‘There are many Indias: Depictions of Indian-ness, epiphanies and moments of
transformative exhilaration in recent literature for young adults published in
India.’

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ABSTRACT

The study ‘There are many Indias: Depictions of Indian-ness, epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration in recent literature for young adults published in India ’ takes its impetus from the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority’s (ACARA) ‘The Australian Curriculum’ for English (2012), which stipulates as one of its aims the emphasis of Australia’s ‘links to Asia’ (p.3). As an experienced and practising teacher of English and Literature within the secondary classroom in Melbourne, Australia with an interest in Indian culture and literature, I wanted to explore beyond the Asian texts booklisted by the Asia Education Foundation (2011) for use in the English classroom. Curiosity, amongst other factors, led me to India. It is in bookshops and schools in India where I discovered that there are many more texts, delightful, powerful often confronting texts, written in English, and evoking a deep sense of Indian culture, that we teachers of English in Australia were aware of.

This thesis analyses a selection of Young Adult Literature (YAL) novels written in English and published in India recently. It explores the depiction of Indian-ness within the experience and realm of childhood, against a distinctively Indian backdrop. In an appropriation of Hollindale's concept of childness, the term Indian-ness is adopted, addressing the multilayered nature of Indian experience whilst exposing attitudinal shifts in both the depiction of the child/youth protagonist and societal perceptions of the child/youth as reader.

Furthermore, this thesis examines Hollindale’s concept of epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration as they manifest in the selected YAL works. Their subsequent implications from within the text (in terms of the protagonist) and beyond the text (in terms of reader response) are also explored. This study analyses the significance of epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration in relation to perceptions of society and the world of the young adult and how literature offers another way of seeing and being in the world. Thus the expansive potential of literature to empower and transform the individual is examined. Finally, this study asserts that these factors act as a unifying element and allow for a richness of interpretation which extends and further embellishes the scope of possibility in one’s perception of life, their vision for the future and their perception of the quality of Indian-ness and its many manifestations. Hollindale’s concept of epiphanies and
moments of transformative exhilaration serves to illustrate the common humanity that the selected YAL texts expose the reader to, whilst simultaneously suggesting the universality of the reading experience.
Declaration

This is to certify that this thesis comprises only my original work towards the MEd. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used. This thesis is less than 50,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed: …………………………………………………………………………..
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Dedication

For my family in Australia

and in India.

And of course, for my beloved husband Rohit.
Contents

Abstract.........................................................................................................................i
Declaration......................................................................................................................ii
Acknowledgements.......................................................................................................iii
Dedication.......................................................................................................................iv
Contents........................................................................................................................vii
Introduction....................................................................................................................1
Chapter 1 – Literature Review.......................................................................................8
Chapter 2 – Methodology...............................................................................................41
Chapter 3 – Analysis......................................................................................................65
Chapter 4 – Conclusions.................................................................................................104
Bibliography...................................................................................................................112
Introduction

i. Placing the study within a personal context

As an experienced teacher of English and Literature at a number of schools in Melbourne, Australia with a passion for reading and writing, this journey began quite a while ago.

During the 2000’s in my English and Literature classes of predominantly girls between the ages of 14 to 17 residing in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs, I noticed a significant increase in the attraction to reading. Suddenly, students were asking for ‘quiet reading time’. This had not happened with such enthusiasm and frequency in the past. Indeed, the reading and discussions occurring had a very specific bent; it was a very particular kind of reading at that, with one pivotal focal point – Harry Potter.

This seemingly overnight phenomenon was much more complex that the initial hype and marketing had suggested. As a teacher of Literature and as a reader I became intrigued and curious; thus, my exploration into the attraction of the Rowling’s works began. Some of the questions that arose for me at the time included: How was it that so many young people were so spellbound by this young wizard? In fact, why were adults reading and devouring Rowling’s texts as well, subsequently making her one of the most successful, if not the most financially lucrative author in literary history at the time? What did Harry represent? This final question was huge in scope and, from an initial desire to explore the complete series; I was wisely advised to par it down. So I did.

Specifically, I chose to explore the depiction of the child and childhood in J. K. Rowling’s *The Prisoner of Azkaban*.1 After all, as in the whole series, in this text as well, Harry was a child, he was an orphan, a student, a friend and yes, a wizard. What did Harry represent to the readers, and in hindsight, one might ask, what did he represent to a culture, that he drew us magnetically to follow his precarious and

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compelling adventures and life journey? Was it that here was a basically helpless child, pitted against the harshness and heartless world of adults? Without support we saw him carry on and making it through life’s difficulties; surviving not only his cruel maternal family but also triumphing over the clutches of the vile and evil Voldermort. Here we have a child who is victorious against evil not only on a human ‘muggle’ level but also within a context of a supernatural and magical realm.

Harry, from the outset, is initiated and anointed as the quest hero. He has no choice, but in the mould of so many heroes that have preceded (mythical, classical, Arthurian - to take from the Western literary tradition) he forges on in the name of goodness, integrity and yes, ultimately, love. A rich tradition precedes him. So, my musings and considerations assumed that Harry was possibly the latest and most modern manifestation of this type of hero. He is a child but he indeed presents more adult and mature qualities than the adults who inhabit his fictional world. What message, if any, was Rowlings seeking to convey? How and why were young readers hungry for every precious word? Eagerly awaiting the next book and (until July 13, 2011) the next film instalment? Does Harry empower and transform the young reader? Does he represent the possibilities that exist but are not always obvious to young people going through the turbulent time of adolescence? Does his journey provide faith and hope that things will ultimately resolve themselves and be ok? That even though we may not have choice at times in life (as far as the situations we are presented with) we do have input and choice in the attitude and carriage we adopt. Does Harry endow childhood with an almost knightly honour, valour and grace? If so, do these qualities appeal to readers and why? Furthermore, the progressive instalments of more Harry adventures, took young readers on a very personal and intimate journey. Not only did young readers know Harry also he has become part of their life. Children grew up and entered adulthood with Harry. So, it may be that a special kinship with, even ownership of, Harry may have been another drawcard and attraction to the massive readership. Jack Zipes in *Sticks and Stones* profoundly and practically warns of the ‘homogenisation’ of literature that dangerously presented an almost formulaic

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2 ‘Muggle’ is the term used in the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling to denote ‘human’. Thus in the novels we note the depiction of the wizard world and the muggle world.

denouement. In terms of the economics and marketing of Harry Potter, this formula was a success. But what has been possibly sacrificed in the process? So many pertinent questions presented themselves.

As mentioned earlier, this was not going to be a straightforward and simple exploration. Another major factor that came into consideration is that the readership of these texts also consisted of adults. Again, in terms of adults reading these texts, questions arose: What was the attraction? Tellingly, adult special editions were released by the books’ publishers – basically with covers that deceptively looked like more mature texts. God forbid that an adult be caught reading a children’s book! Was it pure escapism? Had life and the pressure of an accelerated western lifestyle in the 2000’s become such that these children’s book series about a wizard and his friends provided a welcomed and necessary respite and outlet? Was Harry the child hero but simultaneously was he also the adult that so many adults themselves yearned to be, but in reality could not? Thus, many questions of a social and psychological nature also arise.

At the time, having read the work of commentators such as Hollindale 5 and Zipes whose expertise and insights cover a diverse range of concerns in children’s literature. The following preoccupations resonated with me and I was able to link them with Rowlings’ text; primarily Hollindale’s thesis on ‘childness’ and Zipes’ examination of the ‘homogenisation’ of children’s fiction. These writers provided me with perspectives that allowed me to ‘see’ The Prisoner of Azkaban and more generally the Harry Potter series, through new eyes, per se. Specifically, the experience of examining the text is relation to Hollindale’s concept of childness offered the opportunity to examine Harry Potter in a number of the contexts mentioned above: child, orphan, hero, crusader against evil, whilst in turn exploring the role and position of the reader. Moreover, Zipes’ work jolted naïve perceptions of the idealised hero in terms of text and literature as a marketable product.

These were just some of the many threads I was in the process of teasing out. Then came the Black Saturday Fires of February 7, 2009 when the south-eastern states,

4 ibid., pp.ix-xiv.

primarily Victoria, were ravaged by catastrophic bushfires. In one fell swoop, everything was wiped and vanished. Ironically, I had re-enrolled to finish my Master’s thesis the very day before the devastating inferno, one very hot Friday afternoon in Melbourne – February 6th 2009. A numb hiatus followed. To make sense of the words lost amongst the tangible material items that no longer existed has been, and is still, part of long process of healing. Trying to make sense of what happened, what was lost and what has re-emerged is part of the process of regeneration and transformation. And, what of Harry and my thesis? I fell silent and travelled to India.

ii. First Impressions and a suggested approach.

One is struck by the absolute diversity and richness of every aspect of life in India. As an educator with a somewhat inquisitive disposition I wondered what young people, what children, in India were reading. Education, in any country is a veritable Pandora’s Box, in India I am sure this is also the case. What was being read in English in Indian classrooms? My focus and essential interest remained children’s literature; as does the representation of the child in literature written in English, but the cultural context had shifted totally. So as an absolute novice (and clearly very naïve) I started asking, exploring and of course reading. Between the years 2009 and 2012 I visited bookshops and schools in New Delhi, Varanasi, Shimla, Jaipur and Kolkata and became at once enchanted, further intrigued and concerned.

At times I became frustrated as my expectations as an Australian teacher were challenged and I had to promptly remember that the world is big and that what may be deemed the norm for consumers and readers in one country, may not be the case elsewhere. I was becoming aware that there are many and very real reasons for these differences. For example, in a country like Australia with a significantly smaller population there is a strong and acknowledged culture of Young Adult Literature, would this be the case in India as well? Often in general (not specifically children’s) bookshops, the sections devoted to children’s literature were limited in the breadth as well as the variety of texts available to a Young Adult readership. I found many different types of texts pitched at younger readers and their content again varied from
narratives set within a contemporary context to translations of mythic Hindu tales; to clearly didactic stories with a strong moral message.

Significantly, the above questions and impressions were forming at the very moment in Australian education when the whole educational curriculum started to undergo a widespread and massive national review; with it, an overhaul of what was being taught in classes around the country was initiated by the government. This overhaul is still in its initial stages and is unfolding under the auspices of ACARA (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority).

In the area of English, one major component and expectation placed upon schools (government, non-government) is to extend the literary and cultural experiences of our students as readers. So, a mandate has been issued effectively inviting the inclusion of ‘Indigenous’ related texts and what is generally termed as ‘Asian’ literature. The Australian Curriculum English Version 3.0 (January 2012) rationale states:

_In this light it is clear that the Australian Curriculum English plays an important part in the understanding, attitudes and capabilities of those who will take responsibility for Australia’s future...The Australian Curriculum: English contributes to nation-building and internationalisation...Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have contributed to Australian society and to its expanding contemporary literature and its literary heritage through their distinctive ways of representing and communicating knowledge, tradition and experience. The Australian Curriculum: English values, respects and explores this contribution. It also emphasizes Australia’s links to Asia._

The final seven words in the rationale of the newly drafted ACARA The Australian Curriculum English Version 3.0 are crucial and most significant. The choices that schools across Australia make regarding what Asian texts to include or exclude from text lists for study in the English classroom will inevitably impact upon how young Australians in the near future, the Australia of future years perceives, views and understands Asian culture and literature.

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What images, stories and texts will ‘hold appeal’ to English faculties across the nation? Why will these texts be chosen? As teachers of English in Australia what is our experience of Asian literature so that we can make educated, open and equitable choices for texts that reflect the immense diversity that is Asian literature? Does Indian literature for children, or which feature the child as protagonist within an Indian context, fall into the texts being considered for study in the Australian English classroom? And if so, will be we limited to texts like *Bend it Like Beckham? Monsoon Wedding? Bride and Prejudice? Water?* Some of these texts provide wonderful insights into aspects of Indian culture, however, will we be limited to film? And although much beautiful adult writing features in the classroom such as Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* which is on the current Year 12 English curriculum in Victoria; what Young Adult Literature written in English and recently published in India has been recommended for study in the English classroom in Australia?

There have been many concerns that ACARA’s stipulation for Asian literature in the Australian English curriculum is reflective of a number of broader agendas, namely of an economic and political nature, as implied by the language employed in the rationale, specifically in reference to the final seven words, culminating in the phrase *our links with Asia*. Thus, the question arises whether the phrase is merely tokenisitic. Or, should we breathe a deep sigh of relief that finally, the literature being presented to students in the Australian English classroom will allow us as an Australian society the opportunity to stop our navel-gazing and Eurocentric focus, extending our children and ourselves in a way that embraces the richness of our local and global community; these are different kind of links, not necessarily of an economic nature, but links that relate to identity and a sense of one’s place in the world. Dr Larissa McLean-Davies in *Why India Matters: Literature and global citizens* reminds us that,

> ...literary texts enable students to make the links between their own lived experiences, and the experiences of their counterparts in other countries, providing a nexus between theory and practice. (p.30)

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Thus, with the above personal experiences and the above ideas and thoughts regarding the sharing of literature and experiences forming in my mind, this thesis started to find its way.

Due to the limited nature of my study, firstly accessibility to Indian resources, word limit, distance and time, I chose to explore the following areas:

1. What is the current state of YAL (Young Adult Literature) written in English and recently published in India?

2. How is Indian-ness (an appropriation of Hollindale’s thesis on childhood) manifested in YAL written in English and recently published in India?

3. What is the implication and impact of ‘epiphanies’ and ‘moments of transformative exhilaration’ on the young Indian protagonist and the readers of YAL written in English and recently published in India?

In the following chapter is a review of the extant literature I was able to locate on the topic of children’s and young adult literature in India.
Chapter 1 - Literature Review

In the previous brief chapter, the Introduction, I set out the personal and professional context within which this study manifested.

In this chapter I discuss the difficulties in sourcing critical literature on Young Adult Literature in India. I offer a chronological examination of critical readings on Young Adult Literature in India. I include a summary of Sheoran’s ‘Contemporary Children’s Literature in India’. Finally, I review critical literature on Young Adult Literature in India post 1975 until 2011.

I. Difficulties in Sourcing Critical Literature on Young Adult Literature in India

There is very little study of children’s literature in India save the odd dissertation often based on stereotypical ideas. So we have no way of judging; we have no parameters with which to examine children’s books. Somehow, books for children are still not considered important enough for critical examination and evaluation. This is why we often first look to the West for models of multiculturalism and political correctness before we realise that no, those systems and standards don’t apply in quite the same way. India as a mosaic of cultural representations must be reflected in the books. Where one rule can apply for one book, it cannot in another.

Sandhya Rao, Editor, Tulika Books  

In preparing a review on extant commentaries and literature relating to contemporary or recent children’s literature in India, with specific focus on the depiction of the child in Young Adult Literature, Sandhya Rao’s (2001) above claims and assertions warrant examination.

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As an editor of a reputable publishing house of children’s literature in India, Rao’s position offers her a particular insight into the current state of children’s literature in this vast country. In fact, one is struck by the number of issues and concerns that are implied by Rao which recur in the discussion surrounding children’s literature and the depiction of the child in recent Indian literature. These concerns and issues are also encountered whilst sourcing and researching critical readings on Young Adult Literature in India that are available to one, from the position and perspective of researcher outside India in 2012.

In 2012, when the population of India is over 1.2 billion¹¹, the researcher is challenged by the formidable nature of compiling reliable data and sources in the area of critical readings and reviews on the topic of literature for young adults in India. This, as will become evident, is a recurring theme. Indeed, sources for this researcher were scant and few, in proportion to the vastness of India’s population and its rich literary heritage. Questions regarding the accessibility of relevant material for this thesis were an issue in the initial stages of this work. The predominant factor being I was searching for information and sources on Young Adult Literature written in English and published in India from outside India itself. This proved to be a challenge.

Significantly, Rao’s abovementioned words were not found in the annals of university libraries, in journal or book catalogues, but reflect a source that has been invaluable in this particular study. Despite trawling numerous library catalogues and many research engines, most of the critical readings accessed have been via the Internet. On the Internet, sources include Indian literary websites such as Tulika Books, Muse India, Zubaan. These represent primary examples of sites that abound with information and insights on children’s literature and Young Adult Literature (YAL) in India today. Joy and Raj¹² posit the following idea, that ‘While there is little or no response to this new writing [meaning YAL] from traditional critical establishment, the new age media

¹¹ According to the source India online, retrieved from http://www.indiaonlinepages.com/population/india-current-population.html, at the time of writing this work, October 5th 2012, India’s population stands at 1.22 billion, making it the second most populous country in the world.

have been celebrating and tracking its development’. Furthermore, in tracking the development of YAL in India, earlier texts and critical readings do not even use the acronym YAL or the term Young Adult Literature; the general ‘children’s literature’ is the preferred term. By 2011 however, we note that YAL has crept into the discourse. The introduction of new terminology and different perspectives suggests that a shift has occurred in how YAL is perceived and received in India.

Thus, prompted by the abovementioned suggested shifts in the discussion regarding YAL in India, this literature review will be structured as a chronological examination of extant critical reviews and commentaries in order to afford the reader an overview of how the discussion pertaining to literature for young adults has evolved in recent times in India. Consequently, in this review, critical literature texts are examined according to the date of their publication. The texts reviewed cover four decades, commencing in 1975 and ending in 2011.

Why these dates? In researching this paper, it became apparent that there has been an increased interest in specific YAL texts and as a genre in recent years. Yet, comparatively, this researcher did not locate such interest, nor was it evident in much earlier critical writing on YAL. Thus, Sheoran’s (1975) work serves as a point of departure for the exposition of extant critical literature on YAL in India.

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ibid.
II. A Chronological Examination of Critical Readings on Young Adult Literature in India.

Setting the panoramic that is Young Adult Literature in a present day context, within the body of critical work examined, Sheoran’s stands out as seminal. Written in 1975, Sheoran provides guiding parameters within which to view and discuss children’s literature in India. It is significant that many critics and commentators since touch upon many of his initial preoccupations.

Thus, before embarking upon an exploration of more recent critical literature on YAL, an overview and analysis of Sheoran’s thesis is provided. His work assists in contextualising the ideas and critical work regarding children’s literature in India that follow. Sheoran literally provides a critically significant starting point in critical inquiry on this subject.

i. Overview and analysis of K. Sheoran’s work ‘Contemporary Children’s Literature in India.’

In 1975, nearly forty years ago, Kamal Sheoran in his journal article, ‘Contemporary Children’s Literature in India’\(^\text{14}\) makes the jolting statement that ‘it is an unpalatable truth that in a country where thousands of children are doomed to illiteracy the urgent need is to provide textbooks and other basic needs for rudimentary education. At this point, to speak of children’s literature as a specialised field is far-fetched and fanciful.’\(^\text{15}\) Sheoran identifies undeniable socio-economic concerns that are imbued with a vigilant sense of social justice and equity. The tone and nature of these concerns are still relevant today and are raised by more recent commentators on children’s literature in India in 2011 such as Agarwal, Joy and Raj whose views will be examined in this chapter.

Sheoran identifies the paradox of the tension between the issue of illiteracy and India’s age old, thriving oral tradition, the latter being a phenomenon he perceives as ‘the greatest living oral narrative tradition in the world.’ Sheoran argues that this

\(^{14}\) Sheoran, K. (1975) op. cit.
\(^{15}\) ibid., p.127.
thriving oral tradition ‘fulfils and feeds the needs of every young and growing child in that he gets his complete “story” quota orally’.\(^{16}\) The issue of India’s great oral tradition and its impact on story telling is acknowledged and lauded in many contemporary commentaries. However, whether a growing child gets ‘his complete “story” quota orally, is an assertion that is vehemently questioned by later, more recent studies.\(^{17}\)

Sheoran provides a sense of the magnitude and breadth any exploration of children’s literature in India entails. As such, the writer characterises children’s literature in India as ‘elastic and sprawling’.\(^{18}\) Subsequently, for the practical purpose of categorisation, he makes an arbitrary, but understandable categorisation of children’s literature in India into ‘three levels’. This distinction assists in his own analysis of children’s literature in India.

On the one level he identifies ‘the traditional children’s literature, which, for the most part, is oral narrative’. Characterising it as a living literature ‘that spills into various forms of spoken and written word.’ The second level he discerns is the ‘modern’ printed children’s literature dealing with present day styles and subjects. This second category Sheoran considers more didactic in form, less creative and still slow in development, irrespective of language.\(^{19}\) It is significant that quite a number of critics raise the concern regarding the ‘didactic’ tone of many children’s books in later commentaries.\(^{20}\)

To further embellish the complex picture that is children’s literature in India, Sheoran introduces another level from which to examine children’s literature in India, that of language. The critic engages in a detailed analysis of children’s literature found in regional languages such as Malayalam, Marathi, Bengali and Hindi, focusing on the definitive oral tradition links (whether they be folkloric, historical and mythical narratives) evident in children’s stories, which are ‘rich and imaginative and remains the most interesting source for children’s literature’.\(^{21}\) Whilst recognising that Indian

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\(^{16}\) ibid., p.127.
\(^{17}\) This questioning is considered by the following critics whose work will be analysed in this thesis: Rao (2001, 2003) and Agarwal (2007, 2011).
\(^{18}\) Sheoran, K. (1975) op. cit. p.127.
\(^{19}\) ibid., p.127.
\(^{21}\) ibid., p.128.
mythology is not specifically for children, Sheoran emphasises it is nevertheless most popular with children.

Within a tradition of oral narrative, Sheoran notes that whilst still a practice ‘in every home in India, story forms are changing’, which adds further complexity to the discussion. In relation to printed literature of a folkloric ilk, Sheoran notes that much of Indian folklore (at the time of writing his essay, 1975) has yet to be printed. Of note however, is Sheoran’s mention of the Children’s Book Trust and Echo as publishers of classic Indian tales in English. Despite viewing this development as encouraging, Sheoran does not hesitate to observe that in transferring these oral tales into written adaptations, much of the ‘natural spontaneity and humour so evident in dialect is lost’ thus, suggesting the limitations of the written word within the context of an oral tradition.

Moreover, using ‘language’ as a significant distinguishing feature, Sheoran seeks to highlight the difference between literature for children written in English, as opposed to literature written for children in Hindi and other regional languages. Reflecting upon the differences that become apparent for him, Sheoran identifies the socio-economic reality that Indian child readers of literature in English experience. ‘English, which is the medium of instruction in almost every major city in India, caters to the more affluent section of society.’ His summation then culminates with the view that children’s literature in English displays ‘Western’ characteristics in style, subject and treatment; whilst, children’s literature written in Hindi and other regional languages is more insular, more ‘relevant’ in content. According to Sheoran, ‘The regional languages have access even to remote corners of the country and, although different from each other in treatment, nevertheless draw their themes from traditional folklore’. This point of accessibility is a crucial element in Sheoran’s argument, for he is essentially arguing that children’s literature written in Hindi or other regional languages has a more folkloric base, and thus a more authentic impulse and tone in terms of content, and, therein lies one major difference with literature written for children in English in India which he identifies. The suggestion being that

22 ibid., p.129.
23 ibid., p.128.
24 ibid., p.127.
the Indian child reader will connect with the regional text more readily than with the English text; thus a more meaningful experience is rendered.

Sheoran further elaborates upon the impact of language when considering a ‘written’ children’s literature. Here, he seeks to highlight the complex and difficult nature of researching the area of children’s literature in India if ‘language’ is to be the prime consideration. Firstly, in view of the size of India’s population, he highlights the already gargantuan and multidimensional linguistic reality: ‘No other country has such a variety of recognised individual languages in current use as India, and the fact that there is no common language for the five hundred million people affects the entire literature of the country.’25 Therefore, for Sheoran, it is not so much despite, but because of, the very richness of India’s oral tradition, accompanied by the reality of so many languages and dialects, that ‘one can appreciate how difficult and awesome is the task of compiling any kind of reliable data for the purpose of critical study.’26

The complexity and awesome nature of the task is illustrated in Sheoran’s discussion of Marathi and Bengali literature for children. Here, he debunks the suggestion that regional languages only produce children’s literature that is folkloric in content. He acknowledges P.K Atne as establishing a new movement in Marathi literature and notes that with the establishment of ‘children’s literature as a separate field’ many young writers have set out to explore the medium, ‘producing a spate of fresh and original writings which may not stand up to critical literary analysis, but which, nonetheless, were exceedingly popular with children.’27 P K Atne is deemed by Sheoran to be ‘the first well-known author to produce textbooks for children in a simple and interesting style.’ Here, the word ‘textbook’ finds itself included in the discussion of children’s literature. Thus, for Sheoran, textbook and storybook both represent components, or forms, of children’s literature. Also noteworthy is the writer’s assertion that some of this ‘original writing’ may not merit literary critiquing. Later commentators explore this preoccupation with critical reviewing of YAL.28

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25 ibid., p.129.
26 ibid., p.130.
27 ibid., p.131.
Furthermore, varying nomenclature denoting ‘children’s literature’ is found in Sheoran’s analysis of the vast literary tradition of Bengali literature. Having drawn our attention to the popularity of Bengali poetry with children as a form of literature, Sheoran shifts focus to prose, commenting on the ‘keen interest taken in it by every famed man of letters’; Tagore, Shastri and Keshav Chand Sen are cited for their keen interest in ‘juvenile literature’. Thus, another term of reference is included in the children’s literature discussion, subsequently introducing other layers, nuances and connotations to the term ‘children’s literature’. Paralleling his Marathi example, Sheoran identifies a shift from traditional storytelling, where many contemporary Bengali writers concern themselves with increasing the range of a child’s vision. For these writers, Sheoran asserts ‘Merely telling a story is not enough. An interest is taken in the mental development and character of the child.’ Thus, Sheoran proceeds to explore the tensions which exist between those who see children’s literature as a vehicle for didacticism and those who rebel against such ‘puritan dogma’. The latter group of writers seek to use plot and language which ‘underscore the urgency of present-day situations. Realism is their key word.

