Aleyah also implies a degree of creation which she carries out each time she completes her stories.

In fact, what Aleyah does through this process of recollection, and through an archeology of her memory, is to reach her own conclusions about what she speculates fully happened between her grandparents Nazeer and Baby. However, as the narrative evolves, the reader realizes that Aleyah is not only speculating but projecting herself upon the retelling of her grandparents’ stories, and that the details of her own marriage and experience as a woman are emotionally grafted into her recollections of the life of her grandparents, because events in her grandmother’s life have been replicated in her own life.

‘No, Baby’, he says. ‘If you ever stop-up your words they’ll choke you. You aren’t like the other women round here who just keep their skirts and their kitchens. I like the fire in you, it’s true, but I can’t be who you want. You want to change the world. Me, I just want to enjoy it. You push me how you want to go and I try to speak your words and fight your fights. Now I’m ‘Baby’s boy’. That’s what the men call me. That and worse. All that they know is that their women know their place and don’t look to make themselves headman. (A Silent 28)

The above dialogue between Nazeer and Baby is imagined by Aleyah, after her mother Shabhan cuts short the story she is telling her, and “gets up and switches on the lights” (28). Aleyah then takes the incomplete narrative and goes to the “backyard”, sits “under a tree”, and turns her “mother’s memories, over and over again” in her head (25).
Aleyah also appropriates the stories that her Great Aunt Shamroon tells about her grandmother. “But a woman to blaze so bright on a stage? She should’ve known her place.” . . . “She must have known that a thing like that could only bring sorrow on your head. What made her think she could push herself up so and turn the whole world around?” (A Silent 20).

“Aunt Khadijah’s reply came quickly, right on the heels of the question. ‘She couldn’t help herself, you know Sham. She did try to stay back and let Nazeer do the stage work, remember?’ ‘But all he could do on a stage was dance’” (20). The retrospective nature of the narrative in A Silent Life creates a contrast between Aleyah’s past and present selves, and reveals how similar Aleyah’s and her grandmother’s emotional and psychological make-up are. Both women are at one point in their lives, torn between the expectations of men towards them, and the female gender roles imposed on them, and how these negate and limit their identity, which eventually causes them to suffer nervous breakdowns.

It is in the second part of the narrative, when Aleyah goes abroad to England, earns a degree and gets married, that the parallel between Baby’s and Aleyah’s experiences as women and wives becomes clearly evident. Baby’s and Aleyah’s marriages cause trauma and emotional dislocation to both their husbands and themselves. Baby’s refusal to stop her grass-roots activism has tragic results, and Aleyah like her grandmother, turns out to marry a man who does not measure up to her natural leadership and professional capabilities. Although there is a difference in historical location and education that separates these two husbands, since Nazeer Mohammed Raheem worked as an indentured laborer and Mohammed Dean Yacoob is far removed by generations
from the experience of indenture and is well educated, they both are men who share a patriarchal Indian social and cultural heritage.

Therefore, it does not matter if Aleyah and her husband Dean are members of the educated middle-class, they are not spared the frustration and madness that gender restrictions, impositions, and expectations can produce when they cannot fulfill or conform to them. There are certain clues in the novel to the fact that Aleyah’s recollection of her grandfather’s failures as a family provider and trying to act in Baby’s place as a labor movement activist, are triggered due to similar experiences with her husband Dean who has also failed to perform the gender roles he is expected to fulfill as the headman of his house.

Both Nazeer’s and Dean’s masculinities become wounded and emasculated not only because they cannot perform their expected roles of family providers and successful men, but because their wives are more competent and successful than they are, which in both men causes dishonor and emasculation. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar describe the distressing effects of being a woman writer in the male-dominated literary world of the 19th century. “Both in life and in art, we saw, the artists we studied were literally and figuratively confined. Enclosed in the architecture of an overwhelmingly male-dominated society,” which in turn produced in the fiction of women writers such as Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Dickinson, and Sylvia Plath: “Images of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves” (Gilbert and Gubar xi).

This feeling of entrapment within a society that expects women to do gender in a normative way is also experienced by men, regardless of our still “overwhelmingly male-
dominated society” (xi). In fact the inability to measure up to performance expectations in a male-dominated society produces Nazeer’s suicide and Dean’s depression in A Silent Life.

Mohammed Dean Yacoob’s Wounded Masculinity

In A Silent Life, the passing down of knowledge and recollections of trauma are predominantly done by women who have heard Baby’s and Nazeer’s stories through the grapevine. Baby’s plunge into silence is a mechanism of defense against the guilt she feels about Nazeer’s suicide, however it is also a mechanism to prevent passing down the trauma of her experience to her granddaughter Aleyah. “All day she would sit in her rocking chair with her hands prayer-folded and keep company with silence” (A Silent 8).

However, Baby’s fighting spirit is not dead, it is just paralyzed, and when her granddaughter Aleyah is born “she smile[s] and smile[s] and you could see the hope come fresh to her eyes” because Baby sees in Aleyah “her future”, believes Aleyah will “continue what she started”, that Aleyah is the one who is going to make “her promise come true” (31, 32). But at the same time, Baby fears that if Aleyah follows her steps, if she challenges the prescribed gender roles of her society, there will be tragic consequences, so Baby keeps these thoughts to herself.

Nevertheless, Baby’s influence on Aleyah has taken its toll; Aleyah does well in school and eventually wins a scholarship, leaving Guyana for England to study. In Britain, she meets Mohammed Dean Yacoob at a “fundraising dinner” “shortly after” she “start[s] working at World Aid” and shortly afterwards, marries him (87). Profoundly influenced by the stories she has been told about her grandmother’s community activism, Aleyah tries to make the world a better place through her work at the “World Aid”
organization. After being married for several years to Dean, Aleyah realizes he had initially been attracted to her because of the way she looked, because of what he assumed her physical appearance told him about her character. Dean had thought Aleyah to be submissive and malleable which was exactly the kind of woman he wanted to marry.

“He knew I was a girl from back home the moment he saw me, he said. ‘The face, the hair, the voice: I still remember. I was seven when my parents left for England, but I remember.’” (A Silent 89). It took years for Aleyah to recognize that Dean had chosen her: “a girl from back home”, because he believed her to be a woman who would subject to her husband. Dean “was a trainee accountant with the Angus Bank, but one day he was going to be a vice-president and then president. He was going to take all the banking examinations and business management courses needed to get there” (89). However, just as Nazeer’s promises to Baby had remained unfulfilled, Dean’s dream of becoming president of the Angus Bank is never fulfilled.

Aleyah’s grandmother is very critical of her husband Nazeer because he is a dreamer and an unsuccessful provider for the family which has negative effects on her grandfather, and Aleyah fears bringing up her own husband’s lack of successes can have similar consequences on him. When Aleyah is still a child, she dreams the following exchange of words between her grandparents which shows that already as a child, Aleyah is subconsciously coming to terms with the gender expectations prevalent in her community, which she will face head-on in her adult life.

They understand it to be so from the gods. In the Bible, in the Koran and the Gita, it’s the men who preach and do battle and the women—they keep
to their own things. So it’s been, so it’s always been, but you, Baby, you want to turn everything on its head.

I try to hustle a living for you and Shabhan. I catch my hand at everything to make a nice home, but that’s not enough for you. You want to breathe out words that shake up the world and burn a hole in the sky. Worse, I made a hole in myself for you to fill up, but the hole’s gone empty now, Baby. Empty, empty. (A Silent 28)

It is precisely the criticism above which Aleyah is afraid of laying on her husband for fear that Dean may also commit suicide to restore his bruised honor. Baby hopes through her silence that her traumatic experience with Nazeer will not be repeated in Aleyah’s life. However, Aleyah’s own marriage unfold in a similar way to that of her grandparents. The difference is that although Baby refuses to allow Nazeer to stop her from becoming vocal in the community again after many years of silence, Aleyah has kept herself from shining bright throughout her career in order not to undermine her husband’s self-esteem, and to keep her husband from spiraling into self-destruction like her grandfather.

The constant here after so many decades, is that, Nazeer’s and Dean’s masculinities are very fragile and vulnerable because its honor depends on the subordination of their wives’ intellect to avoid feeling threatened and dishonored. Thus, Shah’s representation of Indian masculinities in A Silent Life shows their immutable patriarchal nature which began to be exercised in the early post-indenture Indian community in the novel, and is still at work in Aleyah and Dean’s marriage, half a century later in England where they live.
As Aleyah watches her husband sink progressively into despair because he has not achieved the career goals he set out to accomplish when they married, she realizes that “only something dramatic and compelling will get him to turn away from the promise he has made to himself” and she tells herself: “I shall have to keep watch on the moments, the events of our lives, and wait for the time when I can fetch him from his despair” (A Silent Life 105). Initially A Silent Life appears to be narrated by Aleyah while she is a child, but later on it becomes evident that Aleyah’s narration is based on retrospection which takes place after she is recuperating from a nervous breakdown.

There is one significant similarity between Aleyah’s recollections at the beginning of the novel and towards the end of the novel, that suggest that Aleyah’s memories and entire narration in A Silent Life are triggered by a “clinical depression” and her “spirit being broken” and that her narrative is laced with facts from her own experience, as well as the stories she heard from her relatives, the imaginings she arrived at based on those stories, and at some critical points, the hallucinations produced by her mental breakdown (128).

I sighed, dreamt opened eyed of palaces and beaded gowns and rainbow-coloured gems that trapped light and glittered in the belly of the earth. I imagine myself grown beautiful, too, and living such a dream. Then the silent music that filled the air slowed and Nazeer and Baby were barely moving. The sun withdrew, and the room grew smaller, forcing the dancers to make smaller and smaller steps. I held my breath for an eternity and when I exhaled, the room exploded with light, and the walls drew back to their farthest corners. (A Silent Life 11)
The “opened eyed” dream quoted above actually takes place when Aleyah is a child after listening to stories about her grandparents that “came from the family women” (9). Several decades later after having had two boys with her husband Dean, Aleyah describes the symptoms she experiences the day she suffers her emotional and mental collapse as follows:

After travelling around the house a few times, I realized that each tour took me farther and farther away. Each time, the walls drew away from me, fell back as I advanced, leaving me to grapple with larger and larger spaces that opened up around me. I became smaller, each journey taking longer to complete as the terrain kept stretching itself out to a horizon that was always beyond reach. (A Silent 126)

These receding and withdrawing walls may represent Aleyah’s memories shifting from the past to the present as she tries to anchor herself to her present and her reality, but these walls receding and withdrawing from her, may also represent how Aleyah’s dreams and goals become increasingly more difficult for her to reach within her marriage to a man who is threatened by her success. The sensation of walls moving back and forth, making spaces smaller and then larger is present in both her childhood and adulthood memories, suggesting a oneness and an overlapping of the past and the present, the past remaking itself in the present.

Just like her grandmother Baby, Aleyah is an intellectual and an idealist who marries a man who is not her intellectual match. However, unlike her grandmother, Aleyah does not confront or criticize her husband’s lack of success. Instead, she keeps her professional accomplishments secret so her husband’s self-esteem does not further
erode. Aleyah feels compassion for Dean because of the pressure he is under to fulfill the expectations his father has of him.

And this happiness” . . . “when he was playing cricket or other games” . . . “he denies himself to study for exams I fear he will never pass. It took me years to admit this truth to myself, and realize that, without thinking about it, I’d been keeping my own successes from Dean out of consideration for all that he was not achieving. (A Silent 96)

The expectations to fulfill “patriarchal Indian social and cultural practices”, and the failure to do so cause significant pain to many of the characters in A Silent Life, including Nazeer, Baby, Aleyah, and Dean who nods meekly as “his father draws the familiar grand pictures for him, always sure that the first rung of the ladder of success is just within his son’s grasp” (97). Dean has made a promise to himself that he will accomplish the goal of becoming a successful bank manager, but whose dream is it really, is it his or is it his father’s dream? “The piles of books had just grown higher, and Dean’s lips more taut, as if he was under intense pressure to prove himself to his sons. Was that it, or was it his father’s bright ambitions, or his friend Raj making manager of the Oxford Street branch?” (97). Or is it Aleyah that Dean is “under intense pressure to prove himself to” (97)?

There is no clear answer to these questions. However, it is clear that Dean’s masculinity is further frustrated and vulnerable when he receives a letter “from the bank’s personnel manager” expressing “regret that the post of Assistant Accounts Director has been filled” and making the incisive comment that Dean “has applied for every senior post that has become vacant, even though he does not have the requisite qualifications
nor work experience” to fill these positions (*A Silent* 102). The letter written by “Mrs. Barbara Wilson Piggott” ends with an invitation for Dean “to meet with her to discuss setting more realistic career goals” (102). Aleyah finds this letter hidden in a drawer several months after Dean receives it and is surprised to see that Dean has not been “showing any distress greater than his usual weariness” (102).

Dean’s identity becomes further destabilized when Aleyah tells him she wants to accept a job promotion as director of “the Caribbean headquarters for World Aid” which would require that Aleyah, Dean, and their two boys, Omar and Arek all move to Barbados (117). “So, what happens to my years of work? What of my career? And since when do you make the decisions for the family? I’m the head of this house. You go where I go. It’s never the other way around.” (pp. 123-124). Shortly after Dean’s violent outburst at the dining room table Aleyah has a mental collapse and her “spirit” is “broken” (128).

Aleyah had hoped Dean was different than the men in her Muslim-Indian community at home, but Dean also believes women are not meant “to make themselves headmen” nor to “make the decisions for the family” but to “keep to their own things” (28). Aleyah’s realization that the past is still right there with her, becoming the present and the future, seems to unhinge her mind. In self-reproach, as if she had already known what the outcome of her present situation was going to be, and that she should have known better, Aleyah declares:

I had stepped over his authority. I had overstepped mine. No, we were not partners. Whatever gave me that idea? My highfalutin theories of women’s place in the world? Ha-ha-ha. Those lived between book covers.
In the real world, men were in charge and their wives followed, so many paces behind. (123-124)

Aleyah feels defeated by Dean’s threatened yet oppressive and menacing masculinity which depends on her subjection so he can survive the bitterness of his frustration. At least two generations have gone by, but just like the poverty and inequality Baby and Aleyah attempt to eradicate in Guyana at different points in history, the gender role expectations upon which patriarchy depends, remain strongly rooted across generations in the psyches of both men and women in A Silent Life. The pressure to conform to the expected performance of gender in A Silent Life becomes a monstrous weight which traumatizes Baby and Nazeer, and Aleyah and Dean.

However, in A Silent Life Shah presents alternative approaches to healing these traumas and to the possibility of female and male emancipation from these gender expectations although not without pain and risk. Aleyah “had thought the marriage” to Dean was “one thing when it was another” and now knows that divorcing him and standing on her own, and returning to Guyana are the things she needs to do to regain control of her life (138). Similarly, Dean takes Aleyah’s advice and gets “out of the bank and get[s] a job that” he “can really make a go of” and sets himself goals that he can achieve (138).

Dean unburdens himself from the expectations his father had created for him of becoming “a vice-president and then president” of the “Angus Bank”, and instead fashions his manhood in his own terms (89). Aleyah is glad to hear that her ex-husband has regained his emotional stability.

“Hi. How are you? What is this I hear about a new job?
“I wanted to tell you myself. I’ve changed my job. I’m now at Sainsbury’s, a purchasing manager. They have a good in-house promotion scheme.” As he talks about his work, I hear the high notes, the flow of words that I knew so well when I first met him. “I’m so happy for you.

You sound well,” I say. (A Silent 171)

Dean has gained control of his life by undoing the gender expectations that weighted him down, and Aleyah has done the same by realizing that marriage, at least to Dean, is not suitable for empowering who she is, because she is not, as Dean expected, “a simple girl from back home after all, someone comfortable with the old ways” which had had such negative effects on her grandparents Nazeer and Baby (138).

Sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one’s personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life. Other times, the experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim. (Butler, Undoing 1)

In A Silent Life attempting the undoing of “normative conception[s] of gender” is traumatic and tragic for the first generation of characters in the novel, Baby’s fire is extinguished and Nazeer commits suicide. However, the younger generation of Aleyah and Dean, although not free from trauma, have more space to maneuver the undoing of the “normative conceptions of gender” they are the inheritors off, but clearly the undoing of normative gender expectations is never painless, complete, or without risk, and neither is the tension between upholding and undoing Indian tradition which permeates Ryhaan Shah’s work (1).
The Violent and Corrosive Effect of Politics on Indian Masculinities and Gender Relations in *Tomorrow is Another Day* (1994)

**Introduction:**

In this chapter politics becomes a monster as well as a source of monstrosity which pollutes the characters and the multitude in Narmala Shewcharan’s *Tomorrow is Another Day* which is set in the period of the resurgence an escalation of ethnic tension in Guyana during the early 60’s and mid 80’s. Hardt and Negri argue that: “Political action aimed at transformation and liberation today can only be conducted on the basis of the multitude”, however the multitude in the present novel becomes a monstrous mob because it is propelled by an ethno-political hatred which is only concerned with domination through attaining and securing political power (99).

