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“THEY SHARED THOSE BITS OF HISTORY”: READING *THE TAINTED* AS A TRANSNATIONAL MEMORY-NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

*This article seeks to examine Cauvery Madhavan’s historical fiction The Tainted (2020) as a memory-narrative engaging with cultural memory and colonial history and their impact in the lives of Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Indian characters of Irish descent. It examines the representations of mixed-race identities as ‘tainted’ while also foregrounding the notions of ‘nostalgia’ and ‘home’ in colonial and postcolonial historiography. Through a close reading of the text and the transnational historical context that has inspired the narrative, this study demonstrates how the novel emerges as a site where the cognitive and political potential of fiction and fictional framings help re-create as well as self-reflectively engage with historical materiality. Using the framework of memory studies, this study particularly draws attention to private memories and recollections which are transnational as well as intergenerational. The ontology and the experience of being ‘tainted’ is explored by unpacking the production and reception of desirable and undesirable subjects and the politics of forgetting, rejection, and remembrance in private as well as public lives. The article thus draws attention to how the conflicts, tragedies, and casualty caused by British colonialism have had transnational and intergenerational consequences for Anglo-Indian descendants in India and the diaspora.*

INTRODUCTION

In an extraordinarily rare narrative canvass, Cauvery Madhavan’s *The Tainted* (2020) brings together the history and lives of the Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Indians of Irish

descent, through a fictional re-telling of the historical event of Connaught Rangers Mutiny (adapted as Kildare Rangers Mutiny in the novel) that happened in Jullundur, Punjab in British India in 1920. Through a critical reading of the novel, this article examines the representations of mixed-race identities as 'tainted' in terms of nationality, race, religion, and gender in the context of the British colonial Empire as well as the postcolonial Indian nation. Using the framework of memory studies, this article particularly engages with representations of cultural memory in fiction by foregrounding the fluid notions of 'nostalgia' and 'home', and examines how they help forge a transnational historiography. Through an examination of *The Tainted* which is classified as historical fiction, this study draws attention to the possibilities of capturing Anglo-Indian experiences through private memories and recollections which are largely outside the purview of processes of official documentation. Traversing colonial and postcolonial memories foregrounded in the novel, this article thus draws attention to how the conflicts, tragedies, and casualty caused by British colonialism have had transnational and intergenerational consequences for Anglo-Indian descendants in India and the diaspora.

While most narratives of Anglo-Indian experiences were shaped by the heritage and memory of an imperial forefather from Britain, *The Tainted* usefully 'taints' that narrative with Irish as well as Anglo-Irish presence, on either side of the colonial experience. Though it was always understood that the British ancestry of Anglo-Indians often included the Irish, the Scots, the Scots-Irish and Anglo-Irish, this nuanced complexity in terms of identity was often overlooked, largely due to lack of records. *The Tainted*, a fictional narrative that draws on colonial history, creatively explores the Anglo-Irish politics of the colonial period and stretches it effortlessly into a dialogue with the postcolonial Anglo-Indian identity. This, the article argues, is a very telling departure from most colonial and postcolonial narratives found in the historiography. Accordingly, this study seeks to also demonstrate how Anglo-Indian histories and identities get largely subsumed in the overarching postcolonial metanarrative in which the colonized almost always is represented in antithetical terms with the colonizer/Empire. In the narrative milieu we are introduced to an interesting hierarchy in which the Anglo-Irish as well as Anglo-Indians are seen occupying a marginalized location, belonging nowhere. This opens up a new trajectory of historiography in which the fluidity and transnational location of Anglo-Indian identity

get foregrounded, circumventing as well as subverting the postcolonial discourse in multiple ways.

### *THE TAINTED* AS A MEMORY-NARRATIVE

The critical and interpretative framework for this study emerges from the perspective of memory studies which locates fiction as “part of a social, cultural, and historical intertextual web, a distributed memory” (Welzer quoted in Erll, 2011, p.187). It is in that sense that this article seeks to present *The Tainted* as a memory-narrative where individual memory, cultural memory, and political memory intersect, in an intergenerational, transnational as well as transcultural context. Positioning fiction as a “medium of cultural memory” and as a form that facilitates ‘memory-making’ (Erll, 2011, p.144). *The Tainted* is examined as a site where Anglo-Indian lives are reconstructed from shards of history and memory. The title of this article is drawn from this obsession with ‘bits of history’ which are episodically revealed through different characters’ remembrances. This flags the episodic and metonymic quality of memory and history, while also dramatizing how both categories are characterized by ontological and experiential incompleteness. The fictional framework espoused by Madhavan emerges as the unique framework through which the liminality between remembering and forgetting, between what did happen and what may have happened, converge complexly to mix historical events with imaginative possibilities. As one of the central characters in the novel, May Twomey, an Anglo-Indian character of Irish descent, puts it, *The Tainted* is a historiographical reconstruction of “something that happened 60 odd years ago” (Madhavan, 2020, p.219). The novel creates the “illusion of an authentic memory” (Erll, 2011, p.77) by presenting Anglo-Indian lives and history as mediated memory; this mediation is an extension of cultural memory produced through “objects, images, and representations” (2011, p.132) which are collectively associated with particular groups or types of individuals. It is possible to refer to this novel as a narrative constructed in ‘reflexive mode’, where along with the illusion of glimpsing the past, “a critical reflection upon processes of representation” is also provided (2011, p.158). Thus, in a broad sense *The Tainted* may be classified as historiographic metafiction with a distinct mnemonic system as it draws attention to the processes and problems of remembering an Anglo-Indian past.