So, in 1975, within Bengali literature for children, Sheroan identifies a group of writers creating texts whose content is not based on oral tradition but which ‘touch upon such forbidden subjects such as sex and love, parental conflicts, and teenage rebellion’. What is of note is that at the time of Sheoran’s writing he contends that this ‘neo-literature has come under heavy criticism’ but, according to Sheoran, it continues to grow. This identification of a ‘neo-literature’ is expressed in twofold terms: Firstly, as a development in children’s literature; and, secondly, as a reaction against traditional views of children’s literature as a vehicle for moral didacticism. Discussion of ‘didacticism’ is further developed and considered a real obstacle in the progress of a children literature in India. Sheoran’s identification of this phenomenon in an historical investigation suggests it has been of concern for some time.

29 Sheoran, K. (1975) op. cit., p.132.
30 ibid., p.133.
31 ibid., p.133.
32 ibid., p.133.
33 ibid., p.133.
Additionally, apart from delving into an historical account on the development of children’s literature in India, he hints at positive changes that were occurring in 1975. Having already mentioned the Children’s Book Trust, the National Book Trust and the National Publishing House, amongst others, Sheoran makes the following observation which he feels augurs well for the production of quality children’s literature in India: ‘A new and encouraging step has been taken by Shri Kumtha, a bookseller and publisher. A book week is held once a year at which only children’s books are made available. The event is becoming increasingly popular and may well be the beginning of a new trend.’34

In direct relation to the above statement, and as a concluding point, Sheoran touches on the economics of publishing as another dimension in the progress of children’s literature in India. Here, he presents a series of emotionally fluctuating statements. Firstly, in contrast to the optimism of his book fair observation, he laments the high costs involved in producing quality books, concluding that the situation of the production of children’s literature in India falls behind other nations. ‘The contemporary scene, as far as overall production and publication are [sic] concerned, remains uninspiring. Economics, I am obliged to point out, play [sic] a central role in the functioning of children’s literature as a vital cultural manifestation.’35 Secondly, despite this bleak summation, Sheoran does identify a hopeful possibility that there is evidence of an ‘awakening interest in children’s literature’. Yet, thirdly and finally, he closes his essay with a sad reflection upon the state of children’s literature as he sees it in 1975, ‘It is unfortunate, however, that in this, the “century of the child,” the Indian child is still to come into his own’.36

It is against this context then that the discussion in this study on Young Adult Literature in India in develops.

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34 ibid., p.131.
35 ibid., p.137.
36 ibid., p.137.
ii. Review of Critical Literature on Young Adult Literature in India post 1975.

Nearly two decades later, in 1991, Taylor predominantly focuses on the children’s literature market in India, specifically on its enormous size but also picking up a thread encountered in Sheoran concerning the type of texts produced for children. ‘So far, the children’s books published are mostly educational, but fictional titles are being developed.’ Citing Deepak Merchandani of India House in Mumbai, Taylor focuses on the dearth of children’s fiction reiterating that production of school textbooks remains the primary financial source for most children’s books publishers. Like Sheoran, Taylor comments on the historical impact of the Children’s Book Trust, established in 1957 and its undeniable impact upon the promotion of ‘children’s book publishing in India’. However, Taylor seeks to ascertain the reasons for the sluggish development of children’s literature in India. Thus, Taylor finishes her brief piece with CGR Kurup, the then editor-in-chief of the Children’s Book Trust, who concludes, ‘Our two biggest problems are poverty and encouraging the reading habit’.

Reminiscent of Sheoran’s predictions and varying emotional appeals, Kurup notes that ‘the future is bright. The scene is changing; we can tell from the feedback from our agents. The villages are developing higher levels of education.’ This preoccupation with literacy, access to education, poverty and economy are deeply underlying issues that are examined in varying degrees by later commentators of YAL.

Sandhya Rao in 1998, in a somewhat frustrated voice, comments upon the fact that, we are still talking about ‘children’s literature’, ruing the fact that at that stage, children’s literature may be being produced on a small scale, yet, it is also not being promoted. Thus, in a shift of tone from previous commentators, Rao emphasizes the need for government authorities to ‘consciously promote children’s books.’ Like

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38 ibid.
Sheoran before her, she notes that ‘stories as printed word is a relatively new phenomenon’; she too comments upon the diversity of Indian reality citing ‘22 official languages and 1650 unofficial dialects’, clearly indicating (much like Sheoran) that there are indeed many Indias.

Moreover, further paralleling Sheoran, she focuses on the consequent impact of the English language upon Indian society due to the British presence and influence. Earlier, Sheoran comments on the progress in the quality of children’s literature in India written in English, with specific emphasis on the attention given to the production of texts. However, Rao mourns what she indicates to be an unbalanced representation of the 2% of the population in India who speak English, while most children’s books are published in English. What Rao suggests is an injustice in this unbalanced reality. Thus, she emphasizes the need for ‘our own books’. The use of the inclusive ‘our’ immediately positions this writer as someone directly involved and engaged in the issue. This is not to say that Sheoran is detached, as the closing comments of his journal article attest. Indeed, his language is more academic and formal, perhaps a reflection of the nature of his intended audience and the purpose of his published journal article. Perhaps, his language is a reflection of the times in which he writes.

Adopting a similarly energetic and forceful conviction to Rao, Rhadika Menon directly confronts the reader with the question, ‘Why haven’t we been able to… produce a literature that is truly distinctive?’ This writer concisely encapsulates some of what by now are becoming commonly held concerns for the critic and observer of literature for children in India, not quite yet Young Adult Literature. Menon attempts a categorisation, reminiscent of Sheoran. However, she isolates four classifications adopting a more social and cultural perspective in her examination. Essentially she identifies texts that reflect the following slants: socially- conscious (didactic); melting pot (focusing on the universal and ignoring the subcultural);

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41 Sheoran, K. (1975) op. cit., p.137.


43 ibid.
culturally relevant (presenting realistic images); and, books written not specifically for children but which would be enjoyed by them. Menon’s overarching view asserts that, ‘a good book is a good book.’

Already a shift in the language employed by critics in discussing children’s literature and texts is evident. Couched within the discourse of literary studies a new confidence is discernable. Like earlier observers, Menon questions the traditionally held views associated with children’s literature that ‘children’s books are necessary for acquiring reading and writing skills and no more.’ The implication being that there may be other reasons and factors associated with the value of engaging in and reading children’s literature apart from the very necessary, urgent and ‘rudimentary’ reason of developing one’s literacy skills.

Menon also alludes to the changing trends in economics in India, which are instrumental, and core in the marketing of children’s literature. She mentions emerging ‘new markets’ that she hails as a ‘positive’. Nevertheless, her message also bodes a cautious tone as she warns of ‘yet inherent dangers’. These dangers relate to market pressures that ‘lurk very real’. Menon then quotes Michael Rosen who contends ‘a highly competitive market insists on… more titles, more authors, quick, quick, write, write, no time to edit, no time to rewrite, get it out, sell it, drop it, pulp it.’ So, this article advises against the sacrifice of quality in the literature produced for children.

Menon draws our attention to the reality of a global culture. She emphasizes the need for a ‘democratic balance in the exchange of books between nations, especially for the young. The flow of books has always been from west to east. For a fair exchange, the books have to move in both directions.’ She uses this comment as a segue into a statement, almost a proclamation, about the types of books ‘we’ must produce. Again, the use of the inclusive ‘we’, much like Rao’s ‘our’, suggests a direct and impassioned involvement in the issue of the production of children’s literature in India. Moreover, Menon urgently stresses the need to develop books with an

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44 ibid.
45 ibid.
46 ibid.
47 ibid.
inherently Indian ‘voice’: ‘This is the voice that must speak to young readers everywhere because this is our voice, our language.’

On closing, Menon arouses almost nationalistic Gandhian pride by quoting Dr K Satchidandan’s conclusion to his essay on 50 years of Indian literature: ‘the best of our writers now know that unless we realise Swaraj in ideas, our great country is doomed to die without an individual signature of her own while she signs in different scripts.’ Thus, Menon makes an intellectual leap and connects the future of Indian children’s literature with an evocation of the emergence of a deep national identity amongst India’s young. In her view, literature must offer young readers, ‘a sense of who they are and why they are a part of a larger world than simply the one that surrounds them.’

This slant on Indian identity and voice is a focus and a challenge subsequently taken up by Sandhya Rao and later on Agarwal.

Writing in 2001, Rao continues to focus on this question of children’s literature in India that embodies a truly Indian reality, with an authentic Indian ‘voice’. Rao argues for a truly multicultural children’s literature for India and not merely one borrowed from the British as she suggests in her allusion to children who have been reading for years ‘about scones and chocolate eclairs, meringues and tongue sandwiches, pixies and gnomes…’ Notwithstanding this assertion, Rao does acknowledge that many of these British books are of sound quality, much loved and in this manner, have their place. Here, the critic is interested in the extension of children’s imaginations to include ‘all possibilities’. These, she implies, include texts that reflect the real world of varied people and cultures.

Thus, Rao adopts a tone of urgent responsibility in an effort to underline the social inequity that exists and is an inherent concern in the creation of books for children in India. In her view, only some children are being catered for in the production of literature for children. This is highlighted with her question: ‘When we create books for children, which children do we address?’ By delineating the various groups, such

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48 ibid.
49 ibid.
50 ibid.
51 Sandhya Rao (2003) and Agarwal (2011)
53 ibid.
as middle and upper class English speaking children, urban versus rural children; children who attend school comprised of a one room shack with one teacher ‘who almost never turns up’; children attending elitist residential schools; poorer children whose parent are eager to send them to school thus ensuring that they ‘may at least have one meal by way of the noon meal incentive’, Rao clearly illustrates in general terms the various and real social demographics which impact upon whether a child has access to literacy, let alone literature.54

In 2003, Rao continues the thread of this discussion from an editorial perspective commenting on the quality of books produced in India, (a concern raised by Sheoran earlier).55 In an attempt to provide further clarification of the term ‘books for children’ she initially claims that due to increasing engagement with television, ‘Books are definitely at a low premium in India’.56 Then she distinguishes between practical literacy texts, ‘Yes, literacy is big in India. But we’re not talking bus numbers and signing your name. We’re talking literature: books in which we find ourselves, books that stay with us all our lives.’57 This engagement with, and reference to, children’s literature as a transformative medium becomes more prevalent in commentaries written more recently (post 2000) for example in Agrawal (2011) Jafa (2011) and signifies a shift in the examination of children’s literature as a powerful and meaningful form of expression and change.

It is this notion of expression that Rao takes up as her final point. She questions who indeed is expressing themselves, or what is being expressed in the creation of children’s literature in India. Thus, she concludes that further discussion and refinement need to take place in the areas of stereotyping, cultural inconsistencies and the absence of location. These she identifies as some factors evident in Indian children’s literature, which often, in her view, lead to ‘plain bad writing’.

Reflecting upon the varying attitudes to children’s literature in India, Rao does not hesitate to comment of the position of children in Indian society. In what may be seen as a generalisation, Rao claims: ‘Most people have a distinctly patronising attitude to

54 ibid.

56 ibid.
57 ibid.
Reminiscent of Sheoran’s bleak tone in his concluding statement, Rao is saddened and deeply concerned that this patronising attitude is then carried over into children’s books. Moreover, it may also be reflected in the absence of significant critical literature about children’s literature. Concerning critical literature, ‘much of it is learned from other cultures and experiences.’ Although other critics raise this concern regarding the dearth of critical work on children’s literature in India (eg. Sheoran), the contrasting observation has also been made by Agrawal (2011), that there is more critical literature regarding children’s literature found in the West.

In a dramatic end to her commentary, having provided various vignettes into the multicultural and class diversity evident in Indian society, Rao reflects on the powerlessness of children in India and the subsequent reflection of this in children’s books. ‘Children’s books in India in particular, like the children, are often voiceless, unheard, unknown’. She deems the valuing of children in Indian society, discernment in the production of quality literature and ‘discerning reviews by discerning reviewers’ as factors that will affect change.

In 2007, Deepa Agrawal commences her editorial commentary in *Muse India*’s edition dedicated solely to children’s literature, with what by now has become a recurring theme in the discussion; that this is a ‘a genre that has received little serious attention in our country.’ Reasons for this lack of attention are attributed to the vast storehouse of ‘traditional literature’, which finds that ‘homegrown’ original writing is still battling to create its own identity. Thus, Menon and Rao’s earlier concerns regarding the Indian voice are intimated here and continue to preoccupy.

Like Rao, Agarwal is interested in the process of selection of books for children within the context of a changing world. She outlines that often parents select familiar stories from their childhood, ‘forgetting how much the world has moved on since then.’ Yet, in 2007, as in 1975, the moral and didactic role of children’s literature is still a concern. So that whilst on the one hand Rao calls for the valuing of the child,

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58 ibid.  
59 ibid.  
60 ibid.  
62 ibid.  
63 ibid.
Agarwal suggests that many parents see choosing a particular text for their child as a moral act of caring: ‘being impressionable, children should only be exposed to literature that provides moral instruction or the ‘knowledge’ considered so essential in this information driven age’.\(^{64}\) Hence the tension between the thesis that literature represents ‘books in which we find ourselves’ (Rao) and the more utilitarian view that we read ‘to gain knowledge’ still resonates in the discussion, as it did in 1975. Like Rao, Agarwal comments on the limitations in the view many parents hold, where the functional purpose of literature is emphasized, ignoring the possibility of children constantly negotiating new frontiers, imaginary worlds and magical moments through story and narrative.\(^{65}\)

In a more substantial commentary, ‘Children’s Literature in India’\(^{66}\) and reminiscent of Sheoran’s approach to the discussion, Agarwal, seeks a definition of children’s literature and illustrates Rao’s point, that often the West provides a starting point for critical references. Citing Lesnik-Oberstein, children’s literature is deemed as: ‘a category of books the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience: children.’\(^{67}\) For the purposes of her study, Agarwal confines her examination to the study of literature for children written in English, which is directly relevant to this particular inquiry. In an attempt to convey the multifaceted nature of the discussion, which is often positive and hopeful whilst simultaneously somewhat frustrating, Agarwal notes that the status of children’s literature is shifting in India. Using the recent acknowledgement and honouring of some illustrators and writers by the Indian government as an example Agarwal stresses the importance of such events as ‘they indicate recognition of a genre of writing almost invisible in our country.’\(^{68}\)

Following the model of past commentators (Sheoran), Agarwal examines the history of the printed children’s book in India commenting on its relatively brief 150-year span. Significantly, within an historical context, Agarwal specifically signposts Indian

\(^{64}\) ibid.
\(^{65}\) ibid.
\(^{68}\) ibid.
post-independence as a starting point, possibly even a catalyst for change. She also notes and identifies a steady growth in ‘juvenile literature’ (terminology employed earlier by Sheoran) despite obstacles encountered. Hopefully, she claims that India is ‘clambering over the high walls of taboo’ and ‘shaking off the dry dust of didacticism’,\(^{69}\) concerns raised by nearly every commentator thus far examined.

In contrast to previous critics, and catapulting the discussion into the 21\(^{st}\) century, Agarwal comments on the nature of fiction available to young readers. Whilst a shortage in Indian literature for children of realistic fiction dealing with everyday issues is identified, Agarwal does not fail to acknowledge the plethora of fantasy in traditional tales. In her view, ‘original fantasy fiction for older children actually took off after the *Harry Potter* craze set in.’\(^{70}\) Hence the impact of the West on reading markets and children’s literature is suggested at this point.

From this juncture in her writing Agarwal starts to employ the term ‘young adult fiction’ and there is specific reference to adolescents. Commenting on adolescence as a time of turmoil, she recognises that adolescents identify with books that address their concerns, ‘but young adult fiction is a genre yet to establish a strong presence in our country’ even though Agarwal does claim that some ‘good writing in this area’ exists.

As noted with other commentators, in seeking to reach conclusions regarding a favourable outcome for the development of children’s literature in India, points of comparison are made with countries such as the USA and UK, and India is identified as ‘lagging’ behind.\(^{71}\) In addition, government and economics enter the discussion as factors needing to be considered in seeking any solution. Public libraries run by the government, according to Agarwal ‘are in a pathetic state’; whilst only now are ‘teachers and school librarians beginning to recognise the importance of encouraging and sustaining the reading habit’.\(^{72}\) Clearly, a hitherto lack of appreciation of the importance of reading for pleasure is hinted at on the part of government and educational institutions. The greatest onus however, in Agarwal’s view, is upon parents, who need to appreciate the intrinsic value of ‘leisure reading in the overall

\(^{69}\) ibid.
\(^{70}\) ibid.
\(^{71}\) ibid.
\(^{72}\) ibid.
development of the child”73 As such; a true and vast reading culture needs to gain momentum in India. This will then have positive repercussions in terms of sales figures ‘and authors and illustrators [will no longer] languish on the literary margins.’74 Agarwal’s tone is inspired and intense, making definite statements concerning what she deems to be intrinsic in the awakening of a social consciousness that will embrace the importance of children and young people developing the reading for pleasure habit.

Bhattacharji provides a publisher’s perspective on children’s literature in India, as in her view by 2007 ‘children’s literature’ was the veritable ‘buzz word’ in publishing.75 In excited tone, this commentator claims that it is the ‘big new genre/reader segment that publishers, literary agents and authors have ‘discovered’. Bhattacharji categorises children’s literature primarily on age, suggesting that it includes ‘all shades of literature for the 0-18+ age group. Problems that she encounters in her examination of children’s literature include the tendency for people to consider children’s literature to be educational text books, stories based on the previously mentioned folk tales, and didactic in nature. Thus, the preoccupation regarding the functionality of children’s literature persists.

Bhattacharji delves into a definition of literature for young adults conveying the difficulty she perceives in neither publishers, distributors, retailers nor readers being able to decide what to classify in this genre. Bhattacharji suggests the option of ‘the best way to define this category is to include all literature that tells a good story.’76 This directly contradicts Rao’s earlier assertion that not all published literature for children is necessarily ‘quality’ literature. Indeed, the quality of the written material and books produced has been a prime concern for many critics as noted earlier with Sheoran, Rao and Menon.

In fact, in commenting on the economic constraints of ‘producing a good quality book’ (another previously encountered preoccupation) Bhattacharji comments on the frustration she encounters as a publisher at the ‘uneven quality and unavailability of

73 ibid.
74 ibid.
76 ibid.
titles’. She too, like others before her, laments writers’ inability to ‘deviate from the didactic style of writing.’ Thus, her earlier assertion regarding the definition of literature for young adults does not seem to coalesce with her latter claim. This perceived contradiction is possibly an illustration of the difficulty encountered when one attempts to provide a definitively worded explanation of what constitutes ‘children’s literature’ – does it encompass both ‘good’ and not so ‘good’ work?

Like Agarwal and Rao before her, Bhattacharji comments on the lack of books produced for children and young adults. The critic also identifies the preoccupation for children of this age in India to be ‘concentrating on their education in a very competitive environment.’ This assertion implies that the readers of children’s literature or young adult literature are students (like Agarwal suggested earlier) influenced by Western commercial trends in literature. Indeed, ‘Pottermania’ is once again deemed to be responsible for an increase in readership of books by young people in India. Moreover, students competent in English are implied to be the target audience of these books. In fact, Bhattacharji asserts that English dominates the market, whilst on a positive note ‘regional markets like Bengali, Assamese and Marathi are also thriving’. It is curious to note that these markets were also noteworthy in Sheoran’s work. So that whilst commentators do seem to primarily focus upon children’s literature written in English, consideration is also given to regional languages, however, in the critical readings examined the emphasis on regional languages is not so great.

Finally, ending on an economic note Bhattacharji provides the statistic that in India of 2007, 40% of the population were below 25 years of age. She concludes that this becomes ‘an extremely lucrative segment’. Furthermore, with India’s growing prosperity, the purchasing power of young people has increased, suddenly affording them a voice in what they ‘wish to buy and read’. This represents a very different picture to the voiceless Indian child mentioned by Sheoran and Rao. Bhattacharji’s commentary ends with advice for those involved in writing, illustrating and producing children’s literature: she urges a capitalisation on their strengths to raise the visibility

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77 ibid.
78 ibid.
79 ibid.
80 ibid.
of children’s literature, thus, suggesting that despite recent market trends, more initiative is needed to entrench children’s literature in India.

Rama Rao takes an overarching view of children’s literature in India as a reflection of that nation’s cultural nobility.\textsuperscript{81} Children’s literature is seen as a ‘unique component of [India’s] cultural blossoming.’\textsuperscript{82} This writer seeks to convey a sense of India’s rich literary heritage, which sadly has not acknowledged its burgeoning children’s literature. This is specifically evident in critical circles. Rama Rao too provides the now familiar observation: ‘Children’s literature does not seem to have engaged the attention of scholars and researchers.’\textsuperscript{83}

Much like Menon and Sandhya Rao\textsuperscript{84} Rama Rao seeks to highlight the vital role literature can play in a child or young person’s life. According to this commentator, ‘reading is one of the most important inputs for the mind to mature into ever-widening vistas of thought and action.’\textsuperscript{85} This statement connects to the emphasis on reading for pleasure and expanding the child’s experience of the world encountered in earlier commentaries. Thus, whilst we see a movement away from texts that are didactic and moralistic in nature, there is a certain moral evident in the notion that quality literature shapes and nurtures the development of the child. As Jafa suggests in an interview with Ghosh in 2011, ‘We need to understand that children’s literature is not just entertainment. It’s a vital tool for shaping the future of society.’\textsuperscript{86}

In 2011, Deepa Agarwal revisits children’s literature.\textsuperscript{87} By this stage however, the term YAL is firmly and confidently employed in commentaries, which conveys a definite shift in how YAL is perceived in India today. Indeed, Agarwal comments on the surging pace of publications for the twelve plus age group, evident since the turn

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{82} ibid.
  \item\textsuperscript{83} ibid.
  \item\textsuperscript{84} Menon (2000) and Sandhya Rao (1998; 2001; 2003.)
  \item\textsuperscript{85} ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
of the 21st century. She also makes an observation regarding what we have encountered earlier in this review as the dearth of children’s literature; drawing our attention to the fact that teenagers reading in English had to make a direct leap ‘from middle grade fiction to books written for adults,’ thus suggesting the literary vacuum for young adult Indian readers of literature in English is being filled rapidly.

Agarwal asserts that until a decade ago ‘homegrown’ Indian YAL in English was ‘almost unheard of in our country.’ Whilst in her earlier writing she comments on the shortage of realistic fiction, in 2011 the general situation has definitely improved. The greater part of her piece is preoccupied with another attempt at a definition of YAL. Here, she specifically refers to the wording ‘young adult’ and concludes: ‘The very term young adults implies that section of readers who are taking their first steps into adulthood.’ Hence, for Agarwal this involves the age group between the years 13 to 21 years.