In *Tomorrow is Another Day* we encounter the violent and dangerous political period of Forbes Burnham’s dictatorship in Guyana from 1964 till his death in 1985. I use Foucault’s description of Louis XVI during his reign in France: “of the monster as king and of the king as monster” to read “P. M. Rouche’s” character which alludes to Forbes Burnham in the novel, and argue that the divisive party politics in the novel produce “revolutionary people” that although often meaning well, become “mirror images” of the governments monstrosity (*Abnormal* 98).

In the same period, however, opposite the royal monster we find the other great figure of the monster in the anti-Jacobin, counterrevolutionary literature. Here it is not the monster of the abuse of power, but the monster that breaks the social pact by revolt. The monster is no longer the king but
the revolutionary people who are the mirror image of the bloodthirsty monarch. (98)

The monstrosity of politics is manifested in several ways in the novel. In the first place it produces the “political monster” in whom “crime is pathologized” and for whom political power is the main goal (99). These are the” talentless party bureaucrats” of the “Official Party” who under “P. M. Rouche” have abused their political power, made themselves rich, and brought poverty upon others, replicating past colonial oppression (Shewcharan 49, 51).

The toxic and violent forces of politics also invade the rallies where political euphoria turns the crowd into a destructive multitude. Unfortunately, in Tomorrow is Another Day while “the country [is] in chaos” and the men in the novel are running “about like half-baked radicals in their vain efforts to oppose the chaos created by the corrupt and inefficient bureaucrats of the Official Party”, it is the women and their children in the novel who are left unprotected in their struggle to survive (Shewcharan 175, 199).

Besides the “political monsters” belonging to the governing party and the “revolutionary people” who militate in the opposing party, we have in this novel two characters, Lal Panday and Jagru Persaud who belong to the third category of politicians I look at in the novel, that of the idealistic politician who means well but cannot escape the corruption which permeates their entire society (Foucault, Abnormal 98).

**Theoretical Framework**

I read Tomorrow is Another Day as a novel “of political estrangement” since its characters suffer from separations resulting from hostility, migration, and imprisonment,
and the feeling of being alienated from other people and themselves (Scheingold 1). The feeling of disaffection, separation, and hostility is manifold and encompasses the political system, as well as the society, the families, the communities, and the individuals in the narrative.

Novels of political estrangement live in and draw sustenance from cultural context filtered through the mind’s eye. As such they empower us to re-imagine the twentieth century and help us to anticipate the twenty first. Novels of political estrangement engage not with political processes and institutions but instead with those who are subjected to, but have little or no say in the decisions made by authoritative agencies on their behalf — and too often at their expense. These novels are a product of, and a window into, the dispiriting calamities of the twentieth century.

(Scheingold 1)

Shewcharan’s represents in her novel the precarious position women were placed in the male-dominated political and economic scenario of the Georgetown, Guyana of the period. However, the author also shows how these women exercise their agency to secure the survival of their Indian community in ways which surpass in their effectiveness, the political engagements of men. Throughout this study I depart from Judith Butler’s premise that “gender”, and therefore masculinity “is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts”, an identity which is also constituted by history, and in Tomorrow is Another Day through the act of engaging in politics (“Performative Acts” 519). Violence is a driving force of the masculinities
performed in *Tomorrow is Another Day* and I look at such violence through the lens of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.

National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon. At whatever level we study it—relationships between individuals, new names for sports clubs, the human admixture at cocktail parties, in the police, on the directing boards of national or private banks—decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain "species" of men by another "species" of men. (35)

Political violence in the novel becomes a vicious cycle in which oppressor and liberator are difficult to tell apart. Furthermore, it is not only the replacing of one type of oppressor by another type of oppressor that takes place in the so-called “restoration of nationhood to the people” in the novel, but the revival of the colonial ideology of divide and conquer is kept alive (Fanon, *Wretched* 35). Because of the historical, cultural, religious, ethnic, and political complexity of Guyana’s society, I also use in this study the lens of the theory of Intersectionality coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw.

Crenshaw’s intersectionality seeks to “develop a Black feminist criticism” which departs from “the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis” (“Demarginalizing” 139). Crenshaw proposes to substitute “the single-axis framework” of analysis, focusing either on race or gender, for a “multidimensional” analytical framework in which the simultaneous effects of race and gender in Black women’s experience can be incorporated into the analysis of their
experience. Krenshaw utilizes the following analogy to exemplify the use of intersectionality.

Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (“Demarginalizing” 149)

Intersectionality as “an approach to literary analysis” aids in the analysis of “how a range of identity factors, such as gender, race, nationality, class, sexuality, age, physical ability, corporeality, role, or setting, interact to shape character” and particular nuances of masculinities (Kentoff 66). Both Jagru Persaud and Lal Panday identities are influenced and affected by their involvement in the political movements in the novel, but their different levels of education, and their different social, class, economic statuses result in often different political worldviews and actions. The simultaneous, multidirectional, and multifactorial perspective of the sources of oppression of Black women that Crenshaw proposes is optimal for the analysis of masculinity and femininity especially if we view prescriptive masculinity and femininity as forms of oppression which are forced upon both men and women through colonialism, colonial socialization, peer pressure, education, and the media, among other channels.

In Western culture performing gender is an inextricable aspect of identity formation, but why and how everyone asserts his or her identity through the performance
of masculinity and/or femininity depends on the concurrence of a variety of factors. Crenshaw demonstrates that Black women may experience simultaneous “double discrimination” . . . “in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men” (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing” 149).

Crenshaw’s concept of a multilayered, multidirectional experience of discrimination is applicable to the East Indian experience in the Caribbean because they have experienced colonialism, indenture, oppression, and discrimination “in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by” (149) Afro-Caribbean, Amerindians, Chinese Caribbean, Portuguese Caribbean, Syrian-Lebanese Caribbean, and Jewish Caribbean people, among others, because there is arguably a triple sense of otherness to the Indo Caribbean experience which incorporates three condemning gazes. The gaze of the white colonizer, the Afro-creole gaze, and Indian motherland gaze, all of which the Caribbean Indian is aware off.

Determining which are these “ways” of experiencing oppression “that are both similar to and different from” other ethnic groups in the Caribbean can help in the process of understanding the nature of Indo-Caribbean masculinities and femininities performed within specific historical, social, and political circumstances in the novel. Jagru Persaud and Lal Panday, and their wives and families experience oppression in unique ways which are determined by their different levels of education, social class and economic statuses. However, the precarious situation of their family becomes further affected by the decisions Jagru and Lal make throughout the narrative, deteriorating in *Tomorrow is Another Day* the symbiosis between the manhood and womanhood of these characters.
Another aspect Shewcharan captures in her novel is the massive migration and social and economic oppression the political rule of Forbes Burnham’s party: The People's National Congress (PNC) produces on the Indian community and women in the novel. The privilege of self-governance that independence brings during the historical and political period in *Tomorrow is Another Day* becomes a substitution of an external colonial oppression by a now internal political oppression in the guise of self-governance. The masculinities tainted by politics predominant in the novel have negative effects on the gender relations of the characters, and affect the stability of their families and communities. I look at the Indian gender relations in *Tomorrow is Another Day* through Sylvia Walby’s concepts of private and public patriarchy and how the mostly male-dominated world of politics in the novel further excludes women from the public sphere.

“Private patriarchy is based upon household production, with a patriarch controlling women individually and directly in the relatively private sphere of the home” while “public patriarchy is based on structures other than the household . . . regarded as part of the public domain” such as government positions and high paid jobs from which women in the narrative are barred from (Walby 178). With a few exceptions in the novel, women are mostly dependent on men for their economic sustainability, but this issue becomes worsened with class difference within the female characters in *Tomorrow is Another Day*.

In a similar way, although Radika Persaud is middle-class and Chandi Panday is poor and working-class, they are both relegated to the private sphere of the home, and have to fend for themselves when their husbands fix their attention solely on politics. However, in the estranged scenario of the city Chandi is in greater disadvantage. While
Radika Persaud is kept by her husband, Chandi Panday is forced to go into the unwelcoming city of Georgetown to find a job to feed her children after her husband abandons her. In addition, the sexual politics that subordinate women in the novel conflate the seclusion and subordination experienced in the private sphere and extends it into the public sphere of the market and city streets where women like Chandi are victims of sexual and physical violence (Walby 178, Millett 23).

Nonetheless, the peasant and working-class women in the novel are not isolated from each other and their communal effort to save their families and Indian community becomes Shewcharan’s antidote to the failing and destructive male-dominated politics in the novel. Mariam Pirbhai’s describes *Tomorrow is Another Day* as an example of the “development of the Indo Guyanese novel from an earlier generation’s focus on the secluded estate community to a younger generation’s more politicized interest in the urban Guyanese society” and this movement from the countryside to the city strains the economic and living condition of the peasant and working class characters in the novel such as Aunt Adee, Lal Panday and Chandi Panday (*Mythologies of Migration* 111). Now in the city the often possible self-sustainability that a plot of the land could bring is mostly out of reach, and shelter and economic survival depend on paying rent and obtaining a wage paid job.

Jagru Persaud’s and Lal Pandy’s complete focus on politics and their turning away from their wives and families affects their marital relations and particularly for Lal’s wife Chandi, affects her economic situation when she is left alone with the entire burden of providing for her children after Lal forsakes his family to go on the road as a political rally-speaker.
In comparison, Jagru’s economic situation is stable since he enjoys the privileges of his middle-class status, but his marriage erodes as well due to his fixation on politics. In one of their arguments, Jagru’s wife Radika tells him: “You come home and I’m here waiting like a doormat to greet you. You don’t tell me anything. You don’t act like you want to see me” (Shewcharan 125). In Shewcharan’s representation, politics becomes an ailment which clouds the judgement of the men in the novel, and the so-called decolonization process of self-governance becomes a type neocolonialism which excludes the masses in favor of a middle and upper-class minority.

**Historical and Political Background of Narmala Shewcharan’s *Tomorrow is Another Day***

The historical period of Shewcharan’s *Tomorrow is Another Day* spans from “the 1960’s to 1980’s” in postcolonial Guyana during “the People’s National Congress régime of Forbes Burnham” when “the utopian ideal of cooperative socialism in Guyana became a vile reality in which political expediency, corruption, racial intimidation, and violence (mainly) against Indian-Caribbean men and women, thrived” (Donnell 163).

Guyana’s oldest political party, the People’s Progressive Party (PPP), was founded in 1950 by Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham. The PPP won the 1953 elections and Jagan became Guyana’s first elected Chief Minister. Jagan’s political agenda was “to push for independence” and establish a “just socialist society”, but five months after the elections, Guyana’s constitution was suspended, and Jagan was substituted by a British interim administration under the allegation that he was about to “establish a Communist state in Guyana” (Notholt 3.12).
Burnham conveniently dissolved his political alliances with Jagan to divorce himself from the stigma of Communism, but more so to launch his own political career as he “formed the People’s National Congress (PNC)” establishing “the lasting racial/political fault line in Guyanese politics” which remains in the present 21st century (Notholt 3.12).

Britain restored the Guyanese constitution in 1957, and PPP won both the 1957 and 1961 elections with Jagan as Guyana’s premier. The People’s National Congress (PNC) party won the pre-independence election of 1964 and Burnham Forbes became the prime minister and later president of Guyana until 1985 when he died of heart failure during surgery of his throat. The atmosphere of Shewcharan’s *Tomorrow is Another Day* is impregnated with the racial and political tension described above, and with a sense of overall economic and social oppression dealt upon the characters by Burnham’s government.

The political tension between the Indo-Guyanese People’s Progressive Party and Afro-Guyanese People’s National Congress has very deep colonial roots. Since the emancipation of slavery and the subsequent introduction of Indian indenture labor to Trinidad and Guyana, an ethnic rivalry has existed between the African and Indian descended population in both Anglophone Caribbean nations. The first clash materialized when emancipated slaves complained that job wages had become unfairly low because Indian indentured laborers were willing to work for inferior wages than the ex-slaves were willing to accept.

Land ownership also became a point of contention between the two ethnic groups when at the end of their indenture contracts; many Indian laborers were given the
opportunity to become landowners as a way of luring them to continue working in plantation fields. However, the opposite took place with emancipated slaves and “ordinances designed to restrict the sale of land and cripple villagers’ autonomy in the management of their own affairs” were approved after slave emancipation (Peake and Trotz 44).

Progressively, the demarcation of completely different and separate Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese identities and corresponding masculinities and femininities becomes an integral aspect of ethnic and political identity formation and differentiation for both groups during the post-indenture, independence, and post-independence periods in Guyana. In Tomorrow is Another Day the nation building project of the “Official Party” is not trying to fight a foreign impurity, but the Indo-Guyanese population which is treated as an ethnic internal impurity. Consequently, the Afro-Guyanese government in the novel limits the Indian population from access to political power and relegates them to a position of economic disadvantage.

Theorizing the Rise of an Indian Political Masculinity

Masculinity is an ever evolving cultural, societal, political, and psychological construct which is learned, imposed, and assimilated through parenting, peer pressure, education, religion, politics, and law. However, masculinity is also an identity construction tool which can be customized by the individual, and may also be viewed as a game with a set of stated rules by a given culture, into which individuals bring their own style together with their ethnic, religious, social-class, economic, intellectual, and psychological make-ups.
This primordial investment in the social games (*illusio*), which makes a man a real man, the sense of honor, virility, 'manliness', or, as the Kabyles say, 'Kabylness' (*thakbaylith*) is the undisputed principle of all the duties towards oneself, the motor or motive of all that a man 'owes to himself'; in other words what he must do in order to live up, in his own eyes, to a certain idea of manhood. (Bourdieu 48)

During the independence and nation building period in the Anglophone Caribbean, the idea of a masculinity performed through politics became closely associated, although not exclusively, to a local rising, educated middle-class which sought to demonstrate that its members had the maturity necessary for carrying out the political self-governance of the colonies. “Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Guyana all attained independence by the mid-decade of the 1960s and they immediately embarked on expansionist, state-building policies” (Barriteau, *The Political Economy* 61).

In the colonial Caribbean, what a man did, “in order to live up, in his own eyes, to a certain idea of manhood” depended greatly on his race, legal status, education, and social and economic position. The criteria of “a certain idea of manhood” was different during the periods of slavery, indenture, emancipation, post-emancipation, post-indenture, and particularly during the independence and nation building periods in the Caribbean, when politics and the involvement in political self-determination were tools to redefine and assert the masculinity of many men in the Caribbean (Bourdieu 48).

For many educated middle-class men in the Caribbean, engaging in politics became a way of redefining themselves and their manhood. A political masculinity
allowed them to expand their role from domestic patriarchs who guided and provided for their families and communities into public patriarchs and the glorified role of fathering the nation. For the purpose of the analysis of masculinities in *Tomorrow is Another Day* I use the following definition of “political masculinity” by Starck and Sauer (6):

“Political masculinity” encompasses any kind of masculinity that is constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed by “political players”. These shall be individuals or groups of persons who are part of or associated with the “political domain”, i.e. professional politicians, party members, members of the military as well as citizens and members of political movements claiming or gaining political rights. (6)

Furthermore, the concept of political masculinity in this chapter is synonymous with “Caribbean elitist masculinities” which “are built upon the symbols of colonial white masculinities” ranging “from political leadership to Western education and wealth” which are represented in “the Afro-Caribbean middle class that dominate[s] the political landscape during the early years of independence” in the Guyana of *Tomorrow is Another Day* in characters such as “Mitchell” who “get[s] his value in returned favors” in a corrupted political world were one hand washes the other (Diatta 142; Shewcharan 64).

The Indian masculinities performed in *Tomorrow is Another Day* are still driven by patriarchal models of domination and subordination of others. The roots of these patriarchal models of domination, as discussed in the introduction of this study, are cemented in ancient Indian mythology and religion, which were then further shaped by British colonialism in India, and reenacted and transformed in the Caribbean plantations
during the indenture period, and later reconfigured in the post-indenture establishment of Indian villages in Guyana and Trinidad.

In *Tomorrow is Another Day* we see the further transformation that involvement in politics operates on Indian masculinities in the Georgetown, Guyana of the novel, and theoretically in the Caribbean during the novel’s historical period. A shift from Indian men centered on the reconstitution of the Indian family within rural Indian villages and communities, to Indian men with their sights set on attaining political power and operating social change through politics within the inauspicious scenario of the city. bell hooks’ definition of patriarchy is useful here:

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (“Understanding” 18)

In *Tomorrow is Another Day* the “psychological terrorism and violence” of patriarchy’s “political-social system” becomes omnipresent in the city scenario where the violence of the private and public sectors of gender relations becomes fused making the metropolitan scenario inhospitable for women. In fact the city of Georgetown in *Tomorrow is Another Day* becomes as unsafe and violent for the women in the novel as plantations were during the indenture period in Guyana. There is an impending sense of danger in Shewcharan’s narrative which is derived from her first-hand experiences as a female-witness and as a journalist working for the *Guyana Chronicles* during the 1980’s stretch of Forbes Burnham’s dictatorship.
Through her characters Shewcharan presents us with three basic political masculinities which are shaped and affected by the level of education, social and economic status, but foremost by the morality and intentions of the characters. The first type is the political “Caribbean elitist” masculinity represented in the members of the “Official Party” in the novel who show what Lauderdale denominates as “political deviance”, in the way they “circumvent” legal and social “restrictions to achieve personal ends” (Shewcharan 49; Diatta 142; Lauderdale 521). Ben-Yehuda theorizes that “morality, in and by itself, is insufficient to turn any behavior into deviance” since in any given society “there are many people who feel that some behaviors are deviant and many others who disagree” (213). Therefore, Ben-Yehuda argues that “the other major element” necessary “to turn any behavior into deviance . . . is power. It is the combination of power and morality which lies at the basis of what is defined as deviance and what is not” (213) Therefore, those in power are not only capable of determining what is deviant and what is normal, but those in power can also legitimate morally deviant behaviors such as corruption (213).