Set in the small military town of Nandagiri in Southern India, *The Tainted* portrays how a historical event in 1920s British India, impacted the lives of Anglo-Indians then in colonial times and later in 1980s postcolonial India. Life in Nandagiri revolves around the cantonment with the town functioning almost like a metonymic mimicry of an Irish town constructed around the cuisine, chapel, and distinct lifestyle, despite the sweltering heat of its real tropical setting. The novel opens with Private Michael Flaherty an Irish soldier serving in Royal Irish Kildare Rangers, who had enlisted himself in the British army as there were no jobs to be had in Ireland. Michael is being given 'lessons about life in India' by Sergeant Tom Nolan who takes him for a customary visit to the brothel in Nandagiri, frequented by the Irish Regiment. A chance encounter with Rose Twomey in church, while he is assisting Father Jerome, soon grows into a relationship which is not approved by his Irish superiors and companions as Rose is an 'Anglo-Indian', a 'chee-chee girl', with 'plenty of Indian blood running in her veins', thus foregrounding the complex entanglement of memory and miscegenation in a colonial setting, as dramatized in the novel. Alison Blunt in her book *Domicile and Diaspora* examines the ways in which "mixed descent complicates the imaginative and material intersections of home, nation, and empire" (Blunt, 2003, p.30). Even the most benevolent figure in the novel, the Irish priest Father Jerome, describes the Anglo-Indians as of 'mixed blood', and 'highly complexed'. Furthermore, he refers to the mixed-race marriages as "disadvantageous marriages with half-caste girls". The biased attitude of the Irish characters in the novel towards the natives as well as Anglo-Indians are thus made very clear right at the outset, with the Irish looking down upon both with the typical imperial, judgmental gaze which accentuates the racial reification operative in a colonial setting.

The first half of the novel narrates the story of May Twomey's grandmother Rose Twomey, a young Anglo-Indian woman with an Irish father Sean Twomey who serves as 'bacon-wallah' for Irish soldiers, and an Indian mother who grew up in a military orphanage, and is described as 'half-caste' and 'several shades darker' (Madhavan, 2020, p.63). Rose, whose complexion belies her 'mixed blood' (2020, p.63) has never been to Ireland but considers herself fully Irish and hopes to return to Ireland someday. Upon the Irish priest Father Jerome's recommendation, she finds employment as lady's maid in the household of Colonel Aylmer, the commander of the Royal Irish Kildare Rangers in Nandagiri. Rose becomes conscious of her mixed lineage and the

resultant inferior status when she is working at Mrs. Aylmer's household though she never shares her insecurities with anyone except her 'Diary' which is almost personified in the novel. Rose realizes that she is treated as an inferior by Mrs. Aylmer due to her Anglo-Indian lineage but she is also unable to identify herself with the natives or even hangout with other Anglo-Indians who are 'darkies' (2020, p.51). She falls in love with Private Michael Flaherty, hoping to marry him and leave with him for Ireland, the homeland that she longs for. While Rose and Michael do not make their relationship public in Nandagiri, they get to spend a day together when Rose visits Michael in Madras where he is posted temporarily. Following a riot in the city in the wake of rumours about Gandhi's impending arrest, Rose and Michael are forced to take shelter in Dr Swamy's apartment where they make love and Rose becomes pregnant. Life takes a tragic turn when Michael is sentenced to death for his involvement in the unfortunate Mutiny in which the Irish regiment turned against their British masters, to show their solidarity with the Irish back home. Rose finds herself pregnant, faces disgrace, is disowned by her father and dismissed from employment at the Aylmers'. She is sent off to Madras, to be with her aunt Mags with whom Rose's mother grew up in the military orphanage, where she gives birth to a son. Rose's mental health deteriorates; after Michael's death she is sent for treatment in an asylum while her son Maurice is raised by aunt Mags's family. The first part symbolically ends on the day India achieves independence, on 15 August 1947 with Father Jerome breathing his last, his concerns about Rose alleviated on being told that she is no longer in the asylum but safe in heaven (2020, p.128).

The second part of the novel opens in 1982, when sixty years later Colonel Aylmer's grandson Richard Aylmer visits Nandagiri where Rose's granddaughter, Maurice's daughter, May Twomey lives with her brother Gerry who is the District Forestry Officer. Here, Nandagiri is presented as a town with one bazaar and an ageing 120-year old club which also symbolically represents the decadent lives of Anglo-Indians. The central character in this part is Mohan Kumar, an IAS officer and District collector of Nandagiri. Richard, who arrives in India from Ireland to pursue a photography project that replicates his grandfather's paintings of Nandagiri, is introduced to the Twomeys by Mohan Kumar who is Richard's official host. Richard has little knowledge about his grandparents' life in India as "India was a taboo subject" due to the disgrace the Mutiny caused (2020, p.218). As the tale progresses we find both Mohan Kumar and Richard

Aylmer enamoured by the charms of May. Richard and May discover that they have a shared history of the Empire which brought together their ancestors who are Irish, Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Indians. Meanwhile, Mohan courts May and becomes personally involved in the Twomeys' family history, eventually even helping May locate her grandmother Rose who is discovered to be still alive in the asylum in Madras. The novel ends with them finding Rose alive, and with the promise extended to Rose that they are taking her 'home' (2020, p.282).