The commentator then proceeds to outline the major requirements for a text to be deemed YAL. These include: a teenage protagonist; issues that concern teenagers; a protagonist that makes important discoveries about the world around him/her; a protagonist learning to make his or her decisions; a protagonist overcoming serious problems without the help of adults; and, a protagonist hopefully ascertains her/his own inner strengths and weakness;

Regarding thematic concerns, realism seems to abound. This marks an obvious shift from past thematic foci. Agarwal argues that the themes in this literature tend to reflect challenges and issues young people confront in this stage of life: sexuality; sense of identity; school; peer pressure; coping with tragedy. Much like Rao (2007) and Jafa in Ghosh (2011) Agarwal reflects that such literature serves as a template for developing inner strength and subsequently holds some impetus for change. She claims that such literature ‘gives young readers an opportunity to contemplate daunting …issues.’ She goes even further by suggesting that such involvement with text helps young people, ‘define their role in life and learn that each of us possesses

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88 ibid.
89 ibid.
90 ibid.
91 ibid.
abilities to make a difference in the world.' The implication here is that instead of being didactic, narratives provide an opportunity for the young reader to contemplate. They are not necessarily being told how to behave or what to do, but rather to consider and experience other people’s realities, hopefully gaining a deeper understanding. Thus, for Agarwal, YAL is transformative.

In terms of the literature that has preceded them, Joy and Raj take an innovative approach in their essay. Quoting Barthes’ *The Death of the Author* (1977) as a catalyst for their discussion, they argue that the fact that there is little or no response from the traditional critical establishment to the emergence of YAL in India is ‘symptomatic of a shift in literary reception where the reader and the publisher have gained prominence over the author-figure and the literary critic.’ To illustrate this assertion they examine the contexts of the production of YAL in India.

As with previous studies encountered, these commentators provide an examination of the historical context of YAL. They refer to YAL as ‘Young Adult Fiction’ or YA fiction. Joy and Raj comment on the relatively recent phenomenon of YA fiction in India. Even though it is not entirely new, they too perceive it as ‘still fighting for recognition within the establishment,’ which has been a recurring critical concern. In India, according to their observations, YA fiction is ‘limited to media reports and occasional book reviews’ which betrays a dismissive attitude to this form of writing implied above. Joy and Raj also seek to explore the use of YA fiction in classrooms and curricula, an educational approach that occurs in the West but not in India, according to these writers. Significantly, educational opportunities and outcomes as an area of exploration have not been encountered previously in any commentary, again suggesting a shift in perceptions regarding the relevance and use of YA material in the lives of young adults both at home and at school.

What is of note for these two writers, amongst many concerns, is that it is essentially difficult, even in 2011, to trace the origins of this ‘genre’ in India to a single moment. The use of the term ‘genre’ in reference to YAL has been encountered earlier in

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92 ibid.
94 ibid.
95 ibid.
Agarwal for example, further drawing attention to the accepted terminology regarding YAL. Moreover, Joy and Raj comment upon the absence of a systematic exploration and examination of YAL claiming: ‘While the studies on the genre have not yet emerged in a systematic fashion, there are some observations that one could anchor on in order to understand the starting points.’ 96

In terms of the recent emergence and popularity of YA fiction, Joy and Raj cite the article ‘Books for India’s Young Adults Turn New Page’ which traces the escalation of interest in India regarding what they label ‘contemporary young adult’ literature, to 2007 with the Twilight series. 97 What is of note here is that due to the popularity of these English fantasy adventures, which was so ‘promising’ financially, ‘several Indian publishers and authors began considering producing desi (Indian) versions of the same.’ 98 Joy and Raj force the question of what constitutes ‘success’ as they claim that in this context, ‘success is now being measured in terms of the number of copies sold.’ 99 The suggestion here is reminiscent of earlier critics such as Menon and Rao who warn against the sacrifice of quality for quantity and market pressure to produce. 100

Continuing their examination of what they consider to be ‘the birth of the reader and the publisher’, Joy and Raj suggest that media interest, popular demand and market forces are essentially key factors in the development of YA fiction in India. In their view, media interest is largely due to ‘the kind of profit and new market avenues that it promises the publishing houses.’ 101 Noting the emergence of book fairs as a by-product as well as the ‘confident articulations of the publishers, based on statistical figures and responses’, Joy and Raj assert that the publishing industry is a major driving force behind the emergence of YA fiction in India. 102 Thus, they are led to the assumption that ‘Here, we find the buyer-reader emerging as the decisive figure

96 ibid. (The resources they cite in this section of their essay are the following websites: sify.com and dailybhaskar.com.)

97 ibid.
98 ibid.
99 ibid.
100 Menon; and Rao (2001)
101 ibid.
102 ibid.
negating the very existence of critics and authors.' This argument has not been encountered in any other literature on this topic.

Continuing with the economic slant, Joy and Raj refer to Sudhesha Shome Ghosh, editorial director of Penguin India Young Adult, who like Agarwal notes that YA fiction is closing a ‘gaping hole in the Indian publishing scene for books for people between 15 and 20’. The conclusion reached at this point draws a contrast between the emergence of Indian English literature in the 19th and 20th centuries, seen as ‘a by-product of colonial-nationalism and as a creative response to the need to imagine and forge the yet-to-be-born-nation into being’ whilst, YA fiction in India in the 21st century is ‘born out of market demands.’ By focusing on market demands, Joy and Raj, most contentiously believe the role of the author and the critic to be relegated and diminished.

In fact, according to Joy and Raj, such is the power of the publishing houses that specific criteria are stipulated in the production of Indian YA fiction in terms of the author’s background and the content of the work: ‘if not Indian, then ideally the book should have an Indian or sub continental connection’ the writers contend.

Joy and Raj pursue a line of argument regarding the nature of themes and considerations found in YA fiction. Contesting what earlier critics have intimated regarding the universality of adolescent themes and concerns which can be identified in Indian YAL, Joy and Raj believe that this ‘almost holistic representation’ of issues which have bearing on young adult minds has not emerged in YAL in India as yet. Contentiously, Joy and Raj assert that ‘YA fiction in India seems to be radically free from the tangles of moral, ethical questions and focuses mainly on ‘magic and vampires.’ Thus, they conclude that publishers seem to be responding to the demands of new generation teenagers who perhaps find ‘children’s books too childish and adult fiction too serious.’ Despite this assertion, apart from the successful sales of vampire books, no other evidence is provided to support their claim.

103 ibid.
104 ibid.
105 ibid.
106 ibid.
107 ibid.
108 ibid.
Seeking to explore possible causes, Joy and Raj then suggest that the popularity of YA fiction could be viewed as another way in which young Indian writers are ‘writing back to the empire.’ Citing Madhushree Cheterjee, they point out that until the 1990s English books for young adult readers were imported from the West. Now, Joy and Raj find it noteworthy that publishers have redirected this readership to ‘Indianised Harry Potters and Edwards modelled on Ravanas, Krishnas and Kamsas.’ What is also found noteworthy by these two commentators is what they consider to be one of the most remarkable features of YA fiction and that is ‘the non existence of gendered identity on terms of authorship and readership.’ This comment is supported by a reference to the existence of feminist publishing houses in India, which foreground the writing of women. This Joy and Raj hopefully suggest may help ‘to eventually negate the gendered literary spaces’ which exist in India. The suggestion being that whilst the non-existence of gendered identity is noted in young adult literature; socially, gendered literary spaces exist and the latter is perceived by Joy and Raj as problematic. No further evidence is provided to support their assertions.

Finally, and in a sobering tone, Joy and Raj focus upon the nature of the target readership, which they admit, ‘is definitely the young adults who inhabit the elite urban centres.’ Returning to Sheoran and Rao’s comment regarding the sheer vastness of India’s population, Joy and Raj claim: ‘IE (Indian English) fiction as a whole does not, and perhaps cannot, cater to the demands of or address the vast young adult population which lives outside the boundaries of modern, secular, elite, urban spaces which invariably belong to the upper castes and upper class.’

Thus in a slightly deflated tone, Joy and Raj returning to their premise of Barthes’ *Birth of the reader* acknowledge that ‘it is slightly disturbing to note that the subject position of the young adult reader is predictably urban and upper class.’ It is this group that then drives the market for YAL in India and it is within this ‘urban, upper class bias with which the so-called mainstream publishing houses are forced to

109 ibid.
110 ibid.
111 ibid.
112 ibid.
113 ibid.
114 ibid.
operate.¹¹⁵ Joy and Raj end their article with a series of questions regarding the lack of interest from the literary critical establishment; the need for new writings to be critically accommodated; and, the need to understand YA fiction in the context of contemporary literary studies. Exploration of these areas they feel is crucial in the continuing discourse on YAL in India.

Manisha Chaudry¹¹⁶ also examines the state of publishing children’s books in India – a country she views as ‘rapidly urbanising’ and essentially not ‘book loving.’¹¹⁷ Adopting a cynical tone, she alludes to the problems of lack of choice regarding the books available and makes the strong statement that: ‘We publish very few books for children in our country.’¹¹⁸ Chaudry supports her claims with shocking statistics. In 2011, there were 300 million children in India. Basing her research on then current estimates, she claims that ‘each one of them gets about one twentieth of a book! (in the UK there are about six books per child).’¹¹⁹ When considering books in Indian languages the situation becomes worse. What the critic seeks to do is to underline the great disparity between those who have access to books and those who go without.

Chaudry asserts the familiar concerns of critics on the bleak situation regarding access to literature for children, naming the lucrative textbook market, the focus on publishing books for an urban, largely middle class, English speaking audience, poor distribution channels outside cities, the largely absent or decaying idea of community libraries, the labyrinthine School Library Purchase system, and finally, the issue of price. In 2011, the year her piece is written, it seems that the perennial concerns persist.

Most cautiously, Chaudry acknowledges that questions regarding in which language one chooses to buy a book and the parental perceptions regarding the value of purchasing a book that is not a textbook are relevant to ask. However, ‘the answers are too varied to process and employ in a sensible manner.’¹²⁰ This view suggests an

¹¹⁵ ibid.
¹¹⁷ ibid.
¹¹⁸ ibid.
¹¹⁹ ibid.
¹²⁰ ibid.
awareness of the multifaceted and complex nature of how reading is perceived in India.

What is noteworthy in Chaudry’s estimation is the intrinsic value of reading. Citing ASER surveys of 2005 and the educational NGO (Non-Government Organisation) Pratham’s findings, she concludes that ‘poor reading skills contribute to dropout rates.’ The critical value of reading and books is directly related to the quality of education provided. Nevertheless, she asserts ‘there is no great clarity or uniformity in policy about how this should be integrated into the shifting shape of the school journey.’ Thus, once again reference is made to the possible role and impact of literature in the classroom. And, once again, the transformative potential of children’s literature is alluded to when reading for pleasure is lauded and seen to provide ‘a degree of autonomy to each student to learn and explore beyond the prescribed curriculum.’

Chaudry concludes with a focus on the multilingual reality of India and advises that this reality must be reflected in the books children read. This is reminiscent of Rao and Menon’s view in the early 2000s. Here, images from daily life are evoked to convey the point: ‘The smell of frying vadai/pakoras/bhajiyas in amma’s kitchen all intermingle to create an entirely new bouquet called urban India…Children’s publishers have to capture these new aromas and images and convey them effectively in many languages too.’ Although this imagery may be considered as a patriarchal stereotype of a woman in the kitchen, the essential point relates to the rich variety of realities existing throughout India and the inherent problem of equitably reflecting them with integrity and truth. This perception is closely related to Menon and Rao’s earlier call for an Indian voice in children’s literature.

Continuing this preoccupation with definitions of YAL within an Indian context and the Indian voice, Dalai explores the YAL phenomenon in India by posing the

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121 ibid. (Pratham is a non government organisation that establishes learning communities across India with a focus on making education sustainable.) http://www.pratham.org

122 ibid.

123 ibid.

124 ibid.
following questions: Why Young Adult Literature? What is Young Adult Literature? What are its features? What is its relevance, its usefulness? 125

Like many before, Dalai commences with an assertion that, ‘despite several canonical attempts in defining, devising and critiquing several bodies of literature, an honest and rational approach to understand and acknowledge YAL ironically been absent’. 126 Employing a similarly confident tone to Joy and Raj, Dalai essentially condemns what is deemed as ‘the post-colonialists’ gaze’, the view of literary establishment (and the adult world) that does not view YAL as warranting serious consideration and study.

Appropriating Foucault, Dalai asserts, ‘if knowledge is power; adults are doubly powered – mentally and physically! Hence the generational hegemony of the adults over the subaltern Young Adults (YA hereafter) is quite analogous to the literary hegemony of the former over the latter.’ 127 Dalai clearly employs the language and discourse of rigorous critical literary theory, a quality not experienced in much critical writing on YAL thus far. This in itself marks a definite shift in focus.

Dalai proceeds to extol the merits of YAL and aspects upon which we should reflect to enhance and inform critical thought and practices. ‘We can reflect on its language, its representations, its mediating link between text and society.’ 128 Thus, this writer provides literary criticism and fresh insight regarding YAL and does not seem to be limited or obstructed by the impact of publishing houses who herald the death of the author and critic, as Joy and Raj warn.

The questions Dalai asks relate directly to the aforementioned view of the transformative power of literature and resonate with distinct social nuances, as at one moment, the critic reflects: ‘And finally, how can YAL help us in understanding perceptions of caste, class, gender, race and disability?’ 129 Whilst some critics question whether YAL in India presents realistic concerns at all, others clearly see the potential of this literature to raise consciousness on many contemporary and complex issues.


126 ibid.
127 ibid.
128 ibid.
129 ibid.
Addressing the contemporary Indian reader, Dalai compels ‘us’ to ‘forsake our prejudices and hypocrisy about YAL and resume reading, sharing, reviewing, and researching into this potential world literature.’130 There is an urgency in Dalai’s words that seeks to reveal the potential of a literature that can reflect and touch such a vast number of people and ultimately change lives and society. Again, the transformative impulse is highlighted as crucial in forming a new reading culture.

Moreover, Dalai revisits the anachronistic stance of serious critics to ignore YAL, in this particular case, not in India but in Western countries. What is of note here is the recognition that similar attitudes to YA literature as secondary also exist outside India. Quoting Cindy Lou Daniels (2006), the writer emphasises,

‘Some still believe that YA literature is merely a secondary category of child-like story telling – didactic in nature- and unworthy of serious literary evaluation, when in fact, it is really an overlooked and underappreciated literary genre that has only recently begun to attract the critical attention that it deserves.’131

Within an Indian context, Dalai illustrates the abovementioned attention that YAL has recently begun to receive by citing, mostly Western critics’ views regarding the definition of YAL. Significantly, Dalai is uninhibited when it comes to referencing non-Indian critical sources and as such offers a rich, confident and varied panoply of ideas for reflection, which may originate in the West but connect directly and universally with the concerns of YAL in India. This critical approach itself represents a shift in the manner YAL is examined.

Dalai does not hesitate to expose reasons why YAL may have been deliberately ignored in the past; by parents (who view the content of YAL as provocative in terms of the confusions and conflicts depicted) and in pedagogy and literary canon (whose attitude reflect older, ‘puritanical and prejudiced ideology’.) Simultaneously however, Dalai seeks to highlight the relevance and usefulness of YAL, once again centring upon the manner in which YAL crucially provides an unquestionable role in society

130 ibid. Much like Rao’s (1998; 2001; 2003.) and Menon’s (2000) intense calls for an awakening regarding attitudes to YAL.
through educating, inspiring and transforming lives, revealing the young world, exposing social hegemony and enhancing literary skills.132

Dalai’s essay provides a considered approach to examining and engaging with YAL in India in which rethinking YAL is deemed as critical. Contentiously, and on closing, the reader is left with a number of points to consider: namely, the definition of YAL in terms of age is deemed ambiguous as the age groups dividing children and young adult are often ‘fluid’: an arbitrary age group may not be accurate.133 Furthermore, Dalai enters into the authenticity debate, suggesting that it is adults who write most YAL. Thus, young adults cannot be wholly and authentically represented in this literature, as ultimately an adult is censoring what is included in the writing.

Finally, by returning to the issues which seem to prevail in Indian YAL, which may not necessarily reflect the same focus on drugs, teenage pregnancies, but instead focus on caste, religion, class and career, Dalai asserts that an Indian reality is being presented and as such the writer sees this a reason for celebration, not despair.134

Adopting a less optimistic tone, Rangachari135 recognises that due to cultural and traditional constraints, the development of YAL in India has been difficult and ‘hence the very applicability of the term is debatable in the Indian context’. Thus, in 2011 it seems that even though there may be general agreement concerning some definitional aspects of YAL in India, there is no total consensus.

Subsequently, Rangachari notes that gender was not considered a significant aspect worthy for discussion, until recently. Citing a number of recently published books that raise questions regarding traditional views on gender: It Happened That Year (the first of the trilogy), No Guns at My Son’s Funeral, The Battle for No.19, Faces In the Water, Smitten, Rangachari suggests that this is an area that is gaining attention. In contrast, the critic points to children’s books written by Indians settled abroad, which is an area of YAL not frequently mentioned in the commentaries examined. She asserts that ‘one notices ‘their routinely gender-sensitive themes: stories that are set in

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132 ibid.
133 ibid.
134 ibid.
India but invariably raise gender issues or have very strong female protagonists’.\textsuperscript{136} In an effort to understand this occurrence, Rangachari asks whether this is due to the ‘relatively unfettered publishing mores available’ to writers abroad; or, is it more acceptable for non-resident Indian to be raising these issues; or perhaps, the critic ponders, it is merely a reflection of a growing in interest in gender issue in Indian children’s literature as a whole?

Thus, Rangachari, draws attention to the increasing awareness of the representation of female characters in narrative for children and the subsequent impact this may have on readers. The nature of the discussion concerning YAL seems to be delving into greater narrative and textual depth, whilst considering the social ramifications associated with children and young people reading such depictions of Indian reality.

So, when Ghosh\textsuperscript{137} interviews Manorama Jafa, a stalwart in literature for children in India, echoes of the messages and concerns raised by most critics presented in this review resound. For Jafa argues that in the West, unlike in India ‘children’s literature is a serious discipline.’\textsuperscript{138} Furthermore, Jafa asserts the need for mainstream children’s literature to become a key component of elementary education, implying clearly that as such, it is not the case. Of note here is that an elucidation of what exactly constitutes ‘mainstream children’s literature’ is not provided. Notwithstanding, Jafa’s stance is enhanced by a number of supporting arguments: that literature stimulates a child’s imaginative powers and that the emotional development of the child is nurtured through literature.

She emphasizes that the whole reading process is not about ‘learning and passing on moral values’ but more so about allowing the individual child the opportunity to ‘get in touch with their feelings, making them inquisitive and giving them confidence about the world.’\textsuperscript{139} This attitude contrasts greatly with the established view that we read to ‘gain knowledge’ or that we read for fun, as this age of popular media and entertainment may encourage. Jafa concludes with the conviction that ‘we need to

\textsuperscript{136} ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} ibid.
understand that children’s literature is not just entertainment. It’s a vital tool for shaping the future of society.’ Consequently, focusing on the transformative potential of children’s literature, Jafa adds another layer to the discussion regarding ‘reading for pleasure’ which has featured greatly in the commentaries presented in this review.

In summary, this literature review has found that, until 2011, the following issues and concerns regarding the development and current state of children’s literature and YAL in India are highlighted by commentators and recur in the critical literature examined:

a. The diversity of the Indian reality – in terms of culture, population, language – is emphasized;
b. The desire to establish a true Indian ‘voice’ in children’s literature and YAL that reflects the abovementioned diversity is often forcefully proclaimed;
c. The undeniable impact and lasting legacy of a vast and rich oral tradition on children’s literature is noted to have left an indelible mark on how literature for children is perceived within the context of an Indian reality;
d. The existence of literature for children and young adults in English and Indian languages does not always reflect the vast cultural demographics and non English-speaking Indian population, thus the drive to reflect Indian society equitably and accurately remains a preoccupation;
e. Specific interest is expressed in the role of literature beyond its ‘textbook’ functionality and a subsequent shift in attitude is proposed by some critics on the part of government, educational institutions and parents is essential, if change is to occur;
f. In recent years commentators have observed a surge in the production of Young Adult Literature in English in India which, until recently, was experiencing a dearth in this area;
g. Some critics focus on the influence of market forces on the publication of Young Adult Literature in India as a driving factor in production;
h. There is an over-riding consensus amongst commentators that there is a lack of critical literature engaging with and reviewing Young Adult Literature in India which

140 ibid.
reflects an age-old attitude which perceives literature for children and young adults as secondary;

i. Definitional concerns regarding what is YAL and specifically which age groups it entails still occur within critical circles as one definitive consensus remains elusive due to the variable nature of adolescence, when it commences and ends;

j. Finally, within the context of YAL written in English and published in India, recent changing trends have been observed – critics have noted the beginning of an encouraging shift in attitudes towards children’s literature and YAL which seeks to allow readers the freedom to contemplate, imagine and possibly transform. Couched within an Indian reality, these texts reflect a growing awareness of the richness of Indian society and cultures and are not necessarily didactic but essentially seek to evoke a wonder in and sense of the pleasure of reading, which can often be transformative.

In the next chapter, an outline of the critical framework to be employed in examining select recent Indian Young Adult Literature written in English and published in India recently is presented.
Chapter 2 - Methodology

The previous chapter discussed the difficulties in sourcing critical literature on Young Adult Literature in India and offered a chronological examination of critical readings on Young Adult Literature in India. A close analysis of ‘Contemporary Children’s Literature in India’ Sheoran, K. (1975) was incorporated into the discussion. Finally, I reviewed the critical literature that I was able to source on Young Adult Literature in India post 1975 until 2011.

This chapter will outline the critical framework to be employed in examining select recent Young Adult Literature written in English and published in India. This framework will be expounded upon within the context of Peter Hollindale’s concepts of childhood, literature of youth, epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration. It is these concepts that provide a model for appropriation of the term Indian-ness and which additionally provide a model for literary analysis of the chosen YAL texts that forms the body of this thesis.

Peter Hollindale’s work *Signs of Childness in Children’s Books* provides the critical framework for this thesis. His work is significant in that he evokes a deep questioning not only of what is children’s literature but also of the whole process or the ‘reading event’ surrounding children’s books, in all its richness and complexity.

Adopting a rigorous definitional approach to his subject, Hollindale seeks to explore an essence of meaning in this intricate area of study, that is, children’s literature. Thus, he commences by asking: What do we mean by ‘children’? And what do we mean by ‘literature’? He duly draws the reader’s attention to the problematic nature of the difficulties inherent in the children’s literature debate, specifically regarding these commonly used terms of reference (‘children’ and ‘literature’) and then he aims ‘to clarify’ them.

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Hollindale’s approach of critically analysing and questioning the terminology employed in discussing children’s literature, using a diverse sample of literature, both children’s and adult, adds a valuable dimension to this area of research. In the process of ‘clarification’ he suggests new terms and words which may enter into the discourse. Terms like, ‘childness’, ‘childly’ and ‘literature of youth’.

A twofold influence of Hollindale’s work can be identified as a methodological catalyst for this thesis. Firstly, contextually: Hollindale’s assertions regarding the definition of ‘children’s literature’, lead to his discussion of and elaboration upon childness and the term ‘literature of youth’ (which, according to Hollindale, incorporates the notion of ‘epiphanies’ and ‘moments of transformative exhilaration’). For the purposes of this thesis, these concepts provide a complex and diverse backdrop upon which to explore recent literature for young adults in India (YAL). Indeed, the notion of literature as transformative in the lives of the child reader is a preoccupation encountered in a number of Indian YAL commentators, such as Agarwal, Dalai and Jafa. Furthermore, this thesis illustrates that an aspect of the source for this transformation resides in the depiction of the child/youth protagonist’s experience in narrative. This transformative aspect is evident in the texts examined for this thesis.

Secondly, stylistically: Hollindale adopts a critical literary approach, whereby he seeks to clarify complex literary concepts using texts from many different sources. His exploration of ‘The Uniqueness of Children’s Literature’ sees Hollindale employ perspectives from a number of sources. Taking the slant of popular culture, he quotes from Steven Speiberg’s film Hook (Father: Stop behaving like a child! /Son: But I am a child!) in an attempt to highlight different perceptions and perspectives regarding the question ‘What is a child?’ Moreover, he develops his argument by citing writers like Conrad in his work ‘Youth’ to illustrate the pervasive and ever-present nature of childness in literature. Significantly, in critical readings on children’s and YAL literature in India examined in the previous chapter the question of the child and the child’s multiple manifestations features as an area of serious

142 ibid., pp.126-127.
143 ibid., p7.
144 ibid., p.7.
145 ibid., pp.130-131.
concern, with social, economic and cultural ramifications in terms of how children’s literature and YAL are viewed and valued.\textsuperscript{146}

Specifically, Hollindale’s work has a twofold influence on this thesis: theoretically, and in terms of practical application through textual analysis. Theoretically, this thesis transposes Hollindale’s theory of childness (discussed later in this chapter) and allows it to form a contextual frame upon which to examine children’s literature in India and by progression YAL in India. Thus, this thesis proposes the quality or condition of Indian-ness as a term of reference when alluding to the variety and diversity of Indian child experiences and conditions rendered in recent children’s literature and YAL in India. For as aforementioned, there are many Indias and Hollindale’s work, with his specific terminology, assists in providing a template for a possible approach in examining the multifaceted nature of the diverse ‘reading events’ arising from literature for children and youth in India, within a context that honours and celebrates difference.