“Rouche”, like Burnham Forbes, wins “the support of his own [African descent] people” and “manage[s] to persuade many of the other peoples” that he has “all their interest at heart”, however through the years of his dictatorship “corruption and inefficiency” grow, and any discontent expressed by the people is dealt with violent repression (Shewcharan 50). However, besides this type of politician which is corrupted and immoral, Shewcharan also imagines alternative types of politicians which are not self-serving but rather have the “energy . . . to pursue universal causes” like Jagru Persaud, or a “grass-roots person” like Lal Panday (236, 142).
Although Shewcharan lays bare the corruption, violence, and immorality of the “Official Party” and its members in 1980’s Guyana, she also paints another face of politics in which well-intended yet idealistic men like Jagru Persaud and Lal Panday, try to make a difference for their community (Shewcharan 49). Parallel to the stories of these men, Shewcharan also tells us the stories of the Indian women in their lives, of their wives and mothers who instead of being swept political hysteria and fanaticism, fight for survival through “a model of female activism” which concentrates in the safeguarding of their families and the community (Pirbahi, “Recasting” 40). The following two sections compare Jagru Persaud’s and Lal Panday’s political masculinities and the intersection of the different elements of class, education, and economic status which make each of these political masculinities unique.

**The Alternative Politicians in *Tomorrow is Another Day***

As stated before, the socio-historical process in which the issue of masculinity is placed in this chapter is the period between the early 1960’s and the mid 1980’s in Guyana when ethnic tension between Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese people became further complicated when it took the shape of an ethno-political issue. Within this ethno-political violence, politics becomes the blue-print for creation of new masculinities in the novel which at times are positive and at others violent, oppressive, and toxic. In “Caribbean Masculinities at the Fin de Siècle”, Linden Lewis places the origins of Caribbean men’s engagement in politics to “contest colonial authority” in the late 19th century (249).

In all of these changes Caribbean men began to appropriate the new opportunities for leadership which were emerging and became actively
involved in contesting certain aspects of the established economic and political order of the day. In the end, freed and formerly indentured men in the Caribbean at this historical conjuncture began to negotiate new routes which would eventually lead to their control over much of the public domain. In short, by the end of the nineteenth century the transition from colonial male domination to indigenous male ascendency had already begun. (250)

I argue this historical moment in the end of the nineteenth century in which “the transition from colonial male domination to indigenous male ascendency” took place, mutates and degenerates in 20th century Guyana into a politics of madness. For the purpose of this analysis politics is defined as the “power structured relationships, the entire arrangement whereby one group of people is governed by another,” and in which “one group is dominant and the other subordinate” (Millet 23). Sometimes the political masculinities the men in Tomorrow is Another Day display are naïve and idealistic, and at others immoral and premeditated, but always harmful since subordination is an inextricable part of the corruption that surrounds them.

Although in general I look at the effects of politics on the psyche of all men in the novel, my focus is on Jagru Persaud and Lal Panday. Jagru is a middle-class, educated career-politician, and Lal is an ex-sugar factory worker who becomes a grass-root politician. Even though both of these Indian men have different social and economic statuses, and have different levels of education, which allow them different political world views and approaches to politics, both men show a tendency to depart from, and put in second place or abandon the role of breadwinner and protector of their families,
giving priority to politics which becomes their way of life and their idealistic way of helping others.

In politics Jagru Persaud and Lal Panday find a higher calling upon which to reconfigure their manhood. For both these characters, politics becomes a drug which makes them experience euphoria and elation; an exhilarating psychological state of pride and optimism which their status as fathers, providers, and breadwinners no longer provides. Family and marriage become incompatible with the stimulus politics provides them. Therefore, in different but equally harmful ways, both Jagru and Lal abandon the palpable and tangible entities of marriage, family, and community to adopt an “imagined political community” as their new family (Anderson 49).

I read Lal’s and Jagru’s characters as alternative types of politicians those who are members of the corrupt “Official Party”, and to the hysterical and equally violent members of the opposing “Worker’s Party” (Shewcharan 39, 42). However, although with well-intended goals, Shewcharan portrays these characters as naïve because they are often blinded by idealism and do not recognize the pervasive colonial ideology of divide and conquer which still drives and poisons the politics of the parties they belong too. In this way, Shewcharan points at the inadequacy of a male controlled political apparatus as the solution for social and economic inequality in the novel, and in contrast shows how the Indo and Afro Guyanese women in the novel become indispensable and sharp-witted elements in the survival of the Indian community in the novel which the political system is destroying. While men have the luxury to engage in political platitudes, the women have now become the providers for their families. But have also become the last rung of
the ladder, and placed in the most vulnerable position in their society where they are being brutalized and disposed of.

Manu [is] talking about what he call[s] another ‘raid’. Jagru cock[s] his head attentively, but [is] thinking about himself, about what the next day would bring.

‘They killed her afterward. The police find her with her hands tied. She had marks all over her body’ . . . The words pierced through Jagru’s self-absorption. He stared at Manu. What was he talking about? . . . Manu shook his head sadly: ‘Things getting worse. They take you gun. But what happens? They put these satellites overhead and everybody getting TV sense. They have more kickdown door bandits here than in the movies.

(Shewcharan 25)

The increasing vulnerability of working-class and peasant women in *Tomorrow is Another Day* arises from how they have been further alienated by the political system and by the men in their lives. Shewcharan representation of Lal and Chandi Panday’s marriage points at the erosion of the Indian family during the political turmoil in the novel, and the deterioration of Indian manhood, represented in Lal Panday, which turns its’ back on Indian tradition by disregarding marriage and the family.

**Lal Panday’s Emotional Political Masculinity**

Lal Panday is an Indo-Guyanese working class man who is not highly educated, and who is tired of his sugar factory job. The legacy of indenture and the feeling that he is still under the weight of oppression like his ancestors weighs heavily on him. Initially in the narrative Lal performs an “instrumental breadwinner masculinity”, which defines his role within his family and community life as a provider, but eventually the
breadwinner role becomes a “shameful masculinity” for him, which he rejects altogether (Hanlon 50, 69). “One could not just live to eat. Was this all life was about. ‘There’re things which a real man should do to maintain his dignity,’” (Shewcharan 37). Usually, not being able to provide for his family would be a shameful situation for a man, but instead it is working at the sugar factory to provide for his family which feels shameful to Lal. “It is difficult for marginalized men with low status and limited access to resources to feel valued as men” and Lal is tired of feeling he is “a cog in a system” which he feels robs him of his humanity.

Therefore, looking to be valued as a man, Lal becomes “political” and forsakes “his own in order to fight . . . for a better tomorrow for everyone” (Hanlon 70; Shewcharan 70, 72). After Lal joins the opposition “Worker’s Party” Chandi wonders what is going to “happen to her children”, what is going to happen “to her?” (Shewcharan 42). And she wonders about Lal’s safety as well, for she knows stories of “people who [have] been locked up or killed for opposing the Government” (42). Lal’s journey to becoming political had started with a nervous breakdown which sent him to the hospital. Chandi, and her children had become “dispossessed of the home she had helped to build for so many years with her husband . . . all because this sudden sickness” (17). Even the “marriage itself” seemed “to disappear overnight, leaving her alone with the burden of all the tomorrows which came” and found her without shelter or money (17).

Lal’s “strange illness” is not just produced by the physical work he performs at the “sugar factory” but by the emotional and psychological dehumanization he experiences there (35). Chandi does everything possible to make Lal “stop shutting the world out”, encouraging Lal “to stop being a pale shadow on the bed, looking at the wall
as if that was all there was to life”, but Lal’s coping mechanism is to discard his identity as a worker and provider and forge a new identity as a self-proclaimed savior of his people (Shewcharan 35).

Why I go take back that job? You think I’m a machine to be cutting cane all my life? Eh? You ever try standing up for hours at the car park to get transportation, then bending your back for the rest of the day in a wet muddy field? They can keep their damned job. No more slave work! (37)

Lal not only rebels against working in the cane fields, but also against his position as breadwinner and protector of his family, in short, against Indian tradition itself. His identity and masculinity are no longer guided by his culturally and socially imposed role as father, provider, and protector of his family, or by the fear of failing to fulfill the role of head of the family which he felt when he lost the house he had built with Chandi. Rather, Lal is convinced that “there’s things which a real man should do to maintain his dignity” . . . because “in this land it have only slaves and blasted parasites” and he is not willing to be either (37).

When Lal “sought refuge in the hospital bed” complaining he had a “sickness of the soul”, he was undergoing an existential crisis which dislocated his identity, but now he felt reassured and full of purpose after his decision to delve into politics (16). Perhaps Lal’s unwillingness “to take his job again and make haste to provide for his family” also comes as a result of being “dispossessed of the home” he and Chandi had “built for so many years” together, which must have demoralized and uprooted him in a way which made the option of starting all over again, daunting. This is evident in the way Lal feels when he is forced to leave the hospital. Chandi “watched silently as he prepared his
things to leave the hospital. His shoulders were slumped as if he had just been sentenced to jail, instead of being reprieved from his hospital bed” (Shewcharan 36).

Shortly after leaving the hospital, to “maintain his … real man . . . dignity”, Lal abandons his family, and as he leaves he tells his wife Chandi: “there isn’t going to be any money for a while”, and becomes militant in the “Worker’s Party” as a speech-writer and rally-speaker (37, 41). The political fervor and “fierce energy” that burns “within him” is “fueled by the same anger” that makes him walk away from his family, an anger which is not far from madness. In fact, Lal becomes a self-fulfilled prophecy, bringing upon his family the homelessness, pain, and hunger that his “grass-root” efforts want to eradicate in the lives of others. This contradiction is clearly manifest in one of the speeches Lal delivers at a rally.

I am prepared to work hard. I believe in hard work. My job gave me a shelter over my head. It gave my children bread in their mouths. But the day came when I had to stand back and take stock. I left my job. How could I continue? How could I allow myself to be fed and housed and to be a cog in a system which was allowing so many others to starve? (72)

Lal Panday’s speech is quixotic especially at a time when his wife Chandi lives in an abandoned shack “with no electricity” and “ha[s] to cook outside the shack on an earthen fireside, fuelled by the driftwood the children [collect] from around the neighbourhood” (18). Although Lal is not aware of it, Chandi is pregnant with their fifth child when he leaves his family. The situation worsens when Janki, their daughter, is caught stealing at a store and sent to the police station, and the humiliation and stress due to her daughter’s arrest causes Chandi to have a miscarriage. Lal’s political ventures cost
him the respect and approval of his children, especially from his oldest son Das, who loves him but does not understand why Lal instead of “join[ing] the smugglers” to earn a living, “ha[s] chosen to become a political rat” and has forgotten about his own family (Shewcharan 71).

While Lal delivers a speech at a rally, his son Das watches him, “drawn by his father’s eloquence”, “but still feeling a deep-seated resentment against the man who [has] deserted them” while trying to figure out “why his father considered them so unimportant in comparison with his political antics”? (73). Shewcharan represents in Lal Panday a working-class Indian masculinity which is still tied to the plantation economy and sees in politics a redeeming possibility. Answering Das’s questions about his father’s decision to walk away is not a simple task. Perhaps Lal is too vulnerable to retake his expected role, or perhaps he simply does not want too. In the conclusion of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon makes the distinction between the approach to fighting colonialism which a “Negro who works on a sugar plantation” would have, versus that of an educate middle-class Negro like himself (174).

For the Negro who works on a sugar plantation in Le Robert, there is only one solution: to fight. He will embark on this struggle, and he will pursue it, not as the result of a Marxist or idealistic analysis but quite simply because he cannot conceive of life otherwise than in the form of a battle against exploitation, misery, and hunger. (174)

Lal Panday is a working-class Indo-Guyanese man who works in the fields of a sugar cane factory and his feverish involvement in political activism, and his turning away from his family is in essence an act of rebellion carried out under extreme duress.
No doubt his actions seem to be driven by a blinding madness and are harmful to his family, but he is clearly fighting to eradicate the burden of the legacy of indenture from his life, and his psyche.

It’s not enough to say that we can’t take it anymore. We must make it plain that we won’t take it anymore.’ The speaker paused. He was a short man, eyes bulging out of a gaunt face, loose-fitting clothes flapping over his thin body. Lal Panday was alone on the platform with a microphone which seemed to dwarf him. He should have made a pitiful figure, his defiance ridiculous, but he did not. Indeed, his appearance seemed to lend fire to his words, making his audience listen as if spell-bound. ‘Yes’ he shouted, waving his arms as his words rushed at the microphone, ‘we must place our lives on the line if necessary. For believe me, my friends, we are already doing this in a place where we must crawl to survive, where we can only live by scavenging for food for our bellies and scuttling into huts at night for shelter. (Shewcharan 71)

Lal’s messianic leadership and the political euphoria that carries him into the masses and political rallies comes to a tragic end when he is stabbed one morning when “the first light [is] beginning to appear over the horizon as he arrive[s] at the party’s rooms” (213).

He tried to pull the knife out but couldn’t. The pain was overwhelming. . . He had been going to write a speech. What had it been about? Chandi. She would be worried. He couldn’t let her worry. He had promised her. But he might not have lived up to this. Had he made her worry? What had he
done? He tried to trace the path of recent happening, but it was all too hazy. How had he wronged Chandi? He felt an unquenchable need to reach out to her, to tell her that he had never meant to hurt her, to see her smiling at him, wanting to spend the rest of her life with him” (214).

Lal Panday’s attempt to reconstruct his identity and masculinity through politics is not necessarily deplorable; on the contrary, poverty and destitution are painful landscapes upon which to construct one’s identity. However, by turning his back on his family and embracing an “imagined political community” which turns against him in the shape of an anonymous murderer, Lal Panday renounces to the community which most matters, his family (Anderson 49).

**Jagru Persaud’s Cerebral Political Masculinity**

The reconceptualization of Jagru Persaud’s masculinity through politics has similar yet different manifestations than those experienced by Lal Panday. In the first place, Lal Panday is a naïve idealist driven by enthusiasm and a thirst for social change through positive action. Jagru Persaud is an intellectual plagued by cynicism and ambivalence. Differences in social class, level of education, and socio-economic statuses intersect differently in Lal’s and Jagru’s identity makeups, producing two distinct types of political masculinity.

Jagru Persaud’s actions and thoughts embody the Indo-Guyanese middle class attitudes during the twenty-four years of the PNC’s political control of Guyana. Jagru seeks representation, a voice, recognition, approval, and above all, a share of political power in the decision-making process in the political arena controlled by the Afro-Guyanese “Official Party” (Shewcharan 39). Jagru leaves the “United Party” to join the
party in power because he truly believes he can operate positive changes in his society which will benefit his “imagined political community” (Shewcharan 141). Unlike Lal Panday’s needs which are more immediate and material, Jagru’s needs are more intellectual and driven by an egotistical craving for recognition.

He had not defected. Not from what was just and right, not from his beliefs. He had simply made a timely recognition of the influence wielded by those in power. He did not believe that one man alone [Rouche/Burbham] was responsible for everything as the opposition claimed. There was in reality, a complex power structure in which quite a number of people and groups had a share of authority and responsibility.

He thought of the many things he could do with such authority. (15)

Jagru is no less naïve and idealistic than Lal Panday, when he believes that he can effect change through political action. The difference is that Lal knew effective change was only achievable through putting in power an Indo-Guyanese administration. In fact, Jagru Persaud seems more naïve than Lal Panday because Jagru believes that regardless of the corruption and centralized power characteristic of the “Official Party”, which he has recently joined, he will be granted a share of authority to improve “the welfare of others” (Shewcharan 39, 128). “I would be pleased” Jagru muses, “to be given the opportunity to help, in any way I could” (128).

However, Jagru is part of the problem of the existing economic and political inequality If in Lal Panday, Shewcharan represents and symbolizes the alienated working-class sector of the Indo-Guyanese population during the twenty-four years in power of Burnham Forbes’ People's National Congress (PNC). Then, through Jagru
Persaud, she represents and symbolizes the “relatively privileged professional and intellectual” middle class with its “elitist leadership style” which helped Burham Forbes stay in power (Mars 105).

In his study of the *Caribbean Left*, Perry Mars observes that the “middle class control” has historically been “a negative factor in the efforts of the Left towards successful mobilization of the masses and working classes, and thwarts the eventual realization of political power and social transformation” (105). Evidently, the political aims of the middle class during the pre-and post-independence period in the Caribbean were to secure their position of privilege which seldom aligned with the needs of the peasant and working classes. On the contrary, their position of privilege depended on the oppression of these groups.