Arguably the first work of fiction which distinctively portrays the lives of the Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Indians, Madhavan's third novel *The Tainted* calls for a fresh perspective to examine mixed identities in colonial and postcolonial settings. This is the story of three families whose lives and future are altered forever during the Connaught Rangers mutiny and its aftermath, depicting how events shape remembrance and remembered identities in discursively and affectively marked spaces. The notion of 'prosthetic memory' is particularly useful here as the characters find their lives, subjectivity, and politics shaped by a past event through which they never lived (Landsberg, 2004, p.2). The telling takes the reader through the stories of Irish, Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Indian families whose loyalties to the British empire were divided on account of their Catholic/Protestant beliefs, which again is part of a history which the Anglo-Indians in the novel do not directly subscribe to. This intervention of religion usefully complicates the identities of the Anglo-Irish characters; however, the implications of the same on the Anglo-Indians of Irish descent are not quite captured in the novel. In the novel, what holds the various episodes on either side of the colonial history together are the 'bits of history' and micro-memories shared by different characters. For instance, very early on in the narrative in the 1920s we are given to understand that the Aylmers and Flahertys go back a few generations through a "history of mutual loyalty" (2020, p.112). While the staging of this past gives the reader a glimpse into life on the other side of colonization those instances fail to integrate themselves into the ecosystem that the novel seeks to produce and sustain. A generation later the descendants of Aylmers and Flahertys, Richard Aylmer and May Twomey respectively, discover that they have a shared history which is more personal, familial, and intimate beyond the colonial administrative past shared by their ancestors during the presence of the Anglo-Irish in the British army serving in colonial India. While Richard's grandfather Colonel Aylmers and May Twomey's grandfather Michael

Flaherty served in the Irish Kildare Rangers, May's grandmother Rose Twomey served as lady's maid to Richard's grandmother Mrs Aylmers'. Fiction here emerges as a dynamic site which could potentially transmit different versions of a "socially shared past" (Erll, 2011, p.105).

The authorial intent and perspective which have been widely covered in the media through interviews, discussions and reviews highlight the author's twin connections with India and Ireland as well as the intensive research she had done on Irish presence in British India (Madhavan, 2020b). The splintered diasporic experience of the Indian author in Ireland makes her fictional re-telling of a hyphenated transnational community empathetic to a very large extent. At the same time, it needs to be stated that Madhavan's knowledge of the Anglo-Indian/Anglo-Irish community is neither experiential nor always empirically reliable. The fictional reconstruction of the Connaught Rangers mutiny is not born out of subjective experience or individual memory but by putting together the many fragments gleaned from different sites and sources. *The Tainted* is a fictionalized account of a real historical event reconstructed from the documents, memories, and versions that the author could have access to. The engagement with history, culture, and identity is heavily determined by the knowledge and details gained through the author's intensive 'research' which was focused as well as 'accidentally tangential' (Madhavan, 2020b). The sites Madhavan accessed includes movies, books, magazines, periodicals, Army and Navy catalogues, medical archives, documentaries, art galleries, museums, photographic exhibitions, dairies, long letters published in women's magazines, and even visits to older mental hospitals in India including the Kilpauk Mental Hospital in Chennai. While the novel is not entirely free from the many stereotypical images that overshadow Anglo-Indian lives, it enables the reader to look at the past as a "dialectical process of memory and forgetting experienced by individuals and societies" (quoted in Erll, 2011, p.41). What *The Tainted* narrates is thus a past that is collectively remembered gathered from a multitude of sources and sites.

The significance of the title *The Tainted* continues to unfold as the narrative progresses with snide remarks being made about the possibility of producing 'unexpected darkie children' if a white man gets involved with an Anglo-Indian woman, even if the woman appears fair-skinned (Madhavan, 2020, p.88). Not surprisingly, in

the novel the skin colour seems to determine much, including marriage, social mobility, and domicile choices, depicting what may be described as epidermalization of identities where racial reification operates through exclusion as well as rejection of miscegenation. Laura Bear's work *Lines of the Nation: Indian Railway Workers, Bureaucracy, and the Intimate Historical Self* (2007) which looks at the Anglo-Indian community as a 'railway caste' draws attention to how "the stigma of mixed-race, though it may be hidden by a non-swarthy complexion", was always a "tangible barrier" in accessing better privileges including salaries and allowances (quoted in Bear, 2007, p.79). Similarly, in the novel we find the anxiety and paranoia surrounding the 'darkies' who would eventually have to be left behind in India. Interestingly, Rose, an Anglo-Indian herself who is discriminated against owing to her mixed blood, maintains her distance from other 'darkies', and is quite obsessed about preserving her fair skin, even taking precautions while stepping out in the sun. Sudarshana Sen recounts how despite being in the "margins of British social life", the Anglo-Indians themselves 'often viewed other Indians as an inferior order' (Sen, 2017, p.54). Interestingly, the 'darkie' possibility is graphically discussed in the 1920s as well as the 1980s thereby also revealing some of the fundamental biases that have defined this identity on the basis of one's skin colour on either side of the colonial-postcolonial divide. This, we may note, mirrors the anxiety in the oft-quoted limerick on mixed relationships in John Masters' 1954 novel *Bhowani Junction*, "There once was a lady named Starky, who fell in love with a Darkie. The result of her sins, were triplets not twins; one Black, one White, and one Khaki" (Masters, 1954, p.170).

The contemporary meaning of the term 'tainted' is 'to spoil something or give it an unpleasant quality'. However, etymologically the word may be traced to the Latin 'tingere' meaning 'to dye' after which it passed through Old French to become 'teint', before briefly acquiring the Middle English 'teynten' meaning 'convict, prove guilty'. In this article we choose to understand 'tainted' as a term that captures the word's evolutionary journey, through 'colour', 'guilt' and 'unpleasantness', thus offering a study of colonial identity through multiple focal points and experiential positions. In this novel we find the pattern getting replicated through the obsession with skin colour, followed by the overturning of lives around feelings of guilt and conviction, leading towards unpleasantness and trauma of varying degrees that the characters who bear mixed identities live through. Madhavan herself in one of the interviews refers to the



'legacy of trauma', drawing on bell hooks which will be a useful concept for another discussion though it is beyond the scope of this article (<https://shaunagilliganwriter.com/2020/03/27/writers-chat-26-1-cauvery-madhavan-on-the-tainted-hope-road-london-2020/>).

*The Tainted* explores and experiments with different narrative strategies. Diary entries and letters emerge as very strong narrative tropes, giving us access to personal as well as political details particularly from the woman's point of view. Though fragmented in nature, Rose Twomey's diary entries serve as a first-hand witness account of the complex ways in which race, class and ethnicity operated in British India in settlements that were part of the Irish Regiment, thereby foregrounding the complex colonizer/colonized locations in imperial India, if one considers the Irish position apropos of the imperial British. In the first part of Rose's diary entries, the reader is allowed to hear her voice, and the third person omniscient narrative keeps the reader informed about everything that is happening around her, including how her own mixed identity is being perceived. In the second part the linkages with the past are forged strategically through characters such as Richard, Ronnie, May and Gerry. Mohan, the product of secular Indian modernity is presented as the central force that holds the characters as well as the past-present connections together; his role is aided appropriately by his bureaucratic power and position as well. Interestingly, all chapters are dated (sometimes along with the place) accentuating the sense of time and place. Bringing the narrative to a cyclic and organic closure, Rose's letters recovered through uncle Ronnie connect the dots in the second part leading to the reunion between May and her mother Rose who was thought to be long dead. The modes of recovery of the past in the novel also has a metonymic and textual quality, as the historical raw material that the author Madhavan relies upon was also "gleaned from books memoirs, letters and manuscripts in both the Irish and British public and military libraries, as well as from private collections" (Madhavan, 2020b). Therefore, the story is a recovery of a tainted and forgotten political as well as family history, weaving together memory-narratives that are scattered across different sites across two different generations and nation states.

The figuration of Rose Twomey as a character that bridges the two parts of the novel raises more interesting questions about memory and identity in Anglo-Indian histories.

May talks about Rose, her mother, as the one who “paid a heavy price for that mutiny by the Kildare Rangers. She bore the brunt of it all, physically, mentally” (Madhavan, 2020, p.240). In Irish and British history, the Mutiny is seen as the ‘only slur on the Regiment’s glorious history’ (2020, p.244) thus drawing attention to the historical and political implications of the event. Rose, on the other hand, emerges at best as a collateral damage of the event though her life is permanently disrupted beyond redemption, foregrounding the experience of interrupted identities that the novel constantly dramatizes. The disrepute suffered by Colonel Aylmer due to the insurgency of the Regiment under him and the dishonourable death faced by Michael Flaherty are indeed tragic; however, their lives and reputation are also salvaged historically to a very large extent. Colonel Aylmer’s grandson Richard gets to revisit and redeem the legacy left behind by his grandfather; the respect and official recognition he receives in Nandagiri including his access to bureaucratic privileges are reflective of this poetic justice enacted politically. Similarly, Michael Flaherty is later declared as a hero for the Irish cause, and his body is taken back to Ireland in an official act that restores his honour though posthumously. However, Rose’s humiliation due to her pregnancy out of wedlock, followed by her trauma in the asylum in Madras, lasts almost an entire lifetime until she is ‘rescued’ by her granddaughter May and Mohan. On a unique note, unlike the official definitions and reiterations which are patrilineal and patriarchal, the novel does engage with the location of the ‘mother’ whose presence/identity is otherwise immaterial in most Anglo-Indian discussions of origin or family history. In the novel, the Anglo-Indian characters May and Gerry even carry their grandmother’s family name Twomey in a telling defiance of the dominant patrilineal Anglo-Indian tradition.

*The Tainted* seems to be extra cautious while presenting a community which is often absent from official records and whose identity has little legal standing unless descended from a European in the male line as the constitutional definition does not consider maternal lineage. Accordingly, the heavy state intervention deployed in the novel may be read in two different ways. One, it marks the integration of the community into various state institutions, almost overcompensating for the near absence of records and official documents. For instance, the character who can make a difference in the Anglo-Indian lives is Mohan who holds a powerful bureaucratic position, whose access to state machineries is normativised in the system. Similarly, Gerry Twomey

works as District Forestry Officer, an official designation that connects the Twomeys with Mohan as well as Richard Aylmer. Secondly, it makes a deliberate attempt to legitimize the private memories by giving them the stamp of state authorization. The reference to Commonwealth Military Graves Association who could help maintain the graves, the support offered by the Public Works Department (Madhavan, 2020, p.269), the Secretariat, the offices of the Registrar of Births and Deaths, and the extended and privileged access Mohan has to official records make a difference in the way the Anglo-Indian lives undergo changes in the novel, exemplifying the entanglement of the experiential and the bureaucratic textual orders of material engagement characterizing the Anglo-Indian identity and its rituals of remembrance. Rose Twomey, whom the family thought was dead is brought to 'life' by pursuing official records relentlessly. The memory-narratives in the novel are thus also shaped by space, place and location, and characters are symbolically resurrected through textual and material processes of re-membering and recollection.

*The Tainted* is a blend of historical fiction and romance with elements of history heavily determining individual lives and their emotions for each other, even after sixty years. The event that is placed as the turning point is based on the Connaught Rangers Mutiny where the Irish infantry regiment registered a violent protest against British superiors, as a mark of solidarity towards the Irish cause, thus enacting the event of one anti-colonial protest on the site of another colonial exploitation. As a major symbol of the Irish colonial struggle in the British-Indian setting, this rebellion, dating back to 28 July 1920 is recorded in the British imperial history when five men from the Irish Regiment of the British army based at the Wellington barracks, Jalandhar, Punjab refused to follow orders or perform military duties in protest over British repressive policies and the imposition of martial law in Ireland. They were protesting at the behavior of the 'Black and Tans' during the Irish war of independence. Reportedly, as revealed in RTE Archives, Joe Hawes, one of the Irish soldiers, remarked to other mutineers, "We're doing the very same job that the British are doing in Ireland suppressing the Irish people" (<https://www.rte.ie/archives/2020/0623/1149159-connaught-rangers-mutiny/>). The protest emerged out of this conscience and empathy for Indians, and the solidarity for the Irish cause. As the protest spread to two garrisons, the British troops took over, and of the 88 who mutinied about 19 were sentenced to death after court martialing. However only one member, the ring leader

Private James Daly was finally executed, and the remaining were sentenced to life imprisonment. The Regiment was disbanded in 1922, after the establishment of the Irish free state. In *The Tainted*, the fictional re-telling of this event, serves as a pivotal point bringing together the lives of the Anglo-Irish and the Anglo-Indians.

#### NARRATING ANGLO-INDIANNESS AND MISCEGENATION IN POSTCOLONIAL INDIA

*The Tainted* encourages the reader to reassess the crisis of marginality in contemporary anti-colonial/postcolonial discourses. While listening to Richard's narration of the plight of Anglo-Irish families who were Protestants, Mohan says that they were 'like the Anglo-Indians' as they did not quite fit in. At the same time, he is also quick to point out that with the Anglo-Indians, "it's nothing to do with religion" but about the ambivalent Indian identity and the in-betweenness (Madhavan, 2020, pp. 257-8). In another instance May laments, "We're tainted – we were never white enough then and will never be brown enough now" (2020, p.221). Even the otherwise benevolent Father Jerome who always took an active interest in Rose's well-being generally refers to the Anglo-Indians with disdain, as ones with tainted pasts. Mohan who is overtly conscious about the Muslim-question which lies at the core of minority discourse in India makes a seemingly innocuous comment about how the Anglo-Indians "stand out a mile further than Muslims" (2020, p.228). It shows that the indifference or discrimination or even the passive hostility that the Anglo-Indians faced were very different from any other minority community, with the additional element of racial prejudice built into it. This also meant that shrouded within the discourses of illegitimacy and obscurity, the mixed-ness of Anglo-Indians had the additional burden of shame and humiliation as well, as they inhabited the interstitial territory between the colonizer and the colonized.

This article attempts to critically engage with *The Tainted* as a work of fiction that usefully complicates the complex identity borne by Anglo-Indians, irrespective of their descent or their ancestor's relation with the Empire. The mixed identity of the Anglo-Indians in terms of genealogy and culture had always surfaced as a "curiosity" in historical inquiries and discussions on national integration particularly in the post-Independence decades. Though the term Anglo-Indian was officially recognized as early as 1911 in the Census, and was used to describe persons of mixed descent, by

1935 the definition narrowed down to accept only persons “whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is/was of European descent, but who is a native of India” (Muthiah and MacLure, 2013, pp.58-59). This patrilineal structure along with the requirements of domicile status had led to many exclusions while documenting Anglo-Indian history and lives in postcolonial India. *The Tainted* as a historical narrative penetrates into these fissures in historiography, augmenting the challenges and trauma involved in this process.

Laura Bear’s essay “Public genealogies: Documents, bodies and nations in Anglo-Indian railway family histories” (2001) draws attention to the problematic nature of this process through a thorough discussion on archives and state-interventions. Bear, through case studies from East Indian Railway Nationality Files, asks pertinent questions about the State becoming the ‘final arbiters and guardians’ of the genealogies of Anglo-Indians. This absence of documentation and the lack of institutional authorisation are also interestingly intertwined with the discourse of colonialism and legitimacy. For instance, as Allan Sealy, the renowned Indian writer in English, reveals in one of his recent interviews, “My family’s [history] goes as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century; up to 1798, the documentation is sure. The first Sealys – two brothers, John and Charles, one a sea captain, the other a member of the Bengal judiciary – arrived in the 1770s, and the family could have descended from either one of them, who had an informal union with a ‘kept’ woman” (<https://www.thehindu.com/books/books-authors/allan-sealy-on-his-latest-book-zelaldinus/article19457234.ece>). This partial knowledge, which potentially posits a challenge on the discourse of legitimacy, is also at the core of Anglo-Indian mixed identity. As Alison Blunt recounts, this invocation of ‘illegitimacy’ particularly affects Anglo-Indian women, leading to assumptions that Anglo-Indian women are more licentious than other European and Indian women (Blunt, 2020, p.66). Thus, at multiple levels the marginalization faced by the Anglo-Indian community is tied up with the intricacies of family histories and personal liaisons along with the already complex historical workings of race and nationality.

In *The Tainted* we find this negotiation between personal memories/histories and historical documentation being foregrounded in very compelling ways. Michael Flaherty who as per documentary/State evidence is officially single at the time of his

unfortunate death is identified by Gerry and May as their grandfather. While a number of individuals including the Irish Reverend Father Jerome, Rose's father Sean Twomey, Aunt Mags' family and most members of the Irish regiment are aware of the fact that Maurice Twomey is Michael's son, this knowledge remains only as a private and hushed up information. Rose's status as an unwed Anglo-Indian mother and Michael's dishonourable discharge followed by death sentence make this entire episode a "shameful business" (Madhavan, 2020, p.242). May Twomey also recalls her mother's sentiments, "There weren't that many left in Nandagiri who knew the family history and she wanted it to remain that way" (2020, p.243). Even after the Irish government declares Michael Flaherty and Tom Nolan as 'heroes', Maurice Twomey decides not to let himself be known to the Irish authorities as he was only Flaherty's 'bastard son' (2020, p.244). In another significant episode when it is revealed that Rose was in a mental asylum, May echoes her brother Gerry's concerns and says, "Anglo-Indians with a family history of madness? He thinks it can't get any worse so why not just burn the letters and go back to believing that she [Rose] died in England of TB?" (2020, p.270). The stigma associated with shameful pasts and family histories have often emerged as a deterrent in tracing Anglo-Indian genealogies. An unnamed memoir published by an Anglo-Indian of Irish descent (Rileys who were born and lived in Madras before returning to England) in the blog [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) notes that after the 1857 Mutiny there was a shift in attitude due to which "the Anglo-Indians were no longer the privileged children of the Empire but its shameful secret" (A Hidden History, 2016).

In the novel, obscurity and rootlessness seem to underscore the complex workings of mixed identities and their articulation or the lack thereof. This anxiety is not historically and culturally unfounded either. For instance, Laura Bear gives an account of how Anglo-Indians were seen as being "low-class, too Anglicized, rootless, sexually disreputable, and cheap imitations" (Bear, 2007, p.11). Similarly, Parker's essay, which is autobiographical and experiential, draws attention to how most Anglo-Indians feel 'foreign' or 'homeless' despite having lived their entire life in India (Parker, 2015, p.26). The stereotypical notions about the community and the tendency to present unique characteristics in a derogatory light have been addressed by Dorothy McMenamain (2011) as well. In *The Tainted* we find this anxiety, operating from inside as well as outside, affecting the self-esteem of Anglo-Indian families sometimes in

intergenerational ways. Neither the European ancestors nor the native population into which they have assimilated seem to be able to offer a resolution to this anxiety which affects most Anglo-Indian characters in the novel. Part of this irresolution, which the novel uncritically subscribes to, may be located in the inability of colonial and postcolonial discourses to acknowledge these mixed identities whose belonging is contested. Sen's study on Anglo-Indian women succinctly demonstrate how "a discrimination-ridden situation gave birth to numerous stereotypes, mostly negative, and fostered a unique psychological state and social position of ethnic marginality" (Sen, 2017, p.142). As Homi Bhabha puts it, these stereotypes are a form of knowledge and identification that must be 'anxiously repeated' and which did not need proof but can never be proven. Crane and Mohanram's *Imperialism as Diaspora Race, Sexuality, and History in Anglo-India* is a work that argues forcefully about the need to interpret Anglo-Indian identity itself as fundamentally diasporic as it is a complex identity whose determinants rest on issues of diaspora, nostalgia, fear and restlessness (Crane and Mohanram, 2013, pp.1-2). To use a Saidian phrase, the Anglo-Indian's diasporic experience could perhaps be compared with that of a migrant who inhabits a "discontinuous state of being" (Said, 2000, p.183). These experiences of belonging which is diasporic and discontinuous at the same time could be historically as well as theoretically engaged with only by beginning to move away from 'typical' discourses on postcoloniality.

Anglo-Indian Studies, in terms of its historiography and location, has always signalled a departure from the postcolonial modes of accessing as well as framing identity. Characterised by intergenerational memories which were also transnational, the Anglo-Indian identity was a continuation of colonial mixed modernities from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. For the same reason, drawing attention to this complexity, historians such as Muthiah have always stated their preference for the term 'Euro-Indian' which highlights the European roots, without necessarily limiting it to British alone (Muthiah and MacLure, 2013). Laura Bear notes, "The mixed and illegitimate origins of Anglo-Indians embedded in the history of the colonial encounter made it impossible for them to imagine founding any political, national or community space, even a homeland for themselves in contemporary India" (Bear, 2007, p.271). The 'impossible' nature of this imagining largely due to the 'illegitimate origins' is in stark contrast with the many 'imagined communities' that have emerged in the twentieth century. Arguably the first

fictional narrative that outlines the story of Anglo-Indians of Irish descent, *The Tainted*, also makes a case for the need to understand Anglo-Indian identities by being attentive to family-stories which do not always fall within the discourse of legitimacy. If one looks at the characters in *The Tainted* who are also metaphorical presences of the Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Indians of Irish descent, we find that their lives are determined by the discourse of shame and the construction of stereotypes which operate through the Empire in terms of political loyalty or morality, and later seep into postcolonial discourses as well.

The Anglo-Indianness that the novel explores emerges as an attempt to address issues which are largely pushed to the peripheries of colonial/postcolonial history. Here one needs to be attentive to the discursive background against which *The Tainted* is positioned. The complications that underscore the definitions of Anglo-Indianness has been the topic of political debates and scholarly discourses from mid-twentieth century, if not earlier. However, like most mixed-race communities, the discussions often remained diffused locally and globally, as there were multiple histories, nations, and ethnicities at stake. More importantly, given the paradoxical relationship between postcolonial studies and cultural memory, there was very little scholarly attention given to the Anglo-Indian stories which were mostly re-membered and re-constructed versions without archival or any institutional documentation. For instance, Michael Rothberg points out the complete absence of any mention of the category of 'memory', particularly 'cultural memory' in most canonical theoretical works or practices in the field of postcolonialism (Rothberg, 2013) even when the 'practices of remembrances' were often the subject of extensive research studies. The vocabulary of postcolonialism, which is largely an offshoot of the Saidian framework, arguably stressed narrative and stories over 'remembrances'. Even in the case of Partition history it was only in the 1980s, with remembered versions of the past, the event of Partition began to receive academic and scholarly attention. In the absence of state documents which were the "symbolic legitimation of power and discipline" (A. Assmann, 2008, p.101), the researchers often had to rely on personal experiences, memories and even stories to reconstruct the event. In similar ways when one engages with Anglo-Indian studies there is a pertinent need to also depart from the fundamental premises of postcolonial theory upon which most histories, narratives and identities *after* colonialism are founded. At best, in order to access the scattered and



hybrid transnational Anglo-Indian history, one could position the Empire as the 'forgetting machine' (Césaire et al., 2000, p.52) and the Anglo-Indian storyteller/historian as the 'remembrancer' (Burke, 2003, p.110). In *The Tainted* the struggle essentially is also between the many acts of the forgetting machine and the attempts of the remembrancer to counter the same. In the context of the novel we find the Anglo-Indian characters of Catholic Irish descent (such as the Twomeys) and the Protestant Anglo-Irish characters who were dealt with unjustly by the British (such as the Aylmers) emerging as 'remembrancers', as there are no official markers or supporting documents to supplement their claims. The re-remembered stories that are foregrounded in *The Tainted* thus call for a departure from colonial as well as postcolonial constructions of Anglo-Indian lives and histories.

#### NOSTALGIA AND HOME IN *THE TAINTED*

In the novel, the term 'nostalgia' appears several times especially whenever May tries to talk about Anglo-Indians in general, whose lives according to her are steeped in the past. Nostalgia (from the Greek word 'nostos' meaning homecoming), is a term that best captures the Anglo-Indians' experience with the past and the way it informs their present; it serves as a useful pointer to discuss Anglo-Indian memory-narratives and their location. It may be noted that Svetlana Boym's notion of nostalgia defined as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" will be useful to understand the vital role played by memories in preserving and protecting Anglo-Indian identities. As Blunt puts it in the context of Anglo-Indians of British descent, "England is imagined at a distance as an inspiring source of memory, heritage, tradition and veneration, whilst India is imagined in more immediate terms as the site of daily life, present meaning and the location of home" (Blunt, 2003, p.42). For Boym, this longing, which in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was even considered as a pathological condition, is a longing for another space and time with a retrospective as well as prospective quality. As she extrapolates, "nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desire to obliterate history and turn it into a private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues human condition" (Boym, 2002, p.xv).

In *The Tainted*, 'nostalgia' is experienced variedly by different characters in retrospective as well as prospective ways. For Rose Twomey, the daughter of Sean

Twomey, the Bacon-wallah, nostalgia operates through her longing for Ireland, the home that she never has seen or been to. Though she has never been to Ireland, she considers Ireland as 'home', and writes in her diary, "I'm Irish and I intend to stay that way". She aspires to claim this 'home' by working as a lady's maid for Mrs Aylmer, and later through her relationship with Michael, hoping she would be able to leave for Ireland with him. However, the 'Indian blood' that runs in her veins, her 'half-caste status' or the 'Eurasian identity' (Madhavan, 2020, pp.41, 61), of which the Aylmers are wary of and Michael has been warned about, complicate her possibilities of 'returning to' Ireland. It is in the context of an exploration in such spatial and temporal terms that Alison Blunt examines the construction of 'nostalgia' as an extension of the 'homing desire' of Anglo-Indians. She identifies McCluskiegunj as 'productive nostalgia', "oriented towards the present and future as well as towards the past, and revealed as an attachment to both India and Britain as home" (Blunt, 2003, p.717). However, this nostalgia is a traumatic memory for a character like May. May's mother lived in McCluskiegunj and had experienced that place as "one of the saddest places" (Madhavan, 2020, p.219) which seemed to have tainted the Twomeys's perceptions about the Anglo-Indian 'penchant for past'. Later in the novel, May even goes to the extent of perceiving nostalgia as a 'dangerous thing' with a "whole community strangled by dreams of what they never had in the first place" (Madhavan, p.219). The project of McCluskiegunj in rural Bihar is described by May with a tinge of cynicism referring to it as "an example of nostalgia gone badly wrong" as it was "an Anglo-Indian little England, a shrine to isolation" (2020, p.219). Despite what McCluskiegunj could never become, it continues to be referred to as a nostalgic reminder of the aspirations of the past as well as what was once thought possible (Erll, 2011, p.52).

In defining Anglo-Indian history and identity, this liminality between past and present is very valid. May recalls at one point, "Anglo-Indians have made an art of keeping those memories alive. God, how we live in the past" (Madhavan, 2020, p.199). However, what makes these 'memories' and 'past' more interesting is also the fact they are varied and non-linear, making it possible for multiple realities and identities to emerge. For instance, the Anglo-Indians in the novel namely Rose, May, Gerry and May's uncle Ronnie, differ radically in the way they identify with their Anglo-Indian identity. Rose always saw herself as fully Irish despite her 'half-caste' mother; May and Gerry prefer to subsume their Irish connection on account of the many stigma

associated with their roots; as for uncle Ronnie he chooses to stay close to his Indian roots, which on the other hand is exoticized by his children who have found their 'home' in Australia. Interestingly, even for Mohan it is the exotic quality of Anglo-Indianness which is more appealing; it is evident in the way he 'remembers' the Anglo-Indian girls in his class who "could really jive, those Anglo-girls, all cap sleeves and sweetheart necks". Further, he also recalls how he was "warned off Anglo-Indian girls" (2020, p.173) and how they had "the reputation of knowing how to have a good time" (2020, p.174). Interestingly, Mohan's mother clubs the Anglo-Indians with Muslims when she says, "never a Muslim, no Anglos" (2020, p.174) while discussing his marriage prospects. Later in novel when Mohan listens to May's stories from the past with a lot of empathy, he prefers to look at McCluskiegunj as a place that preserves collective identity (2020, p.219). With the same sentiment he also finds himself being fascinated by the "Anglo-Indianness of the whole tableau" when he dances in Uncle Ronnie's living room (2020, p.227) where May feels completely at home.

Home, here, becomes an extension of this experience of nostalgia, which is traumatic and exotic at the same time. The Anglo-Indian conception of 'home' is more metaphorical than real, especially when it is away from India. It gets further problematised as they were often ridiculed for longing to return to a home they had never seen. The novel showcases how Anglo-Indian notions of domesticity are heavily influenced by the 'homes' and spaces they have only heard about from either parent or other Europeans who are temporarily based in India. Alison Blunt's *Domicile and Diaspora* talks about the paradoxical positioning and complexities of home and belonging for Anglo-Indians as "of feeling both in and out of place, and of living as both insiders and outsiders" (Blunt, 2003, p.23). For instance, in the novel, we find that there is no unified idea of 'home' among the Anglo-Indians of Irish descent. Ronnie's idea of home scattered across Madras, Ireland and Sydney. As stated earlier, for Rose home is that idyllic place in Ireland – Glengarriff – which is her 'hometown', and of which she has only heard from her father and others including Mrs Aylmer (Madhavan, 2020, p.47). Michael, when he is at Aunt Mags' place in Madras along with Rose, he realizes that he was in a "real home" for the first time after he had left Ireland (2020, p.60). May's mother identified England as home and never missed a chance to show her loyalty to the crown (2020, p.243) by dressing up her Anglo-Indian kids as Prince Charles and Princess Anne. May who has lived her whole life in Nandagiri is skeptical

of ever finding home, and her sense of non-belonging is evident when she feels, “We’re tainted – we were never white enough then and will never be brown enough now” (2020, p.221). However, when the novel ends with May’s statement, “Home, Rose. We are taking you home”, it is clear that May has found her home in Nandagiri which evolves symbiotically out of the convergences across Anglo-India, Anglo-Irish and modern India.

#### CONCLUSION: MEMORY-NARRATIVES AS HISTORY

*The Tainted* makes it possible to ask fresh questions about Anglo-Indian mixed identity through interventions made through private memories and records, less remembered historical events and state archives/machineries, thereby presenting the ‘illusion of an unmediated memory’ (Erl, 2011, p.140) albeit in the space of fiction. The novel acts as a point of reference, drawing attention to the complex and invisible Anglo-Indian past which is otherwise neglected in cultural remembrance. It foregrounds the “complex processes involved in the circulation of stories and the evolution of collective remembrance: both the convergence of remembrance of particular sites and the gradual erosion of those sites” (J. Assmann, 2008, p.352). The narrative is woven together carefully to integrate the points of view of the Anglo-Indian as well as the Anglo-Irish characters, along with the Irish and Indians. It also brings in race, class, religion, region, and gender albeit sweepingly while discussing the lives of individuals who are Indian, Anglo-Indian and Anglo-Irish. This link across issues and identities is created by placing Mohan Kumar, an Indian middle-class male with a bureaucratic position as the central connecting point, thus underscoring the machinery and memory of bureaucracy that historically informed the empire and its aftermath. Mohan’s key role in the novel accentuates the possibilities of assimilation into the ‘mainstream’, by facilitating State interventions to capture family histories. This positioning, though entirely incidental, may be read as symbolic of the larger constructs of historiography where the State plays a major role as a mediating agency repressing, regulating as well as facilitating modes of recording and re-membering. For, in the collective imaginary, archives have always served as “institutions of cultural memory, which gather, preserve, administer, and impart culturally relevant information about the past” (Erl, 2011, p.100). The intervention of a number of official bodies and statutes is recurrent in this narrative with the British Empire and Indian State determining the course of private lives in the 1920s and 1980s respectively. The anxiety faced by May

an Anglo-Indian woman of Irish descent, and Richard an Anglo-Irish man whose father served the British army have a number of commonalities when analysed from the perspective of *their* memory of the Empire. Alternatively, the contrast between the memory of the individual and the forgetting of the Empire also demonstrates the 'fragility' of private memory as against the "ideological implications of public commemoration" (Erll, 2011, p.66). Here, despite the class and status differences that separated May's grandmother Rose and Richard's grandmother Mrs Aylmer in the 1920s, we find that both sets of families, and the individuals, are mere casualty and even collateral damage for the cause of the Empire. Michael's death sentence, Colonel Aylmer's dishonourable return to Ireland, Rose's humiliation and displacement are all events which permanently 'taint' the reputation of their respective families. While the mixed identity of the characters and the way their hyphenated identities determine their share of colonial and postcolonial experiences form the central concern of the novel, one cannot help notice how the narrative also actively foregrounds connections and relationships between and across identities, generating a transnational historiography.

*The Tainted* is a novel about miscegenation and memory, about mixed and interrupted identities in complex cultural and political settings informed by colonialism and postcolonialism. At a more fundamental level, it is a story about the production and reception of desirable and undesirable subjects and the politics of forgetting, rejection, and remembrance. It has as its historical core a major political event which connects two sites of subversion – the Irish and the Indian – situated against one order of imperial dominance. But the nuance of the narrative lies in its depiction of how political events generate ripples in intimate and sentimental spaces, in ways which are performative as well as permanent. The ontology and the experience of being *tainted* – being contaminated in private as well as in visibly public ways – makes Madhavan's novel a compelling study of liminal identities and their associated subjectivities informing subversion as well as shame. Most importantly, the novel emerges as an excellent example of the cognitive and political potential of fiction and *fictional framings* to re-create as well as self-reflectively engage with historical materiality, which makes literature such a significant medium in memory studies research today.

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