In order to elucidate the development of the term Indian-ness, it is necessary to specifically relate the relevance of Hollindale’s ideas and how they are appropriated in this thesis. These following three questions are central to the critical framework provided by Hollindale: What is children’s literature? What is childness? What is literature of youth?

A brief examination of these three questions posited by Hollindale follows. The definitions provided in answer to the abovementioned questions illustrate the natural affinity and relevance of his work not only to children’s literature written in English for western readers in terms of childness, but in terms of literature written in English for the child or young reader in India. Thus, allowing the term Indian-ness to be considered when analysing texts.

\textsuperscript{146} See Agarwal (2011), Joy and Raj (2011)
I. Definition: What is children’s literature?

In evoking a sense of the uniqueness of children’s literature, Hollindale raises questions that pertain to both adult and child reading responses. Paralleling suggestions implied by some commentators of children’s literature and YAL in India in the Literature Review such as Sheoran, Hollindale asks whether for adults, reading children’s literature involves an act of ‘unavoidably stepping back, whether in nostalgia or condescension or escape, in order to reoccupy a prior self.’147 This proposal serves to illustrate the complexity of ‘children’s literature’ since clearly, the process is not just about the child. Moreover, the adult is intrinsically involved in the construction of text. This reflection resonates deeply with the Indian experience of children’s literature and YAL, thus corresponding with this thesis’s assertion that ‘children’s literature’ and in this case, YAL, is an experience that involves both child/youth and adult in different capacities.

This thesis argues that children’s literature is a construct that entails the inclusion and involvement of both the adult and the child. The clarification that follows is of significance in the development of an understanding of children’s literature and YAL within an Indian context: Hollindale identifies the involvement of three distinct components in the ‘reading event’ that is children’s literature: the author, the text, and the child reader. The author is a person (usually an adult) who possesses ‘imaginative interests in constructing childhood (usually but not necessarily through creating child characters.)’148 Their construct is such that its narrative voice resonates with children; the text is ‘one in which this construction is present; finally, the reader is a child, still in the process of constructing their own childhood and ‘aware of it presentness.’149 However, Hollindale distils his definition of children’s literature even further:

*Children’s literature is a body of texts with certain common features of imaginative interest, which is activated as children’s literature by a reading event: that of being read by a child. A child is someone who believes on good grounds that his or her condition of childhood is not yet over.*150

This definition of children’s literature is the accepted and applicable definition of children’s literature adhered to in this thesis.

147 ibid., p.9.
148 ibid., p.29.
149 ibid., p.29.
150 ibid., p.30.
The complex nature of adult and child involvement in this ‘reading event’ and the inherent layers of this construction are exemplified by Hollindale’s discussion of the politics of childhood. As illustrated in the Literature Review earlier, definitions of the child and childhood are many and varied, not only in terms of an age specific definitional signpost of who is a child or what is childhood but also in terms of the nature of the experience of being a child and the nature of childhood. The discrepancy in the chronological determinants of the reader age for YAL expressed by a number of recent Indian YAL commentators such as Agrawal, Joy and Raj suggests, as Hollindale has claimed, that there are many views on who is a child and when childhood ends. Within the parameters then of appropriating Hollindale’s concept of childness to the notion of Indian-ness in examining recent YAL in India written in English, the researcher is led to ask: Who is the Indian child? When does childhood end for the Indian child? How are these realities depicted in the various narratives? This thesis invariably tackles issues of the Indian child and childhood in unpacking these questions, what is revealed in the texts examined is that the Indian child has many manifestations and faces. And these manifestations extend from the portrayal of the Indian child within narrative; to the Indian child reader’s own experience, to the experience, memory and expectations which adults involved in the construction and reading of text also contribute. Thus, when we contemplate this notion of Indian-ness and its manifestation in recent YAL published in English in India, one is aware of the complexity of the whole.

Consequently, Hollindale’s work serves to further highlight the complexity that is encountered when delving into an area of study, such as childhood, the child, and children’s literature, which is varied and diverse. What terms of reference can be used to accurately express these complex concepts? What terms of reference can assist a discussion that is relevant and specific to the above experiences, whilst simultaneously acknowledging their existence in many diverse forms and realities? This thesis aims to provide some possibilities to aid in the discussion of children’s literature and YAL in India.

Moreover, in terms of acknowledging the complexity of childhood, the child and children’s literature, of direct relevance is Hollindale’s exploration of the idea of the

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151 Agrawal (2011); Joy and Raj (2011)
child and childhood as provisional states of being as opposed to autonomous states of being. The impact of these two positions are reflected respectively in how they consequently manifest in children’s literature, either as educative (if childhood is a provisional state) or affirming of childhood, enabling the child to be a child (if childhood is an autonomous state.)

This issue also arises in the examination of recent children’s literature and YAL in India and is illustrated in some of the texts examined in this thesis.

Subsequently, what must not be overlooked is Hollindale’s use of term ‘the politics of childhood’ (a culturally laden notion, with meanings which reflect varying social, economic and historical perspectives). This term, in reference to childhood, (which can be further appropriated to Indian childhood) suggests a plurality of opinion, views and values, further underpinning the multifaceted nature of childhood and by association, children’s literature; a phenomenon identified in this thesis. This plurality of opinion and experience is further expounded in this thesis as a reflection of an inherent aspect of Indian-ness and the many possible forms of manifestation in the ‘reading event’ that is children’s literature and YAL/literature of youth in India.

II. Definition: What is childhood and what is Indian-ness?

The concept of childhood as developed by Hollindale offers a critical model upon which the term Indian-ness is developed in this thesis. ‘Childness’ assists in providing a perspective into possible readings of the works, which elevate it above the commonly (according to commentators of recent YAL literature) held view, which many continue to hold in India that it is only children’s literature. By appropriating the term Indian-ness in the discussion of children’s and YAL in India, this thesis proposes that other windows, perspectives and positionings transpire which allow for a broader kalaidoscope of Indian realities to be accepted as children’s literature, YAL or literature of youth and to be valued as worthy of merit, reading and further exploration. Such literatures reflect the changing face of Indian society and should not

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152 ibid., p.13.
153 ibid., p.13.
154 ibid., p.13-14.
be dismissed as quasi-literature or merely children’s literature and thus not worthy of serious consideration.

In fact, writing in 1997, Hollindale identifies what he terms a ‘linguistic poverty’ when referring to childhood. Generally, terminology pertaining to childhood is reductive. Childhood, he argues, is seen as either a neutral state or a state vaguely loaded with ‘freight of all the qualities and limitations which we associate with children, form our own experience and our common culture’. Thus, in the process of providing a critical framework for this thesis, a connection between the abovementioned reductive claims and the view of adults and parents who are identified as controlling the type of texts purchased for children, or young adults is established. Until recently, texts were viewed primarily for their educative potential. In these instances, the perception of what a child should read is authorised by an arbitrary decision that holds a particular perspective of childhood. Furthermore, this idea links to the aforementioned view of childhood as a progressive state. It is clear that Hollindale’s thesis provides many strands for the examination of recent YAL in India

Hollindale’s encounter with the term ‘varying childness’ in Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale is illuminating for the critic. The merit and relevance are in their simultaneous elegant simplicity and unarguable complexity, both inherent qualities associated with being a child. Specifically, in referring to his son Florizel’s ‘varying childness’, Polixenes, according to Hollindale, is referring to the ‘dynamic, imaginative, experimental, interactive and unstable’ quality of being a child. Hollindale is seeking to find a term that is not condescending, nor value laden, which has been a common tone of reference to children’s literature in the past. This fixed and anachronistic view of children’s literature concerns Hollindale and is also an area of concern expressed by many critics of recent YAL in India.

Of similar concern within an Indian context is the depiction of children or young adults in children’s literature, YAL or ‘literature for youth’. This thesis focuses on the

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155 ibid., p.44.
157 ibid., pp.45-49.
idea of varying childhood as alluded to by Polixenes and embeds it within an Indian context. There is indeed ‘varying Indian-ness’. One only has to examine the literature published in English for the child reader in India, let alone the plethora of indigenous languages that represent embodiments of these variations, in order to establish the reality of the broad diversity that is Indian life.

Furthermore, in stating that childness represents the quality of being a child that is shared ground, ‘though differently experienced’ by adults and children, Hollindale validates the co-occupation of this area by both children and adults.\textsuperscript{158} This co-occupation is also evident in the narratives of the texts examined in this thesis. Thus, the multi-layered application of Hollindale’s definition of childhood slowly becomes evident. There is a suggestion of a dynamic continuum where the child is living as a child and engaging in the reading event from the vantage point of the present experience, whilst the reading experience for the adult involves amongst other things, memory and the past. Of specific relevance to this thesis, is the application of this perception to the experience of Indian-ness. The experience of being a child may hold a universal commonality that transcends nationality; whilst the experience of Indian-ness may represent the common and shared ground experienced of being Indian. However, both these states (childness and Indian-ness) are inevitably experienced differently.

Essentially, Hollindale recognises childness to embody a critical term with broad application and relevance for both the child and the adult in different ways. Thus Hollindale argues that for ‘the child, childness is composed of the developing sense of self in interaction with the images of childhood encountered in the world (including adult expectations, standards of behaviour, grants of privilege and independence, taboos, goals and offerings of pleasure.)\textsuperscript{159} This sense or consciousness of childness will subsequently vary from child to child, whilst certain common views and experiences may stand. Simultaneously however every adult experiences childness in his or her own idiosyncratic manner. Within an adult context therefore, according to Hollindale ‘childness is composed of the grown up’s memories of childhood, of meaningful continuity between child and adult self, of the varied behaviour associated with being a child, and the sense of what is appropriate behaviour for a given age, of
behavioural standards, ideals, expectations and hopes invested in the child as a child.\textsuperscript{160} Essentially, Hollindale identifies relatively different perspectives of child and adult in the experience and perception of childness and concludes that, ‘For the child, childness includes the knowledge and acceptance that that one is a child; for the adult knowledge and acceptance that one isn’t, though adults have differing beliefs and valuations about possible survival of the child in the mature being.’\textsuperscript{161}

Consequently, in the process of appropriating Hollindale’s theory, this thesis argues that Indian-ness is composed (amongst other things) of the developing sense of self within an Indian context, in interaction with the images of childhood encountered in an Indian world (including adult expectations, standards of behaviour, grants of privilege and independence, taboos, goals and offerings of pleasure). Thus, for the adult, ‘Indian-ness’ is composed of the grown up’s memories of Indian-ness – what it means and feels to be Indian, of meaningful continuity between child and adult Indian self, of the varied behaviour associated with being an Indian child, and the sense of what is appropriate behaviour for a given age, of behavioural standards, ideals, expectations and hopes invested in the child as a child. For the Indian child then, Indian-ness includes the knowledge and acceptance that that one is an Indian child; for the Indian adult, knowledge and acceptance that one is Indian but no longer a child.

Indian-ness like childhood seems to provide a position from which to view the many extant possibilities of their respective condition: the quality or condition of being Indian; and, the quality or condition of being an Indian child. Like childhood, Indian-ness is not static but a dynamic, changing, cultural determined concept allowing for the inclusion of many more possibilities as far as the experiences and thematic concerns encountered in the literature for children and young adults, or youth in India as encountered in this thesis.

This is not to differentiate and create a distinctive separate, chauvinistic or discriminatory category of Indian-ness. This thesis certainly does not propose this. There are intrinsic qualities that every child, regardless of culture, religion, gender, ethnicity imbues and possesses. This thesis proposes that with the term Indian-ness,

\textsuperscript{160} ibid.
\textsuperscript{161} ibid.
the vast cultural panoply of Indian reality, in terms of society, languages, customs, morals, attitudes and opinions, subtleties of etiquette and identity, social strata, caste, gender, religion, education and the inherently differing views, values, historical, economic, social and cultural perspective are somehow embodied. Furthermore, this thesis proposes that the diversity reflected in even a small sample of YAL literature recently published in India in English and examined here, is reflective and indicative of a broader movement currently taking place within the context of YAL in English in India, a movement that seeks to reflect and illuminate this diversity. This thesis posits the belief that this diversity is embraced and deemed to be the reality and that a ‘one size fits all’ mentality cannot apply to the literature for children and youth in India. In this manner then, Indian-ness as a term acknowledges this vibrant and rich reality.

III. Definition: What is ‘literature of youth? Can YAL be alternately seen as ‘literature of youth’?

The issue of discerning between children’s literature and YAL in India features prominently in much of the critical literature examined in the Literature Review. Reflecting upon Hollindale’s model of childness, a similar line of investigation can then be graduated even further; if childness as a critical term possesses wider relevance in terms of the child and the adult, what of the young adult? Hollindale’s model, it would seem, is flexible and organic enough to facilitate this extension of his argument. The young adult is essentially sandwiched between these two states of being. Straddling both the realm of childhood and adulthood, the young adult is in an idiosyncratic position whereby physically, temporally and chronologically they are simultaneously in close proximity to both childhood and adulthood. Society provides a number of titles to name this period in a young person’s life: puberty, adolescence, teens, youth, are just some of the more commonly used terms.\(^\text{162}\)

Hollindale focuses on adolescence and youth and states: ‘‘Adolescence’ is not a synonym for youth.’\(^\text{163}\) Adolescence thus is seen to occupy a ‘narrow band of time of tempestuous sexual awakening which has social and emotional consequences’, whilst youth represents ‘the actual years we share, when child and adult are actively alive

\(^{162}\) ibid., pp.45.; pp.59-60.  
\(^{163}\) ibid., p.60.
together in the individual. The critic settles on the term, ‘literature of youth’ to frame the reading event that occurs at this point in the young reader’s development towards adulthood. This thesis explores the efficacy of the term ‘literature of youth’ within the context of recently published texts in India, especially in terms of the reference to the earlier mentioned ‘epiphanies’ and moments of ‘transformative exhilaration’.

Critically, the above definition gives rise to a number of significant implications and provides a point of departure into the exploration of literature of young adults, adolescents, youth, or as the term earlier used, YAL. As mentioned earlier, in modern societies, childhood ends gradually; secondly, there is a belief that adults who write or read children’s books still dwell in the realm of childhood, ‘that their childhood is still alive in themselves’; and thirdly, there is a belief that ‘reading children’s books is a childish, lazy and escapist thing to do.’ This thesis explores some of these preconceived notions within the confines of the chosen texts, and although it is a limited selection of works, certain patterns seem to arise regarding assumptions about childhood and the reading of literature for children and/or youth within an Indian context.

Furthermore, the critical readings examined earlier (Agarwal, Joy and Raj, Dalai) validate Hollindale’s points. Since, the end of childhood is not easily identifiable, the onset of adolescence does not commence at a definitively and universally designated point of time. Hence, the identification by some commentators of recent YAL in India of a number of age groups, as a definitive marker to indicate the beginning of YAL may reflect broader social perceptions regarding the specific age when one is no longer a child and is a youth or young adult. How does one arrive at a conclusive date to indicate the end of childhood? The clear suggestion one may derive from these commentators of YAL in India, is that, whether 14 or 16, a child has entered into their youth and adolescence, since the commentators deem YAL suitable for, or catering to, the needs of readers at these specific ages.

The question arises whether the fact that a 14 year old may be reading YAL becomes an indicator of their passage from the realm of childhood. Hollindale’s position

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164 ibid., p.60.
165 ibid., p.30.
questions these demarcations by highlighting the complexity involved in travelling through childhood into adolescence and into the adult world. ‘There is infinite diversity.’\textsuperscript{166} suggesting that everyone’s experience is different. In terms of this thesis, one notes that the narratives explored invite a questioning of these demarcations, as well as the qualities of being a child. Young characters such as Hari, Haroun, Gauri, Luka and Bilal\textsuperscript{167} are entwined in adult situations and predicaments, which require adult resolve and tenacity to reach a form of resolution, yet in moments of reflection they ponder upon their position and place in the world, invariably identifying themselves as children. In terms of the reader responding to the text, questions directly related to these musings upon one’s state of childhood may subsequently arise.

Thus, in the examination of what is children’s literature, inevitably questions pertaining to what is literature for young adults emerge. When does one become a young adult? Or, what or who is a young adult? Definitive answers to these perennial questions are elusive. However, Hollindale makes a number of observations which frame the exploration of YAL or literature of youth in this thesis, which may assist in identifying certain hallmarks of youth that the above questions seek to unravel. According to Hollindale, unlike childness which directs our focus to elements of childhood, the realm of youth exists within a greater continuum which ‘lengthen[s] and blur[s] the boundary between childhood and adult life.’\textsuperscript{168} The following assertion by Hollindale represents a pivotal component in the examination of recent children’s literature, YAL and literature of youth, encountered in this thesis because it encapsulates an acknowledgement of the complex nature of youth not only as a lineal, chronological progression but as a series of expansive experiences which are often epiphanic and transformative in the life of the young individual as reflected in literature. This becomes a focal point in the final chapter of this thesis. Hence Hollindale’s cautionary assertion resonates directly.

\textsuperscript{166} ibid., p.131.

*We need to remember, always, that youth can be very long, extending into the early stages of adult life. And we need to remember that although it is long and a continuum, it is also marked by significant moments, for which we can properly use the Joycean term ‘epiphanies’. Such moments vary in their nature. Some...are encapsulations of total childhood, fusions of actual or desired experience in single unforgettable events. Others are times and moments when we feel our lives on the turn – irreversible movements forward into adult life...*¹⁶⁹

It is the notion of the ‘epiphany’ representing a turning point in the young reader’s awareness of themselves, no longer as a child but as an independent individual, bringing them closer to the sphere of adulthood, or the adult world, that resonates deeply with much of the YAL and literature of youth examined in this thesis. Through the various narratives selected, this thesis examines how the shift in the protagonists’ view of themselves through their diverse experiences, ‘authentically reflected in story’¹⁷⁰ may indeed provide a transformative vehicle for the young reader, whose respective experience, although inherently different, may indeed also be ‘authentically reflected in story.’¹⁷¹ Thus, the transformative nature of YAL as a catalyst for a change or shift in perception becomes the second major focal point of this thesis.

¹⁶⁹ ibid., pp.119-120.
¹⁷⁰ ibid., p.120.
¹⁷¹ ibid.
IV. Recent Indian Young Adult Literature analysed in this study.

i. Criteria for Selection.

This study has sought to explore a variety of texts that fall under the designation of recent Young Adult Literature written in English and published in India. The initial selection, of a much broader group of approximately thirty titles, was the direct result of books that were found and available in the children’s literature sections of bookshops in Delhi between the years 2009 and 2011. These books drew the attention of this researcher in terms of the stories and characters they presented as well as the worlds they depicted.

Specifically, the selection of texts for analysis, occurs in terms of a number of criteria such as: gender of author, social realism, magical realism, urban vs rural India, historical vs contemporary setting as well as availability.

In ascertaining specific justifications for incorporating the texts selected for analysis this study, the above criteria form the framework for selection. Works have been chosen because they represent narratives written by both male and female authors respectively. In this way a reflection of Indian-ness from both genders is examined. Some texts selected are couched within social realism. The reason for this choice lies within the desire to explore the idea of Indian-ness within a realistic Indian context. Other texts are fantastical and influenced by magical realism and as such, I wanted to explore whether Indian-ness is confined to narratives which are couched in the real world or whether it extends beyond into the imaginary. Some texts chosen for analysis represent urban and rural experiences. Again, I was seeking to expound on and explore through textual analysis, the earlier intimation regarding the richness and diversity of Indian-ness.

Moreover, texts whose narratives are set in contemporary time settings and others which are set within an historical timeframe are also employed in this work, as I wanted to examine the depiction of character and Indian-ness across time and its relevance to the contemporary young Indian reader. Thus, whilst the publication chronology of the written works examined in this thesis span from 1982 until 2011; the chronology represented in the narratives themselves span from the 18th century (Curse of Grass) to very recent times (as suggested by references to Harry Potter,
iPhones and video games). As aforementioned, the reason for this choice lies in the desire to explore different Indian realities as depicted in various fictions. Significantly, the majority of texts were written post-2005 for young adults, thus placing them in the category of recent Indian Young Adult Literature. Within the confines of the texts available, I have also sought to work with narratives that deal with a diversity of subject matter, underlining the varied reading experiences and manifestations of Indian-ness reflected in this selection of recent literature for young adults in India.

ii. The texts to be analysed.

Although 1982, is not recent, *The Village by the Sea* (Desai) was selected as it was written not long after Sheoran’s work on children’s literature in India and thus, may or may not be exemplary of some of Sheoran’s proposals. Also, having been written chronologically when it was, it provides a comparative catalyst in terms of the depiction of the child, childhood and Indian-ness and their subsequent depictions in later texts. Furthermore, it is a text that explores the transformative element attributed to the literature of youth. For in his decision to leave his village life and venture into the daunting and frightening world of Bombay, Hari is jolted into an examination of his life, his relationships and his yearning for home. This revelation provides the impetus to work hard and earn money to help his impoverished family. Although the happy ending of the story may suggest a stereotypical resolution, this type of ending may imply something about the Indian psyche. Or, in terms of narrative, the ending may reflect the author’s decision for a restoration of order that the reader, young or old may find comforting. Moreover, this text offers a valuable glimpse into the role of both men and women in rural village life.

Salman Rushdie’s canon of work is recognised internationally as seminal in contemporary Indian literature. Thus this thesis analyses, within the context of Indian-ness and the transformative nature of epiphanies, two texts by this writer whose narrative style is distinctive and evocative of a multifarious India both real and magical. Salman Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) is an enchanting tale, characterised by whimsy and a dynamic, forward-moving impetus, set within a magical realism framework.
The setting is clearly Indian, but of a fantastical order,

‘There was once, in the country of Alifbay, a sad city, the saddest of cities, a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name.’¹⁷²

The narrative works as a fairy tale, where the young hero sets out on a quest that asserts his own individuality and strength within an often harsh and challenging adult world. There are lessons to be learnt but also much experience and fun to be had. This quality is universal; however, the manner in which the text is constructed, the language and character depiction also illuminate the intrinsic Indian-ness of the text. Although imbued with a strong sense of morality, as such, the text is not prescriptive or didactic, but rather illustrative and an intensely riveting ‘reading event’.

*Haroun and the Sea of Stories* works on many levels simultaneously - as an affirmation of the power of story and narrative, as an assertion of the freedom of one’s personal imagination to empower the individual will and transcend difficulties, whilst also leading the reader to reflect on the thin veil that often separates illusion and reality. This is a most sophisticated text that appeals to children, youths and adults. Once again, the treatment of women is of particular interest. The protagonists are mostly male, women feature, however, one is left to consider what this representation may suggest culturally about the position of women in broader Indian society. Subsequently then, does this depiction add anything to our understanding of the term, Indian-ness? Is it indeed in anyway relevant?

Paro Anand’s *No Guns At My Son’s Funeral* ¹⁷³ takes us forward fifteen years in time and provides a stark contrast to much of the YAL examined in this thesis in terms of the nature of its thematic concerns. Anand catapults the reader into the reality of conflict and terrorism. Set against a Kashmiri background, the exposure of ‘innocent’ youth and children to warfare and terrorist acts is confronting and forces a questioning of the general notion of childhood innocence. This text serves to illustrate the recognition by certain writers of YAL in India that Indian society has many stories to

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tell. Again, this work is not didactic, nor does it romanticise rebellion, and it is highly engaging and illuminating on a number of levels, despite the tragic ending being predictable.

In terms of audience, its more ‘mature’ themes of war, death, pregnancy and civic defiance may challenge earlier views of what children’s literature or YAL should concern itself with, although more recent critics note the movement towards more ‘adult’ concerns. In terms of authorial decision to write this story, what is of significance is a sense of development and shift in the writing culture where these themes are deemed appropriate, meaningful and imperative as reflections of broader Indian realities. The tragic ending maybe deemed as overdramatic and possibly even melodramatic. However, the nature of the events is shocking and terrifying. Whilst the text may be deemed to be moralising and delivering a clear anti-terror message, Paro Anand goes far beyond this superficial rendering in exposing the young reader to material which may earlier not have been considered the stuff of YAL, and in doing so, she forces consideration of everyone’s culpability in the undoing of civil society through violence and fanaticism. What becomes an almost predictable observation is the presentation of women in text and their role in the unfolding drama. Again, the researcher is forced to ask, what might this reflect? Is this treatment of women connected to the notion of Indian-ness?