Jagru Persaud’s political ideals are as quixotic as Lal Panday’s, because he knowingly jumps into the tiger’s mouth and joins the “Official Party” even though he knows their strength resides on centralizing “political power” while they make false promises about “mass empowerment” (105). In denial of these issues, Jagru Persaud tells himself and his friends: “I am not hungry for power. I’m just tired of seeing things go wrong. If I’m up there I may be able to help, even if it’s a little” (Shewcharan 29). Ironically, Jagru’s blind idealism becomes the potential source of monstrosity because it becomes the silent accomplice of injustice.

Jagru’s switching of political parties, from the opposition party to the party in power, matches his need to reconfigure his identity and masculinity because he needs to communicate and to be heard, to satisfy a sense of approval and validation, which being in the opposition party does not fulfill. Jagru is mostly a positive, educated, and well-
intended politician who nevertheless is insecure and craves reassurance from his wife, friends, and party members.

Jagru also yearns for a community of politicians that will share his ideals and political views, but to his disappointment he realizes that his colleagues and party members are only there for the money and for “superfluous allowances”, which makes his disappointment with the “Official Party”, increasingly escalate (Shewcharan 54). One day while at lunch, Mitchell asks Jagru: “Why do you want to do anything? They’ve given you a letter about your salary, haven’t they?” (54). Mitchell’s indifference and greed angers Jagru. In fact, Jagru soon recognizes that the heroic alliances he expected to form with other members of the “Official Party” will never take place.

Instead, not long after his switching to the “Official Party”, on “orders from the Prime Minister” and “based on evidence” that is fabricated, Jagru is stripped from his “ministerial rank” and “placed under immediate arrest” with the intention to discredit the “United Party” which he was a member of not long ago (218). Sadly, Jagru’s idealism and naivety have made him a sacrificial lamb of the “Official Party” (39).

Consequently, unlike Lal who never doubts politics can be the ultimate venue for serving his people, Jagru Persaud’s original enthusiasm begins to wear out. In Patricia Mohammed’s view, “how concepts of masculinity and femininity undergo change is determined by the political and material circumstances of the period” (Gender Negotiations 264), but changes in “concepts of masculinity and femininity” are also influenced by the intellectual nature of individuals. To be highly educated permits Jagru to eventually become sarcastic and unbelieving of his own political mission while Lal Panday’s limited education permits him the bliss to be blindly fanatical and naïve about
his political ideals. Jagru Persaud’s political masculinity is at times fatalistic, and at others, as idealistic as Lal Panday’s.

At an “Official Party’s” rally Jagru shows ambivalence and reluctance towards his purpose in politics and the people he is supposed to serve (Shewcharan 39).

At the microphone, the man began to urge the crowd. People began to shout and clap and cheer. This was absurd. This people were suffering. Many could not afford proper food. He wanted to shout at them, to urge then not to glory in their suffering. Instead, he found that his own hands had somehow come together and that from his own throat the sound of ‘hallelujah’ to echo the roar of the crowd. (49)

Jagru is turned-off by the fanatical mentality of the people he claims he wants to help. He wants to urge them, to stop glorying “in their suffering,” (49) and scorns them for succumbing to political euphoria. However in the blink of an eye, Jagru Persaud is swallowed by the same emotions and feelings he had a moment ago found absurd and disgusting. In Jagru we witness a tug between two aspects of his political masculinity: his cerebral masculinity in opposition to his emotional masculinity. Although at times Jagru seems to feel compassion for the constituents of the “Official Party” (39) he represents, he feels no kinship towards the people in the crowd. But surprisingly, when Jagru walks by the “Old Square” and encounters a “protest march” (49) carried out by the opposing “Worker’s Party”, he has an unexpected reaction to the participants in the march (42).

A woman was leading the marches. About eleven men. As Jagru watched, he found himself in the grip of a tightening in the pit of his stomach which claimed kinship with the group and it was all he could do not to cross over
and join them. He pressed panic buttons. What was he doing here? Was it safe? With an effort, he turned and walked away. (Shewcharan 92)

The latter passage reveals a great deal about Jagru Persaud because it illustrates how his intellectual and socio-economic status have distanced him from his Indian ethnic roots in such a way that he refuses to commune with the group of marchers even though he is emotionally, physically, and psychically drawn to them. Evidently, the marchers Jagru is standing before are his real and tangible political community, but he rejects them, and turns and walks away to pursue the bettering of a fictional society which he cannot see or touch, driven by abstract ideals of progress and modernity, in contrasts with Lal Panday’s more concrete goals which sought dignified work that would provide descent food and shelter for his people.

**Women In Tomorrow is Another Day**

In the novel there are only three women who consider getting involved in politics. At one point in the narrative Asha feels inspired by Jagru Persaud’s determination to bring positive change through his new political appointment at the “Official Party” and Asha is tempted to stop being “a distant observer” and “become more active” in the political struggle (179). “Perhaps change was possible, if people joined together in hope and determination”, however Asha brushes away this idealistic thought and returns to her original view that “it made little sense to run about like the half-baked radicals in their vain efforts to oppose the chaos created by the corrupt and inefficient bureaucrats of the Official Party” (179).

The other two female characters who actually are engaged in political activism in the novel are Ban and Mitzi. “Ban had celebrated with the Official Party after their rigged
victory, believing in their claims that they would strive for development and prosperity” but “disillusioned” by the parties “total absence of principle” lives the party and becomes “one of the founders” of the political opposition, the “Workers Party” (Shewcharan 141). Mitzi is “devoted to Ban” and they had been “colleague” at the “Official Party”, and “loyal to the last” Mitzi follows Ban and the “Workers Party” (141).

Mitzi and Ban stand in contrast to the rest of the peasant and working-class women in the novel because they are completely devoted to the “grass-roots” work of their party because they have no family so sacrificing “their family life for the cause” has never been an issue for then (142). However, contrary to these two women, Aunt Adee, Kunti Persaud, and Chandi Panday are “so busy trying to make ends meet they [have] no time for any other considerations, political or otherwise” because motherhood is their foremost task (142). However, these women give a new sense to the concept of motherhood which goes beyond the stereotype of their reproductive and nurturing roles the preservation of Indian culture associated with the domestic realm and make of motherhood a vital force that commands the public domain of the city, the market, and their communities.

Alison Donnell describes the author’s approach to politics in *Tomorrow is Another Day* in the following way:

Shewcharan shows how the anticipated nationalist models of public power and masculine agency are no longer functioning in the service of egalitarian anti-colonialism. The inefficiency, corruption and many scandals of the state simply negate the possibility of transformative politics that Jagru initially invests in. (*Twentieth-Century* 163-164)
But Shewcharan also shows how women face the consequences of the failed male-dominated nationalist model with a united front and unbreakable alliances like those between Kunti, Chanti, and Aunt Adee. As Chandi’s ability to provide food and shelter for her children becomes increasingly more difficult, Jagru Persaud’s mother, Kunti convinces him to help Chandi find a house to live in, and “a job” for her daughter “Artie” (Shewcharan 196).

It is because his mother’s request that he helps Chandi Panday, and that Jagru actually effects positive change in his community. It is through his mother’s influence and upbringing that Jagru is able to fulfill his desire “to contribute to the best of [his] ability”, and not through his political appointment to the “Official Party” (39, 128). Soon after Chandi moves into the “new house, with its nice beds and furniture” where she lives with her children, her estranged “wild-looking” and “malnourished” husband, Lal Panday seeks his wife and finds Jagru Persaud alone with her at the house he has found for her (121, 197). After rudely dispatching Jagru away, Lal questions Chandi about the house and about how can she be able to afford it. Chandi does not answer Lal, and “with calculated brutality [he sets] about to master her body” and forces himself upon her (197). The desperate and chaotic atmosphere in the novel causes both the vulnerability of Indian women in the novel, and the violent mutation of the irrational Indian manhood which Lal Panday exhibits.

Her silence seemed to goad him and he made a savage attempt to rip off her dress. The new material resisted his efforts. They were lying on the floor now and Chandi cringed as he forced himself upon her, savagely pushing her legs apart. Needles of pain shot through her, reminding her
that it had not been very long since she had lost her child. (Shewcharan 197)

Lal rapes Chandi, whom he abandoned to become a political rally speaker and to “fight for what he felt was a greater cause, to fight for a better tomorrow for everyone”; rapes his wife because he erroneously imagines she has been unfaithful to him (192). This is the violent behavior of a monster, or a madman, but also of a very vulnerable man who reclaims the only remaining stable aspect of his manhood, his wife’s body. Lal and Chandi never see each other again, and the survival of her family is entirely left in her hands. For women like Aunt Adee, Kunti Persaud, and Chandi Panday, motherhood becomes the energy that fuels their “female activism” and gives them direction (Pirbhai, “Recasting” 40).

Mariam Pirbhai observes that in Tomorrow is Another Day Shewcharan sets “up a model of female activism that is deeply embedded in women’s plantation histories” where they struggled to be self-sufficient through strong ties with other Indian women, ties which become even more crucial for survival in the city scenario were the self-sustainability that land allowed in the country side is rare now, and were people depended on “queuing” in “food lines” to receive government handouts (“Recasting” 40; Shewcharan 17).

Struggles for self-sufficiency are evident in characters such as Aunt Adee “who work[s] and [sleeps] . . . at the market . . . and would know if there were any jobs going” in order to help other women (Shewcharan 43); and Kunti Persaud, who “had spent many years bending in the canefields to give” her son Jagru “a reasonable education” (54). The Georgetown, Guyana Shewcharan documents is as hostile and as dangerous to these
women, as the plantations and barracks during indenture. Within this dangerous environment, the community and the family remains the focus of their efforts, while the men focus on their political parties and rallies.

By contrasting the party politics and feminist activism of these men and women in the novel, Shewcharan highlights the indispensable need of “female activism” for the survival of the community in the novel, and the opposite counterproductive effects that male dominated politics has over the community. The self-centered, corrosive, and self-destructive political masculinities of the male characters in the novel clash and threaten the selfless sisterhood of the women and the motherhood driven activism they carry out.

“There were too many ministries and too many state corporations filled with talentless party bureaucrats, and over the years productivity had declined and only corruption and inefficiency had grown” and it is within this chaos that women like Chandi try to survive accosted by a system where men are in control of the economic and political sectors. Enduring in a society where women are treated as sexual objects, and are vulnerable to abusive and predatory males (Shewcharan 51). When Chandi goes to the “electricity office” to request they “give her lights” she feels “the guard’s eyes on her, dwelling on her old faded dress which had seen too many night-washings for the next day’s wear” (34).

The guard is in a position of power and feels entitled to sexually harass “Chandi” who “[breaks] off abruptly and jerk[s] herself away as she [feels] the hand of the guard caressing her shoulder” (34). In the eyes of the “electric office” guard, being alone makes Chandi a female body for the taking. “‘You a pretty woman,’ the guard leered. ‘What’s you man doing to let you go begging like this. Why don’t you let a proper man take care
of you’” (Shewcharan 34). This event is another instance showing that the sexual politics of the plantation which made women prey prevails in the city scenario of the novel (Millett 23).

In the 1980’s Guyana of the novel, roughly 70 years after the end of indenture, women remain vulnerable to male oppression and violence. In the market place Chandi Panday faces “an ugly-looking man” who comes “up to her and kick[s] her basket aside” spilling “the oranges” which roll “into the road” which are “immediately squashed” by people walking by . . . “You tief me spot!’ the man hissed” (Shewcharan 66). Chandi’s encounter with the shouting and snarling ugly-looking man” is interrupted by the approach of the “market constables” who regularly harassed” market women like Chandi and Aunt Adee for payment of their “dues” to be allowed to do business in the market place (67). Even Lal’s absence continues to hunt her with political rivals threatening her safety.

Chandi “was about to leave when she felt a hand on her shoulder. I was a hard commanding grasp. She turned to look at an unfamiliar face. A man stared at her.

‘You Lal Panday’s wife?’

Chandi pulled away from his hand. All her fears about her husband’s venture into politics resurfaced.

‘I don’t know what you are talking about.’

‘I know you, you can’t hide.’ The man took a step towards her.
Aunt Adee pushed her way in between Chandi and the man. ‘Leave she alone, you big bully,’ she cried shaking her fist at him. ‘Why you don’t go look for your motha!’ (Shewcharan 68)

**The Intersection of Class and Motherhood in *Tomorrow is Another Day***

In Shewcharan’s narrative we see how difference in social status produces different approaches to being a mother between working-class Chandi Panday and middle-class Radika Persaud. Even though Jagru’s wife, Radika Persaud, is privileged by being married to a veteran politician, she is relegated to the domestic sphere and has no access to the public sphere of politics, or at least shows no interest. She has fulfilled her expected reproductive role of a mother by giving birth to two children; however, she seems to be detached from the upbringing of her children and most of the time relies on a nanny or Jagru’s mother to take care of the youngest child.

In comparison, poor, working-class Chandi Panday achieves a motherhood driven by a compromise which Radika does not seem to have. Throughout the narrative Chandi’s femininity is driven by the survival of her children, and thus contributes to the survival of the Indian community through the values and examples she performs and incorporates into the upbringing of her children. Radika and Chandi are both educated Indian women but they show a different degree of closeness and dedication towards their children. “Chandi had been [Radika’s] best friend, but school was a long time ago now and she felt no obligation towards her” (Shewcharan 215). In school Radika had felt inferior to Chandi, but now being married to Jagru Persaud the politician and living accordingly, made her look down on Chandi who “looked faded and worn and older than her years” (215).
Unlike Chandi, Physical beauty is of utmost importance for Radika, but the greatest difference between them, and which shapes their way of being mothers, is their worldview. Chandi Panday is closer to Indian tradition while Radika is a Westernized Indian woman. Chandi had had a traditional Indian wedding, and now that she is in financial hardship, she is “glad . . . her father had held such a big wedding” for she still has hidden in “a small bundle” some of the “jewels” she received as presents (Shewcharan 41). Remembering Chandi’s wedding annoys Radika who describes it as an “almost indecently expensive wedding” which in the end she feels was a waste. Another important difference is that even when Chandi has motives to shun and dislike her husband Lal for leaving her. She remains loyal to him and honors him with her actions. Even when Chandi understands Lal is “deluded” and “the enemy [is] inside him, eating away at his love for her and her children”, she still tries to find him and bring him to his senses (167).

However Radika does not approach her marriage in the same way, but rather it is something expendable. When things become difficult between her and Jagru she has an affair with “Paul Bagat” (170). When Jagru’s mother catches them in the act, Radika takes her children and leaves Jagru altogether. Along the effects of class difference, I argue the effects of modernity and tradition in Radika and Chandi correspondingly, are reflected and contrasted in the different postures towards their husbands, marriages, and mothering they display in the novel.

As a mother, Radika spends only the necessary time with her children and instead knits as a pastime in a “comfortably furnished” house with “highly polished” floors, and “lace curtains” on “the windows” (Shewcharan19). However, in spite of being destitute
sitting in the dark, telling herself: “I don’t know what to do. I just don’t. I have no one to help me. No one” (18), for Chandi her children are the axis of her life and are always her priority, while for Radika motherhood is a casual undertaking that can often by deferred to her mother in law, Kunti. This something her husband Jagru frowns upon. “If you were home more often,” Jagru complains, “you would know what was going on . . . You’re out all day and you don’t even cook for me anymore. You leave my little two-year-old son, your son, in here and if it wasn’t for Ma I don’t know what would happen” (112).

Radika’s is a self-centered mother at most while Chandi includes the community and other women in her task of caring.

Another of the women in the narrative who is representative of the jahaji-bhain sisterhood is Kunti who, “spent many years bending in the canefields to give [Jagru] a reasonable education”, and who raises the only man in the novel who has the only potentially alternative masculinity that can have transformative effect in his society (Shewcharan 54). Although initially Jagru allows his idealism to cloud his understanding, he increasingly begins to grasp, particularly after being jailed, the social and political reality in which he lives, and how he can better effect change.

Just as Caribbean women writers have built a separate literary universe from that of men, so does Shewcharan construct a new way of narrating the role of Indo-Caribbean peasant women in nation building. Edmondson argues, that “the writing of immigrant women is literally making the West Indian Nation from another direction” (10), and this is what we see working-class and peasant women do in *Tomorrow in Another Day*: making an East Indian Nation “from another direction” and without the help of men (10). A nation-making driven by the force of motherhood which allows Chandi to spend “long
hours . . . knocking at the doors of offices, asking for work” although her husband has “sought refuge in the hospital bed” to heal his wounded masculinity (Shewcharan 16). The same female agency that permits the seemingly destitute and homeless Aunt Adee to sleep and work at the market, and yet to be able “to know if there [are] any jobs going” and “be able to help” women in need to obtain these jobs, although sometimes she has to “make an effort to block out the image of her only son lying on a cold slab” which she had lost many years ago (165).

