

# Of Books and their Covers: Marketing Fiction in a Globalized Context

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## Abstract

Though a book is not supposed to be judged by its cover, the truth is publishers do their best to make us do so. This paper looks at different strategies deployed by leading publishers to market books and their authors through carefully thought out covers and blurbs. It follows the history of the publication of some key novels by South Asian writers, namely Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie and Jhumpa Lahiri, to show how their works have been designed for niche markets. In fact, it demonstrates how the same book is provided with different covers for different markets and different historical moments to capture particular groups of the reading public. This paper concludes that publishers pursue a policy of blending the global and the local too since their priority is the selling of the books and not merely intellectual stimulation.

For every aspiring writer at the "periphery," there is a publisher at the "center," eager to seize upon their work as a source of marketable "otherness." - Graham Huggan (1994)

In this age of globalization, it seems that the age-old saying "Don't judge a book by its cover" is passe. Once a book's manuscript leaves the author's desk, it becomes a marketable product, similar to many other multinational consumer products. The publisher then works out different strategies to aggressively market the product with special book launch programmes, publicity stunts and reading sessions by the author at different locales where he/she also becomes a performer and salesperson signing out copies for dedicated readers. As several Culture Studies critics point out<sup>1</sup>, in postcolonial literature in the global late-capitalism

system, the book is also commodified as an object of consumption. Thus its production, selection and consumption are regulated by the influence of publishing houses and academic institutions. But how much the author himself has to play in it remains a debatable point.

This article traces the history of the publication of some specific novels in English written by Indian writers and writers of Indian descent that took the global readership by storm. The writers discussed here, namely Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri and Manil Suri, have all been recipients of different literary awards.<sup>2</sup> Going through the various avatars of some of their texts, with different kinds of covers specifically manufactured for a niche market, I will try to show how all this talk about uniformity, transnationality, and multinational publishing policies has embedded in it deeper meaning through which we now have to judge a book not only by its cover but also of covers.

In Hindi there is a saying "*pehle darshandhari peeche goon bichari*" meaning, "you first judge something by its appearance and later by its merit". For the contemporary writer then, the 'book' or the 'product' that he/she is promoting also becomes unique. Good publishing is ultimately a matter of detail — the choice of titles, the editing, design, quality of production, and finally, marketing and sales. Each of these functions involves a whole lot of sub-functions that have to be finalized before the package is finally put into the market. My concern here is with only two aspects of this entire process, namely the pictures on the cover of the book and the dust-jacket synopsis that it offers. So, though a book is now launched worldwide on the same day, it comes in different custom-made forms according to the sensibilities and interest of regional readers.

In his essay, "Rhetoric of the Image," Roland Barthes attempts to "submit the image to a spectral analysis of the messages it may contain." He turns to the advertising image, an image which, he argues, draws from "signs that are full, formed with a view to the optimum reading" and which therefore is more "frank" and explicit in the information it conveys. Barthes wishes to use this clarity to move towards a clearer conception of how the image and its linguistic attendants produces signification. He proceeds by breaking this system of signification into three parts, that of the linguistic message, the coded iconic message, and the non-coded iconic message. He also argues that attention must be paid to the composition of an image as a signifying complex and to the naturalizing role played in photography, where the exact replication of reality "naturalizes the symbolic message ...innocent[ing] the semantic artifice of connotation"(45). The

politics behind different covers produced for the same book involve all the three different types of signification that Barthes talks of.

In other words, the language, the coded and the non-coded signifiers all add up to the understanding of the visual impact disseminated through the cover of the book.

As mentioned earlier, I judge a book by its cover. I also judge a book by its covers. Apart from the image that lies right on top of the book that decides whether I pick it up or read it, I also find pleasure in possessing good multiple book covers of the same book — which, of course, means picking up the same book many times. The first time I noticed this entire well-thought-out strategy to attract the regional reader was in 1997 when Arundhati Roy created history by winning the Booker Prize for her debut novel *The God of Small Things* which was promoted as a 'unique product' and therefore a 'commercial proposition' for the publishers. We have read a lot about how Arundhati Roy was very particular about the entire production of her book, including the type-set and the cover design.<sup>3</sup> Padmini Mongia delves deep into this phenomenon thus:

Let me begin with a consideration of the novel's cover. Most readers of this article are probably familiar with the cover, with its image of blurred lotus leaves within which one can find a single, surprising, small pink bougainvillea flower. Placed almost at the dead centre of the front cover, the small pink flower draws the viewer's eyes both for its placement and for its colour. The flower is the more striking for being a small drop of colour amid the greenish gloom of the leaves and stems of the lotus plants. On the left of the front cover, though, another concentration of the same colour — partly a dead leaf and partly the bud of a lotus flower — draws the gaze. As the reader's eye follows the pink lotus on the side of the spine, an even fuller lotus appears on the back. Although not in full bloom and photographed from the side, the lotus on the back cover is the deepest concentration of colour on the book jacket. Following the path suggested by the colour red leads the reader to the inside jacket, where a winsome author photo greets the reader. Photographed against foliage, she too glows and is luminous. Just as the green lushness allows the flower on the front cover to be more striking, the blurred green background highlights the picture of the author with dreamy eyes. The circularity of Roy's narrative is mirrored in the images which

adorn the cover of her book, where hints of red tinge all its sides, including the author photograph where the red band in her hair rounds out the use of red on the rest of the book jacket. Further, the entire book jacket glows and is iridescent.

The most interesting fact to be noted now is that the cover picture of the pink lotus blooming amid dark green leaves remained the same in all editions but the author's picture and the gist of the story on the dust-jacket differed from country to country, region to region. So we got a happy and smiling face of the author with her bright eyes full of self-confidence on the cover of the Indian edition published by India Ink in New Delhi and a much more dreamy and vague-looking photograph on the Random House edition published in the United States, as if lending an enchantment to this novelist from far off India. In the Flamingo version published in the United Kingdom, the photograph, done in black and white is "more contemplative" and tending "towards sepiatone." Mongia further informs us that here, "the dreamy appeal of the author photo relies on nostalgic softness unlike the beckoning sensuality of the Random House edition."<sup>4</sup> In all these cases, of course, the photographer was none other than her husband Pradip Krishen.

Though seeming apparently trivial, the marketing strategy was clearly exposed when we went through the absolutely different story outlines presented in the two editions under discussion. The Indian edition read thus:

In a purely practical sense it would probably be correct to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem. Perhaps it's true that things can change in a day....

Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story ...Still, to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem is only one way of looking at it...

It could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came... Before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag.

By June 1997 the readers of *The New Yorker* were introduced to a full page picture of Arundhati Roy with the following caption: "A novelist who works as hard to avoid as to reach her destination of forbidden sex and atrocious violence" and so the dust jacket story outline for the Random House edition published from New



York was totally different from its Indian counterpart. Beginning with a quotation in italics it went thus:

*They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. The year is 1969.*

In the state of Kerala, on the southernmost tip of India, a skyblue Plymouth with chrome tailfins is stranded on the highway amid a Marxist workers' demonstration. Inside the car sit two-egg twins Rahel and Esthappen, and so begins their tale....

*The God of Small Things* takes on Big Themes — Love, Madness, Hope, Infinite Joy. Here is a writer who dares to break the rules. To dislocate received rhythms and create the language she requires, a language that is at once classical and unprecedented. Arundhati Roy has given us a book that is anchored to anguish, but fueled by wit and magic.

According to Padmini Mongia, "the tropes used in the aestheticization of the book are worth remarking on, especially since the work is clearly very skillfully put together and an enormous effort was expended for its construction and marketing."<sup>5</sup> Incidentally, the totally different cover of the special limited copy hardbound edition made of *The God of Small Things* as one of the shortlisted books for the Booker since 1991 tells us another story. The profusion of the colour pink both in the cover — with the embossed gold lettering of the title on the spine as well as on the hardboard case covering it — seems to be preserving something no longer exotic from India but a prize product that needs to be safely preserved for posterity.

## II

After Roy's book, the novel that probably underwent the maximum number of avatars in its cover design is Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. I could locate at least twelve different covers since the time of its first publication in 1981 and probably there are many more. Over the span of all these years, and especially after the book won the 'Booker of Bookers' award, the range and experimentation with cover designs of the novel is amazing to note. While each publisher attempts to provide an attractive design on the front cover, all related to different significant aspects of the story, some shy away from even offering the gist of the story at the back cover. They just fill it up with excerpts of critical comments provided by journals and newspapers. Some randomly selected

editions offer my case in point. For example, let us look at one of the earlier editions published by Jonathan Cape in 1981. Done primarily in half blue and half white, the front cover has several artistically done up clock-like faces — one half displaying the hours of the clock face and the other half with an open eye of a child. The artwork obviously represents imaginatively Saleem Sinai and the thousand other children born on the stroke of midnight on the day of Indian independence in 1947. The plain looking dark blue front cover of the Avon Paperback 1982 edition (published by arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf) has three entries apart from the title:

- "An Extraordinary Novel"— *The New York Review of Books*
- Winner of the Booker Prize
- Author of *The Satanic Verses*

Apart from the necessary information provided on the front cover, the publishers explain the storyline on the back cover along with two more critical comments focusing on the literary merits of the book:

#### BIRTH OF A CHILD...AND A NATION

Saleem Sinai was born at midnight on August 15, 1947 — the very instant that India attained her independence. Together in this brilliant phantasmagoric saga, nation and child go through the pangs of birth, the tantrums of childhood, the traumas of adolescence, and the anomie of adulthood. Author Salman Rushdie has woven dreams into reality, mystery into magic, and truth into fantasy.

*The New Yorker* has called Salman Rushdie "a glittering novelist — one with startling imaginative and intellectual resources, a master of perpetual storytelling. Like Garcia Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, he weaves a whole people's capacity of carrying its inherited myths — and new ones that it goes on generating — into a kind of magic carpet...as a tour de force his fantasy is irresistible."

And the *Philadelphia Inquirer* called *Midnight's Children* "a dazzlingly written novel...a fascinating history lesson as well as an engrossing story."

In 1991, a Penguin Paperback edition was released. The standard cover with a

profusion of dark red on the top and along the borders has the partial image of an oriental building along with a typical minaret in black. This design certainly entices the viewer to pick up this 'exotic' novel from far-off India. The summary on the back cover once again emphasizes the significant traits of the text:

Salman Rushdie won the Booker Prize for this novel, which follows the lives of children born on August 15, 1947, the day India became an independent nation. The book is simultaneously the story of one boy's coming of age, a chronicle of the growing pains of the new nation, and a family drama, all told in a magical-realist style that manages to be humorous and hopeful despite the gravity of the events depicted.

Interestingly enough, the very same year in 1991, Penguin released another edition of the novel that had a totally different cover done in white and blue. Artistically embedding the picture of a riot on the Indian subcontinent by the famous photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, it reminds us not so much of the exotic east as the earlier edition had focused on but more on the issues that led to the partition of India and its consequences, which of course shapes Saleem Sinai's life as it is. Apart from mentioning that the novel is "WINNER OF THE BOOKER PRIZE," it identifies Rushdie as the "author of the bestselling *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*" and also includes praises from *The Washington Post* Book World that states — "Burgeons with life, with exuberance and fantasy ...Rushdie is a writer of courage, impressive strength, and sheer stylistic brilliance." Martin Ogolter, the cover designer, thus manages to inculcate all the necessary requisites that are needed to make a reader pick up the novel.

The back cover of this edition too adds two more critical comments along with the story outline.

- 'In Salman Rushdie, India has produced a glittering novelist — one with startling imaginative and intellectual resources, a master of perpetual storytelling.'

—V.S. Pritchett, *The New Yorker*

- Born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, at the precise moment of India's independence, the infant Saleem Sinai is celebrated in the press and welcomed by the Prime Minister himself. But the coincidence of birth has consequences Saleem is

not prepared for: telepathic powers that connect him with 1,000 other "midnight's children" — all born in the initial hour of India's independence — and an uncanny sense of smell that allows him to sniff out dangers others can't perceive. Inextricably linked to his nation, Saleem's biography is a whirlwind of disasters and triumphs that mirror the course of modern India at its most impossible and glorious.

Brilliant, operatic, comic, and serious, this novel is a wild, astonishing evocation of the maturity of a vast and complicated land and its people — a brilliant incarnation of the universal human comedy, Indian style.

- "An extraordinary novel...one of the most important to come out of the English speaking world in this generation."

— Robert Towers, *The New York Review of Books*

In 1995, Everyman Library brought out a Hardcover edition with a bare brown background but was the only one to include a photograph of the author on the front cover. The same year, Vintage released a colourful edition with the front cover done in dark blue background. Two significant images appear on it — on the upper part we have the picture of Lord Krishna with his blue face, on the lower panel the ubiquitous clock face. The third interesting feature of this cover is the divisive line that gives the illusion that the actual cover is folded and divided into two parts. The back cover of this edition is interesting because it does not give us any outline of the story but just relies on the critical comments of six newspapers and journals to entice the reader:

- 'One of the most important books to come out of the English-speaking world in this generation' —*New York Review of Books*
- 'Huge, vital, engrossing...in all senses a fantastic book' — Sunday Times
- 'The literary map of India is about to be redrawn...*Midnight's Children* sounds like a continent finding its voice. An author to welcome to world company' —*New York Times*
- 'I haven't been so continuously surprised by a novel since I read *One Hundred Years of Solitude*' —*The Times*
- 'A brilliant and enduring novel, the latest of India's many

contributions to English fiction, and the most remarkable of them all' — *London Review of Books*

- 'A magnificent book and Salman Rushdie is a major novelist'  
— *Observer*

The 2000 Penguin Paperback edition (Great Books of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Edition) has a yellow-ochre cover with the picture of a mother with two wrapped up newborn children on both her arms done in black. The only other visible object within this dark picture is the face of a clock. The back cover includes a picture of Rushdie in the centre and below it printed in white are these lines from the first paragraph of the novel:

"I was born in the city of Bombay...once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date. I was born in Dr. Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947."

For more details about the book one has to turn inside the flap of the front cover:

After the publication of *Midnight's Children* in 1980, Salman Rushdie was awarded the Booker Prize and hailed as the voice of contemporary India. A dense interweaving of narratives, cultures and voices, *Midnight's Children* chronicles modern India through the lives of one thousand and one children born within the country's first hour of independence on August 15, 1947. The protagonist-narrator, Saleem Sinai — born at the stroke of midnight, the precise moment of India's nationhood — is celebrated in the press and welcomed by Prime Minister Nehru himself. The coincidence of his birth endows him with telepathic powers that connect him with the other one thousand midnight children, who also possess magical talents. Inextricably linked to his nation, Saleem's story is a whirlwind of disasters and triumphs that mirror the course of modern India.

Ebullient, operatic, comic and serious, this novel is a wild, astonishing evocation of the maturity of a vast and complicated land and its people. It is also a brilliant incarnation of the universal human comedy.

At present the most easily available edition of *Midnight's Children* that was

released by Vintage in 2006 to celebrate the 25th Anniversary edition of the novel and its winning the 'Booker of Bookers' prize has on its cover a serpent surrounding the two children in a nest, done in white and red. The same year Picador also released a paperback volume done in gold and green with the picture of two clock hands artistically drawn on the right hand side of the cover. Mentioning that it is the "Winner of the 1981 Booker Prize," it also adds an endorsement from the *New York Times*:

"The literary map of India is about to be redrawn...Midnight's Children sounds like a continent finding its voice...An author to welcome to world company."

The cover of the May 2008 Vintage Classic paperback edition has a deep blue background with chutney bottles of various shapes and colours on it. On the top right hand corner, instead of the author's full name, we have VINTAGE RUSHDIE — probably signifying that Salman Rushdie has reached such a stage that he is already 'vintage' and 'chutneyfied' and needs no further introduction. From the various covers of this novel it seems that serving old wine in a new bottle will also continue in the future.

### III

In her book *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, Gillian Rose introduces the idea that we need new methodologies to interpret the plethora of visual stimuli surrounding us. According to her, we can understand our culture through various visual representations and there are multiple ways of doing that.<sup>6</sup> How significantly visual images can become tools to mould the reader's attraction to a new book is very well illustrated through Jhumpa Lahiri's latest collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth* published in April 2008. Though the official date of this book's publication was throughout the world 1<sup>st</sup> of April, the desire for possessing a copy of the book was fuelled with a large number of pre-publication bookings done at Amazon.com. This design was augmented further with Lahiri's reading in different corners of the US, and pre-publication excerpts available in different newspapers and magazines.<sup>7</sup> In Kolkata, the Sunday supplement of *The Telegraph* magazine published one of the short stories included in the volume, thus enticing a larger segment of non-academic readers to buy the book when it was officially released.

Subsequently when the Alfred Knopf (US edition) edition reached the bookshops, they received a beautiful green coloured book with the picture of a small semi-circular boat tossing amid turbulent waves. For American readers already familiar with the themes of Lahiri's earlier stories and her novel *The Namesake*, it is not difficult to imagine the symbolic connection — the journey of the Indian immigrants (mostly Bengalis) tossed in the turbulent waves of the Atlantic Ocean who face adventure and uncertainty at the same time. They are also aware that as the Vice President of the PEN American Center, much of what Lahiri writes is a personal account as an Indian American feeling the intense pressure to be at once "loyal to the old world and fluent in the new." The cover can also be related to Kaushik, the protagonist of the last three interconnected stories, who gets washed out by the tsunami at the end. The big and stunning portrait of the writer herself on the back cover is also a remarkably well thought out strategy of the publisher as she looks quite attractive. Summarizing individual stories, the inside-cover description of the US edition reads as follows:

From the internationally best-selling, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, a superbly crafted new work of fiction: eight stories—longer and more emotionally complex than any she has yet written—that take us from Cambridge and Seattle to India and Thailand as they enter the lives of sisters and brothers, fathers and mothers, daughters and sons, friends and lovers.

From the internationally best-selling, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, a superbly crafted new work of fiction: eight stories — longer and more emotionally complex than any she has yet written — that take us from Cambridge and Seattle to India and Thailand as they enter the lives of sisters and brothers, fathers and mothers, daughters and sons, friends and lovers.

In the stunning title story, Ruma, a young mother in a new city, is visited by her father, who carefully tends the earth of her garden, where he and his grandson form a special bond. But he's harboring a secret from his daughter, a love affair he's keeping all to himself. In "A Choice of Accommodations," a husband's attempt to turn an old friend's wedding into a romantic getaway weekend with his wife takes a dark, revealing turn as the party lasts deep into the night. In "Only Goodness," a sister eager to give her younger brother the perfect childhood she never had is overwhelmed by guilt, anguish, and anger when his alcoholism



threatens her family. And in "Hema and Kaushik," a trio of linked stories—a luminous, intensely compelling elegy of life, death, love, and fate—we follow the lives of a girl and boy who, one winter, share a house in Massachusetts. They travel from innocence to experience on separate, sometimes painful paths, until destiny brings them together again years later in Rome.

*Unaccustomed Earth* is rich with Jhumpa Lahiri's signature gifts: exquisite prose, emotional wisdom, and subtle renderings of the most intricate workings of the heart and mind. It is a masterful, dazzling work of a writer at the peak of her powers.

As expected, the Dust Jacket storyline of the Indian Edition (Random House India) is radically different. Unlike the US edition, there are no short summaries of individual stories, nor does it explain their geographic locations. Human relationships and the immigrant experience are two things emphasized here:

Everyone has their secrets. In her stunning new collection of stories, Jhumpa Lahiri gently lifts the veil to reveal how even the most ordinary lives have their dramas and tragedies and then, as gently, lets it fall back down again.

A middle aged man discovers that the death of his wife opens up his world in unexpected ways — his daughter worries that she will now have to look after him but finds that the tables have, in fact, turned; a housewife falls in love with a younger family friend — her child ascertains her secrets many years on; a son is revulsed by his father's second marriage to a younger woman who has none of the sophistication and elegance of his mother; a sister tries to save a brother from alcoholism and finds herself rejecting him like everyone else. A young man and woman whose lives cross over the years, finally and fatedly fall in love.

*Unaccustomed Earth* returns to the terrain — the heart of family life and the immigrant experience — that Jhumpa Lahiri has made utterly hers, but her themes this time around, have darkened and deepened. Poised, nuanced, deeply moving, here is a superb collection — the finest she has written yet.

What really draws our attention is the outer cover of the Indian edition. Done completely in black and white, it expresses a typical Indian perspective vis-à-vis its emphasis on nostalgia, loneliness and memory. The empty chair enlarged at

the centre with a reading lamp on one side and the old model rotary dial telephone beside it symbolizes the broken nest syndrome all too well. This telephone with its ubiquitous 1960s look plays a significant role in several of the stories anthologized in this volume — the only mode of connectivity in the pre-internet, pre-mobile phone era. Perhaps this is also the reason why its picture is reiterated in the back cover as well along with the endorsement from *The New York Times* that Lahiri is "A writer of uncommon elegance and poise." Incidentally, the author's picture, remarkably reduced in size now, adorns the inside flap of the dust-jacket at the back. Since we know her quite well, it seems she does not need a great introduction. After all, we have appropriated her as our country's daughter a long time ago.

#### IV

Such studies of different covers might go on endlessly. However two interesting reasons for cover design changes need to be mentioned. First, when a particular novel wins a prize, say a Booker or a Pulitzer, an additional logo mentioning the fact is usually added on to the cover without any major changes of the picture or design. This definitely raises the salability of the book. Again, interesting additions or changes to the cover occur when a film adaptation is made from a particular novel and the picture of the film star usually performing the lead role then contributes his or her share to the marketability of the book. The image of a crouching Amir Khan in grayish sepia tone, waiting with his eyes closed for the train full of refugees from Amritsar to arrive in the post-partition scenario of Lahore that adorns the cover of the Penguin India edition of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* or Kal Penn as Gogol Ganguly walking on the streets of New York that adorns the very colourful red and yellow cover of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* after the 2006 film adaptation by Mira Nair are such cases in point. The transformation from the two earlier covers of *The Namesake* is so stark and powerful that one cannot but overemphasize the visual impact the new cover creates.<sup>8</sup> Thus, taking a cue from Roland Barthes we can say that the linguistic message — contained in the titles, the slogans and captions — juxtaposed with the advertising image, enhances the attraction of the book as a consumer product. Barthes distinguished the image from language and defined the relationship between the two.<sup>9</sup> His theory, granting responsibility to the image maker and enhancing their ability to communicate, gains greater acceptability in this analysis.

I now want to focus on another interesting phenomenon that accompanied the February 2008 release of two different editions of Manil Suri's novel *The Age of Shiva*. In both the US edition published by Norton and the UK edition by Bloomsbury there is the picture of a sari-clad Indian woman along with her son facing backwards but the similarity ends there. The cover of the Norton edition is done in black and white, almost verging on sepia. The picture of a woman with a child in her arms covers 80% of the space. The way she wears her sari, does her hair, clutches her child around her waist, makes her a stereotypical northern Indian woman usually seen in semi-urban settings. She is facing the sea. In the Bloomsbury edition (the same one distributed and sold in India), a pink/mauve tinge covers the entire background. Here the woman is also facing the sea but the child is no longer in her arms. He has grown up and is walking with his mother holding his hands. The mother is wearing a bright orange sari that covers her head like a veil. On the left hand side of the cover is the bark of a tall coconut tree whose leaves drop artistically from the top. Interestingly, the woman is reduced considerably in size and appears in the distance almost as if in a long shot. We all know that the *woman in sari* (conjuring up to represent the image of the typical *Bharatiya nari*) has become a sort of trademark, where we can once more identify the old nationalist trope of woman as the embodiment of motherhood and the motherland. In his analysis on "Consuming India" Graham Huggan has already drawn our attention to the fact that 'Indo-Chic' and Arundhati Roy's contribution to it, are not simply to be seen as naïve western constructs; they are products of the globalization of Western capitalist consumer culture, in which 'India' functions not just as a polyvalent cultural sign but as a highly mobile capital good"(2001: 67). In the case of Suri's novel, the publishers on both sides of the Atlantic take recourse to Orientalist marketing tactics that exoticize 'ethnic' literatures in the international markets in order to raise their economic value while devaluating their political ones. The emphasis is now more on mass-market consumption than on aesthetic perception.

To conclude, we can say that whether we analyze the strategies of cover designing through the serious and academically inclined Barthesian formula, or reinterpret Walter Benjamin's use of the word 'aura' that he used to refer to the sense of awe and reverence one presumably experienced in the presence of unique works of art and apply it to commercial book production and show how in the present context his fear is baseless; or agree with Graham Huggan that "[e]xotist spectacle, commodity fetishism and the aesthetics of decontextualization are all at work, in different combinations and to varying degrees, in the production,

transmission and consumption of postcolonial literary/cultural texts"(20); or simply try to understand it from a layman's point of view; one thing remains clear: in today's globalized world, publishers are offering uniformity on the one hand and discreetly offering glocalization on the other. For this blending of the global and the local — whether it is a book or a multinational brand of jeans, shampoo, or soap — the first priority remains marketability and not intellectual stimulation.

## Notes

- 1 Here I include critics like Walter Benjamin whose 1935 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" has become a standard reference for any attempts to analyze and understand the interrelation of political, technological and artistic development under capitalism; Anthony Appiah who talk of postcoloniality to be best understood as a condition of a "comprador intelligentsia"; of a relatively small, Western-style, Western trained group of writers and thinkers who "mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery"; Graham Huggan for his part believes that the postcolonial writers are adept at manipulating the commercial codes of the international open market. They recognize that the value of their writing as an international commodity depends, to a large extent, on the exotic appeal it holds to an unfamiliar metropolitan audience. See "The Postcolonial Exotic" *Transition* :24
- 2 Since I provide all bibliographic information about the different editions of the books under discussion in my article, I have not repeated them in the "Works Cited" section.
- 3 For a detailed analysis of how the story of the novel's dissemination is a different one from its literary merits see Padmini Mongia's article "The Making and Marketing of Arundhati Roy." Here she also draws our attention to the fact that the book was released at the time India was also celebrating her fiftieth year of independence and a lot of media attention was geared at what is known as a new 'Indo-chic'. Mongia also goes on to contextualize Roy's discovery story in terms of the global economic climate of the mid-to late 1990s, during which India was increasingly portrayed, in the west, as a new investment opportunity and a place of untapped financial promise. This point of view is also supported by the critic Mike

Featherstone in *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* where he states that consumer culture created a new space for the development of postmodernism, particularly in Asia, which experienced a consumer boom in the 1990s (2007: xxiv).

4 Mongia draws three conclusions from the consideration of the novel's cover. First she feels that the picture of lotus flowers amongst dark gloomy leaves on the book jacket is a predictable one, as it is amongst the commonest images used to evoke the 'tropical' and the 'exotic.' The second refers to the qualitative difference of the three different photographs of Roy used in the three different editions. Thirdly, the cover replays the story of the book's 'discovery' — where the exquisite found object is itself, in part, the story of how the book came into being, a story which mirrors how the author emerged on the world literary scene.

5 Several other critics also stress to the new phenomenon of the marketing of *The God of Small Things*. For example, Sadia Toor in her article, "Indo-Chic: The Cultural Politics of Consumption in Post-Liberalization India" states:

Marketing for the book [GOST] has been dominated by glossy photographs of a very photogenic Roy, wispy tendrils of hair framing eyes that stare dreamily out. One publicity poster for the book has a four-foot image of Roy's face, beneath which is the caption 'Set to be the publishing sensation of the year', leaving much ambiguity as to whether the reference is Roy or her book, which is not mentioned even by name. The strategy is clearly one which plays into the Indian beauty myth. (2000:13)

6 Rose specifies different approaches for analyzing visual materials, namely semiology, psychoanalysis, discourse analysis and content analysis.

7 That several of the eight stories published in this volume had already appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly* and other journals was something that the average reader was not aware of.

8 The first US edition has a cover with three different segments. The top panel is big with a bright blue background with the name of the author Jhumpa Lahiri written in large fonts with the words 'WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE' added below it to add weight. The title of the book is then artistically printed in white letters in the central panel which has a deep crimson background. The third and the lowest panel is the most artistic. On

the left is an image of the American flag and on a blackboard on the right hand side the picture of a typical American mailbox is sketched ( the significance of which in the novel is immense). By the time we come to the second edition, the cover has become more sober — the bright colours giving way to an off-white background with a simple branch of a tree with two multicoloured leaves adorning it. What it most boldly announces at the top is that it is 'THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER.'

- 9 After articulating the three levels of signification, Barthes pursues another question: "What are the functions of the linguistic image with regard to the (twofold) iconic message?" (38) He then comes up with two such functions: anchorage and relay. With anchorage, "the text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image... remote-control[ing] him towards a meaning chosen in advance" (39-40, italics in text). In a system of relay, "text...and image stand in a complementary relationship...(41)"

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