A similarly dramatic and fast paced work is Siddharta Sarma’s historical adventure narrative, *The Grasshopper’s Run*[^174]. Set in 1944, during the Second World War, on the far eastern Indian border with Burma, this narrative focuses on the individual courage of a young boy, Gojen, to avenge the senseless murder of his beloved best friend, Uti, at the hands of the Japanese. This narrative also takes on the form of an heroic quest story and it possesses a gripping momentum, where the youth (a wilful boy) is catapulted into the dangerous world of enemy infiltration. An interesting element of this work is its subtle references to privilege in terms of social status, specifically socio-economic position and power. When the reader asks how is it that young Gojen is able to achieve all that he does, his audacious personality is a factor. Although, his social privilege cannot be denied as representing a driving force and

influence in what unfolds. Sarma, weaves into his work an intelligent and subtle representation of the British presence in India at the time, which provides Gojen with his formal education, whilst it is the education and knowledge that Gojen gains from Uti and his tribal community, as well as the deep sense of kinship and brotherhood that inspire him to take on tasks that even an adult would hesitate to embrace. Both educations are of indelible value in the formation of this young boy’s personality and sense of self. Ultimately, the writer suggests that even though each boy represents vastly different Indian worlds, and clearly this text reflects a deep sense of Indian-ness within an historical context, perhaps there are universal truths and qualities, like love and honour, that are worth fighting for and that unite and which ultimately transcend ethnicity and nation. In this manner, narrative exposes our common humanity. Recognition of this common state subsequently leads to knowledge and (as illustrated in this text) through suffering to empowerment and transformation.

Thus, the notion of a transformative episode that alters the life path and life of the protagonist is found to reside in this text. In this manner both Indian-ness and moments of ‘transformative exhilaration’ are evident here. Curiously, unlike in previous texts, the reader is struck by the absence of women in this novel.

Faces in the Water\textsuperscript{175} the award winning novel by Ranjit Lal also delves into the realm of the magical, other worldly, as through the manifestation of spirits into the young protagonist, Gurmi’s, life the socially topical and disturbing issue of female infanticide is presented.\textsuperscript{176} Lal is open in his examination of Indian societal views and values on gender. The protagonist embodies traditional and stereotypical qualities associated with a spoilt, comfortable, urban, middle class Indian teenager. At the commencement of the text he is obnoxious and unbearable in his demands and attitude. He is certainly not held up as an idealised model of childhood. However, as a


\textsuperscript{176}Prabhat J., Kesler, M. A., Kumar, R., Ram, F., Ram,U., Aleksandrowicz, L., Bassani, D. G., Chandra, S., Banthia, J. K. (2011). ‘Trends in selective abortions of girls in India: analysis of nationally representative birth histories from 1990 to 2005 and census data from 1991 to 2011.’ \textit{The Lancet} - 4 June 2011 (Vol. 377, Issue 9781, Pages 1921-1928) This study presents recent findings which reveal a growing imbalance between the numbers of girls and boys aged 0–6 years. The writers postulate that this is due to increased prenatal sex determination with subsequent selective abortion of female fetuses.
young person, a child on the threshold of adulthood, certain family secrets are exposed which transform him and force him into a position where he is compelled to make a crucial moral decision. Thus, he is elevated to the status of quiet hero.

This text was chosen for examination in this thesis as it deals with a contemporary Indian issue against the backdrop of a changing India. Both in terms of cultural context and language, Lal adds another layer in the exploration of Indian-ness and moments of ‘transformative exhilaration’ that impact strongly upon the reader. It is a text that grapples with adult issues in an accessible manner for the young reader. A definite moral message is conveyed, yet it is not overtly forced upon the reader. Lal employs subtle narrative skills to reach a crescendo whose only outlet comes in the form of Gurmi’s action and subsequent resolution. Once more, is the resolution that the writer constructs plausible? What does it suggest about the authorial and reader expectation in the construction of YAL? And do these attitudes reflect an Indian perspective or a more general attitude to ‘happy endings’? This thesis posits that even though a neat resolution is offered, Lal’s ending is unsettling and in this manner most effective. In this text, the women play a powerful and pivotal role, for it is the issue female infanticide that drives the action. It is the voice of the deceased female child that resonates so poignantly and becomes a vehicle for the transformation regarding attitudes towards female children in Indian families depicted in the novel. Even though these anachronistic views regarding girls in the family are not the case across Indian society, female infanticide is a major blight on Indian society that is dealt with responsibly in this text, subsequently suggesting that literature itself can transform or even reform attitudes and hopefully society.177 So, the female voices and presence in this text are indelible and far-reaching.

It is Ira Saxena in *Curse of Grass* 178 who is able to weave a number of significant social concerns in modern India, into an original narrative where, history, environment, social hierarchy and gender issue meet. Significantly, the third person narration seeks to position the reader to view the unfolding events of the text from the


perspective of a young village girl, Gauri. As it is set in 1730 AD Rajastan, the contemporary reader reads an account of how the Thar Desert grew. Thus, *Curse of Grass* intimates at the mindless ravaging of land by older cultures to establish power, a stranglehold and dominion over the land at any cost – even human life. The text is important as it evokes a questioning of our current environmental world situation, in India and beyond. The reader’s conscience is stirred to ask why such things occurred in the past and whether and why they persist today. The tragic ending augurs potential danger if we continue to desecrate Mother Earth. Again, the question arises whether or not this text is purely didactic and this is another reason it was chosen for examination in this thesis.

The traditional village setting and the use of song that reverberates in terms of the rich Indian oral tradition, also add to the exploration of Indian-ness. These elements provide a distinctly Indian colour to the work. Furthermore, the vehement call of the village women to ‘Chipko’, a non-violent resistance render the text philosophically significant, stirring a link to the ideas and beliefs of Gandhi. The human self-sacrifice at the text’s end is terrifying and jolting for the reader, suggesting that some issues and things are worth dying for.

In terms of YAL, Saxena has woven an interesting and most engaging narrative that is historically insightful, whilst holding up a mirror to contemporary environmental, political and moral issues. For it is through the courageous voices of Gauri and Amrita that this text asserts the power and dignity of every human, both male and female. The reader ends the text contemplative, shaken and possibly transformed in their awareness of the Indian landscape and man’s responsibility to save it.

*The Sacred Grove* by Damian Singh deals with the issue of the Hindu-Muslim divide in a contemporary setting. Within the context of a contemporary family situation, Ashwin, the protagonist, lives a comfortable middle class life, with parents who urge him to complete homework, gadgets like mobile phones and computers. Even *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* earns a mention. What is evident from the outset is that socially, Ashwin lives in a culturally diverse world. He and his

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179 ibid., pp.127-128.
classmates represent a melting pot of religious and cultural groups extant in modern India today. Ashwin’s father, a well-respected civil administrator, is often placed in different cities, so Ashwin and family follow. It is during one such placement that Ashwin is confronted with the tragic repercussions of prejudice and violence.

The text effectively illustrates the collision of different worlds, the contemporary Indian within a rural city setting which in many ways remains untouched by urbanisation and Western characteristics of globalisation. In many respects it is as if Ashwin steps back in time to a simpler world that is nevertheless fraught with tension and irrational bias. The author sends an unequivocal message regarding the futility of harbouring seething hatred. The choice of this text for examination rests on the overt relevance of the theme to contemporary Indian society and the potential of texts, literature read by young people, children, to assist in developing a deeper understanding and tolerance for difference and diversity in one’s world.

A number of serious and compelling questions are invited in this narrative. For example, what does it mean to be a Hindu in India? What does it mean to be Muslim? Can people of different religions coexist peacefully? Is violence an answer? What are the repercussions of fanaticism? These questions allow for another central layer regarding the notion of Indian-ness to unfold, and these questions are dealt with in a non-patronising but open and tolerant manner. Thus, the concept of Indian identity is explored in the narrative, with the underlying message being that when co-existence and peaceful acceptance of difference is rejected and trampled on as an alternative, then hope is lost and the consequences can be far-reaching and tragic;

In terms of the transformative aspect of YAL as explored in this thesis, in this novel, Ashwin too undergoes a moment of transformative epiphany that, in this case, is not exhilarating but harsh and confronting. The hero’s youthful idealism is shattered, leaving the reader to ponder the reality of divisions and various social, religious, cultural factions in India today. Returning to the depiction of female characters, the writer presents a variety of both female and male characters who in many ways reflect the broad spectrum of contemporary Indian society. Is the ending predictable and compromising? This is a question that this thesis explores within the context of the concepts of Indian-ness and transformative epiphanies.
In 2010 Salman Rushdie, with *Luka and the Fire of Life*\(^\text{181}\) returns to the Khalifa family who feature in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. This time, the protagonist is twelve-year-old Luka, Haroun’s younger (and only) brother by eighteen years. The adventure that Luka embarks upon, is very similar in impulse to Rushdie’s earlier book, Luka (the child) sets out on a quest to restore his father, Rashid’s, story-telling skills and in so doing saves his father’s life. There is a sense that these magical adventures, which could be described as a phantasmagorical romp, simultaneously functions as a rite of passage narrative. So what Indian-ness is presented in this text and by association *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*? This thesis proposes that the sheer delight in story-telling which is reflected in India’s rich oral tradition is one important element of Indian-ness that these narratives draw much influence from.

The qualities of love and loyalty, whilst universal in character, carry a particularly Indian quality in *Luka and the Fire of Life* as in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. The role of the child and the sense of duty that a child is appropriated within the context of an Indian family holds particular sway in both texts. It is a duty that is respected and revered in most cases by both children and parents. So, apart from physical descriptions of places, colours, smells and sounds which carry a distinctively Indian impulse, the views and values espoused as well as the language found in Rushdie’s two texts, convey an aspect of the Indian, whilst simultaneously resonating at a universal level.

What is significant about Rushdie’s work is the subtlety that characterises his approach to division, tension and threat. His use of a magical realm, which enters and co-exists with the real world of Luka and Haroun, allows the writer the freedom to grapple with issues of warfare, conflict, betrayal on an almost mythical and magical scale. The reader may, in the process of reading, choose to look deeper into his representations and relate them to actual conflicts and possible resolution within an actual and real setting or, simply choose to enjoy the story for its own sake. In terms of Rushdie’s presentation of women, the characters are very real whilst simultaneously at times unreal: they are mothers, carers, heroic ‘Insultanas’, domestic, loving, magical and practical. Does Rushdie present a stereotype? Are these

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female characters in any way disempowered? Or, is their voice and quality inherently Indian in character? Do the qualities these female characters possess provide another insight into Indian-ness?

Finally, *A Beautiful Lie*\(^{182}\) the historical novel by Ifran Master was chosen as it explores the division between Muslim and Hindu within the context of India’s Independence and Partition. Its narrative structure is engaging and involves the reader in its immediacy and intimacy. This immediacy and intimacy is achieved in part, through the use of the first person ‘I’, so the reader feels that they are witnessing the events as they unfold.

On another level, Master successfully draws the reader in through his construction of a character who is a child placed in an impossible situation, which he must somehow transcend. *A Beautiful Lie* tells the story of a young Indian boy, Bilal, who is Muslim in a world where his Indian-ness is being questioned by everyone and even by the government. His world is about to collapse in more ways than he can imagine. This is India in 1947. His deeply close and respectful relationship with his dying father, Bapuji, is the catalyst for much of his decision-making and action in the text. His poverty and sheer determination to keep the truth of what is happening in India and to India from Bapuji forms the main thrust of the novel. What is working on another level however, is this quest to survive and remain strong within his inner world, where his identity and right to live in India is unshakeable.

This is a significant text as it presents a personalised examination of a seminal moment in Indian history from the firsthand experience of a young boy. Reminiscent of the majority of texts analysed, this writer also examines the notion of the dutiful son. Bilal is depicted as obedient, suffering son, caring for his father, whilst his brother, nameless, apart from the generic “Bhai”, is depicted as a ruffian but ultimately a victim of poverty, division and neglect. The ending transports the reader into recent times, sixty years later, with an older, wiser Bilal, reflecting upon the past. The text merits examination as it suggests a way into the reading of recent Indian history. Significantly, in the world of *A Beautiful Lie*, women are only present as mothers and aunts. Bilal’s mother has died six years earlier and his teacher’s wife, Mrs Mukherji, provides him with his only hug from a mother figure in the whole

\(^{182}\) Master, I. (2011) op.cit.
novel. Furthermore, it is only in the closing pages of the text, that his dying father’s sister is mentioned, and it is she who assumes custody of Bilal upon the death of his father. Otherwise, in this novel, the women are primarily voiceless or an absent presence, as we see with the character of Bilal’s deceased mother.

Thus, it is primarily within the context of the above methodological foci of the appropriation of Indian-ness to the theory of childhood and the examination of transformative epiphanies – both concepts inspired by Hollindale’s work - that this analysis of select recent Literature for Young Adults written in English and published in India, takes its shape.

In the next chapter, the aforementioned selection of recent YAL published in India in English, will be analysed within the context of Indian-ness, epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration.
Chapter 3 - Analysis: Indian-ness, epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration in recent YAL published in India in English.

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the critical framework to be employed in examining select recent Young Adult Literature written in English and published in India. The chapter expounded upon Peter Hollindale’s concepts of childness, literature of youth and moments of transformative exhilaration and epiphanies. It is these concepts that provide a model for appropriation of the term Indian-ness and which additionally provide a methodological model for literary analysis of the chosen YAL texts in this thesis.

This chapter presents an analysis of the chosen texts within the context of Indian-ness, epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration in recent YAL published in India in English.

This thesis analyses selected recent Literature for Young Adults, YAL, written in English and published in India, and explores the depiction of Indian-ness within the experience and realm of childhood moving into the world of youth, against a contemporary Indian backdrop. In an appropriation of Hollindale's concept of childness, the term Indian-ness is adopted, addressing the multilayered nature of Indian experience whilst exposing attitudinal shifts in both the depiction of the child/youth protagonist and societal perceptions of the child/youth as reader.

Whilst examining the diverse realities depicted in this selection of recent YAL that subsequently reflects a rich vista of Indian society, this thesis also seeks to analyse the frequent representation of critical epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration and how these epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration may impact upon the abovementioned attitudinal shifts in both the depiction of the child/youth protagonist and societal perceptions of the child/youth as reader.

Thus, essentially this analysis is twofold: a. an exploration of Indian-ness; and, b. an examination of epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration in a sample of recent YAL published in India in English.
a. An exploration of ‘Indian-ness’ in a sample of recent YAL published in India in English

As asserted earlier, Indian-ness is composed (amongst other things) of the developing sense of self within an Indian context, in interaction with the images of childhood encountered in an Indian world (including adult expectations, standards of behaviour, grants of privilege and independence, taboos, goals and offerings of pleasure). Thus, for the adult, Indian-ness is composed of the grown up’s memories of what it means and feels to be Indian, of meaningful continuity between child and adult Indian self, of the varied behaviour associated with being an Indian child, and the sense of what is appropriate behaviour for a given age, of behavioural standards, ideals, expectations and hopes invested in the child as a child. For the Indian child then, Indian-ness includes the knowledge and acceptance that that one is an Indian child; for the Indian adult, knowledge and acceptance that one is Indian but no longer a child.

Indian-ness like childness provides a position from which to view the many extant possibilities of one’s respective condition: the quality or condition of being Indian; and, the quality or condition of being an Indian child. Like childness, Indian-ness is not static, but a dynamic, changing, culturally-determined concept which allows for the inclusion of many more possibilities as far as the experiences and thematic concerns encountered in the samples of YAL in this thesis. What is evident here is the panoramic scope of how and where Indian-ness may manifest. Therefore, in an attempt to focus my study in a more specific manner, and what has transpired in the readings of the YAL texts under examination, is that Indian-ness as a quality is evident (amongst so many other areas) in the domain of home and the characters’ sense of place and belonging. Furthermore, Indian-ness is manifested in the characters’ sense of history and their awareness of their place in the world at a given point in time. Indian-ness is also exhibited in the exposition of cultural issues and taboos. Hence, due to limitations inherent in this study, I have chosen to confine this examination of Indian-ness to the three-abovementioned significant areas, although often, these three factors: home, history, cultural taboos, are deeply interconnected and relate to other aspects of Indian reality.
i. A sense of one’s individual Indian-ness - Home and a Sense of Place

In the closing pages of Irfan Master’s *A Beautiful Lie*, a now 74-year-old Bilal, both protagonist and narrator, is handed a letter written by his father on the eve of the latter’s death and coincidentally, the eve of India’s Independence and Partition. It is August 1947. In it, a dying Bapuji proclaims to his beloved 14-year-old son, Bilal, ‘Bilal, you are my India.’ In this simple statement, a whole outlook on life is embodied. The suggestion that a sense of one’s self, one’s identity is derived not only from the place where one is born and one inhabits, but also a sense of what that place may come to represent for the individual is central to the examination of Indian-ness.

In the case of this text, and specifically Bilal’s father, the notion that presides is essentially that it is the people who form one’s family and community that in turn give a place, and indeed life, meaning and by association, it is these people and relationships that provide the individual with a sense of self and belonging.

Bilal’s father is dying, he has a strong sense of self, his identity is not an issue for him, however, within the context of pre- and post- Independence India this question of one’s Indian-ness becomes critical in the discourse of nation and ethnos. Thus, in the novel, Bilal, a young Muslim boy passionately refuses to leave India and go to Pakistan, despite the dangerous climate of conflict existing at the time. In a heated discussion with his brother or ‘Bhai’, the conflicting tensions and emotions surrounding national and personal identity and belonging which burdened so many during this moment in India’s history are poignantly evoked. Whilst Bhai is willing to leave India because ‘they do not want us here,’ Bilal argues vehemently why they should not leave India. Imploring his brother he stresses, ‘Because this is our home, Bhai. This is where Bapuji grew up. This is where we’re from. I’ve never been to Pakistan.’

In this instance, because of the political situation at the time, Bilal is forced to consciously consider his identity and his Indian-ness. Earlier, when things are peaceful, his sense of identity and belonging are further consolidated and confirmed within his friendship group, which comprises of boys like Bilal: Chota is a Hindu boy, Manjeet is a young Sikh boy and, and Saleem is a fellow Muslim. These young Indian

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183 ibid., p. 334.
184 ibid., p. 224.
185 ibid., p. 224.
boys live and are deeply connected to each other. They live a typical small town existence, having fun, enjoying life and the moment. They love each other as friends do. Just like Bilal, however, their world too is thrown into turmoil by the transpiring political events in India: Saleem and his family leave, and Manjeet, in the final scenes of the novel, sadly confesses to Bilal, ‘Bilal, I won’t be able to see you anymore. My family think…that Muslims…’ ‘I’ll always be your friend,’ replied Manjeet, his voice barely a whisper. ‘We just can’t be friends. I’m sorry. I have to go.’

In this case, Master illustrates that the individual’s sense of belonging to a place is questioned by society at large and the chaos that ensues, not just for the children but adults, is tragic and deeply scarring. Significantly, what seems to remain intact, despite being shaken, is the individuals’ sense of Indian-ness, in its full diversity and richness. Bilal, is resilient and unyielding in his sense of Indian-ness, so much do that he chooses to stay. Nevertheless, Saleem and his family, who choose to leave India also possess an indelible sense of Indian-ness, their sense of self and belonging to the community represented in the text is evident in that they are part of the community and engage in every aspect of town life. For them, leaving represents survival and life. To live under threat and in fear in an untenable reality, so they decide to leave for Pakistan. Hence, within the context of a major moment in India’s contemporary history, the writer suggests that, when taken to extremes, chauvinism can lead to fanatical and violent outbursts that subsequently dissemble not just a friendship group, not just a town, but a whole nation. It is in such a moment when one’s sense of home, sense of self and belonging may be challenged that individuals react in diverse and life transforming ways.

In terms of the reader response to the text, of interest is the writer’s, Irfan Master’s statement in an interview with Asian Writer UK about his novel. When asked what inspired him to tell the story of the Partition from a child’s perspective for children, Master responds:

*When I was younger, I really wanted to read a story about this hugely important period in history, not only important for the Indians but also for the British.*

186 ibid., p.276.
187 ibid., pp.292-293.
When I couldn’t find anything, I was quite frustrated. As I got older, a few ideas started to develop in my head after conversations with my grandfather who had lived through Partition. I began to ask young children if they knew what Partition was and what had happened. Most of them looked at me blankly, so I tentatively but with some determination, set out to write something that young people could relate to and understand.\footnote{Asian Writer UK (2011) Interview with Irfan Master. Retrieved from theasianwriter.co.uk/2011/03/irfan-master/}

The novel provides a way into seeing and understanding a seminal moment in Indian contemporary history, which is engaging and accessible for both the adult reader and child. Furthermore, judging from Master’s comment, the writer’s underlying implication is that Partition is viewed to be of crucial importance to the young (and older) Indian’s individual sense of their Indian-ness as well as providing non-Indian readers with an insight into Partition. If anything, Master promotes the belief that whether one is Muslim, Hindu or Sikh, if one feels that they are Indian, that their home is India then indeed that individual is Indian and possesses their own, personal and intrinsic qualities which reflect their individuated state of Indian-ness.

The idea that one’s sense of Indian-ness is influenced by their sense of home and the place they feel they belong is also illustrated in Anita Desai’s \textit{The Village by the Sea}.\footnote{Desai, A. (1982) op.cit.} The main character Hari, in this text much like Bilal in the previous text, lives a relatively simple village existence with his friends and family. Unlike in the previous text however, where the reader is moved by the poignant relationship between father and son, here, Hari’s father is presented as a hopeless drunkard, caught in a vicious circle of alcoholic dependency that results in his family downward-spiralling into poverty and suffering greatly. The two elder children are forced to leave school and help support the family,

\begin{quote}
‘Hari used to go to the boys’ school but lately he had stopped, saying he had to work in the fields now that their father did not even pretend to work anymore.’ (p.11.)
\end{quote}

What might be viewed as a stereotypical depiction of this situation without hope, is unfortunately the reality for many in Indian society and elsewhere; it is this factor (that hardships occur elsewhere too) that universalises the text, for hardships are not
an exclusive domain of Indian reality but are inextricably connected to the human condition. Furthermore, it is not the hardship or hopeless situation per se that evokes a sense of Indian-ness, but rather the manner in which the family and society deal with this pitiful scenario. Thus Indian-ness is imbued with many intangibles, for example, values, beliefs and appropriate behaviours that at some point come to identify, or be identified by others, as representing qualities of a culture. The focal point here is how these intangible factors are embedded in the significance of home, place and by progression, family and relationships within an Indian context.

Once the reader has been introduced through the third person narrative to Hari and his sisters Lila, Bela and Kamal, they are essentially then positioned to view this reality from the perspective of the child: the Indian child. And how is the Indian child then presented as dealing with this difficult and challenging situation? Much like Bilal in *A Beautiful Lie*, the children possess qualities of resilience, resourcefulness, hope, optimism, fearlessness (to a degree), faith and above all love. And these qualities are not hidden or treated as inappropriate to possess - in other words, the exclusive territory of the adult world - but the narratives seem to celebrate the young heroes who are flung into the realities of a harsh and challenging adult world. The effect of this celebration is that the reader is swept into the action of the story often without much resistance. Lila, Hari’s sister, who is depicted as permanently within a domestic context, tending the house, her sick mother and cooking for the family, is mature and balanced in her handling of the situation. She finds solace and hope in nature that surrounds her whilst simultaneously comforted by a sense of conservative continuity:

*It was the voice of the village Thul as much as the roar of the waves and the wind in the palms. It seemed to tell Lila to be calm and happy and all would be well and all would be just as it was before.* (pp.4-5.)

Here, it is Lila’s positive and ultimately optimistic outlook, often associated with images of a stoic and happy Indian persona that strikes the reader. The writer constructs her characters as possessing an innate dignity and this is also a quality that is evoked in the character of Hari, who makes the decision to go and then to stay in Bombay [name used in text] to work. As readers, we are concurrently positioned to feel outrage at the injustice of a mere a girl confined within the walls of a kitchen, or a boy leaving home to support his family, whilst we also admire their undeniable tenacity.
Still possessing childhood spontaneity, Hari follows a group of villagers protesting against industrial development in his village of Thul, (thus providing an environmental context and message to the contemporary young reader) however, this little boy finds himself in a big city with nowhere to go and basically lost. The writer presents the difficulties and hardships he endures in order to ultimately improve his home situation. Ultimately, Hari survives and returns, with his earnings that he has saved diligently, so that he can ease his family’s suffering. Desai is clearly providing many morals and subliminal suggestions regarding appropriate behaviours, views and values regarding a son’s responsibility to his family. However, she is not overtly moralistic. Significantly, this is a text that has found itself onto class booklists, subsequently indicating the value that it is appropriated with within educational circles.  