These women (not counting Radika who is apolitical and full of middle-class complacency) do not have the luxury of being neither selfish nor individualistic, but are civic and global in their approach to their community. Chandi’s posture that “she and her children [are] not political” reflects the difference between the way men and women approach politics in the novel. (Shewcharan70). Peasant and working class women have a tremendous responsibility in the novel, not only as single heads of household, breadwinners, and protectors of their children, but they also have the responsibility, like Chandi, Kunti, and Aunt Adee, of instilling in their children a sense of justice and equality, yet that they achieve such equality without replicating the oppression they have been dealt with. Therefore, Shewcharan suggests the hope that tomorrow might a better day lies in the hands of women who may raise children with such an understanding as Kunti and Chandi do were their sons.

In their hands is the task of raising a new generation of more compassionate men, as evidenced in Kunti’s upbringing of her son Jagru and Chandi’s son Das (Shewcharan23, 43). After seeing his father lose sight of what is critically important to
Salomé 205

protect, his family and his children, Das realizes that the disease of politics infecting his society threatens the survival of the family as a social institution.

So what if people were suffering, if there were those who couldn’t afford to eat and those who wandered the streets because they had no home. You had to look after your own, didn’t you? Didn’t charity begin at home?

What his father was doing couldn’t be anything other than desertion.

(Shewcharan 73)

Das has learned from his mother Chandi to prioritize his family’s wellbeing and that charity extends and is a byproduct of such a priority. Chandi’s early thoughts in the narrative about her husband’s blind plunge into politics and the consequences it will have foreshadows her suicide towards the end of the novel, and it also predicts the life changing effects politics has in the main characters of the novel. Chandi felt that Lal:

Was entering a maze from which none of them would come out as themselves. Had he forgotten that there were many tomorrows to come and that his children had to eat? She felt so tired. Her mind began to assume a strange calm. What was the use? It could only end one way. (47)

Lal had been stabbed to death, and Jagru had been framed for charges of “subversive activities” using “crudely” made “spliced . . . tapes” as evidence, and when he refused to falsely confess to “working undercover for the United Party”, he was jailed by his own “Official Party” (Shewcharan 39, 220). Jagru’s worldview changes while he is in jail and he emerges as a more realistic Jagru. It is Aunt Adee who gives Jagru the details of Chandi’s death after he is left out of jail. “Chandi had met a fatal accident on the way to work one morning” (233).
She had insurance, you know, on she life. After Lal gone, she broke down. She love she children so much, but it was the best answer, na, the only way to give them the better things in life. What a joke on the insurance company, ha-ha. (233).

Chandi provides the possibility of a better future for her children by sacrificing herself for them. “She children going to be all right, now” Aunt Adee said. “The big boy, the one who go away to sea. He back. He going to the college. Artie going back to school too.” She cackled: “The insurance company going to pay up. They na can prove anything” (233). Das remark about his father’s weakness and his mother’s strength drives home Shewcharan’s characterization of men that although seemingly in power, are feeble, emotionally susceptible, versus the unyielding driving force of feminist activism by women who have no choice but survive. “Is Pa fault. Why he so weak. Why can’t he stay strong like you? Is only women who are strong?” (Shewcharan 38).

As a woman, as a journalist, and as first-hand witness in 1980’s Guyana, Shewcharan’s gendering of politics shows two different approaches for securing the survival of the Indo-Guyanese community and family which men and women put into motion in Tomorrow is Another Day. The peasant and working-class women act upon the community while the political men idealize an “imagined political community” (Anderson 23). As Linden Lewis points out, when men in the Caribbean in the late 19th century “engaged in the struggle for decolonization, the essence of the struggle revolved around the issues of political empowerment . . . and self-determination”, and this struggle was claimed to have been generally controlled by men (“Caribbean Masculinity, Unpacking” 103).
Lewis adds that:

What was notably missing from the struggle for national liberation in the Caribbean was any sense of materially rewarding the contributions of women who contributed significantly to that struggle. Moreover, there was no effort made to broaden the scope of female participation. In short, Caribbean nationalists did not interrogate the patriarchal system that had been bequeathed to them. (103)

In *Tomorrow is Another Day*, Shewcharan not only accomplishes the goal of showing the substantial contributions of women in the 20th century struggle for the survival of the Indo-Guyanese community in Guyana, but she also shows the essential and unique nature of the contributions of these women to their society, which are frequently sabotaged or cancelled out by the actions of men in the novel. Although the masculinities that politics produces in *Tomorrow is Another Day* are either corrupt, self-serving, and violent, or often idealistically self-defeating, in Jagru Persaud, Shewcharan delivers an evolving, alternative-masculinity that is arriving at the point of not being blinded by the false promises of politics, yet aware enough to know that action is indispensable to effect positive change in his society. After being “imprisoned for over a year” Jagru ponders: (235)

How did one change things in a society where suicide could seem such a rational and positive choice? His way? Lal’s way? The way of the smuggler who used the system for his own ends? The way of his old party which went along, playing its part, waiting for the opening that would never come? The way of the masses, seemingly conditioned to accept their
lot, just waiting to survive however they could, not wanting to know beyond that. What could one do? (235)

As Jagru’s questions suggest, different people in the novel have different approaches to how change must be operated in their society, some selfish and some well-intended. Shewcharan’s representation of politics shows the pernicious and toxic effects it can have on a society when it is used as tool of domination and control of power, but at the same time, she seems to point at the fact that once one is aware of such danger, as Jagru is at the end of the novel, that politics is often a necessary evil to operate change and seek justice and equality.
Double-consciousness and Heterosexuality as a Means to an End in Shani Mootoo’s *Valmiki’s Daughter* (2008)

The sociohistorical period the present novel develops within is the late 20th century establishment of an Indian elite in the Caribbean which eventually earned economic as well as political power. Membership to this Indian elite and access to its economic and political privileges presupposed a heteronormative sexuality. In *Valmiki’s Daughter*, Mootoo allows the reader a glimpse in to the world Viveka and Vashti Krishnu and their parents “Dr. and Mrs. Krishnu, who consider themselves to be of high-calibre Indian ancestry” (20) and how Viveka and her father Valmiki struggle to hide their true sexuality lest they lose their social and economic status.

“Early Victorian True Love” was not driven by sexual desire or the fulfillment of physical pleasure but rather “the human body was thought of as a means towards procreation and production; penis and vagina were instruments of reproduction, not of pleasure” (Katz 48). In the “Late Victorian” period “entrepreneurs of desire incited the proliferation of a new eroticism, a commoditized culture of pleasure” which became consumed by the public through “newspapers, books, plays, and films touching on sex, ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’” (49).

“The creation of the new Normal Sexual” deemed as heterosexual within the parameters of marriage “had its counterpart in the invention of the late Victorian Sexual Pervert” including “The monster masturbator, an archetypal early Victorian cult figure of illicit lust”, “the prostitute . . . another archetypal Victorian erotic monster”, and later in the 20th century “the presence of a menacing female monster, “the lesbian” (49). Thus
heterosexuality and homosexuality become mutually exclusive categories, one normal and the other monstrous.

Both movie monsters and homosexuals have existed chiefly in shadowy closets, and when they do emerge from these proscribed places into the sunlit world, they cause panic and fear. Their closets uphold and reinforce culturally constructed binaries of gender and sexuality that structure Western thought. To create a broad analogy, monster is to "normality" as homosexual is to heterosexual (Benshoff 2).

The issue of a normal and an abnormal sexuality becomes a central issue in Trinidad in what Lazararus-Black calls “the heterosexual regendering of the state because Trinidad and Tobago's (1986) Sexual Offenses Act not only consolidated outdated legislation regarding sex crimes but also criminalized homosexuality” (981). However as Cohen points out, one of the threatening aspects of the monster is its hybrid nature and its ability to challenge classification, merging boundaries and inhabiting multiple realms like the characters in Valmiki’s Daughter.

By revealing that difference is arbitrary and potentially free-floating, mutable rather than essential, the monster threatens to destroy not just individual members of a society, but the very cultural apparatus through which individuality is constituted and allowed. (Cohen 12)

In the Caribbean the concepts of masculinity and heterosexuality are often automatically paired as if there was no other kind of masculinity. Thus, the term “homosexual masculinity” would be considered a misnomer since “to many people, homosexuality is a negation of masculinity, and homosexual men must be effeminate” (Connell, “A Very
Furthermore, in the Caribbean the social normative constructions of gender and sexuality are defined through heterosexuality, and any sexuality or gender expression that deviates for its norm is condemned and often at risk of victimization, and this is an issue I explore in Valmiki’s Daughter.

Gregory M. Herek argues that “the social construction of heterosexual masculinity” has “psychical consequences” on men whose identity is rigidly constructed upon it. For such men the idea that “sexual behavior and experience exist on a heterosexual-homosexual continuum rather than in clear-cut categories” is an aberrant and threatening idea. Herek argues the “psychical consequences” of this rigid and normative view of masculinity are often manifested through violence and homophobia.

Furthermore, Herek’s “proposition that to be ‘a man’ in contemporary American society is to be homophobic—that is, to be hostile to homosexual persons in general and gay men in particular” is also evident in the Caribbean (“On heterosexual” 563). Homophobia in the Caribbean and the fear of becoming victimized by it, promote the idea that “expressions of sexual prejudice can demonstrate to others not only that one is heterosexual, but also that one measures up to cultural standards associated with one’s gender role” (Herek, “Sexual Prejudice” 3). However, being perceived as heterosexual and displaying homophobia are also tools for the domination of others and for securing social, economic, and political power in the Caribbean.

I feel that there is a strong correlation between homophobia, heterosexism and sexism. From popular culture to constitutional inequity, homosexuality is dismissed, loathed and ignored by mainstream Caribbean culture. I feel that this fear of homosexuality keeps gender roles sharply intact,
thereby normalizing sexism. Furthermore I feel that homophobia and heterosexism are reinforced by Caribbean nation states, based on a discriminatory nationalism that uses both religious conformity and conformity to capitalist patriarchy as a basis for inclusion. (Atluri 291)

In this chapter I focus on Shani Mootoo’s novel *Valmiki’s Daughter* applying Herek’s view that deploying homophobia is an act to secure inclusion in the imagined heterosexual community of a nation and as a safeguard from being categorized as feminine or as non-heterosexual, and avoiding the victimization it usually produces in the Caribbean. Yet, I also use Atluri’s “correlation between “homophobia, heterosexism, and nationalism” to analyze how heterosexuality, marriage, and the nuclear family in *Valmiki’s Daughter* become compulsory prerequisites for the Indian elite in the novel attain and perpetuate social and economic power.

In my reading of *Valmiki’s Daughter* I focus on the struggle of its characters, particularly Valmiki Krishnu and his daughter Viveka, to protect themselves from bodily harm and preserve the upper-class status and economic power they enjoy in their homophobic San Fernando, Trinidad society. These characters, among others, try to prevent their same-sex relationships from being made public. Their dangerous dilemma is that if their non-heterosexualities are made public, they would be disqualified as members of their upper-class elite Indian society, and would find themselves in harm’s way.

In addition, another predicament most characters in *Valmiki’s Daughter* face is that their sexuality is viewed as transgressive and perverted and thus their true self, and who they pretend to be, are always at odds. Therefore, there is a looming sense of danger
in the novel that follows these characters, forcing them to live double lives and to experience a “double-consciousness” which become their tools for survival (Du Bois 8). “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (8).

In the eyes of their society, the characters in Valmiki’s Daughter inhabit what is deemed the boundaries between normal and abnormal sexualities, and they are often torn between being true to themselves or to conform to heteronormative expectations of their families and society. Therefore, under the mask of heterosexuality they are Indian-elite model citizens of the San Fernando society, yet if their true sexuality is discovered they would be branded as perverse sexual monsters.

However, in Valmiki’s Daughter the boundaries between the normal and the abnormal, and between what is judged homosexual and what is judged heterosexual are permeable, especially in the case of Valmiki Krishnu and his daughter Viveka, because they are continuously crossing back and forth these boundaries in order to bring their sexualities to terms with who they are, and who and what they are expected to be, always juggling how they view themselves with how they are viewed by others.

Thus, in my analysis I apply W. E. B Du Bois’ concept of “double-consciousness” (8) to Valmiki’s and Viveka’s experience of inhabiting two simultaneous and often contradictory realms. What Valmiki Krishnu “wishes he would or could do and what he actually does are related only by being perfect opposites” (Valmiki’s 3). Jane Anna Gordon analyzes Du Bois “double-consciousness” through the lens of political theory, allowing
the concept to be viewed not just as the realization of being disenfranchised from American society because of race or sexual orientation, but also viewing “double-consciousness” as a “potentiated” strategic awareness of one’s particular position of disadvantage in a multicultural society, which individuals, ethnic groups, and communities can in turn use as a tool of agency and resistance (Gordon 153).

Double-consciousness is trenchantly political. It describes precisely what is misguided and disingenuous about an easygoing multiculturalism, by demonstrating that not all difference is equivalent. That, in fact, relationships among racial and ethnic [and non-heterosexual] groups are unequally structured with correspondingly inequitable political options determined by the history of formulations of political membership in a given place, in particular, by the unique political significance of which group’s subordination has been made a racialized [or sexualized] condition for the freedom of other full-fledged members. (155)

I read Mootoo’s *Valmiki’s Daughter* through the lens of Du Bois’s “double-consciousness” (8) and J.A. Gordon’s “potentiated double-consciousness” (155) to describe and explore the juggling of two worlds whose boundaries are permeable, a heterosexual and a non-heterosexual world, and the juggling of the performance of two seemingly different identities and sexualities. The socio-historical background in which the issue of masculinity and femininity are framed in *Valmiki’s Daughter* is the post-colonial period in Trinidad when the consolidation of economic and political power by the Indian elites in the novel can only be achieved through the prerequisite of a heteronormative sexuality which is an assumed aspect of their Indian elite tradition.
The issue at hand in this analysis is not Valmiki’s or any for characters’ sexual orientation, but the homophobic nature of Trinidad’s postcolonial society (symptomatic of the entire Caribbean region), which constructs and punishes the sexuality of the characters as monstrous. A society so hostile to Valmiki Krishnu’s sexual orientation that it drives him to hide under a veil of secrecy and deceit. Within this context I focus my reading of text on how through his maturing from childhood into manhood, Valmiki Krishnu violates the heteronormative gender expectations of his family and society and how he manages to conform to these in the novel. Valmiki’s stages of maturing are marked by a series events like his father’s beating when he is a child, Valmiki’s first same-sex contact, his falling in love with Tony while abroad in college, and his heterosexual marriage are resulting philandering spree.

I do then the corresponding analysis for Viveka Krishnu’s violations of the heteronormative gender expectations she faces and how she deals with them. Viveka’s maturing stages into womanhood include a period in her childhood where she imagines herself as boy, this tom-boyish stigma follows her into adolescence an adulthood when she is viewed as mannish. Viveka is also criticized by her mother for yearning for an education, and like her father experiences same-sex love, and faces the inevitability of heterosexual marriage lest she lose everything. Although Viveka and Valmiki are my focus, the characters which are engaged in their gender and sexuality dilemmas are also addressed below.

**The Crisis of Elite Indian Masculinity in Valmiki’s Daughter**

Nayan, Viveka’s childhood friend, meets Anick, a white French woman, in Canada, and marries her and returns to Trinidad with her. Nayan had married Anick knowing
that she was “the kind of woman who one day slept with a man, and the next with a
woman, the kind no sane man would have risked taking . . . Lucky for her, Nayan
snapped, . . . he had come along” to save her (Valmiki’s 230). In fact Nayan “had whole-
heartedly believed, known deep inside of his very soul, that he—he—could change An-
ick, show her what love and happiness could look like” but the true reason Nayan had
married Anick was because for him Anick was a trophy that brought him prestige,
strengthened his social status, and uplifted his manhood (232).

In Valmiki’s Daughter, not only does Mootoo highlight the tension that society’s
gender policing produces on Devika and Valmiki Krishnu, but she also highlights the
pressure the upper-class heterosexual male characters like Nayan Prakash feel to perform
the expected manhood of the Indo-Trinidadian elite he belongs too. Mootoo represents in
Nayan’s character the identity crisis of the elite Indo-Trinidadian men in the novel. Na-
yan voices this identity crisis when he confesses to Viveka that he is stuck in a limbo:
“We gave up what was ours a long time ago and are trying too late to replace it with the
same things. Too much has happened to us, we can’t go back, but we don’t know how to
go ahead” (308).

Viveka asks Nayan who is the “we” he is referring to? “Are you testing me, Vik? I
know what I am talking about. Indian men here in Trinidad. The ones from our class.”
(308). Viveka continues to seek for specific details and adds, “Oh, I thought you meant
all Trinidadian Indian men.” (308). It is through Nayan’s character and his answer to Vi-
veka’s question that Mootoo reaches the climax of her observations of the Indo-Trinidad-
ian upper-class masculinity in Valmiki’s Daughter.
“No,” Nayan said impatiently. “Of course, not the ones like Mr. Lal and the men who live all around here. I mean men from our class. What gets us acknowledgement—or what we think gets us acknowledgement—is not what black people have that makes them Trinidian (they have culture, we have money—which is better?) but a profession, wealth, children to carry on our names, and friendships with the whites. I know that people envy me because of Anick, you know. (Valmiki’s 308-309)

This vulnerable and unstable masculinity, regardless of sexual orientation or sexual preference, does not belong to men “like Mr. Lal and the men who live all around here” and work in the cane fields, the factories, and the “Chayu” cacao plantation; working-class men who do not have power or riches that can be taken away from them if they are found out to be non-heterosexual, and for which social pretension are less important (232, 308-309).

However, the respectability of upper-class masculinities like Valmiki’s and Nayan’s feeds on women as trophies of prestige, symptomatic of well-educated upper class Indian males like Nayan who pitifully admits “that marrying Anick, or rather, Anick marrying [him] is an indication of [his] worth”, and symptomatic of men like Valmiki who without marriage to a respectable upper-class woman would not have been granted membership into his elite society (232). Unlike Tony, who “was once willing to risk a rather hefty inheritance” to be with Valmiki, Valmiki himself “was much less ready to risk any of” the money and prestige he was to inherit from his parents (309).
Hiding in Plain Sight

Valmiki’s daughter, Viveka, embodies the sense of divided loyalties prevailing in the novel in the following words: “Which was greater, she wondered — to be all that you were, to be true to yourself, or to honour one’s family, one’s society, one’s country? Her family, despite everything, was her life. She could never be without them” (Valmiki’s 326). Viveka is surrounded by uncertainty and a feeling of being split and fragmented, and an understanding that “there [is] nowhere on her small island far away and safe enough” for her to be herself. Consequently, heterosexuality becomes a “performative act” with “a means to an end” to survive in the threatening atmosphere of the novel (Butler, “Performative” 519; Valmiki’s 376).

Through the narrative Valmiki and Viveka Krishnu, as well as Anick Prakash and Tony, try to keep their same-sex relationships a secret to avoid being disenfranchised from their society and families. With the exception of Merle Bedi who is the only character in the novel that makes her non-heterosexuality public, all of these characters perform heterosexuality “as a means to an end” to protect themselves from looming physical violence, and to secure their privileged status (376).

Merle Bedi openly declares her love for her teacher “Miss Seukeran” and is ousted from her upper-class family, shunned by her community, and ends up living on the streets of Trinidad where she prostitutes herself to survive (24). Merle Bedi’s sexuality is branded a perversion and the ways she is discarded like a useless object becomes a warning throughout the narrative of the consequences that can befall those who share her sexual orientation. “It can’t be so that she is a buller. If is woman she like, how come she doing it with man? Well, maybe is not a bad thing, then.” Viveka’s sister Vashti muses:
“That might cure her. And from such a family, too. It is killing her parents. No wonder they put she out the house” (Valmiki’s 23).

Vashti sees Merle across “the street that separates the promenade from the school” she attends, and wants to avoid Merle Bedi who people call a “buller”, because the mere suspicion of association with Merle could damage her reputation. So Vashti tries “to pretend she can’t see who has called her”, tries to pretend she does not know who the “bedraggled woman” walking towards her is (22, 24).

She wants to pick up her pace and hurry across the street and back through the gates. And as much as she wants to do these things, she also wants to go to this woman, stand with her and ask if she can do anything for her. But she does not want her friends, anyone on the promenade, even people who are strangers, to see that she knows this woman about whom rumours have spread far and wide. (22)

Merle has been monsterized as a lesbian and dehumanized by her society and turned into an aberrant sexual object who is derided by some in her society as a “buller”, but at the same time sexually desired by “people [who] have driven their cars here on Sunday to see if they could spot this woman” who “is said to give her body to men” (22). Merle has become a sideshow living at the “promenade” under constant public humiliation. She has become a topic “much discussed” and her body has become a symbol of sexual transgression (22, 23). Clearly, for Vashti a sexuality constructed upon anything other than heterosexuality must be pathological, an illness that Merle needs to be cured from. We see here the expendability of a women’s body which if not used for sexual reproduction is useless to the society in the novel.
At the same time, Vashti remembers when Merle used to visit her sister Viveka at their house, and how they used to “listen to this woman” Merle who was a talented musician “play Beethoven in the piano”. However now at the promenade Vashti sees a “bedraggled woman” . . . which “Vashti knows . . . is only a handful of years older than she is” . . . and “the exact age” of her sister Viveka, and this shocks and frightens Vashti (*Valmiki’s* 22).

Through Merle Bedi’s disenfranchisement from her own upper-class family and society Mootoo sets the tone of impending doom which permeates *Valmiki’s Daughter’s* narrative, setting in motion the possibility that at any moment the same societal and familial condemnation may fall upon Valmiki and Viveka Krishnu. When Merle Bedi confesses to Viveka “her love for their science teacher, Miss Seukeran” and tells her that “she want[s] to hold Miss Seukeran in her arms, and kiss her lips” (91), Viveka scolds her and tries to dissuade Merle from making her feelings known to her teacher, and to her family.

And although at that moment Viveka knows that “saying those words out loud” would be “a kind of suicide”, she also “[understands] some of it”, because “she [knows] something of what Merle [feels]” (91-95). But now that Merle Bedi has become destitute and homeless, Viveka cannot get out of her head the image of the “bedraggled woman” described by her sister Vashti who “appears to be old and haggard” but is her age, a woman whose only source of privacy is to hide “in some shrubs” near the “promenade” (22).

Viveka cannot get Merle’s image out of her head because she knows that one slight mistake, and it could be her hiding in the bushes, and she knows that the balance
between being considered natural and being considered unnatural is a very delicate one in her society. M. Jacqui Alexander argues that “lesbian and gay sex, the ‘pervert’, the ‘unnatural’ are all indispensable to the formulation of the ‘natural’, the conjugal, the heterosexual” (9). Beauty cannot be defined without its counterpart, monstrousness. “This dialectic”, Alexander adds, “must be made visible, for there is no absolute set of commonly understood or accepted principles called the ‘natural’ which can be invoked definitionally except as they relate to what is labeled ‘unnatural’” (9). In Valmiki’s Daughter, Merle Bedi has been made the “visible” sign of the unnatural woman, of an unnatural female sexuality for all to see (9).

Therefore, in Valmiki’s Daughter the “performative act” of heterosexuality becomes as essential tool for inclusion in its society but it also becomes a double-edged sword because it drives Valmiki and Viveka Krishnu to mask and hide their true sexuality and perform personas incompatible with their innate identities, producing in them a “double-consciousness” which carries within it a degree of shame and self-loathing (Butler, “Performative Acts” 519; Du Bois 8). “One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder”, trying to come to terms with “two unreconciled” labels in their society: the respectable heterosexual citizen, and the disreputable homosexual non-citizen (8).

To address this “two-ness” (8) Valmiki Krishnu often masks his true sexuality through his philandering persona to go undetected and escape the homophobic sexual policing of his society. bell hooks sees “patriarchy as “a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak,
especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak” but patriarchy also “insists that males are inherently” heterosexual if they are to have the right to dominate rather than being dominated. Which in turn makes men victims of patriarchy and the “psychological terrorism and violence” inherent in it, either as perpetrators, recipients of it, or both (hooks 1).

**The Krishnu’s Marriage: A Means to an End**

If Valmiki Krishnu’s non-heterosexual masculinity is hiding behind the mask of his philandering, there is also a wounded and frustrated femininity in Valmiki’s wife, Devika, which drives her to justify the farce of her superficially heterosexual marriage, and to justify her collusion with her husband Valmiki, to maintain the status quo of their social and economic elite position. In the novel, upper-class marriage is stripped from its cultural and religious values, and mostly functions as a legal contract for economic purposes.

Conjugal life is practically nonexistent for Devika and Valmiki Krishnu, thus marriage is solely a legal union which becomes “a means to an end” for perpetuating their hold on their economic, political, and social power, to pass it down to their children, and their future generations (376). Mootoo also throws light upon the different gender expectations and constructions of femininity that women belonging to different social-classes in the novel face. After Devika meets Saul’s wife and they both acknowledge they know their husbands have been lovers for years, Devika wonders how Saul’s wife felt the first time she realized her husband was having an affair with a man. “Women from those classes” Devika muses, “had more resources” (123):
They could fight in public, they could let all out, they could leave or throw their husbands out on the streets for several days or for good, but women like Devika had to behave themselves, take it and smile in public and defend their husbands even if they were tyrants or bastards or useless in the privacy of their homes. (Valmiki’s 122-123)

For Devika Krishnu the performance of her expected role as an upper-class wife to “defend” her husband and pretend in public that all is well, is more important than her dignity. And although Devika’s dignity is bruised, what really concerns her is that her husband’s love affair with Saul might be discovered, causing her public embarrassment. However, Devika’s decorous behavior is just pretense, for her true goal is ensuring the perpetuation of her lavish life-style and the economic and social privileges she enjoys by being married to Valmiki Krishnu. Although Devika’s marriage brings her bitterness and frustration, she still finds consolation in her material possessions and her luxurious surroundings which have become the core of her identity and which in difficult times soothe her pain.

Sitting on a reclining chair on a patio surrounded by a garden that looked like it came right out of a home and garden magazine . . . soon she will go into her house and sit down to a dinner prepared by her cook . . . and eat off china that was bought on holiday in Italy, and she [won’t] have to wash a dish herself afterwards. The pendant around her neck [being] the least of her gifts. (123)

Both Valmiki and Devika Krishnu have been trying to avoid losing their upper-class status and luxurious lifestyle for over four decades of marriage. Although Valmiki
at times wishes the “stories of his philandering would leak . . . throughout the town and cause such a scandal that his family would toss him out” he also realizes he is “forever concerned about appearances and doing the praiseworthy thing” and because of that Valmiki can “really never be free” (Valmiki’s 42). He will never be able to fully exist outside the veil of the upper-class Indo-Trinidadian society and its world of appearances and without the praise, approval, and admiration he is accustomed to receiving from its members.

Valmiki Krishnu’s Struggle with Being Himself

Valmiki is the descendant of San Fernando Brahmins who own “a dairy business situated on the same property on which they live” (31). The son of a patriarch, Valmiki grows up being expected to be a man who is “rational, competitive, aggressive, self-controlled, and oriented to success” with a dominating and commanding presence (Wallach Bologh 219). But it turns out that for Valmiki, “being the son of the wealthiest man in the area [is] more of a strain than something to revel in”, for Valmiki feels pressured to follow the steps of his dominant and strict father which he is not inclined to do (34).

Valmiki’s father feels he deserves the economic power he enjoys and that the class boundaries between the Krishnus and the village people are not to be transgressed at any time so the balance of power which is in the Krishnus’ favor is not overturned. At one point in the narrative, Valmiki brings three of his classmates “whose fathers [are] labourers on the sugar cane estates” and “whose mothers [are] government-paid water carriers” and gives them a tour of the cow barns in his father’s dairy business (34). By inviting his classmates to his father’s property, Valmiki violates social-class boundaries, and
his father views this social transgression as a sign of his son’s weakness, and for that
Valmiki is severely punished (Valmiki’s 38).

Valmiki was whipped that night on his raw backside with a guava switch
for not staying in to do his homework, for going into the barn, for taking
boys from the village there, for showing off, for getting cow dung on his
hands and on his pants, for milking a cow, for milking a cow that had al-
ready been milked for the day, and for giving away milk to neighbours
when those very ones, like all others, were accustomed to buying it. (38)

When Valmiki brings to his father’s property the children of the “dairy business”
employees, he is threatening the long-standing foundation of the Krishnu family’s eco-

nomic power and upper-class status, particularly by “giving away milk to neighbours
when those very ones, like all others, were accustomed to buying it (38).

You BETTER LEARN the VALUE of business FAST, you hear? And
take THIS! For not being MAN enough to STAND UP to those boys, for
LETTING OTHER children lead you into doing wrong. His father, fin-
ished,” and “pushed Valmiki away. (38)

Through this humiliating whipping, Valmiki is reminded of his social status and
that he must not unsettle the power structure which places him in the privileged position
of subordinating others. This beating takes place when Valmiki is twelve years old and
its’ precise details stay with him for his entire life. Many years later while working at his
clinic, Valmiki clearly remembers how his mother had tried to rationalize his father’s vio-

lence with her soft pleas that Valmiki understand why his father had beaten him.
Valmiki’s mother rubbed aloe on his buttocks until his sobbing eventually subsided and he lay limp. The sheet about his face was wet from his crying, and about his body it was drenched in the sweat of humiliation and anger at his father. All the while his mother cooed, “Bayta, don’t mind your pappa. He have a temper. He love you, child, but he find you too soft. Mamma love you, too.” She held his face and turned him to face her. “Just so, just how you stay. Don’t mind Pappa beat you. He is not a bad man, he just want you to toughen up a little.” Valmiki was perplexed at the softness his parents saw in him, and from then on, he pondered how he might fix that. (Valmiki’s 38)

Valmiki’s beating had been a warning of the consequences of exhibiting weakness while in a position of power, and he had made it his goal to never be seen again as “the boss’s too-soft, mamsy-pamsy son” (39). This physical beating had also stayed with him as a reminder not to upset the normative gender structure of his society either. Atluri’s observation that there is a “strong correlation between homophobia, heterosexism . . . sexism. . . and nationalism” in the Caribbean is extremely relevant to the consolidation of power in Valmiki’s Daughter. It is through these ideologies that the “relations of power that ‘sex the nation’ in highly discriminatory terms” in the novel are established and the violence these discriminatory conditions produce have been already been internalized by Valmiki (Atluri 291).

At the beginning of the narrative Valmiki struggles to accept his sexuality and his attraction to other men and tries to cope with this painful process by trying to simultane-
ously live inside and outside himself, looking at himself “through the eyes of others”, attempting to deal with what he sees at this time in his life as the ambiguity of his masculinity (Du Bois, 8). Valmiki is torn between either performing the heterosexual gender role his family and society expects of him, which would make him very unhappy, yet allow him to preserve his family fortune and name. Or telling his parents he is in love with Tony whom he met while studying abroad. However, Valmiki knows such a confession would destroy his mother and turn his father’s wrath against him; all of which frightens him.

Valmiki is an adolescent when his same-sex attraction becomes evident to him, but he is horror-struck after his realization, and self-loathing overtakes him. After his first sexual encounter with another young man Valmiki becomes so “revoluted” with himself that “he knee[s] the boy under his chin so hard that the boy accidentally clampe[s] his jaw shut on his own tongue and blood spew[e] out of his mouth” (53). When Valmiki violently rejects the “boy”, he is also repudiating himself, causing a split in his identity. This a moment in which he recognizes and simultaneously rejects himself. “Valmiki ran, pulling on his shirt, buttoning it and tucking it back into his pants. He ran, tears of anger and horror in his eyes” (53). In the years following this incident, Valmiki seeks to suppress his true sexual orientation. “He couldn’t have hated that boy any more, and he hated himself in equal measure” (Valmiki’s 54).

After this incident Valmiki looks at himself not only through his self-perception, but through his imagined criminalizing-gaze of others, through the eyes of a vigilant homophobic society which has no pity for him, but rather exhibits a violent contempt towards any sexual orientation that falls out of its heteronormative parameters. “For weeks
he was terrified that word of what he and the boy had done in the bushes would spread and he would be beaten up, kicked out of the soccer team, perhaps pulled into the bushes by other boys” but time passes by and Valmiki is relieved “no word of it” is “ever . . . spoken” (54).

But Valmiki cannot rid himself from his shame, of his own perception that what took place in the bushes is an “unnatural activity” and although he is grateful it was not “made public”, it is this moment which marks the beginning of his attempt to dissociate his sexual identity from his public image through the adoption of the persona of the philanderer (54). Valmiki “made a point of engaging in disparaging jokes about women and “faggots.” . . . He launched, too, into a display, at school and in front of his parents, of noticing girls, commenting almost to the point of excess, sometimes with a lewdness that did not suit him” (55).

At such times, Valmiki’s awareness of himself is split, caught between how he perceives himself as a man, and how others might perceive him as a man, always fearing that others might see in him what for him is obvious. Decades later after the emotionally scarring beating of his father, and the shock and revulsion he feels after his first same-sex encounter, Valmiki once again threatens to disrupt and violate the gender roles expectations his parents and society have of him when he falls in love with Tony at “medical college” in England (66). However, by now Valmiki clearly knows that if he makes public his relationship with Tony he would be renouncing to his financial stability and elite social privileges in Trinidad. But what most deters him from making his sexual orientation public is that “he [is] not willing to raise the ire of his father or (as he [thinks] he might do with such revelations about himself) kill his mother” (68).
Since he met him, Valmiki “had known that his particular bond with Tony would have to end” and “that upon qualifying he would return home—to Trinidad, that is—and marry” (Valmiki’s 66). He knew that in order to return to Trinidad and face his parents and their expectations, the only sexual orientation he could publicly display was a heterosexual orientation legitimised through marriage and the fathering of children.