What Hari chooses to do in handling the difficulty his family is facing is reflective of the deep sense of responsibility and love he feels for his family including, as revealed in the end, his pathetic father. This is a son’s duty and he is fulfilling it. This idea of responsibility, the duty of being a son, within the context of a traditional patriarchal social structure in India, such as the one depicted in Desai’s novel, is accepted automatically and not questioned by the characters in the novel. In fact, this sense of responsibility to family is inherently linked to the notion of Indian-ness. Hari is bound to his family by blood and even though, whilst in Bombay, he dreams and yearns for Thul and the sea, his village by the sea, it is his family that represents the catalyst for his risk-taking and sacrifice. His family, and his memory of them, sustain Hari with a sense of belonging and self, further providing him with an inner strength to endure hardship and pain in order to help his family and ultimately fulfil his task.

Moreover, the kindness Hari encounters along his journey also offers the reader another window into a deeply embedded value that characterises Indian culture. It must be noted that he also encounters charlatans and seedy characters; however, it is the wise and endearing Mr Panwalla, who takes him under his wing and mentors him, offering Hari the love and nurturing that a young child needs that reaffirms the young.

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190 Joan Goody (No date provided) NATE Reading Across Cultures, states that ‘The book has been used successfully with … year 9 and years 10 and 11… it has much to offer as a way of bringing to life universal issues that will be part of humanities and citizenship courses, and focuses on some of the problems that perplex teenagers wherever they are.’ Retrieved from http://www.collaborativelearning.org/villagebythesea.pdf
hero’s faith in his fellow man. Mr Panwalla, as his name suggests embodies a type of ‘Everyman’ figure: the ordinary man. In this case, he functions as a father figure for young Hari who is alone in the big city. He embodies the responsibility of elders in a traditional patriarchal society. Hence Hari’s, and the reader’s, optimism and faith are not allowed to recede. When examining Desai’s text, one notes that both Hari’s selfless sacrifice and Mr Panwalla’s kindness reflect aspects of the Indian psyche that we may characterise as Gandhian in tone. This quality, also illustrated by Bilal earlier, subsequently allows for the layers of this exploration into Indian-ness to be embellished further.

Of specific interest and relevance is the response of reader Anupam Karn (age not revealed) in his blog anupamtimes.com, posted 10th April 2011. Whilst he acknowledges that *The Village by the Sea* is an empathetic text, with the writing at times reminding him of Jhumpa Lahiri, he rates the novel 4/5 as opposed to 5/5. The arbitrary numerical demarcation is not of significance here, but his reasoning is illuminating. Karn states that the novel does not fully satisfy him because:

*It lacks the smell of the local language either hindi or marathi which could best suit their feelings.*

This comment directly connects to the concern voiced in the Literature Review by some critics earlier regarding the efficacy of English as the language of YAL in India. Specifically, the concern reiterated above pertains to whether the use of English in YAL recently published in India can effectively convey the specific and authentic quality of feelings and experiences within an Indian reality. By extension, this thesis is compelled to ask whether the use of English somehow compromises the expression of Indian-ness.

It seems that the texts being examined in this thesis, including *The Village by The Sea*, strongly suggest that ‘Indian-ness’ is manifested through a diversity of factors, some tangible, like language (and we note the incorporation of Hindi words and terms peppered throughout texts such as *A Beautiful Lie, The Sacred Grove, Faces in The

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Water, Curse of Grass which is not tokenistic but natural and real); others less tangible, like the views, values, attitudes and beliefs which are overt or implied through narrative.

However, in terms of the authentic manifestation of Indian-ness via the English language, Sen argues in her specific examination of Rushdie’s use of English (which we encounter shortly) that:

*The popularity among Indians of the current generation of Indian writers writing in English provides a marked contrast [to earlier writers writing in English – my parentheses]. The greater acceptance in India of these younger writers has been possible primarily because Rushdie and his contemporaries have utilised the English language in a way that previous generations were never able to do. Thus the rise of the new generation of Indian writers in English reflects a deeper shift within Indian society.*

So even though the Sen acknowledges the frustration experienced when one encounters the ‘inadequacy of language’, her examination of Rushdie’s language specifically asserts that:

*Rushdie has managed to re-create his Indian childhood not only through images but also by shaping the English language in a way that it reverberates with the nuances of an Indian existence.*

Thus, with this in mind, one might extend the notion of tangible and authentic manifestation of Indian-ness not to only confined to the use of Hindi or Marathi, or any of the other Indian languages as suggested by Karn, but to actually include English, as for many Indians this is their language of primary communication which represents a particular Indian reality.

Returning to the examination of Indian-ness through the depiction of the individual’s connection to home, their sense of place and belonging and the relationships that make life meaningful however, one notes that these components also feature strongly in Salman Rushdie’s beautiful novels, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *Luka and the Fire of Life*. Indeed, they provide the impetus that drives the characters to perform

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193 ibid., p.655.
feats of great courage; some might say foolishness, in order to restore order to their disrupted worlds.

In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, the protagonist Haroun Khalifa, finds himself on a quest to restore his father’s ability to tell stories. The narrative itself commences with the story-telling convention, which is a variation of ‘the once upon a time’, construct, an invitation into the text:

> There was once, in the country of Alifbay, a sad city, the saddest of cities, a city so ruinous that it had forgotten its name. It stood by a mournful sea full of glum fish, which were so miserable to eat that they made people belch with melancholy even though the skies were blue. (p.15)

Immediately the tone of the narrative places the reader, whether young or old in the (to the adult) familiar position of being told a story. This in itself is an event, or reading event as referred to earlier, and the opening of this tale overtly signals the commencement of this event.

Once drawn in to the tale, we note that in contrast to the sad world of Alifbay, Haroun:

> ...grew up in a home in which, instead of misery and frowns he had his father’s ready laughter and his mother’s sweet voice raised in song... (p.15.)

Haroun loves his parents Rhasid and Soraya and it is because of the strength of these relationships that he is able to embark upon his adventure to save the Sea of Stories and in doing so, his father. Set within a fantastical and imaginary world of Alifbay, we know from the outset that clearly the novel is not set in India. Yet, the text is characteristically imbued with a tone both visual and aural that is quintessentially Indian in character. For example, in describing the house where the Khalifa family lives, one is presented with an urban landscape that is very Indian:

> The Khalifas lived in the downstairs part of a small concrete house with pink walls, lime-green windows and blue painted balconies with squiggly metal railings, all of it made it look (in Haroun’s view) more like a cake that a building. (p.18)

Even though it has been established that Indian-ness is a not necessarily a manifestation of physical, tangible representations of an Indian world, suffice to say that the above very vibrant and visual description of Haroun’s home betrays a distinctly Indian style. Furthermore, it is interesting to note how Haroun uses his
home as a point of reference when he contrasts his not so grand house with the houses of the poor:

The poor lived in tumbledown shacks made of old cardboard boxes and plastic sheeting, and these shacks were glued together by despair. (p.18)

It is Rushdie’s metaphorical use of the word ‘despair’ that resonates deeply with not only recognition of the plight of the poor but also an empathy and statement of fact that there are the poor and indeed the super-poor (gradations of poverty) that exist in this society; just as there are the super-rich. Although the use of the word ‘despair’ triggers an emotional response from the reader, the writer does not pass any value judgement; this is just the way it is. And in this manner, the subtle perception of the Indian child-writer-story-teller-observer is touched upon. And an Indian reality and major social issue is touched upon delicately but with potency.

Haroun’s centre is his home and his family, and it is against this backdrop that the rest of the world is measured, assessed, experienced and given meaning. Even if the worlds experienced are imaginary, just as noted in the earlier texts examined, Haroun possesses a son’s very real and innate desire to assist his father and family and in the process return the disorder and chaos to peaceful harmony. Haroun, like Bilal, also feels a sense of remorse that somehow he is to blame for the situation at hand and somehow he has to redress the wrong:

‘My fault again,’ Haroun thought wretchedly. ‘I started all this off. What’s the use of stories that aren’t even true. I asked that question and it broke my father’s heart. So it’s up to me to put things right. Something has to be done.’

The only trouble was, he couldn’t think of a single thing. (p.27)

The reader may identify with this desire to redress a wrong and in doing so empathise with the young protagonist who is flawed yet heroic in his nobility and willingness to face the challenges that fate places before him. In this manner, Haroun and subsequently Luka in Rushdie’s text *Luka and the Fire of Life*, assume the dimension of heroes whose fearlessness and vulnerability are reminiscent of qualities encountered in India’s Hindu classic tales such as the *Ramayana*.¹⁹⁴ Haroun and Luka in particular, due to the fantastical nature of the setting, are veritable quest heroes who

the reader, whether they are young or old, is positioned to admire. What we are not allowed to forget however is the common humanity and fallibility of these heroes, which further inspire the young reader’s empathy and possible identification.

This engagement with story and narrative is universal. As mentioned earlier, however, the context within which the story of Haroun and later of Luka unfolds, albeit imaginary, is Indian in spirit: Whether it is the physical setting of the imagined land of Alifbay; the language employed by the writer which is of a distinctly Indian English quality in tone and diction:

‘Well, well, well young Haroun Khalifa’ he chortled ‘you certainly did make some blinking funny friends.’ (p.120.)

The views and values that are exposed and at times challenged (as we note when Haroun’s beloved mother runs off with the slimy Mr Sengupta) and indeed in essence the story-telling of Rashid and in turn Rushdie seem to be imbued with particular Indian overtones. Again, adding to our understanding of the complexity implied by the term Indian-ness and all that it may encompass.

Moreover, in examining Haroun and the Sea of Stories however, the researcher cannot ignore Rushdie’s intense preoccupation with story and narrative as a means of expressing meaning and finding meaning in one’s life. The writing is strewn with references to the art of narrative and story-telling, in fact stories provide Rashid with a voice which not only expresses his own personal and whimsical spirit but also that of others. So that whilst the child Haroun, is influenced by a very real, pragmatic and cynical stance that asks: ‘What’s the use of stories that aren’t even true?’ It is this power of stories and imagination to transport and indeed transform which Haroun questions that this thesis will discuss later, and which Rushdie seeks to capture in constructing the world of Haroun.

For despite the cynicism that Haroun’s question implies, the narrator, gently reminds the reader that: ‘…there were people who thought Rashid’s stories were

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195 Rushdie, S. (1990) op.cit., p.62. This is a question which ironically resonates in the perception identified by some commentators of children’s literature in India as evidenced in the Literature Review which highlights the view some adults hold relating to the nature and function of children’s literature in India: That children’s literature, up until one point in time, comprised of educational and technical texts, as this is where market forces lie. This is a view and attitude that has been identified as shifting, which coincides with recognition of stories and narratives holding transformative properties, with a place in the Indian classroom.
useful…’(p.20.) and indeed, Haroun himself, being the dutiful and loyal son that he is, reneges on his initial condemnation of Rashid’s stories, and recognises their value, for he has been brought up with them and they constitute the substance of his world; thus he is able to see the impact of a world without stories as representing a ‘depressed’ state of affairs. When Rashid, dejected by his own personal condition and his inability to tell stories, utters the dismissive words: ‘only a story’, Haroun is able to identify that ‘only deep despair could have made him say such a thing’. (p.48) The intrinsic value that is embedded in the narrative and one might suggest the seed that is metaphorically being planted here in the consciousness of the reader is that stories matter.

What unfolds both in Haroun and the Sea of Stories and Luka and the Fire of Life is the integral role story-telling plays in our lives and how intrinsic it (and narratives in general) is to our sense of self and identity, whether one is Indian or not. The fact that these texts are essentially Indian in tone, content, language, allusions and temperament serve to accentuate the position that an Indian reader experiencing either of these texts will identify and make connections that inevitably escape a non-Indian reader for obvious reasons. Nevertheless, the works can be thoroughly enjoyed and rewarding universally as their preoccupations are not limited or confining to an Indian reality. Human experiences and imagination are boundlessly diverse. Nevertheless, Rushdie himself in an interview with Davia Nelson touches upon the idea of the key role stories play in our lives and connects it to the concept of family, which is directly relevant to this study. When asked what it is that makes stories so critical for him, he lucidly responds using the inclusive ‘we’ and suggesting a common experience of story that we as human beings encounter. As ‘the only animal that tells stories’ [to our knowledge] Rushdie asks: ‘What does it mean that we like to tell stories?’196 The writer reasons that the individual is often defined by stories and that meaning in, terms of one’s sense of self and belonging, is often inherited through our inclusion within the group and our subsequent relationships with loved ones and friends:

It struck me that, if you’re in a family, one of the definitions of that family is the stories of that family...When somebody joins the family – either a child is born or somebody marries into the family – one of the ways in which they

Rushdie then reaches the conclusion that initially appears paradoxical, but which reflects the complexity of the common story-telling experience whereby the individual progresses from being outside, a teller of the story, to being within, an actual part of the story itself: ‘So we start off telling the stories of other people, and in the end we become part of a story that someone else tells.’

Rushdie’s insight is included in this discussion regarding the link between Indian-ness and one’s sense of home and belonging because in many ways (and in line with the view that Rushdie expresses) stories provide a similar sense of security and sense of identification just as the family, homes and the places we belong to do. Stories remind the individual of who they are. Bilal, Hari, Haroun and Luka all possess an unshakable sense of identity, they have their stories to tell and they are part of the embodiment of their respective stories. Furthermore, their stories are all very different, yet they all possess qualities both tangible and intangible that assert an undeniable Indian-ness and ultimately an undeniable humanness.

Furthermore, and remaining in the realm of stories, family and identity; Rushdie provides a very conscious insight to the different experiences that reading the same text at different stages of one’s life may entail and in doing so, reminds us of the child reader response in contrast to the adult reader response. In commenting upon the inspiration for writing *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, a novel he wrote for his young son Zafar, the writer states:

*The way I imagined it is that it was written for my son at two moments in his life. It was important that he read as a child and be able to have childish pleasure for it. But I also thought of it like a message in a bottle: One day he would grow up – and now he’s 23 – and he could read it again, and he would see another book there…*(p.27.)

The implications that Rushdie’s comment carries are that indeed, what the child and adult reader experience from text differs; the child should experience a ‘childish pleasure’ whilst for the older reader, an inherent ‘message’ is assumed. Thus returning to the initial premise regarding Indian-ness, perhaps, for the adult, their perception of Indian-ness is composed of their own memories of what it means and

\[197\text{ibid., p.28.}\]
feels to be Indian, of meaningful continuity between child and adult Indian self, of the varied behaviour associated with being an Indian child, and the sense of what is appropriate behaviour for a given age, of behavioural standards, ideals, expectations and hopes invested in the child as a child; and somewhere in this complex amalgam of experiences a ‘message’ resides. Whereas for the Indian child reading the text, Indian-ness includes the conscious, or unconscious knowledge and acceptance that that one is an Indian child; and somewhere in this experience an element of ‘pleasure’ is derived; for the Indian adult, knowledge and acceptance that one is Indian but no longer a child. At this point however, one has to ask, might it not be possible that these experiences of ‘pleasure’ and the extraction of ‘messages’ from narrative be subverted and the child may receive ‘messages’ whilst the adult receives joyful pleasure? Or, is it not possible both child and adult reader encounter pleasure, glean messages, and have other experiences in narrative simultaneously?

Notwithstanding Rushdie’s assertion however, in the case of the representation of home and a sense of belonging in the selection of recent YAL written in English and published in India presented her, namely *A Beautiful Lie, The Village by The Sea, Haroun and the Sea of Stories and Luka and the Fire of Life*, it seems that a sense of Indian-ness is inherent in the depiction of home life, whether it is town life, village or city life that is being presented. Indian-ness is manifested in obvious physical setting and environment; it is manifested in the relationships and associations characters have with their family and friends, as well as their response to unsavoury, seedy characters. Indian-ness is further expressed in the attitudes, views and values regarding appropriate and culturally accepted (as well as non-acceptable) behaviour. Thus we note that both sons and daughters strive to be dutiful and responsible, even in the most challenging of situations. Furthermore, Indian-ness is expressed in the particular tone of optimism and resilience that the characters display in facing life’s hardships and the adult world. Finally, one’s engagement with story and narrative often evokes an analogous sense of belonging and security that reaffirms one’s individual sense of Indian-ness, or if non-Indian, an insight into this quality of Indian-ness and an opportunity to reflect universally upon the human condition.
ii. A sense of one’s individual Indian-ness - History and the individual’s awareness of their place in the world.

If one is to assume from the sample texts of recently published YAL written in English in India examined here, perhaps the resounding historical event that has influenced the content of these works is indeed India’s Independence and the Partition of India. As discussed earlier, Ifran Master’s work *A Beautiful Lie* is such a text that powerfully and specifically transports the reader to August 1947. The story represents one person’s reading of the events that unfolded in India at the time and the social, political and personal consequences that arise from this single moment in history. Of course, Partition and India’s Independence are complex topics and the associated tensions are the result of perennial conflicts within the region that span centuries. However, the definitive moment in India’s history that took place in 1947 changed the lives of modern Indians indelibly.

As mentioned above, Bilal’s sense of self is very much defined by his love for his father and his friends, however, inasmuch as he is a young Muslim boy growing up in an Indian town during pre- and post-Independence and Partition in 1947, his sense of self, his identity and by extension his Indian-ness which has contributed to making him the adult he is at the novel’s end, is also framed by history and the unfolding of events beyond the intimate sphere of family. At the novel’s end, Bilal is a 74-year-old lawyer who returns, ironically, as part of the sixty-year celebrations of India’s Independence. Poignantly, he expresses his ‘horror’ at being invited to speak in front of an audience in his town; the suggestion being that the ‘horror’ rests in having to face past demons; the truth; and indeed, his own self. This is affirmed when Bilal ruminates:

*My whole adult life had been spent trying to forget what I’d done, but I had never truly been able to escape the past. In my professional life, my instincts had led me to become a lawyer. ‘A defender of the truth.’ My many years of service had finally elevated me to the exalted position of Chief Justice. ‘Who better to spot a liar than a liar himself?’* (p.328.)

This excerpt meaningfully intimates that history per se is multi-fold. In this case, history embraces the events that occur on a broader social level, such as the Independence of India and Partition; however, history is also of a very personal nature. In the texts examined, it appears that the seminal moment of India’s
Independence and Partition forms a recurring backdrop upon which personal histories and lives unfold and attain meaning. For Bilal, he is so deeply affected by his childhood experiences that his life becomes a service to redress the wrong he feels he committed by lying to his father about the political reality occurring in India at the time. So the novel commences in an almost confessional tone where the narrator exposes his flaws, or at least lightens his burden, to the reader by naming his sin, which has been brought about by a defining moment in his country’s history. The first words we read: ‘Everybody lies.’ are confronting and suggest that the truth is sometimes avoided or deliberately shunned, for a number of reasons. From the outset of the text, the reader is invited to ask questions on the issue of truth and lies. Once more, as encountered elsewhere, the use of the inclusive pronoun ‘we’ immediately involves us in the narrative. Somehow, as individuals who are members of society, we are not immune. Thus the opening moments of the narrative attest: ‘We all do it. Sometimes we lie because it makes us feel better and sometimes we lie because it makes others feel better.’\textsuperscript{198} In this instance, we are not invited into the text, we are involved morally as a mirror is held up to each individual reader, who may or may not have told a lie. What is of significance to the text’s denouement is the relative reason for the ‘lie’ (or the avoidance of truth) and in this manner Master provides a compassionate opening into the life of the elderly Bilal, who is about to tell his story:

\textit{Many years ago I told one lie that has taken on a life of its own. It defines me as a person. If I close my eyes, the only time in my life I was sure of anything was all those years ago, when I was a boy. When I was lying. Since then I’ve never been comfortable with anything in my life.} (p.1.)

Much in line with Rushdie’s earlier comments pertaining to one’s sense of identification with and within stories, here too the suggestion is posited that we become the stories that we tell and that these stories and the memories which they hold are not necessarily pleasant or truthful. In fact, the truth that the narrator immediately presents the reader with is that ‘Everybody lies.’ So, the reader is left to ponder what the truth is. Essential philosophical questions subsequently arise such as: What is the nature of truth? And, can there be more than one truth? Thus, within the personal world of Bilal’s childhood and the historical events that unfold in the background, these questions are explored in the novel.

\textsuperscript{198} Master, I. (2011) op.cit., p.1.
Moreover, what Master also achieves in his work is exposing the contemporary young reader to historical events and providing them with insights into aspects of their Indian heritage which may or may not inform their sense of Indian-ness but which definitely add insight into the human stories (albeit fictionalised) which transpired as a result of these historical events within an Indian context. Thus the writer’s aforementioned intention to tell the story of the Partition from a child’s perspective for children is achieved, not in a didactic manner but in a manner that honours those affected, exposing real lives and complex experiences that are again distinctly Indian in spirit, whilst simultaneously remaining universal in tenor.

The Hindu-Muslim tensions that form the dramatic core of the narrative in Daman Singh’s *The Sacred Grove* may not directly refer to Partition and the events presented in *A Beautiful Lie*; but they are related to the Hindu-Muslim troubles which emanate from this event and earlier divisions and, they do betray the deep-seated prejudices that exist for many in India, even today. These prejudices may not be uttered publically but characters like Ashwin’s mother nonetheless ascribe to them and these prejudices certainly explode in the communal unrest and violence that occur in Ashwin’s town at the text’s climax.

In this novel, Daman Singh constructs the character of young Ashwin, a 13 year old son of a district collector. It is through his first person narration that Ashwin initially emerges as a privileged and rather spoilt child. He has the household staff at his beck and call; he is obsessed with getting an iPhone proclaiming, ‘I would do anything to get an iPhone…’\(^{199}\) It is through his perspective that we see a basically modern Indian boy, confident in some ways, but equally as vulnerable and impressionable.

Growing up a lonely child, he essentially yearns for company and it is amongst the household service staff, that a most unlikely but crucial friendship develops. Again, as with Master, we note Singh provides subliminal messages regarding the nature of friendship to transcend religious and cultural barriers; even age. Rafiq is Ashwin’s father’s driver and a Muslim. And Rafiq too is passionate about cricket, however he challenges the young Ashwin from the first. Whilst the other service staff succumb to the expectations of their station in the social hierarchy of the household, soothing, massaging and inflating Ashwin’s ego, Rafiq taps into Ashwin’s tendency to regress.

into childish tantrums when it suits his purposes and directly asks: ‘Are you? Are you just a child?’ Thus drawing both the narrator’s and the reader’s attention to the state of being a child and the perceived behaviours that accompany this stage of life. The use of the word ‘just’ is diminutive and seeks to incite Ashwin, which indeed it does as the narrator then realizes: ‘He was making fun of me, I knew he was. How dare he.’ Hence, with everyone’s attention on the child, the child is forced to make transformative decision and, he is most conscious of the ramifications of his choice:

>In a moment, with Ram Singh and Sahmbu and Mohinderlal and the bloody electrician looking on, I had to decide whether or not I was a child. Whatever I decided, there was no going back. At least not for the rest of the cricket season.

‘No, I’m not,’ I said shortly. (p.16.)

The inclusion of the humorous final sentence, allows for some relief for the reader who finds himself in a sensitive situation. Singh presents the negotiation of the landscape of childhood into adolescence and then adulthood as fraught with obstacles and experiences that may, at the time, be confronting and painful but which ultimately allow for growth of the individual to occur.

Gradually, Ashwin grows to love and depend on Rafiq, however his innocence is shattered as he becomes more aware of other worlds that exist in his own backyard. It is in this respect that this text is significant. Singh illustrates the impact and devastating influence of cultural and religious fanaticism through history. Once again, we note that a broader social history impacts upon the personal lives of the characters and changed their lives forever. It is through the specific history of his town that this young boy becomes aware of the dichotomy between Hindu and Muslims, which if taken to extremes, leads to death, betrayal and sorrow. Moreover, it is through his growing awareness of the tensions that exist in the town and their historical causes, that Ashwin develops a greater awareness of himself as a young Indian boy moving from childhood into young adulthood and his place in the world.

200 ibid., p.16.
201 ibid., p.16.
The volatile Hindu-Muslim animosity in the town is a scenario that the naïve Ashwin is oblivious to as he is securely cocooned in his modern life of technology, gadgets, the pressure of teenage friendships, and finally the pressure of school and getting high marks. Singh creates a text that certainly possesses an Indian-ness in its depiction of the lifestyle and attitude of young protagonist Ashwin, but also of every single character presented. The text does not moralise, or praise one view over another, although Ashwin’s mother’s intolerance is certainly and overtly condemned, not only verbally, but also through the description of the body language, facial expressions and the intuitive silent observation of those around her. Hence, when Ashwin’s mother realizes Rafiq is a Muslim ‘her eyebrows shot [sic] up’ and she asks, ‘Rafiq A Muslim?’ both responses denoting concern. Singh’s depiction of Ashwin’s father’s reaction subsequently underlines the fact that people may be members of the same family yet their social, cultural and religious views may vastly differ. Thus, we note that, ‘Papa’s eyebrows came together. ‘Yes. So?’’

Within the context of a patriarchal society, Ashwin’s mother’s response to her husband castigation: ‘Ma’s eyebrow’s wobbled. ‘No, nothing,’ she said casually.’ suggest that she may say ‘No nothing’ and publically acquiesce with his view, as a loyal wife should, however, privately an intolerance is hinted at. Therefore, in this instance the child observer notes the process of adults negotiating a social, cultural and religious landscape that is very sensitive and is able to conclude: ‘But I know it was something.’ (p.18) This final statement provides insight into how young people read the subtext of adult behaviour and in doing so evokes an unsettling tone that further evinces a sense that relations between Hindus and Muslims in the town depicted this particular text are unsettled and festering.

Quite simply, the text provides a snapshot of some of the different attitudes regarding religious groups and social strata that exist in India today and which inevitably filter through into the world of young Indians from the adult world. The protagonist is left to search his soul for answers to these complex and adult issues and consequently so too is the reader. Ashwin, is forced to examine his world in terms of his friendships (as he discovers his best friend Ravi’s prejudice and involvement in thuggery) as well as notions of loyalty and commonly held values. Whilst, as the text reaches a narrative

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202 ibid., p.18.
crescendo, Ashwin witnesses the social fibre of his community fray and literally come undone by the fanatical vehemence of both sides involved.

History in this text forces the protagonist to step beyond his comfortable and complacent status quo. Ashwin is forced by circumstances couched in history, to grow up and confront a great moral dilemma, which is then transposed onto the reader. In terms of Indian-ness Singh may be suggesting the need for an examination of the type of India, the type of world, we would like our children to inhabit. In this instance then, Indian-ness is reflected in the attitude and visions the individual, whether protagonist or readers, may hold about the way life should be lived.

The poignant and haunting mantra of the tragically fated Rafiq, that ‘Faith is bigger than religion’, seems to imbue the work with its moral impetus. Somehow, the writer seems to be suggesting that this is the realization that needs to occur but as such, it does not seem to have come to fruition in the world of *The Sacred Grove*. For the sacred grove alluded to in the text’s title, is regretfully desecrated by the wilful and fanatical proponents of the warring religious groups.203

History, and specifically the history lessons of Sadhana ma’am, serve to educate the young students that one place can hold many histories, many beliefs. In the case of the novel the sacred grove is revered by the Hindu community where sacred deities reside, whilst the Muslim build a school in the same vicinity, and adding to this, earlier tribal dwellers of the area who weren’t Hindu, but ‘had their own tribal religion’, believed that the forest was sacred.204 In the eyes of Hindus and those who revere the land, the building of any structure represents a gross disrespect.

Thus the writer presents readers with a convergence of strongly held beliefs and emotions. This convergence of multiple views and groups come to form a veritable

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203 Malhotra, KC. (2001) *Cultural and Ecological Dimensions of Sacred Groves in India*, Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi & Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalya, Bhopal. The writer contends in his Preface that, ‘In India, as elsewhere in many parts of the world, a number of communities practice different forms of nature worship. One such significant tradition is that of providing protection to patches of forests dedicated to deities and/or ancestral spirits. These patches are known as sacred groves (SGs). The institution of SGs is very ancient, and once was widespread in most parts of the world. Over 50,000 SGs have so far been reported from different parts of India. SGs are the rich heritage of India, and play an important role in the religious and socio-cultural life of the local people.’

melting pot, a melting pot that possesses a characteristic Indian-ness, or Indian quality. The novel adeptly presents various religious and cultural perspectives: and in doing possibly illustrate how literature may also function as a vehicle for hope for peace and harmony to arise from knowledge, understanding and mutual respect. This attitude of acceptance, tolerance and dignified discussion to maintain civil society is one that is integral to the ideals espoused by many in Indian society. Thus, the paradox of chaos and order are often found to at times coexist peacefully; or, be at loggerheads at different points in time, or even simultaneously in a characteristically Indian way, as is illustrated in the texts examined here.

Significantly, a sense of one’s individual Indian-ness through history and the individual’s awareness of their place in the world in recently published YAL in India, written in English, need not and is not exclusively examined against that backdrop of Hindu-Muslim tensions. In Ira Saxena’s *Curse of Grass* the writer explores the environmental and social havoc caused by thoughtless and selfish aggressors who ravage the land without any consideration of the people and culture that inhabit and have lived there for generations. This phenomenon of the desecration of sacred land is also a concern in the previous text and resonates profoundly in a 2012 environmental context. Specifically, in Saxena’s work, the narrative explores these most contemporary concerns within the context of the Thar Desert region of Rajasthan. In this manner the present is linked with the past; suggesting that these issues are perennial.

Set in 1730 A.D., the main protagonist of *Curse of Grass* young female Gauri is thrust into a world of conflict and terror that distresses the reader. Based on an actual event that took place in the Thar Desert, a group of Bishnois villagers, primarily women, refuse to allow the cutting of their holy khejari trees by Diwan Girdhardas’ soldiers. This tribal community is subsequently massacred and the contemporary reader, regardless of age, is shocked by the devastating conclusion to events:

205 Sen, A. (2005) *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*, London: Penguin Books, p.352. ‘The issues of plurality and of choice are immensely relevant to the understanding of the Indian identity. In arguing for an inclusionary form of an Indian identity, Tagore and Gandhi did not deny the presence and contingent importance of other identities. Rather, in terms of political coherence, social living and cultural interactions, both emphasized the fact that the Indian identity could not favour any particular group over others in India.’
Adversity was the lot of the Bishnois of Khejarli and violent misdemeanour the
guiding principal of Diwan. Even the rains did not deter him. The next day
again villagers we rounded and resisted, they were slaughtered one after the
other. Neither did they fell the tress, nor did they let the Diwan's soldiers do
it. (p.123.)

The text is historical in tone, almost at times, as indicated by the above excerpt,
documentary in its style. However, the reader is drawn in by Gauri’s fighting and
energetic spirit which, as with most young protagonists encountered in this study, is
tenacious and defiant. Placing the contemporary reader, whether Indian or not, into
the past to witness this heinous historical episode, again, apart from shock, many
other reader responses are possible. The writer herself indicates that her motivation
was to educate, inform attitudes and ultimately transform perceptions and respect for
the planet:

The incident portrayed in the book is a historical fact which touched me to the
core...I wanted to tell the story to suit the current generation and the
characters began to take shape, the plot structure developed incorporating the
events of Indian significance like marriage in the village, appearance of a
saint, presence of royalty in those days. The heroine became the source of
expressing my feelings. Finishing a tragic happening with a spirit of Hope was
quite a challenge in terms of plotting. Its history and fiction all rolled in
together...The spiritual devotion of the Bishnoi for the earth resonated ...the
only way to move forward if we hope to live on a viable planet.206

Gauri is the first and only female protagonist encountered in selected YAL texts
analysed in this thesis, that is not to say that female protagonists do not feature in
recent YAL, it is merely a reflection of the randomness of this particular selection.
Within the context of her Indian-ness and her awareness of her place in the world
through the unfolding of historical events, we note that initially Gauri is diminutive
and insignificant when pitted against the burly aggressors and soldiers. Yet, as the text
progresses, she becomes more and more empowered. The young female reader, or
indeed any reader, of this text may be moved to believe in the possibility of otherwise
impossible goals.

Saxena affords the young village girl, Gauri, the right to engage and guide royalty and
her elders, who are mostly (apart from Dhai Ma) males; Gauri’s core role in the

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206 Saxena commenting on 4 September 2011 on writing the work. Retrieved from
unfolding of events and in the decision to take a non-violent, passive resistant approach to Diwan Girdharda and his soldiers is undeniable. In terms of what Saxena achieves with the construction of this character and narrative is multi-layered and compelling. In her ‘rolling’ together of history and fiction, the contemporary reader is exposed to the fact that stories of environmental activism are not new; nor is the plight of the poor and defenseless against those who terrorize the weak and peaceful. She also poignantly allows this female character a voice that is powerful and which transforms the otherwise pathetic villagers into empowered stakeholders in their own land and environment. They are able, at the end of the text, to uphold their cultural and moral beliefs in spite of the dangers that they are facing. The passive resistance that is espoused by the text adopts a very Indian slant and this is consolidated at the novel’s end where in the Epilogue, Saxena writes:

_Nearly three hundred years later the demons of deforestation and denudation of the natural habitat in the name of development began to raise its head. Once again in 1970 the simple mountain dwellers, groups of female peasants revived Chipko, dedicating to the entire world community an eternal wisdom for environmental conservation._

_Truly Gandhian in spirit- Chipko is a non-violent resistance. “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs, but not every man’s greed,” said Mahatma Gandhi. (p.127.)_  

Saxena is clearly making Indian connections through allusions to the sense of community and love of the land expressed by the villagers. Indian-ness is a quality which is tangible in the references which signify a deep reverence of family, friends and traditions. Finally, in the Epilogue when Saxena weaves past, present and a vision of responsibility for the future together through her reference to the historical significant figure of Gandhi, the writer celebrates, and essentially invites the reader to celebrate, the cultural and philosophical answers his words as well as the stance of the strong and courageous Khejarli women represent.

Furthermore, in her desire to ‘tell the story to suit the current generation’ Saxena’s tone may, especially in the closing Epilogue resonate didactic, however, perhaps this is a quality that to some degree imbues some quality of Indian-ness. Paralleling the implication gleaned from Singh’s work, Saxena also, quite openly is advocating a particular view of tolerance, respect and civility in human relations and in the relationship between humans and planet Earth. This is a powerful text that has
obviously resounded deeply with educators in India as indicated by its selection by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in New Delhi, India in February 2011, as a recommended text. In a CBSE circular entitled ‘Promoting Reading Habit Among School Students’, it is stated that:

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\text{It is essential that schools impress upon children that reading good books apart from the prescribed textbooks not only widens their horizons but uplifts their spirit by instilling in them higher values.}
\]

Perhaps in terms of history evoking a sense self and sense of one’s place in the world, through the character of Gauri, apart from representing a portal into an aspect into India’s past, Saxena offers the young contemporary Indian reader the scope for further exploration into the kind of society they would like India to represent, and the kind of planet they would like to live in; thus universalizing the scope of this work. In this way perhaps the lofty and admirable objectives of educators in India may also be met, whilst also catering to the aforementioned readers’ needs of experiencing pleasure as well as a meaningful and possibly transformative message through the reading event.

Siddharta Sarma in his work *The Grasshopper’s Run*, is also set against the backdrop of historical events, namely the second world war and the Japanese invasion of Burma and Eastern India. However, despite the historical context, what is gripping about this tale is the controversial issue of children engaging in warfare and how one decision can ultimately transform the path one’s life takes. Thus this text will be discussed in the ensuing section of this thesis and as asserted earlier it serves to illustrate that Indian-ness is a complex and at times nefarious and elusive concept which entails many threads of a social, personal, historical, political, religious and cultural nature.

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iii. A sense of one’s individual Indian-ness - Cultural issues and taboos.

The view of childhood is often imbued across cultures and time, as a joyous time of awakening, of purity and romantic innocence. This conventional view is alluded to by commentators in the Literature Review in their discussion of YAL in India (which often presents confronting themes) and how it differs from literature for younger readers where age appropriateness is a driving factor in the stories constructed. It is also intimated by Hollindale in his discussion of the reductive view some readers and critics have concerning children’s literature.

Our societies, laws, institutions protect the child and childhood and this universal value is inevitably reflected in literature and art. Thus when texts present scenarios that challenge the established views regarding the child or young person, or social issues pertaining to them, the text (apart from functioning as a ‘good read’) inherently carries with it a culturally laden reflection of the social reality it depicts and the social reality that produced it. If culture, is as Zipes posits:

...an historical process of human objectification, and the level and quality of a national culture depends on the socialization developed by human beings to integrate young members into society and to reinforce norms and values which legitimise the socio-political system and which guarantee some sort of continuity in society.

then is seems that the following texts: *The Grasshoppers Run* (2009) by Siddartha Sarma; *No Guns at My Father’s Funeral* (2005) by Paro Anand and *Faces in The Water* by Ranjit Lal serve to reflect what these Indian writers perceive as not only questionable but intolerable realities in that society, whether in a contemporary context or the past.

In *The Grasshopper’s Run*, even though Gojen’s love and loyalty to his dead friend Uti is lauded through the depiction of his heroic quest to avenge his death. The fact that this boy is armed and engaging in warfare is confronting and conveys a message regarding the appropriateness of young boys engaging in violence of this nature. But as writer Siddharta Sarma states in an interview with Sunita Baveja, he was concerned

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that some readers might be upset by this depiction, however, he does not compromise or ‘sugar-coat the world for any reader, young or old.’ Underpinning this decision rests an intention to present the personal reality of Gojen against the backdrop of a seminal event in recent Indian history event. Thus, the contemporary young Indian reader may perceive the moral significance of Gojen’s decisions and be, forced to contemplate upon them within a more modern and personally relevant context. This is just one possibility.

In the end Gojen does not kill Mori (Uti’s murderer) himself (it is a task that the tribal elder, Meran performs). Sarma seeks to sensitively portray the confronting nature of conflict and the horror entailed in the killing of human beings. The writer constructs the text so that although exposed to the killing and engaging in it, Gojen is protected. This authorial decision may in and of itself, reflect an aspect of Indian-ness in terms of the attitude regarding the portrayal of children and violence, and the place of violence, killing and warfare in a child’s reality.

Told in both third and second person narrative form, the reader is positioned to experience the events from Gojen’s perspective thus when his friend Uti’s voice speaks to him, it is almost as if Gojen’s conscience is guiding and advising him. At the text’s end (having come face to face with Uti’s killer whom he does not kill) the young protagonist recognises the duality and complexity of experiences in life; that just as there is pain in the world, ‘there was (sic) a lot of good as well.’ As such, the young protagonist wisely resolves that he ‘would have to value all the good things in life, while assuming that they would not last forever.’ Hence, the ending of the text elicits a balanced and stoic tone that does not condone violence but elevates honour and personal integrity and acknowledges that in life at times we are confronted with difficult moral questions.

It is significant to note Sarma’s specific reference to his moral intention with his novel. In constructing a world which confronts and jolts young Gojen, Sarma is

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211 ibid.

212 ibid.
essentially seeking to confront the young reader and by extension to allow the process of examining the world and its complexities to unfold. In this manner, Sarma provides a way in for the young adult reader, it is then up to the young adult to delve deeper. This process is ultimately one of empowerment as each reader makes up their own mind on the basis of their own views and values. Hence the writer asserts:

...I never intended Gojen to do the killing. I just wanted the reader to see Gojen meeting the killer and finding out that there is no special difference in behaviour between good and evil men. There is good and there is evil, but explaining them, that’s difficult. Gojen does not get any answer to why people kill. That was my message, if you can call it that. There is no need to believe in a supernatural source of evil, it is all here on earth. What isn’t easily found is a rationale.213

So how is Indian-ness manifested in the above depiction of a cultural taboo such as children engaging in warfare? Perhaps a connection can be made with Zipes’s earlier statement regarding culture: Sarma’s text reinforces norms and values which are, in this case, Indian in context, specifically in relation to the depiction of Gojen’s socio-economic background; the contrast of his privilege and Uti’s tribal existence; the rites of passage a young village boy from Assam undertakes to become a man; the impending departure of the British from India; and the fact that friendship in India as elsewhere, can transcend social strata and cultural groups; for even within one nation, like India, there are so many cultural groups which form the whole. All these components betray a distinct Indian quality whilst, simultaneously conveying a universal perception of the moral correctness in the belief that a child or young person’s, in fact all citizens are entitled to have a safe place in society.

The child or young person’s safety in society is also a pivotal concern in No Guns at My Son’s Funeral where Paro Anand exposes the young Indian reader to the dangers and horrors of terrorism. Set against the militant backdrop of Kashmir, the writer’s evocation of the ease with which a young, naïve boy who loves his family, friends and cricket (quite typically Indian) can become embroiled in dangerous behaviours which have far reaching consequences for his family and community; is designed to shock the reader. Anand recreates the excitement and alluring aspect of belonging to a group, which so many young people yearn for, however, the text, if anything, alerts

213 ibid.
the reader to the urgent necessity for one’s powers of discernment to preside at all
times.

In the case of Aftab, the protagonist, his romanticism and the desperation of his
situation lead to his death. His secret affiliation with the aggressive, manipulative and
charismatic terrorist, Akram, may resonate with young contemporary readers, in terms
of the devotion so many teenagers during puberty afford their peers; often
overlooking advice of their elders. Thus, whilst the reality depicted in this narrative
may not be the one encountered by young readers in India, especially young adult in
an urban megalopolis; the story may serve a cautionary function as it simultaneously
exposes the sensitive relations between the various conflicting factions in this region
and alerts the young reader to a political issue of import; developing the sense of the
broad scope of their country’s contemporary political and regional preoccupations.
Finally, and of overt relevance to this section, the narrative serves as a severe
indictment on any group or society that allows the young to engage in senseless
violence.

Paro Anand speaks of her inspiration for the text arising from a series of writing
workshops she conducted as part of a Rajiv Gandhi Foundation initiative, where she
worked with children impacted upon by violence in the Kashmiri region:

_They don't want to avenge death. They want a way out. They feel they are
trapped between the security forces and the terrorist violence. There is a lot of
resentment towards the forces but they don't see the militants' violence as
something like a heroic struggle for freedom. Many children have lost their
father in the violence, some other family members too. And all this has had an
effect on their psyche…_214

With the above insight, the writer’s intention to construct a story that negates violence
and moves towards reconciliation and co-operation becomes apparent. The writer, by
placing arms in the hands of a child, as with Sarma earlier, forces us to consider the
type of society the reader chooses to ratify and what values and attitudes are reflective
of Indian culture; and the universal human condition. Thus, despite presenting the
confronting Kashmiri reality, she is intimating that there may be a more peaceful
method of resolving conflict. The taboo of children bearing arms should not be

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214 Salam, Z.U. interview with Paro Anand. Retrieved from
http://www.hindu.com/mag/2005/04/03/stories/2005040300600500.htm
tolerated under any circumstance and this is poignantly reiterated by the devastated and grieving Shazia, Aftab’s beautiful sister, who is also seduced and manipulated by the terrorist Akram and who bears his child:

\[
\text{Will I follow in my father’s footsteps?}
\]

\[
A \text{ shudder jolts Shazia and life seeps back into her eyes. Colour rushes to her cheeks as the blood starts to flow. ‘Will he follow in his father’s footsteps?}
\]

\[
‘\text{No!’ she sits up, straightens her long-bent back, squares her shoulders. No.}
\]

\[
\text{Her precious precious son will not, will not ever hold a gun in his tender hands. His feet will never walk the killer’s path. His father’s path.}
\]

\[
‘\text{Never!’ she breathes out loud now.}
\]

\[
‘\text{There will be no guns at my son’s funeral.’ (p.172.)}
\]

Thus, the value of family, of life, and the precious nature of relationships that are intrinsic to the human condition are reiterated, as they have been in every text examined in this thesis. Indeed, each of the narratives examined resonates with a deep sense of dignity and respect for humanity which further suggests that this may be an inherent quality that engages the readers of recently published YAL in India written in English. Furthermore, it is this attitude of an inherent dignity that provides a way into exploring Indian-ness; for there is a distinct Indian spirit conveyed in the texts, which as mentioned earlier is tangible (like language, physical setting) but is also quite obscure and intangible, (manifesting in views, values, cultural beliefs, spirituality, religion and social mores). It is various combinations of these factors that then are depicted in the texts examined and which provide the researcher with a sense of the quality of Indian-ness.

In Ranjit Lal’s *Face in the Water* the reader is confronted with the disturbing contemporary issue that unfortunately has been exposed as pervading Indian society to an alarming level; this is the issue of female infanticide. Female foeticide is directly connected, however, Lal makes the courageous authorial decision to address the unacceptable situation of female infanticide. The text represents a blatant condemnation of this practice and in doing so, by targeting a young adult readership, brings to light the consideration that not all traditions are necessarily morally correct, or legal. This is not to say that female infanticide is a practiced tradition, however, within the context of this novel, this is how it is presented. The ‘great Diwanchand
family’ (a tone of dark sarcasm is established from the outset) are known for two things, as the protagonist of the story, Gurmi, informs us with the opening words of the text:

There are two things my family is very proud of. The first is the fact that only boys have been born in our family for generations – they say no one can really remember when a girl was born the last time. The second thing is that we all keep tip-top fit – again, no one can remember when anyone fell sick – we don’t even have a family doctor. (p.1.)

In an inventive and whimsical approach, Lal, constructs a narrative content which is serious and confronting in nature, however the means he adopts to draw the young reader in through is the imaginative incorporation of the supernatural and technology, which so appeals to younger people. Gurmi, whilst staying in his ancestral home (which also serves as a clandestine birthing hospital) comes upon (as every adventurous teenager who is bored and at a loss about what to do does) an old abandoned and prohibited well. This is the well where the family source their miraculous water that is endowed with amazing healing powers. It is also the well where the family elders (Surinder aunty, Papa, and the male uncles) dump the unwanted female newborns that are born to the family. Surinder aunty is a doctor and is exposed as totally unethical in her practices.

Drawn to that which is forbidden, Gurmi, looks into the well on one of his initial forays into this prohibited area and sees to his surprise ‘faces in the water’ as the title suggests. As the narrative unfolds he becomes privy to the crime of female infanticide committed by his own family members and which is cloaked behind the term ‘family tradition’. Gurmi’s curiosity, along with the reader’s, is triggered and we too want to know the truth. However, the truth in this instance is confronting and unimaginable. Employing uncomplicated language and a urgent discursive pace, what Lal achieves is a realistic evocation of adolescent language and youthful curiosity which engages the reader:

‘Yes, I want to know!…

‘You see it’s like this. We ...er...weren’t boys...so we went against family tradition...’

‘The great Diwanchands don’t have daughters you see, wimps have daughters,’ Nanni said, ‘but we were daughters...so here we are.’

‘But...but...how...?’
‘By whom?’

‘Does it really matter? Well, by the family...’

‘But who actually left you here?’ Mohini took a deep breath, her eyes downcast. ‘Er...Papa,’ she said softly, ‘Papa, Surinder aunty and Balvinder uncle.’ (pp.20-21.)

The hesitation of the girls’ spirits to expose the horrific act, suggests the difficulty in exposing and talking opening about crimes of this nature for it strikes at the core of the values a society possesses. Thus, the ‘greatness’ of the family is debunked totally and the truth is revealed and it is absolutely disturbing. The protagonist is exposed to the reality that one’s loved ones are capable of committing the most heinous of deeds. Such knowledge jolts the reader whatever the age, and it allows for the consideration of new possibilities. Lal forces the question to be asked: How does one respond as an individual on a personal level, and as a member of civil society? Thus from the specific depiction of one family’s reality, the narrative expands as compels the reader to explore big questions of a social and moral nature.

Lal’s narrative endears the reader to it with the depiction and maturation of Gurmi as a responsible and morally commendable young individual. His relationship with his sisters develops and there are many episodes of ghostly pranks, which appeal to the older reader, whilst also the young adult readership to which it is targeted. However, it is the exposition of the heinous practice of female infanticide that sheds another light on Indian culture that is a cultural taboo from the perspective of acceptable behaviours and norms. Tellingly, when Gurmi confronts Surinder aunty with the question: ‘Surinder aunty, how come no girls have been born in our family?’ He is duly reprimanded and asked to apologise.215 Surinder aunty, an educated woman (she is indeed a doctor) responds in the following nonsensical but alarming way: ‘Baba – we’re Diwanchands. DCs don’t have daughters! It’s a law of nature, haina? A matter of great honour.’216 What is noted here is that regardless of Surinder aunty’s qualifications, she is entrenched in an attitude and practice that excludes and disposes of human life. It is tragically ironic that for her, the discussion of girls in this family is a taboo topic in itself, not so much the killing. The sad realisation for Gurmi is the


216 ibid.
criminal practice his family is engaged in is not seen as taboo and thus the hypocrisy of his family is unveiled.