No matter how much he and Tony suited and cared for each other, Valmiki had been determined to return home and to fall into whatever role was expected of him, or at least to adopt some form of numbing complacency. People talked, and he had heard of others, men he knew, who lived a double life. He didn’t want to be talked of in such a manner. (67)

Valmiki realizes at a young age that marriage is “a means to an end” which will make him unhappy yet camouflage him, and protect and preserve his respectability as a well-known doctor in Trinidad (376). Consequently, back in Trinidad, Valmiki “got in touch with Devika Sankarsingh, the pretty daughter of a good family known to his parents” and “left alone one evening” he did what was unnatural for him, and “had sex with her, cementing, in case of a dip in his courage, his determination to marry her” (68-69). That same evening Devika became pregnant and “it was not until he heard of Devika’s pregnancy that he understood what he had done to himself” and how what he had been trying to avoid, living “a double life”, was to become exactly the dilemma of his life (67).

Eventually Valmiki develops a “friendship with this man Saul from the back of nowhere,” and although he sees him in the anonymity of the “Maraval hills”, he is constantly surrounded by the fear that his relationship with Saul will be discovered (42). Valmiki’s love life is also stunted, for “Saul’s comfort [is] limited . . . only physical—a
respite from home . . . but always a shortlived respite and always on the sly” which makes him feel helpless and hampered by his “double life” (*Valmiki’s* 27, 67). Mootoo represents in Valmiki a man for whom same-sex intimacy is not enough for he wishes he could have the freedom to publicly love whom he chose too, in a society where his sexuality would not be seen as transgressive and monstrous.

Valmiki “imagines . . . falling in love . . . loving someone, a man, a man from his own world with whom he would share another life” (72). In this sense, Valmiki’s character subverts the “fiction about promiscuity” being the force behind same-sex intimacy, and “that sex is all” gay men “do and consequently the slippage,” that “it is all . . . [they] . . . are” (Alexander 9). Ironically, the same society that denies Valmiki the freedom to openly love another man, applauds and admires philandering as a mark of a real man, a mask that Valmiki wears well.

If philandering had been for him a sword, it was the double-edged kind.

On the one hand, it was a suggestion of his more-than-okay status with the ladies (not one, but many) and so worked against suspicions of who and what he was at heart. A man was certainly admired by men and by women for a show of his virility, even by the ones he hurt. On the other hand, since philandering had never been a shame in Trinidad — a badge it was, rather — for a man who wanted to be caught, broken, and expelled, it was a problem. (42)

In a way heterosexuality becomes a sort of carnival performance for Valmiki in which he wears the mask of the philandering man to hide a prohibited and more sensitive masculinity. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois also writes “I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil?” (4). Parallel to the
idea of “double-consciousness” Du Bois uses the idea of living in two worlds, “the two worlds within and without the Veil of Race” (3). The racial space “within the Veil” designates the world of the “Negroes”, their communities and neighborhoods where they are seemingly safe from the white man’s critical gaze (3).

“Without the Veil” constitutes the white man’s world where black men and women are scrutinized regardless of their social status or education (3). “Leaving, then, the world of the white man, I have stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses—the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow” (3). In raising the Veil of race for his readers Du Bois becomes a sort of anthropologist, a pathfinder charting and showing his white audience that which is unfathomable for them: the feeling of experiencing racism and of being an American Negro.

In a parallel way, through her characters Merle Bedi, Valmiki Krishnu, and Viveka Krishnu, Shani Mootoo maps the unknown territory (for some of her readers) of experiencing discrimination and fearing physical violence because of one’s sexual orientation. Valmiki and Viveka Krishnu travel back and forth between “the two worlds within and without the Veil” that separates what their society deems the normative and non-normative worlds of sexual orientation (Du Bois 136). Without the veil resides the heteronormative world of Trinidad’s society where the married heterosexual nuclear family with children is the compulsory requisite for enjoying the rights granted to its citizens, and for membership of Indian elite Valmiki and Viveka Krishnu belong too.

On the other hand, the world “within the Veil” (Du Bois, 3), belongs to the non-heterosexual individuals in the novel, Saul, Valmiki, Viveka, Tony, and Anick who seek a degree of safety and the freedom to be attracted to whom they want to be attracted and
express such feelings. Valmiki Krishnu steps “within the Veil” (3) of the shadows of the Marabella forest to be with his lover Saul under the pretext of hunting, and steps “without that Veil” to perform his heterosexual masculinity as “Dr. Krishnu” one of Trinidad’s “more prosperous citizens” (Valmiki’s 13).

“What he [Valmiki] wishes he would or could do and what he actually does are related only by being perfect opposites” (3). This painful paradox drives Valmiki to try to protect his daughter Viveka from living a double life herself, and from being hurt and rejected by a society which has no use for a female citizen that is not heterosexual, and who is not willing to fulfill the biological reproductive duties imposed on her by her society (Yuval-Davis 12). Valmiki has been through this predicament as a man, but he is concerned his daughter is in greater danger, particularly since Viveka is not inclined to getting married, and she dresses and carries herself in a manner that is viewed, even by her mother and sister, as masculine.

Thus, in Valmiki’s Daughter we encounter two generations, father and daughter, facing the same dilemma of trying to avoid social victimization and disenfranchisement because of their sexual orientation. Although their experiences are close to four decades apart, both father and daughter are confronted with the questions: “which [is] greater, . . . to be all that you [are], to be true to yourself, or to honour one’s family, one’s society, one’s country?” (326). Through the years, Valmiki has been observing his daughter Viveka and knows that she does not embody the idealized model of femininity that Trinidad’s upper-class society expects.
Viveka Krishnu and “The Boy She Had Imagined Herself to Be” (111).

Viveka’s parents never encourage her to be the person she really is: an independent, determined, physically strong-built, and intellectual woman. Instead, her mother urges her to be more like her sister Vashti, who is malleable, proper, delicate, domestic, and fashionable. Her mother Devika and her sister Vashti have repeatedly told Viveka that she is mannish and unfeminine. The fact that Viveka is attending college, unnerves her mother Devika, who views “educated women” as “aggressive” and “unladylike”, and views “female professors” as “grim and lack[ing] social graces” (Valmiki’s 101).

Viveka grows up being told that self-assertiveness, confidence, and independence are qualities reserved for men, not for women. Therefore, her mother criticizes and suppresses the latter qualities in her daughters and instills in Vashti and Viveka, the idea that “preparing oneself for marriage” is the ultimate goal for an Indo-Trinidadian upper-class young lady (74). Although Viveka’s mother thinks her criticism aids Viveka’s socialization and refinement, Viveka is beginning to view herself as deviating from the expected physical, social, and sexual standards of her upper-class society.

Evidently, Viveka cannot fulfill neither her parents’ expectations, nor the high-society expectations which the Indo-Trinidadian elite has imposed on her. Viveka’s femininity described as mannish, rough, and inappropriate, incongruous and deviant from the bourgeoisie ideal of femininity, and Viveka is painfully aware of this, however this sense of being different has been with her since childhood when Viveka had a recurrent fantasy of being a boy.

SHE HADN’T ALWAYS FELT DEMURE. SHE USED TO THINK OF HER SELF as a blond-haired boy who was strong, powerful, peaceful,
could do anything and everything. He had a horse he could ride. He didn’t speak much. He was kind. His name was Vince, short for “invincible”.

(Valmiki’s 110)

This feeling that being biologically male would have suited her life better stays with her through her entire life and strongly resurfaces when she falls in love with another woman for the first time. As she grows up, Viveka is made aware of the ways in which she violates the gender role expectations of female of her social standing. Her mother and sister describe her as “rough”, and she unceasingly compared to her sister Vashti, who is the paradigm of bourgeois femininity: delicate, fashionable, beautiful, proper, and conforming to her mother’s wishes (88).

Even Vashti does not hesitate to tell her sister Viveka that she is “muscular” and “mannish” (88), nor does she hesitate to tell her sister how her parents feel about her physical appearance. “Mom and Dad said that playing volleyball would just make you rougher than you already are” (87). Vashti’s honesty verges on hurtfulness when she adds, “Well face it, Vik, you’re not like other girls. You walk so fast, and you don’t stay still, and you don’t dress up or wear makeup. You don’t even talk about boys” (87).

Being compared to “body builders” and being called “muscular” upsets Viveka, but at the same time, although “Viveka [doesn’t] dare say it . . . it flatter[s] her that Vashti [thinks] she [looks] like a body builder” (88-89). Unlike Valmiki who has been hiding his sexual orientation all his life, Viveka is naively intent on being who she really is, a non-feminine woman according to bourgeois standards, who (as she will soon find out) is attracted to other women, and this worries Valmiki. “If only he could take her away. Tell her his own story so that she might create a different one.” (4). So, that she may be aware
of how dangerous it is in her homophobic society to be openly “mannish” and openly attracted to other women (Valmiki’s 88).

On the one hand, Valmiki does not want his daughter to experience his own in-betweeness, his “double-consciousness” which has driven him to perform a lecherous masculinity to hide his true sexual orientation, but on the other hand, Valmiki knows keeping her sexuality underground is the only way for his daughter to avoid humiliation and harm (Du Bois 8). In a naïve way, Valmiki wishes he had “stood up, not to her [his daughter Viveka], but to his wife” Devika and “let his daughter do all that she wanted, be all that she was” for Valmiki believes that “in his day he had had no choice,” but to suppress his true sexual orientation in order to avoid disaster, but that now, forty years later, his daughter Viveka “had choices” and that “times were different” (Valmiki’s 4, 392). However, the truth is Valmiki is hoping for the best but expecting the worst.

Through her representation of Viveka Krishnu, Mootoo points at the higher degree of vulnerability gay women face in a society like Trinidad. While Valmiki is able to live a fully double life, it is increasingly more difficult for Viveka to do so because her body is under a sort of biological servitude since she is expected to marry and procreate, which automatically makes her husband’s property. But Viveka remains uncomfortable with the idea of fulfilling the requirements of a bourgeois femininity which include being “pretty, weak” and “dependent” because “marriage [has] never interested her” until later in the narrative when she realizes she must follow her father’s steps or be crushed like Merle Bedi (90, 101).

Through her representation of the Krishnu family, Mootoo raises the issue of the correlation between Indian upper-class status and the corresponding ideals of femininity
and masculinity that need to be fulfilled for its membership. Vashti, describes her sister Viveka as “mannish” and looking “kind of tough for a female” because Viveka does not care for her physical appearance in the same way her younger sister does.

While Vashti like[s] to dress and to preen, to come out and mix with guests — sometimes a little too long into the evening for Devika’s liking — it [is] difficult to get Viveka to wear a dress, to put a little makeup on her face, even just some lipstick, much less make a polite token appearance. (Valmiki’s 126)

When her sister tells Viveka: “Look at how you push out your chest, and how your arms stick out from your side” and calls it a “mannish” posture, Viveka draws the line and argues that bourgeois femininity, and the delicate and dependent way in which femininity is constructed through it, is about and produced by upper-class privilege which depends on the power to exploit others and the privilege of being served (89). When a woman is neither kept nor relegated to the home because she has to physically fend for herself and her children, there is no space for being delicate of dependent, her body becomes as strong as a man’s.

Do you see those women walking on the side of the highway with bundles on their heads and heavy bags in either hand? They can’t pay others to do it for them, but they are women, and have no choice but to be strong. Tell me they are mannish! All this dependence we are taught is not natural, it is class related. (89)

Viveka is arguing that an upper-class femininity thwarts women’s potential by making them reliant on men, and “not realizing” their “full potential” . . . “I don’t know
why” she tells Vashti “it is admirable in our little claustrophobic world to be pretty, weak and so dependent” (89). Although Viveka is clearly fighting a societal imposition about how to comport and physically look which is directly related to her elite Indian society and the homophobic component of her society, it is her family which is ultimately the most powerful policing agent she is fighting against. Vashti and her mother Devika, play the role of policing Valmiki’s and Viveka’s sexualities.

**Viveka Falls In Love**

Nayan, Viveka’s childhood friend, meets Anick, a white French woman, in Canada, and marries her and returns to Trinidad with her. “Anick was even more beautiful than anyone had said she was. Viveka found she couldn’t look her in the eyes” and so eventually they have an affair (Valmiki’s 198). Viveka, has now reached a point in the narrative where she is facing the same dilemma her father faced almost fifty years before her. She is beginning to realize that her affair with Anick and her sexual orientation are very dangerous things to carry out in her exceedingly homophobic society,

Furthermore, she begins to realize that love in itself is not enough to overcome the gender policing in her society and the devastating effects it can have in her life if she openly admits she is in love with Anick. Her awareness of existing within a “double-consciousness” is beginning to complete itself, and she is beginning to realize that she must inhabit two worlds at once if she is to survive undetected (Du Bois 8). In the privacy and remoteness of Anick Prakash’s house in Rio Claro, Viveka “[pulls] Anick to her as their mouths [come] together, and they [breathe] in each other’s warm moist breath” but now in the public space of the volleyball court when “Anick [stands] to greet her with their usual hug” Viveka, puts “her hand quickly on one of Anick’s shoulders, pressing her
back into her seat” and then “[leans] in over the drumming” and “[whispers], “Not here” (Valmiki’s 319, 333). Like her father in the past, Viveka is aware that she is in danger, and is now apprehensive of the risks of being affectionate with another woman in public, especially because Viveka is mindful of her “mannish” appearance (88).

Anick complains loudly when Viveka rejects her affection which sends Viveka into a panicked frenzy “quickly [scanning] her memory of the five past minutes, which [seem] now interminably long, wondering if there [has] been any incriminating interaction between her and Anick”, retracing her actions and looking at them through the eyes of an imaginary audience (336). Throughout the narrative, Viveka never stops thinking of her friend Merle Bedi, and how she has been forsaken by her family because of her sexual orientation.

A seemingly secondary character, Merle Bedi, is a doomed heroine in Mootoo’s novel because of her courage, and commitment to her true self which she never betrays. And her banishment and disinheritance because of her declared love for another woman, looms over Viveka’s thoughts constantly. Merle Bedi is the only character in Valmiki’s Daughter who is willing “to be all that [she is], to be true to [herself]” for which she is destroyed (326). Although Devika is initially swept by the current of her desire for Anick and is hopeful of continuing their relationship even if it is in hiding, it does not take long for reality to sink in.

Over the last couple of weeks, every conversation between them had deteriorated faster than the last into recognition of the difficulty of this love between them and the need, growing ever more urgent daily, to do something about it. Anick had spoken again and again of wanting to return,
with Viveka, to Canada—either to Toronto or Montreal or Vancouver—where there were thriving communities of people like the two of them.

(Valmiki’s 335)

Viveka is not convinced that migrating to Canada is the solution since she knows what this would do to her family and that “she could never be without them” and that “she could never do to them what Merle Bedi had done to her family” (326). Therefore, like her father almost fifty years earlier, Viveka begins to come to terms with her dilemma and to analyze her options because “she [is] determined not to become Merle Bedi. Nor to become Anick” either who is now pregnant with Nayan’s child (376).

Although Anick’s pregnancy is devastating for Viveka, it becomes an eye-opening realization that she is like Anick, biologically a woman and that she really is not “the boy she had imagined herself to be” when she was a child (111). This realization brings her to terms with her social-class status, the reproductive gender role expectations she faces as a member of the Indian elite in Trinidad, and its’ contradiction with her sexual orientation.

Anick’s pregnancy is also symbolic of the instrumental role of women in the perpetuation and retention of capital and social rank in the Indian upper-class society in the novel. A pregnancy within the confines of high society marriage becomes an investment for the future of the well-to-do, and the passing down of power. And still, although Viveka understands that she is physically and biologically a woman, she cannot repress her desire of being capable of impregnating Anick, she cannot control her urge to fantasize of being able to subvert her biological nature which seems to burden her.
She recalled hovering, moving her body against Anick, and the strange, true feeling in those moments that between her legs there was an appendage, a phantom one that swelled with all her desire and something baser, too, something more bestial and demanding, something that could enter and penetrate Anick, empty itself into her. How many times had she wished that she could cause Anick to become pregnant, and how often had the futility of the wish made her feel inconsequential and invisible?

(Valmiki’s 360)

Viveka is tired of this invisibility or rather her continuous camouflaging of herself, but she also knows that if she follows Merle Bedi’s steps and is true to herself, “it [is] not only her security but that of her family, her mother and her father and Vashti, that would be affected”, so after going out on several dates with Trevor she decides to marry him, just to fulfill the social expectations of her society, but also to camouflage her sexuality (360).

Just like her father, Viveka understands that because of the society in which she lives and the social class she belongs too, and because she is a woman, she will not succeed in being true to her sexual orientation and being happy at the same time. So, Viveka begins to learn how to live alternately within and without the realms of what is considered a normal sexuality and what is considered an abnormal sexuality in her society. Valmiki and Viveka Krishnu’s “kind of sexuality” as M. Jacqui Alexander theorizes, “presumably imperils the nation” because it is not “the kind of sexuality that promotes citizenship. Not just (any) body can be a citizen any more, for some bodies have been marked by the state as non-procreative, in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex that is
non-productive of babies and of no economic gain” (6). Therefore, Valmiki and Viveka make sure they are not “marked by the state” as noncitizens and that through marriage they can ensure “economic gain” (8).

The resolution of the conflict between Viveka Krishnu’s sexual orientation and the gender role expectations she is faced with in the novel, is enigmatic and inconclusive. Viveka reencounters Trevor, who had asked her out while she was still having an affair with Anick, and Viveka had brushed him off at the time. “Over two months had passed since that invitation. Trevor had returned to Canada shortly after, and Viveka had not heard from him since. She had almost forgotten about him, actually” (Valmiki’s 371). Although still “inextricably and deeply in love” with Anick, Viveka knew their relationship was impossible to continue with and thus she let Trevor back into her life in a more permanent fashion than she anticipated (371).

Trevor “seldom spent his time off in Toronto, he told her. He was a mechanical engineer and worked with one of the major airlines” and frequently spent his days off traveling “worldwide, as long as space on a flight was available” (372). Trevor told Viveka “he and a coworker had been in Argentina, and before that he had gone on his own to Lisbon” (372). Viveka finds Trevor’s lifestyle “strange” and is puzzled by “the sheer craziness of it” (372). Trevor’s eventual marriage proposal to Viveka is also puzzling to her since Trevor is fully aware that Anick and Viveka have been lovers.

But I’ve been thinking. You’re an expensive date!” Trevor was solemn. “I can’t keep coming to see you like this, you know. We have to do something.” Viveka felt a sense of doom at Trevor’s words. There immediately arose inside of her that particular hunger she had only known in relation to
Anick. It was a hunger but it did not come from her belly. It was Merle Bedi’s hunger. It was bigger than she was, and would not easily be quelled; it would, rather, forever gnaw at her. She knew this. But she was determined not to become Merle Bedi. Nor to become Anick. She, rather, had to do something. “Like what?” she said, but not waiting for an answer, she quickly offered, “Get married?” “That’s what I was thinking,” Trevor replied jovially, adding, “It’s always a means to an end, isn’t it. Would you like to?” She wondered why he would say such a thing. It’s always a means to an end. Did he know how true his words were? Perhaps he, too, like everyone else it seemed, had his reasons. If he had, they didn’t interest her. “Where would we live?” “Well, in Toronto, I suppose. We’d travel a lot, I think you might like that. But we’d live in Toronto. That’s where my work is. So, what do you say?" Viveka thought for a moment. Finally, as if agreeing that they should make a left turn rather than a right at a fork, she shrugged and said, “Okay. I guess so. Let’s.” Trevor chuckled. “I will have to speak with your parents, then. Won’t I? Don’t say anything. I’ll return in a few weeks and we’ll surprise them. What do you say?"

(Valmiki’s 376-377).

The previous conversation between Trevor and Viveka constitutes the resolution of one of the main conflicts in Valmiki’s Daughter. The tension between Viveka’s sexual orientation and the gender role expectations of her upper-class society is presumably resolved or at least eased, not just through marriage but through marriage with Trevor who Viveka suspects “like everyone else it seem[s], [has] his reasons” for using marriage as
“a means to and end” and although she is not inclined to find out which are those reasons, Viveka reaches her own conclusions as she did with her parents’ marriage (*Valmiki’s* 377).

Viveka had long suspected the falseness of her parents’ marriage and had clearly witnessed how Nayan’s and Anick’s marriage had been “a means to and end” as well (376). Marrying Nayan was for Anick a way of bouncing back from a frustrated same-sex affair, and from her previous chauvinist husband. Nayan had married Anick for “the prestige [that] Anick’s Frenchness, her beauty and charm brought to his family” and himself, even though he knew she was “the kind of woman who one day slept with a man, and the next with a woman, the kind [of woman] no sane man would have risked taking”, and so as evidenced through these characters, marriage becomes a pantomime (230, 233).

But why is Trevor willing to marry Viveka knowing what Viveka and Anick were still most likely in love with each other? Trevor, had asked Viveka questions such as, “Have you always had such short hair?” and Viveka had replied: “Only most of my life” and he had added “You like that boyish look, don’t you?” and Viveka had replied “I don’t think it is boyish”, and Trevor noticing he had over stepped his boundaries, had apologetically said “No, no, you’re right. It isn’t boyish” (382, 383).

Nevertheless, these questions seemed more directly aimed at getting Viveka to confess to him about her affair with Anick than to finding out if she cared for him. How would marrying a woman like Viveka be “a means to an end” for Trevor? Mootoo shows mastery of her craft in her characterization of Trevor, who is a sort of trickster, simultaneously revealing and concealing both his as Devika’s true sexual orientations and identities. Although still unknown to Devika, Trevor begins to act as her guide into the world
of a double existence in which Devika will learn to become a sort of shape-shifter, a chameleon being able to live in two different worlds like her father has done for so many years, but now with a partner in crime.

Well, even though you still won’t tell me just how close you are, I know you’re close to Anick. And you’re not like girls from here. It’s why I am attracted to you. You’re not the kind of woman Trinidadian men like. Women like women like you. You’ve never actually told me, you know. What about you and Anick?’’

“Oh, come on, Trevor. How would you like it if I began questioning you?’’

“I don’t mind at all. Ask me anything you like, as long as you don’t mind getting an answer.’’ Viveka blushed so much that Trevor began laughing and said, “So, how does she feel about us getting married?’’ Viveka turned her face away. Trevor persisted. “Does Nayan know about you two?’’

“Know what? I never said anything about us.’’ “You don’t have to . . . ’’

Trevor waited for Viveka to respond, and when she didn’t, he said, “How long have you been lovers?’’

“We were. We’re not anymore. (Valmiki’s 384)

In the dialogue above, Trevor becomes a facilitator asking the questions necessary for Viveka to voice, to put into words the truths that she needs to speak and hear from herself. It is not Trevor but Viveka who needs to verbalize her true nature and feelings to further become herself through naming out loud what she feels for Anick and what it means to herself. Viveka had never said to anyone but only thought to herself what her sexual orientation was. With Anick, Viveka “had had a glimpse of who she was, of what
her desire looked like” but this realization had not been formalized, fully embodied into spoken words until she answered Trevor’s questions (Valmiki’s 326). Unlike Viveka, Trevor is willing to explain what he means by marriage being “a means to and end” but Viveka does not have the courage to ask Trevor any questions (383).

Trevor’s sexual orientation is only hinted at in Valmiki’s Daughter but it seems Viveka’s and Trevor’s will be a marriage of convenience, but unlike Valmiki’s whose marriage was mostly convenient for him, it appears both Trevor and Viveka will be able to temporarily fool their parents and Trinidad’s elite society and blend, appear, and disappear like chameleons into both the heterosexual and non-heterosexual worlds they seem intent at inhabiting.

After a long silence, and although they were alone, she whispered earnestly, “Do you still want to go through with this?

“Have I indicated otherwise?”

They both stared out at the lights just beginning to twinkle alive on the Point-á-Pierre jetty.

“How long do you think we’ll last, Trevor?”

“Is that a serious question?”

“Well, you know who I am.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“It’s a serious question. How long?”

Trevor took a drink of his beer before he looked at her. “Five years, give or take, I suppose. How long do you think?

“I would say two.”
“Two! Oh, come on, Vik. Show a little courage. I am exhibiting a mountain of it, wouldn’t you say? He was terse.

It was a while before she could respond. She looked up at him, tears welling. “You’d be surprised, Trevor,” she said. “You’d be surprised at my courage right now.” (Valmiki’s 395)

With Devika’s decision to marry Trevor, the tension throughout the narrative that Viveka might end up like Merle Bedi, forsaken and abandoned by her society and family, seems to dissolve. However, even though Viveka’s social expectations of getting married are fulfilled, Trinidad is still not a safe place for Trevor and Viveka and moving to Toronto is necessary. As Butler points out, marriage and its consummation by heterosexual intercourse “is one of those “specific corporeal acts” through which “gender is constructed” and heterosexuality and what is normal is reified (“Performative” 521).

“In Victorian England” the counterparts of normative gender where embodied in the “Victorian erotic monsters” which were viewed as a threat to the purity of heterosexual reproduction, bourgeois morality, and social order” (Katz 8-9). In Valmiki’s Daughter, Valmiki and Viveka Krishnu are both “Victorian erotic monsters” as well as members of the bourgeoisie, transgressing the borders of normality and abnormality, and the permeability of their identity more so that their sexuality, is what makes them so dangerous to their homophobic society.

By revealing that difference is arbitrary and potentially free-floating, mutable rather than essential, the monster threatens to destroy not just individual members of a society, but the very cultural apparatus through which individuality is constituted and allowed. (Cohen 12)
Valmiki and Viveka Krishnu are extremely dangerous monsters in the eyes of their society because by turning heterosexuality into a “performative act” and “a stylized repetition of acts”, they strip heterosexuality of its assumed essential nature, creating the possibility of making gender normativity non-existent (Butler, “Performative” 529).
Conclusion

Throughout this study I have used the trope of the monster to argue that colonialism produces monstrosity and transforms humans into monsters. I have relied on Jeffrey Cohen’s “method of reading cultures from the monsters they engender” and applied that notion to the masculinities that Indian and European cultures have engendered during colonial contact (4). Through this analysis, a monster is not simply defined in opposition to the human, or as its polar opposite, but as existing in a continuum between these two seemingly oppositional poles, which nonetheless are both part of our psychic make-up. In spite of the passing of time, the trauma of the catastrophe of slavery and indenture continues to be manifested in our daily lives. Racist European cultures and their colonial enterprises in the Caribbean overtime gave rise to madness and violence which have become an inherent aspects of social, political, and gender relations in the Caribbean, making violence a way many men express their masculinity in the region.

In fictional and nonfictional texts, indentured Indian men in Caribbean plantations are frequently dehumanized by being represented as drunk, degenerate, violent, and murderous. However, rarely do these texts attempt to humanize the perpetrators of such violence. In other words, other than just report the superficial facts or describe the sexual and physical acts of violence against Indian women and other men, I felt that most scholarship lacked a full-fledged attempt to understand the pain and trauma that must have been behind these acts of violence by Indian men.

The ferocity and cruelty with which many Indian men treated Indian women during the indenture and post-indenture periods are undeniable, yet insufficiently
explained by the simplistic justification and narrative of jealousy. Bahadur reports that “more murders occurred in Guiana than elsewhere, but Trinidad’s statistics were only slightly less grim” (109). However, Bahadur also emphasizes that “often, the aim was to disfigure, not kill. Indeed, the cases that didn’t end in death outnumber those that did” (109). However, this disfiguring, far from being less violent, was actually a perpetual reminder for the victims of the trauma and violence they had suffered; a reminder that it all could easily happen again.

This gruesome reality sheds light upon the violently troubled psyche of these Indian men for whom their mutilated women were evidence of their seemingly restored honor. This study was sparked by a desire to understand which historical, religious, cultural, emotional, and psychological aspects among others have been behind the violent expressions of masculinities of Indian men during the indenture and post indenture periods in the Caribbean. In the process, I found one constant factor present throughout these diverse elements and historical periods. Violence against Indian women was often (and still is) the mechanism used by Indian men to save face particularly before other men.

Thus, I set to theorize the evolution of Indian masculinity from the 1900’s barracks into the end of the 20th century by following the historical continuum the four novels in this study provide, and locating the sociohistorical periods in each corresponding novel which I argue have framed and caused the often toxic masculinity mutations analyzed here. I isolate the four issues during these periods that produce trauma in the cultural, religious, and political formation of individual and communal Indian identities. They are, respectively, the forced conversion to Christianity, the
formation of Indian communities, the challenges of political leadership during the period of the resurgence of ethnic tension in Trinidad and Guyana, and the consolidation of power by Indian elites in these two countries, all structured on the prerequisite of a heteronormative sexuality.

I chose these four novels to track these sociohistorical periods, namely the whitening of Indian identity by the Canadian Presbyterian mission in Trinidad represented in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the formation of early post-indenture Indian communities in the Caribbean in *A Silent Life*, the post-independence political turmoil in the Caribbean, particularly Forbes Burnham's dictatorship in Guyana in *Tomorrow is Another Day*, and the consolidation of political and economic power of Indian elites in the late 20th century glimpsed at in *Valmiki’s Daughter*.

In some of the novels I examined particular elements of their colonial experiences and societies produced the violent and monstrous behaviors in the characters. In other instances, the characters were constructed as deviant and monstrous by their own societies. The first issue is the degradation during indentureship, accompanied by the negative stereotypes branded on Indian laborers. These permeated into future descriptions of generations of Indians in Trinidad and Guyana. Brereton articulates this in the following words: “Because Indians entered the society on peculiarly disadvantageous terms, as indentured labourers replacing exslaves, it was only too easy for black and white Trinidadians [and Guyanese] to despise them” (*Race Relations* 186). Consequently, many Indians adopted Christianity, completed an education, and became savvy in European customs with the aim of changing the way they were perceived by their societies.
However by so doing, for many of these Indians, especially those removed from the barracks to boarding schools, a painful contradiction arose between their pasts and their presents, between those things Indian and European, repelling each other like magnets. Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* gives a glimpse of this process of trying to escape the stigma of the barracks through the culture of Presbyterianism and a culture of mental whitening. Nevertheless, during the post-indenture period many Indians formed communities which had the central goal of restoring their Indian roots and identity through strengthening the institutions of Indian family and marriage.

I argue that making the bolstering of Indian family and marriage the axis of the establishment of post-indenture Indian communities in Trinidad and Guyana, also had the goal of restoring the image of these communities as having the necessary social structures to be integrated into the Guyanese and Trinidadian societies. In further looking at the connections between the texts in this study and the historical continuum they form, it is evident that the formation of Indian communities in Trinidad and Guyana and the rise of labor movements, and later political parties, were related and often parallel processes.

In equal measure, these labor movements and formation of political parties became further mechanisms to establish that the Indian populations in these countries had a great deal to contribute to their societies. However, it is these periods of search for, and achievement of self-governance which have produced violence in the Caribbean comparable in brutality to the slavery and indenture periods.

The final sociohistorical period within which I analyze Indian masculinities in this work is the post-independence rise of an Indian elite in the Caribbean which in the case of Trinidad was consummated by the appointment of the first Indian prime-minister
Basdeo Panday. However, as established in the introduction of this study, the roots of these toxic masculinities can be traced back to India prior to British colonization during the carnage and violence of its “martial” histories (Natarajan xvii). As well as the British colonial period in India with its “militarization” and “new economic policies of tax collection” which created a “masculine economy” and devalued women (41). All of these sociohistorical contexts, had have had a great influence on, and produced the traumatic environments in which the toxic Indian masculinities described in this study have been manifested.

In addition, throughout the historical periods encompassed in this study there is a second constant found besides the need for Indian men to restore their honor through inflicting sexual and physical violence upon Indian women’s bodies. That second constant is the ethnic tension between Indian and African descent people that has existed in both Guyana and Trinidad since the insertion of indentured labor into the economy of these nations. The toxic masculinities that arise from this ethnic conflicts continue to produce violence and trauma in the 21st century Caribbean.

While some human monsters in this study like Chandin Ramchandin, Lal Panday, and Nazeer Mohammed Raheem are engendered by colonialism, and their behaviors reflect the trauma produced by the cultural, ethnic, religious, social, and political environments that surround them, their actions make them self-made monsters as well. Although the behaviors and masculinities of these characters reflect different degrees of violence and toxicity, they are nevertheless a reflection of the trauma of colonialism.

Others, like Valmiki and Viveka Krishnu, are constructed as monstrous by their colonial society and its discourse of victimhood and scapegoatism. Thus, there is a
dialectic in this study between monsterhood and victimhood. These are often parallel and simultaneous dual identities reflected in the social standing of these characters in their Indian communities and societies. Although this study uses the idea of a historical continuum from the barracks to the end of the twentieth century, the four sociohistorical events mentioned before often overlap or at certain points take place simultaneously, and what is more important, continue to flow and be manifested in our 21st century Caribbean.

In fact, as I have argued throughout these chapters, the impossibility of Indian male honor without the domination of Indian women, the consequent assertion of a heteronormativity, and the unbreakable links between India, indenture, and Indo-Caribbean identity are not things of the past but issues presently affecting the Indo-Caribbean psyche. All of these latter issues influenced the post-indenture formation of Indian communities in the Caribbean and have determined the present social structure, rituals, and celebrations of Indo-Guyanese and Indo-Trinidadian societies, which have become further complicated with the use of politics as a venue for the reaffirmation of Indian masculinity and economic ethnic power, which fed by patriarchal heteronormative expectations, constitute the persisting root-causes of much of the violence Indian men perpetrate in the 21st century Caribbean.
Works Cited


—. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.


Salomé


Danns, George K. "The Impact of Identity, Ethnicity and Class on Guyana’s Strategic Culture."


—. "Gender as a Primary Signifier in the Construction of Community and State among Indians in Trinidad." *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 3-4, 1994, pp. 32-43. *JSTOR*,


Natarajan, Nalini. The Unsafe Sex: The Female Binary and Public Violence Against Women.


—. *Mythologies of Migration, Vocabularies of Indenture*” *Novels of the South Asian Diaspora in Africa, the Caribbean, South East Asia, and the Pacific Rim*. U of Toronto P, 2009.


Walker, Margaret E. *India’s Kathak Dance in Historical Perspective*. Ashgate, 2014.