In terms of the resolution of the plot, it could be deemed that the final treatment of the criminal aunty, uncle and father in this text is not reflective of the magnitude of the crime. The story has a happy ending with Papa converting the ancestral house where the female infanticide took place into a home and school for abandoned baby girls with Surinder aunty, after closing down her clinic and threatening to go off to the mountain to do ‘kadi tapasya’, to run the establishment. The reader may question the plausibility of this outcome; or otherwise, the writer may be suggesting that it is indeed possible for individuals to change their attitudes and belief systems and to start ‘a new tradition’ as Papa states in the closing pages of the novel.

It is the heroic stance of the young protagonist, Gurmi in dealing with the issue of female infanticide that resounds with honour and reflects the authorial positioning of the reader to applaud this character’s actions. For it is Gurmi who discovers that the whole reason for the family’s visit to the ancestral house is due to Mama’s current state: pregnancy. Upon the birth of the newborn twins, and the confirmation that they are girls, the decision to kill them is made. Unbeknownst to the adults, Gurmi physically lowers himself down the well averts their deaths and saves their lives, just in time.

The confrontation with his father and Mama’s shock at the lie she had been told that the twins were still born, provide a mirror for the whole family of the crimes that have been committed for the sake of ‘tradition’. In many ways, Ranjit Lal also seeks to raise a mirror to reflect and expose a darker side of Indian culture and, in doing so upon a YAL platform, to possible alter views that may be embedded in the young reader regarding the value of human life and the warped view regarding the killing of female newborns in society. Significantly, the writer empowers the young reader by presenting the young adult in this scenario flung into a tainted adult world and, unlike the adults who surround him, it is young Gurmi who acts in the most dignified way.

Finally, in terms of cultural taboo, in the process of analysing the selected YAL texts in this study, it has already been noted earlier that the selection of texts represents a random array. What is of note in this particular selection is the treatment and depiction of females. Gauri in *Curse of Grass* and to a degree Lila in the *Village by
are the only protagonists. The other texts present an interesting insight into the female and her position and role in society. Obviously the selection here is too small to even warrant serious consideration, however the following observations have been made and the researcher ponders upon whether this selection of texts in any way reflects a recurring representation of the female in YAL written in English and published recently in India.

Essentially, the selected texts present females often within a domestic setting (Lila in The Village by the Sea, Soraya in Luka and the Fire of Life); taking a backseat to the decisions made by their male counterparts (Lila in The Village by the Sea, Shazia in No Guns at my Son’s Funeral; often they are sisters or mothers who cook, clean, nurture and support (Lila in The Village by the Sea, Soraya in Luka and the Fire of Life, Mama in Faces in the Water and Bilal’s aunty as well as Mr Mukherjee’s wife in A Beautiful Lie; often they are the instigators of and inspiration for change and rebellion (Gauri, Amrita, and the womenfolk of the village in Curse of Grass, Gurmi’s spirit sisters in Faces in the Water and Soraya in Haroun and the Sea of Stories whose temporary departure shocks but also allows for reflection to occur; Masi, Sadhana ma’am and Soma in The Sacred Grove who question the world around them); finally, in some cases mothers are an absent presence as we note in A Beautiful Lie – Bilal’s mother has died.) In the above cases females are depicted as possessing a quiet dignity. In contrast, there are moments of caricature, where the females lack depth and are riddled with flaws as we see with the depiction of Ashwin’s mother in The Sacred Grove; in providing this alternative being, Singh intimates at the diversity of personality embodied in the female, indeed the human being.

In terms of cultural issues and segueing from the discussion on female infanticide as depicted in Lal’s Faces in the Water many questions arise: Is this portrayal of the role of the female in the texts analysed a reflection of a broader reality for females within Indian society? Why the predominance of male protagonists? Is the depiction of female characters resisted and questioned by female readers of YAL? Despite the obvious presence of strong female role models in YAL, even from this small sample, what social, political, cultural factors contribute to crimes like female infanticide occurring in a society where women and the females have a presence and a voice yet so often are voiceless? What role does YAL serve in the exposition of cultural issues in a simultaneously patriarchal and rapidly changing India? And finally, integrating
and adapting Zipes’ earlier thesis: does YAL assist in the integration of ‘young members into society’ reinforcing, endorsing and at times questioning and challenging’ norms and values which legitimise any given socio-political system’ and in doing so, not only guaranteeing ‘some sort of continuity in society’ but also engendering change?\(^{217}\)

These are complex questions that have arisen in the examination of not only *The Grasshopper’s Run, No Guns at My Son’s Funeral and Faces in the Water*, but as suggested by the brief mention of the depiction of female characters in most of the texts used in this study. Cultural issues and taboo are intrinsic to the examination of Indian-ness in this sample of recently published YAL texts.

### b. Epiphanies and Moments of Transformative Exhilaration

Albeit limited in scope, it is evident from the examination of selected YAL texts recently published in India and written English presented here, that when one discusses Indian-ness, diverse realities abound and they subsequently reflect a rich vista of Indian society. Thus, as with the notion of childness posited by Hollindale (1997), where he identifies what he terms varying childness; (so too, this study in the analysis which has preceded, illustrates an encounter with varying Indian-ness.

Despite the connotation of difference that the term varying Indian-ness may suggest; what will constitute a brief and final analytical section of this thesis, is the unifying notion adopted by Hollindale which argues that YAL (or what he terms, literature of youth) apart from varying qualities of childness, also reveals and exposes the reader to epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration. The manifestation of epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration is evident in every text analysed in this thesis and as such carries with it many implications regarding the role of YAL in terms of reader response, or as established earlier the reading event. These are also significant terms to consider in relation to perceptions of society and the

world of the young adult and how literature offers another way of seeing and being in the world.

In terms of YAL within an Indian context as seen with Jafa in Ghosh (2011) and Agarwal (2011) both touch upon this epiphanic and transformative element of the reading experience and in doing so imply an empowerment of the young adult reader. Moreover, Rushdie’s earlier reflection on the effect narrative and story have upon a young reader, as well as the older reader, also imply an aspect of the transformative power of literature and stories.

This transformative and epiphanic nature of story to shift attitudes and beliefs, and in doing transform the individual, is seen on two levels in the texts examined: firstly in terms of the protagonists themselves; and secondly in terms of the effect this transformation or epiphany experienced by the character affects and influences the reader.

In terms of the protagonists themselves experiencing epiphanies or moments of transformative exhilaration, quite often, and invariably, the protagonist is challenged by the circumstances of life. *Luka and the Fire of Life* provides an apt example and again, even though set in an imaginary but very Indian world, Luka manages not only to confirm his position as a dutiful son, just as dutiful and loving as his older brother Haroun; at the novel’s end he is empowered by the simple epiphany which transpires through the recognition of the power of love and the power of story to transform. In this manner story-telling is perceived as a vehicle for love and for living a good, simple life. This is just one example of the many ideals promoted by the text.

In his final confrontation with the has-been gods of yesteryear, Luka eloquently taps into this notion of the transformative power of story and in doing so provides a moment of exhilarating epiphany for the gods who wish for immortality.

*Listen to me: it's only through Stories that you can get out into the Real world and have some sort of power again. When your story is told, people believe in you; not only in the way they used to believe, in a worshipping way, but in the people believe in stories – happily, excitedly, wishing they wouldn’t end. You want Immortality? It’s only my father and people like him, who can give it to you now.* (p.182.)

Essentially, the narrative draws attention to the creative act of writing. Thus, the power of the word and stories to construct not only characters, but gods and
eventually attitudes to life, is exalted and forcefully presented here to the has-been
gods of yesteryear (and to the reader) as an inevitability, which if not embraced, will
augur a dire situation for humanity. Hence, the text is formidably presented by the
narrator as a means of empowerment in the ‘Real world’.

As the events of the tale unfold however, and in hindsight, this also becomes a pivotal
moment of epiphany for Luka as he realises that if he believes in himself, as the
creator and orchestrator of his own story, his life, he can metaphorically move
mountains, even convince the ancient mythological gods to listen to him and change
their ways.

A similar moment of epiphany is observed in the examination of *Faces in the Water*
where young Gurmi, is able to transform his family’s attitude toward female
infanticide. His indignation at this evil act, his courage, and the moral impulse that
drives him, are factors that provide the impetus for a shift in a practice that devalues
human life. At the novel’s end he is empowered and subsequently life is restored to
some semblance of moral order. He imagines a different world and way of living.

A moment of epiphany, although not transformative exhilaration but rather,
transformative grief, is experienced by Shazia in *No Guns at My Son’s Funeral*. This
character comes to a moment of epiphany when the two people she loves most die.
Up until this moment, Shazia is swept up with the romance of assisting her lover
Akram in his solitary pursuit of what he deems to be justice. Instead of acting in a
responsible manner and deterring her younger brother Aftab against violent
behaviour, in many ways Shazia contributes to the tragedy. The epiphany comes in
the form of her realisation that terror and violence are dangerous and fruitless. Paro
Anand assists in conveying this message of non-violence by quoting the words of a
young Kashmiri child. These are the final words in the novel, as Shazia hopes for a
better life for her son:

‘Whatever else happens, let there be peace,’

- girl from Baramullah (p.173.)

Hence we are led to consider the YAL reader’s response to these epiphanies; and
moments of transformative exhilaration. How does the reader respond to these
epiphanies? What are the writers’ subliminal messages and motivation regarding
society and culture? Are these messages conscious or deeply and subconsciously embedded in the perception of the writer that they reflect ingrained social and cultural beliefs?

Bradford, Mallan, Stephens and McCallum\(^\text{218}\) offer insight into the idea of transformation, specifically utopian transformation that resonates with what is considered here. In the prefatory statements of their work, *New World Orders in Contemporary Children’s Literature* (2008) they introduce and explore the perception of paradoxical alternatives: a new world order or a new dark age; and within this context they establish their work’s focus. Their subsequent claims regarding utopian transformations add to Hollindale’s thesis on epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration and in doing so, citing Bauman they shed light into how and why readers may respond in a particular way to the YAL texts they read and what the writer may be intending:

*To measure the life ‘as it is’ by a life as it should be (that is, a life imagined to be different from the life known, and particularly a life that is better and would be preferable to the life known) is a defining, constitutive feature of humanity.* (Bauman p.222.)

Thus, in this light, considering the notion of epiphanies and transformative exhilaration, the YAL texts analysed in this thesis offer young readers a window, to see, imagine and experience a moment, if not ‘a life imagined to be different from the life known, and particularly a life that is better and would be preferable to the life known’. This idea is intrinsic to the experience of epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration. For these epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration, as evidenced in the characters of the text, represent a direct result of the freedom that the individual is afforded when they transcend the quotidian and venture into possibility.

Furthermore, this is the opportunity that the writer allows their characters in constructing a particular narrative and consequently, it is the freedom that the text allows the reader to also experience. Specifically, through the written text, the individual reader enters other worlds, or versions of their worlds, and in doing so they

transcend the often ordinary and journey into a new realm of being and possibility which quite often becomes a most liberating moment.

Hence, it seems that in the selected YAL texts written in English and recently published in India examined in this study, it is the possibility to dream, to imagine and as Katherine Paterson \(^{219}\) reflects the real opportunity to foster ‘a sense of wonder’ in the young reader that allow for epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration to arise. These factors act as a unifying element and allow for a richness of interpretation which extends and further embellishes the scope of possibility in one’s perception of the quality of Indian-ness and its many manifestations.

Chapter 4 - Conclusions

One of the initial premises of this study was the observation that there are indeed many Indias. This study, through the appropriation of Hollindale’s term of childness within the parameters of an Indian context adopts the working term: Indian-ness, and examines a selection of recently published YAL texts written in English in India. In the application of this term Indian-ness, the perception of the cultural vastness and diversity extant in the available literature for Young Adults recently published in India and written in English is confirmed.

I. Indian-ness

Indian-ness, as an appropriated term to assist in addressing the multilayered nature of Indian experience whilst exposing attitudinal shifts in both the depiction of the child/youth protagonist and societal perceptions of the child/youth as reader, proved a useful yet, at times, nefarious construct. What exactly does this term to encompass?

In this study, it is concluded that Indian-ness entails both tangible (language, physical, social, religious and cultural references) and intangible qualities and factors (views, values, rituals, traditions, beliefs) both of which possess a particular Indian spirit or tenor. How authentic is this tenor? It has been suggested by Short and Fox 220 who adopt Howard’s view that ‘readers from the culture will know that it is true, will identify, and be affirmed, and readers from another culture will feel that it is true, will identify, and learn something of value, sometimes merely that there are more similarities than differences among us.’ (p.92) This identification with and affirmation of aspects of the texts examined which embody an authentic quality of the culture that produced the writing (a culture which it subsequently represents) is verified by the

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numerous reviews and commentaries cited, as well as by the analysis of the sample YAL texts themselves from the perspective of character and reader response.

The scope of the study was vast and for practical purposes this study focuses on the following areas in terms of a sense of one’s individual Indian-ness as manifested in:
i. Home and a sense of place; ii. History and the individual’s awareness of their place in the world; iii. Cultural issues and taboos. These three areas were examined through the characters and scenarios depicted in the narratives. Nevertheless, even in limiting this study to the above three concerns, the layers of interpretation, examination and possible connections also proved to be boundless.

a. In terms of home and a sense of one’s place, this study found that regardless whether the selected YAL was written within a social realistic genre or the genre of magical realism, the focus on family values and the importance of respectful relationships with parents and elders was pervasive. Family, it seems from these texts, is central to the Indian reality. Families in these stories were depicted as flawed, vulnerable and in need of real communication between parents and children. When the lines of communication are open, relationships flourish and love resides. When the communication is disrupted, confusion, resentment and isolation occur. Whilst most child/young adult protagonists accepted their duties as children in their respective family situation (in many cases assuming the adult responsibilities required to restore order in the life of the family) even characters, like Ashwin (*The Sacred Grove*), who protest about the limitations placed upon them by parents, finally understand and accept the social expectation of respect within family. This idealised social framework of a patriarchal nature is evident in the narratives examined. The subsequent questioning manifested in the texts suggests that even though society is changing and children may question the family framework and parental expectations, the generally accepted aspiration and the resolution presented in every text examined, is a prevalent obligation to show respect to one’s parents.

Although the texts examined did not overtly moralise or adopt a didactic tone, they did convey, as the circular of the CBSE ‘higher values’. These values may be deemed to encompass respectful behaviour within family and society; individual integrity and
moral responsibility for one’s actions and beliefs both on a personal and a broader social scope. The advocacy of these implied values by this Indian educational authority suggests that the values presented in particular YAL texts (such as *Curse of Grass* and *The Village by the Sea*) reflect aspects of the moral fabric of Indian society that are deemed significant enough to form part of the content of school curricula and by extension they convey values that should be celebrated, acknowledged, as well as questioned and challenged.

b. Within the context of magical realism, specifically in reference to Rushdie’s works: *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *Luka and the Fire of Life*, the same endorsement of the significance of family as a pivotal catalyst in the individual’s sense of self occurs. What is of specific interest in these works is that even though home is set in the imaginary city of Alifbay and both boys partake in fantastical adventures, these adventures and journeys take on a metaphoric significance which highlights the very human and common rite of passage from the stage of being a child, totally dependent upon the parent, to becoming a young adult who still respects the parent, but who questions and ultimately is able to assist the adult parent through difficulties.

These stories present the journey of two boys growing up as independent individuals, still couched within the security of their family life. Indian-ness in these two texts resides deeply in the values and traditional views expressed regarding the nature of the relationship between parent and child. Indian-ness is also present in the exuberant and vivid tone of the language and the imagery created by Rushdie, which despite being set in an imaginary world is strongly entrenched in the hues and nuances of India, in her culture, superstitions, colours and sounds.

c. A further expression of Indian-ness and the individual’s sense of home and belonging is manifested in Rushdie’s work through the preoccupation with story and narrative as a source of comfort and identification. Just as family, home and the places we belong to do, so too stories remind us of who we are and where we belong. Indian-ness in this instance is expressed in stories that are essentially Indian in tone, content, language, allusions and temperament and which express an aspect of the Indian psyche and spirit whilst simultaneously registering with readers who are not Indian. Thus, story and narrative may resonate directly with the Indian reader, who
may glean elements which reflect aspects of identity; but the universality of the texts also lend themselves to the general reader of English, allowing a window into Indian culture, within a fantastical and imaginary context.

ii. The most resounding historical event within an Indian context which seems to imbue the texts examined is India’s Independence from the British Raj and Partition of India and Pakistan. In some cases the narratives directly relate to and are set during this episode in India’s history as noted in *A Beautiful Lie*. In other cases, such as *The Sacred Grove* and *No Guns at my Son’s Funeral* the setting is more contemporary yet the perennial Hindu-Muslim tensions feature. What is significant in these stories is the focus in each text to honour the diversity of Indian reality and Indian identity. Whilst not disguising the historical difficulties and tensions that pervaded and pervade Indian society in the resultant tensions: the writers in every text examined, seek to explore the very real heterogeneity of Indian society and the empowering nature of text to convey and honour so many different Indian identities. What is of significance here, (not examined in this study in detail, but could provide the impetus for further study), is the that the language employed by writers in English of recently published YAL texts in India in and of itself reflects a particular Indian-ness which is indeed a result of the presence of the British in India. With partition, the British may have departed, however, indelible marks (linguistic and social) have been left as part of their historical legacy and they are subsequently reflected in this literature. Indian-ness, thus resides in this reflection of the many identities that come to form Indian society and are represented within an historical framework. And so a sense of one’s self and identity and individual Indian-ness is expressed through history and one’s awareness of one’s place in the world.

iii. One’s individual sense of Indian-ness is also expressed in the texts through the focus some writers and narratives take on issues of cultural taboo. Whether it is the defilement of the environment, female infanticide, friendships between Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, English; or whether it relates to children bearing arms and engaging in warfare, acts of terror and killing. These texts convey overt messages concerning the acceptability of such practices. At times moralistic, yet not blatantly didactic, these YAL works seek to engender a curiosity and questioning within the young reader, thus empowering the young adult to view the world around them with open eyes and
to make personal decisions regarding these issues. Implicitly, the texts therefore pose the question: Where do you stand on the issue of female infanticide as a citizen of a country where the incidence of this crime is disturbing? Accepting that certain practices occur within Indian society that may be old practices but are not necessarily ‘good’, the young reader is positioned to form a personal opinion, usually through the protagonist’s journey and in doing so, sift through personal questions and positions on issues of identity and self. Thus through the depiction of these confronting issues within an Indian social context, a moral soul searching is encouraged if not subtly imposed by the writer. One can conclude then that reading is certainly not just a matter of decoding symbols on a page, but as Hollindale initially states, ‘a reading event’.

II. Epiphanies and Moments of Transformative Exhilaration

 Whilst examining the diverse realities depicted in this selection of recent YAL that subsequently reflects a rich vista of Indian society, this thesis also seeks to analyse the frequent representation in the selected texts of critical epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration and how these epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration may impact upon the abovementioned attitudinal shifts in both the depiction of the child/youth protagonist and societal perceptions of the child/youth as reader.

Every narrative examined in this study presents at least one moment where an individual character (not necessarily the protagonist) is confronted with a revelatory or epiphanic insight that ultimately transforms them. Luka in Luka and the Fire of Life as well as his brother Haroun in Haroun and The Sea of Stories both respectively realise the depth of their father’s love and their connection as a family, after they experience their life-transforming quests. Gauri in Curse of Grass is transformed by the tragic fate of Amrita and Arjun and the epiphany that there are causes in life that some people are willing to fight and die for. The importance of a moral life is thus extolled. In No Guns at My Son’s Funeral again, out of tragedy epiphany arises for Shazia as she realises the price that is paid in human lives when violence and guns are deemed to be the only solution to conflict. Similarly, in The Grasshopper’s Run,
Gojen realises the depth of love for his friend Uti and the futility of war as he returns after his quest for vengeance a scarred but transformed individual, wiser beyond his years. The invisible lines established by age-old enmities are rendered meaningless when in *The Sacred Grove* young Ashwin is befriended by Rafiq and they bond deeply. Ashwin experiences for a brief time in his life an epiphanic joy of friendship which transcends social taboo and prejudices. The resolution of the text however provides a further twist as this friendship is presented as untenable due to the deep-seated mistrust that exists (within the world of the text) between Muslim and Hindu. Thus Ashwin retreats into the safety of his family. Family tradition provides the impetus for question the Diwanchand family in *Faces In the Water* as Gurmi is transformed and changes his world view due to the revelation of the cruel female infanticide which is practised by his family. The epiphany arises at the text’s end when a newborn child is saved by the young protagonist and his family’s wrongdoing is exposed. Gurmi is subsequently able to change his parents’ attitude through the courageous act of love which sees him going against established family practice, offering a new way of living and a condemnation of their dark past.

And so, whether it is any of the abovementioned scenarios or whether it is Hari and his sister Lila in *The Village by The Sea* both experiencing the same impoverishment through different eyes, yet reaching a point of greater awareness about themselves, the world and their place in it as well as their vision for their future. Or, whether it is 74-year-old Bilal in *A Beautiful Lie* who retrospectively examines his life only to come to a similar moment of epiphany and transformative exhilaration. What is evident is that in reaching a narrative crescendo, the text allows for a transformation to occur where the characters are allowed to consider, or even venture into, another way of being – a possibility for change and attitudinal shifts is made plausible and attainable and invariably accompanying this possibility is the feeling of hope and optimism in life and an insatiable desire and urgency to change.

What is confirmed in this study is that this transformative and epiphanic nature of story to shift attitudes and beliefs, and in doing transform the individual, is seen on two levels: firstly, in terms of the protagonists themselves; and secondly in terms of the effect this transformation or epiphany experienced by the character affects and influences the reader.
Within the context of both the protagonist and the reader engaging in the reading event, significantly, one concludes that the nature of the epiphany and moment of transformative exhilaration is forward-looking and dynamic in nature. In this respect, the impetus of the epiphany and transformative moment empowers from within the text (the protagonist) and beyond the text (the reader) and compel a shift to occur.

Often it is the epiphanic exposition of new ideas that are presented to replace the old that may take on a moral nuance yet poignantly strike a chord within both the protagonist and the reader, consequently affecting their integrity and sense of humanity. Thus, in many of the texts encountered, epiphany and moments of transformative exhilaration transpire through the recognition of the power of love and the power of story to transform.

Finally, in constructing texts that offer these epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration, the writers are essentially providing both the protagonist and the reader a metaphorical scaffold upon which they are free to transcend the quotidain and venture into other possibilities with which to see and be in the world. Within the confines of the texts analysed, life is then depicted as it is (whether real or fantastical), as well as how it could be.

It is the abovementioned factors that accompany the representation of epiphanies and moments of transformative exhilaration in the YAL texts analysed in this thesis that coalesce and manifest so differently in the individual narratives examined. Nevertheless, these also act as a unifying element. Every text examined, despite telling a distinctly different story, and at times offering a distinctly different view of India, presents a common moment of illumination residing in this epiphanic realm. Thus, the YAL narratives examined in this thesis, whilst simultaneously different and unified, allow for a richness of interpretation which extends and further embellishes the scope of possibility in one’s perception of the quality of Indian-ness and its many manifestations within the landscape of YAL in India.
Implications for the English classroom in Australia.

Returning to an initial premise of this thesis, as a teacher of English and Literature in Melbourne, Australia, the above examination has provided me with insight into the breadth and depth of delightful YAL texts available to the English teacher for use in the secondary English curriculum in Australia. Even though ACARA’s ‘The Australian Curriculum’ makes headway into accessing Asian literature (including some Indian literature) for teachers and by extension young adults in Australia. This study reveals that, in terms of Indian YAL written in English, there are so many more relevant and delightful texts which will allow Australia’s aspired ‘links to Asia’ to occur and which to date are not being tapped into.

How this will occur, how teachers will gain access to these sources for use in their classrooms thus facilitating links between their students and the experiences of young people in countries like India, thus forging a synergy between curriculum aims and pedagogical practice is a question this thesis is compelled to ask and which invites further research.
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The novels:


Other Sources:


