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## South Asian Cultural Productions and the Garden

Considering the garden as an archive will work to broaden understandings of how displacement, trauma, and diaspora are worked out in the colonial landscape. The garden is still a private space but intimately resides against the boundary of the public. Not every home has a garden, it is constitutive but also excessive. They can be highly managed or wild, grown for aesthetics or sustenance, a space of refuge and nostalgia. They can be a site of resistance and a site of ambiguity- gardens are a silenced story. The home is a domestic, communal, and national space informing the diasporic imaginary (Gopinath, pg. 161), and I want to explore how the garden works with in this imaginary.

I've analyzed the 1996 novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*, written by Shani Mootoo a Trinidad-Canadian writer and visual artist, the 1991 film *Mississippi Masala* directed by Mira Nair- Indian-American filmmaker, and two short essays by Jamaica Kincaid- Antigua-American writer and gardener. Considering the themes of displacement, hybridity, and trauma while looking at the space of the garden in the colonial landscape may provoke broadened understandings of diaspora and home. I argue the space of the garden, as represented in these South Asian Diasporic cultural productions, work out logics of loss, trauma, and resistance mobilized against colonial and imperial structures.

This study of the garden as archive will primarily focus on the diaspora from South Asia to the Caribbean, East Africa, and North America. Diaspora in its most basic

understanding is the dispersal or movement of people from one location to other disparate sites, these movements are catalyzed through forces of domination and conquest (Gopinath, pg. 6). The South Asian diaspora to the Caribbean began in the 1830s due to the British Imperial project of indentured servitude; this constituted the movement of labor to the Caribbean colonies (Mishra, pg. 421). Indentured servitude ended in 1915 but many found themselves settled, either unable or unwilling to return. The South Asian diaspora to East Africa was due to shifting colonial policies which generated more economic opportunities for certain South Asian groups beginning in the early 1900s (Nagar, pg. 118). Diaspora's etymological roots describe a spreading of seeds (Gopinath, pg. 5). This gendered symbolism is queered when looking at how the garden functions as an archive, a literal dispersal of seeds, informing a sort of queer domesticity.

Much record of the South Asian diaspora is found in the colonial archive, which is its own hegemonic project recording specific information along with categorizing and illuminating very particular subjectivities (Mishra, pg. 426). Within Postcolonial and Feminist studies the colonial archive has been used as a resource and also problematized for the ways it has functioned and continues to function in colonial and imperial discourse. Many scholars have worked to reclaim or problematize the archive in order to broaden or recover understandings and histories of diaspora and subject formations. Analyzing the work of Mootoo, Kincaid, and Nair the garden can be seen as an alternative archive, telling stories of home that have been previously omitted or overlooked. The garden becomes a personal archive, static in space and limited in its' retrievability. But nonetheless important to the project of reimagining the archive,

“Gardens make aesthetic landscapes and political dreamscapes converge utopically, sustaining both in equal measure.” (Aravamudan, pg. 411).

Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* narrates many interwoven stories, all connected through the main protagonist, Mala Ramchandin. Mootoo explores different formations of kinship and sexuality in the town of Paradise on the fictional island of Latanacamara. The novel is engrossed in nature, exploring a bouquet of themes and settings using descriptions of nature in multiple ways until it sprouts through the pages of the book. This is marked by the illustrations of insects on the actual paper (Hong, pg. 93). The space of the garden in this novel becomes central to Mala’s story and how she handles her traumatic experiences. Various gardens are represented in this story; Mala’s garden, the Alms house garden, and the Thoroughly’s garden. I will focus most of this paper on *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Mala’s garden weaving in various passages and events as they are described in the novel while working to compare these passages to other diasporic narratives from Jamaica Kincaid and *Mississippi Masala*.

Jamaica Kincaid is an Antiguan-American writer and a gardener with most of her writing revolving around gardening and using the idea and space of the garden to discuss personal, historical, and cultural issues surrounding identity and imperialism of the Caribbean (Balutankysy, pg. 790). The film *Mississippi Masala* is set in Mississippi and follows Mina as her family continues to work through the loss of their home in Uganda and what it meant to be displaced. The space of the garden emerges in memories of home and memories of violence. Using fictional stories along with personal narratives is imperative to this project of reconsidering the archive. Literature and fiction

can offer space to integrate or reclaim certain narratives and ways of knowing and being that have historically been omitted or appropriated in the colonial archive.

This paper will explore the space of the garden through these cultural productions in three ways. In the first section I will analyze how the garden becomes integral to the home and how this space has been influenced by colonial and imperial projects by looking at *Cereus Blooms at Night* along side of a short essay by Jamaica Kincaid, *In History*. In the next section I will argue how the garden through time becomes an archive of feelings. By analyzing *Cereus Blooms at Night* along with *Mississippi Masala* I work out how the garden and memory are connected to trauma. The final section will explore the liminal possibilities of the garden. The garden mediates certain crossings between the public and private spheres and tracing this generates narratives of particular diasporic experiences articulated in these productions. Again I will analyze passages from *Cereus Blooms at Night* along with Jamaica Kincaid's *Alien Soil*. Highlighting these three areas expands the histories and understanding of diaspora and home as imagined in these specified narratives.

## **SECTION I**

### *The Garden and Home*

*She looked at her yard. Fruit trees and hot pepper trees had sprung wherever birds and insects dropped their seeds. A patch of bright orange, sweet smelling roses and a profusion of night blooming cereus plants were the only ornamentals in the yard... The yard was a jumble of different greens: the bright yellow of the lime trees, the silver of the eucalyptus, the dark blue of the mango. (Mootoo, pg 115)*

The garden becomes entangled with home in *Cereus Blooms at Night*. It is a space of refuge, resistance, and ambiguity. There is a labor involved in the cultivation of such a space, more than just reaping the reward of a bountiful harvest. The labor is

physical and emotional. The garden offers something of familiarity, in sight, smell and taste in response to this labor. Cultivation brings about the notion of familiarity and a sense of belonging. This becomes immensely important in *Cereus Blooms at Night* where so much of public and private life has been influenced and dominated by imperialist and colonialist discourse. Work is being done to reimagine the garden as an archival source. A re-imagining of gardens as a memory will work to describe a form of world making as “Gardens are sites, images, and also ideological tools that document colonial ambition, imperial success, and anticolonial revolution.” (Aravamudan, pg. 409). The space of the garden has changed over time in its role in the home and the flora and fauna it contains due to diaspora, displacement, and the colonial project. Jamaica Kincaid describes this displacement and replacement as a part of the colonial history, describing history as an open wound. Many forms of epistemic violence intertwine in Mootoo’s story to produce an interconnected story of trauma and reclamation (May, pg. 109). Mala’s garden becomes an allegorical site of colonial resistance as a queer domesticity takes form and the garden becomes a space of ambiguity and refuge pushing the boundaries of what is possible within time and space.

The descriptions of the garden at the Ramchandin home calls upon imagery of the Garden of Eden, reminiscent of the colonialist view of the Caribbean when it was being colonized (Hoving, 154; May, pg. 108). The Garden of Eden has been sought after as a sort of Utopia. Mootoo also elicits this symbolism of a Utopic space by naming the fictional town Paradise. Mala’s garden contains flora and fauna only found in the heart of the jungle. The ambiguity of the garden is this lushness exceeding the possibilities of space and time intermingled with a scent of decay, which visitors find

nauseating and overwhelming. Mootoo takes this colonialist imaginary of Utopia and destabilizes it. She does not adhere to the binary opposition of nature/culture, of pure/impure, all of this exists inside and outside of the garden (Hoving, pg. 157). The garden space of the Ramchandin household is a crucial site in the telling of Mala's story. This garden is originally established and maintained by Mala's mother Sarah, until her abrupt and agonizing departure when Mala was a child. As the years pass and Mala becomes more removed from society and more integrated into her garden, the garden begins to shift as well. As the opening quote describes, her yard has become a wild space. Time seems to function slower inside the garden than it does outside, hence why Mala's father's body is still decomposing and emitting odor decades after his death. The scale to which some things have grown, and the existence of plant and animal life thought to have gone extinct push the boundaries of what is possible. Again the binary between nature and culture is dissolved with this absolute coexistence that has evolved between Mala and her garden. This reimagining of nature has been an emergent theme in Caribbean women writers to redefine the understanding of the natural (Hoving, pg. 157).

In the short narrative, *In History*, Jamaica Kincaid questions what history even is. She calls it an idea, a theory, an open wound. She describes Columbus' voyage and his 'discovery' of her Antigua. This discovery and subsequent colonization was premised on the disappearance of native people, plants, and animals to bring in others. As she describes, those brought to Antigua were others that looked like her- referring to the slave labor brought in to work on plantations. She also discusses Carl Linnaeus and nomenclature. She questions the difference between the common name and the proper

name and how this nomenclature also works to be apart of the colonial project, "...they emptied the worlds of things animal, mineral and vegetable, of their names, and replaced these names with names pleasing to them; the recognized names are now reasonable, as reason is a pleasure to them." (Kincaid, 2001, pg. 623). This extension of how language is used to propel the colonial project is also worked out in *Cereus Blooms at Night*. After Mala remakes the garden as home she subsequently quits using spoken words. The ways of her garden and the sounds of nature become Mala's language, ridding herself of words that were inadequate to match the sensations she felt (Mootoo, pg. 126). I interpret this as a resistance to colonialism and violence standing in as not only her father's spoken word, but society's as well (May, pg. 126). Her father was raised in a missionary home and spoke, what he felt was, proper English. Chandin was the source of violence in the Ramchandin home. The town of Paradise knew about this abuse, but seemed unwilling to intervene to end it- a complicit silence. Mala abandoning speech is a mode of separation from that home and the society which never interfered to end her abuse.

In fact words are found to be inadequate in many aspects of this story. The language is limiting and limited. This is something Tyler, the narrator, points out throughout the novel regarding their own self identity and the ways in which they come to know and understand Mala (Mootoo, pg. 19, 77). There is a false promise that words bring clarity and understanding- a sense of reasonable pleasure. Mootoo works to expose how language can be apart of the perpetuation of abuse and domination, a "Narrative intelligibility and coherence are grounded in particular, not universal, assumptions that must be named if trauma is to become known and remembered, part

of public memory rather than willfully ignored.” (May, pg. 115). The villagers of Paradise, knowing about the conditions of the Ramchandin home, never intervene until Mala is taken into custody and put into the Alms house. Rendering the history of the Ramchandin family and Mala’s abuse and trauma as an open wound. The history of the Ramchandin family becomes palpable as an active archive in the space of the garden. Kincaid describes the notion of history as “each breath I take in and expel healing and opening the wound again, over and over, or is it a long moment that begins anew each day...” (Kincaid, 2001, pg. 626). History as an open wound is a prevailing theme worked out in the garden, in the story of the Ramchandins.

After a violent encounter that results in the death of Mala’s father, Chandin, Mala refuses to continue living inside the home. Although she appears to stay in the home she leaves it, choosing to live in the garden instead. She remakes her home inside the walled garden and as she becomes apart of the landscape the landscape changes along with her. The yard becomes excessive and overgrown as birds and insects work to disperse the seeds for new growth. Mala’s role of domestic keeper begins to shift. Following a life of cooking for her father and cleaning his house, she begins to ritualistically tend to the garden. Each season she would collect all of the dead remains and honorably discard them into a rare excursion into the depths of her house, a space we later find out is where Chandin’s body has been kept all this time. As she goes about this task she revels in the odor, “The scent of decay was not offensive to her. It was the aroma of life refusing to end. It was the aroma of transformation.” (Mootoo, pg. 128). In this queer domesticity Mala cultivates her garden without hierarchy, in a more holistic integrated way, incommensurable and outside the hegemony of colonial domination and

logics. Mala remakes a home in the space of the garden renounced by the colonial constructions marking a proper home. Mala's cultivated home space becomes marked by an excess in smell, the antithesis of the colonial home (Gopinath, pg. 183; Hong, pg. 92). This withdrawal from her heteropatriarchal domesticity to one defined by the space of the garden marks Mala and her yard with all of its' impossibility and excessiveness as queer.

When Mala remakes the garden as her home both the garden and Mala begin to change. Mala and the garden become illegible to the people of Paradise as the colonial logics lose dominance in this space. In this ambiguity a queer domesticity is enacted and a queer formation of time takes hold. As the garden becomes fundamental to the home it also becomes a site where memories of trauma become present. In the *Politics of Home*, Rosemary George analyzes various forms of Indian literature and in some of the examples where the garden is relevant it has been used as a site of refuge, to remove oneself from life, if only for a brief time (George, pg. 161-2). In Kincaid and Mootoo's writing of the garden it is used as a site of refuge but it is also a site of ambiguity, outside of colonial discourse, where one works out memories of trauma and modes of resistance.

## **SECTION II**

### *Garden and Trauma*

*The cerise blossoms of pomegranate swayed in the breeze. She shut her eyes and listened. The pigeons had calmed down, their feet scratching faintly against the galvanized iron. Mala's mouth remained open, her jaw dropped partly in exhaustion, partly to release heat and let air in. Her flesh had come undone. But every tingling blister and eruption in her mouth and lips was a welcome sign that she had survived. (Mootoo, pg 134).*

The garden through time becomes an archive of feelings where memory connects one to the space of the garden and emotions of trauma. This is one function of the home garden as archive, and one that I want to highlight by looking at *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Mississippi Masala*. Mala ultimately claims the garden as her home after her father's death. She lives in the garden and it changes along with her. The film *Mississippi Masala* describes a very different trauma around a different diaspora. This trauma from displacement, the uprooting of home, and the feelings surrounding this are envisioned in the garden in Kampala. The garden occupies a boundary outside of the home but still within it. This boundary space can act as refuge from either home or public and it is influenced by both. The connection between memory, trauma, and the space of the garden is distinctly present in both of these stories. To understand the full extent of how trauma is worked out in both of these narratives I argue the garden acts as an archive in these diasporic homes.

Mala's memory becomes intertwined with the elements of the garden space connecting her to sensations of agony and despair. Mala's memory of Sarah and Lavinia's departure initiates an intense visceral response. As described in the text her memory of that moment isn't lucid, "The elements seemed to pull together in perfect imitation of another moment, long ago, just after a heavy rainfall." (Mootoo, pg. 131). Mala describes hearing the insects scream the names of Asha, Sarah, Lavinia, and herself (Mootoo, pg. 132). She describes how it is the lighting, the blueness of the sky, the moisture in the air, all of these elemental factors that align during the rainy season to call upon a bodily, emotional memory of when Sarah and Lavinia left. This departure marks the beginning of her severe physical and sexual abuse by her father. She

experiences multiple losses at her home throughout her life, each being traumatic. Asha leaves when they were teenagers, and Ambrose leaves after a fight between Mala and Chandin. Even near the end of the novel, Mala's imagining of Pohpoh takes flight and leaves as Mala is removed from her home. Each departure is heartbreak for Mala. This hour when all of the elements aligned becomes unbearable for her. A total mental anguish would take over her mind and her body. She strategized against it and found a certain form of relief in her bird pepper sauce. As the light began to reflect just right she would inhale and then eat her hot pepper sauce (Mootoo, pg. 133). This flavor and heat creates a different sort of pain, one that is more manageable and distracts her from the deep emotional agony. It becomes a way of coping, a way of survival.

Mala's refusal of home and reimagining the garden of her home is resistance but also a form of ambiguity. In the novel the garden space does act as a certain retreat from earlier trauma and the society that never intervened (Hoving, pg. 157). The garden remains a constant for Mala, fixed in space that she claims as her own. But this requires she remains attached to the site of her abuse, living in the borderlands of the house, taking refuge in the garden. Trauma as a subject invokes a history by default (Cvetkovich, pg 17). As previously described this garden becomes excessive and overgrown, a way to convey the severity of trauma inflicted onto Mala. And in this excessiveness there is 'An expression of the unspeakable excess of the border-crossing that victimized Mala. The strongest element in the representation of the yard in this novel seems to be the *intensity* of its evocation of ambiguity.' (Hoving, 158). This ambiguity originating from the violence of the household, the public never intervening to end her abuse, and Mala never fully leaving the space. Forms of sexual trauma, such

as father-daughter incest, are invisibilized in certain ways due to it being restricted to the private sphere (Cvetkovich, pg. 30). By invisibilized, I mean intervention by the public is never considered in this novel. While the whole town of Paradise is aware of Mala's abuse, no one ever found it acceptable to end it. Instead everyone had their judgements and would gossip over what was happening, but the idea of it being an issue in the private sphere immobilized the public from interfering. Mala then comes to occupy the liminal space of the garden, as refuge from both the public and from the private. But the garden is not always imagined in such a way. The garden of a home can also be metaphor for a public space such as the nation, indicating another form of loss and trauma.

In *Mississippi Masala* Jay is obsessed over his lost home in Uganda. As described in the film, Jay's father had come to Uganda by the British in order to work on building the new railway. After that was completed he had decided to stay and raise his family. In the 1970s all Asians were expelled from Uganda in order to give economic control to the Indigenous population. This displacement was devastating to Jay. Throughout the film Jay is struggling with his identity and his idea of home. Whenever he imagines his home in Uganda it is always situated in the garden space overlooking Kampala. In the opening scene, as Jay comes to terms with their impending departure, he sits on a porch overlooking a lush green scene of Kampala landscape with a large lake. He is surrounded by potted plants with some in flower. It is colorful and abundant. The plants themselves are viney and lush, giving off a sense of the jungle, but being confined to pots disrupts the idea of this being a wild space. Throughout the film, as Jay has flashbacks of Uganda, all but two are situated in this space of the porch garden.

These flashbacks are always following moments of Jay reckoning with a sense of powerlessness. His imagining of home is never inside, but always in this space of this garden overlooking Kampala. This obsession and trauma of his displacement informs his anti-black racism which becomes apparent when Mina and Demetrius's relationship becomes public. Jay's imaginary of home in the space of this garden becomes an allegory for Uganda. His idea of home is compounded with his idea of nation and citizenship. His view from above, overlooking Kampala, indicates some sort of power or class status. Throughout the film he is obsessively working to reclaim his citizenship and ownership of property. I argue that his obsession and manifestation of trauma over his displacement is escalated by his loss of a certain class or economic status. This comes across when he imagines his home, always a space looking down at the vast green landscape of Kampala.

Mina's only flashback begins with her back in the house in Uganda with her family on her 6th birthday. She runs to the porch and sits on the swing looking out past the garden and towards Kampala. Jay comes to console her and to sing her happy birthday, the scene then cuts to a different time and place. She runs from a different swing with other young children to the edge of the yard. At the gate she looks out and sees a dead black man with blood on his face and moths on his body. The scene ends with her waking from this nightmare. There is no return to this memory and no reckoning of the circumstances around what had happened. Mina has a very different connection to Uganda that comes across in the film. But her traumatic memory of Uganda still connects her to the garden. For her there is no nostalgia or sense of home connecting her to Kampala. Her memories are connected to death and violence. In the film she was

never preoccupied with Uganda and never considered returning to it. It is left as a memory with no desire or ambition to reclaim Uganda as home.

In the gardens of both *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Mississippi Masala*, the home is reimagined and notions of loss are worked out differently. In Mala's garden her home is a site of refuge, resistance, and ambiguity. Her garden is overgrown and wild, she exists as part of the garden invoking no hierarchy over the space. Mala's garden thrives with complete abundance. Jay's imaginary of home and garden invokes a particular power differential. As he views Kampala from above in his garden, this view indicates some sort of economic status. His imaginary of home in the space of this garden represents the nation of Uganda. In his garden all the plants are potted, everything is well maintained. There is a manageability and control represented in this space. Jay's garden invokes a sense of ownership, something that Jay is working to reclaim throughout the film. In both of the gardens, the logic of loss and trauma are being worked out through memory. These different modes of representation in both the film and the novel still show how memory of home is situated in the space of the garden. In both *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Mississippi Masala* the garden becomes an allegorical site to work out notions of home and colonial domination and the subsequent violence inflicted. This allegory of the garden can then provide liminal possibilities of being a space of private, communal, and national imaginaries of home.

### **SECTION III**

#### *Liminality*

*Lavinia loved the freedom and wildness in Sarah's garden, so unlike her mother's well-ordered, colour coordinated beds. She brought clippings and whole plants ripped from*

*Mrs. Thoroughly's garden... and one memorable day she arrived with cactus plant, one each for Pohpoh and Asha. Cereus, she called them... ragged and unsightly until they bloomed." (Mootoo, 53)*

The garden simultaneously is a boundary between public and private spheres, mediating certain crossings. Tracing the cereus cuttings, as they move in the novel, can highlight the various queer formations of kin that emerge in this story. The cuttings or even the blooms of the cereus plant tend to indicate some queer kin formation or shift within the novel, affecting both the private and public lives of those in Paradise. This liminality is also highlighted in how the open secret of Mala's abuse is handled by the public and Mala finding refuge from both society and home within the garden forming a queer domesticity. Through Mala's resistance and queer domesticity an effect of hybridization forms in how she affects others in the novel. The liminal possibilities of Mala's garden trace a diasporic imaginary and colonial resistance that illuminate other ways of knowing and being that have been erased through colonial logics.

The cereus cuttings emerge throughout the story, being given as gifts or tokens of affection. The first cutting, as indicated from the opening quote, came from Lavinia. A cutting she brought from her mother's garden, the missionary home. The source of the colonial influence on the Ramchandin home originates from the Thoroughly's missionary home. These cuttings are a gift for Pohpoh and Asha but also come at a time when the love and desire between Sarah and Lavinia is growing. Ultimately when Pohpoh learns of her mother's plan to leave with Lavinia, she packs a bag including a new cutting of the cereus plant she prepared for her departure (Mootoo, pg. 62). When it came time for them to leave, Pohpoh runs back to the house to grab this bag when Chandin returns and discovers their plan. He gets hold of the children and Lavinia and

Sarah are forced to leave without them. This departure marks when Mala's abuse begins. The cereus cutting emerges again after Mala is institutionalized at the Alms house. Otoh and Ambrose bring her a cutting, and it is one year later when blooms begin to emerge. This movement of the cereus cuttings as well as its' willful hardness represents diaspora in the novel. The way in which it is moved, pieced, transplanted, and scrutinized calls upon the same idea of diaspora, a dispersal and movement of people either through choice or forces of domination (May, pg. 123).

The passage of the cereus cuttings seem to affect both the private and the public consequently due to it occupying this boundary space. In the novel the scent of the cereus blooms travel into the homes of others, "Neighbors in deep sleep stirred, suddenly restless. Some were pried awake but were soon pleasantly besotted by the perfume and swept back into deep sleep." (Mootoo, pg. 138). The town of Paradise as a whole seem to bask in the scent of the cereus blooms from Mala's garden, even as the garden and herself remain illegible to them. Those who either dismiss the cereus plant or Mala's garden become intrigued and curious when blossoms begin to form. The intoxication of the scent signals the possibility of rupture, for a social yet to come, for a break down in the colonial logics that have influenced and constructed Paradise.

In all the descriptions of the cereus plant it is described as unsightly and unruly but the blooms themselves create nostalgia or desire for something to come. There is a desire or curiosity for something previously dismissed and devalued. These moments of desire are important to attend to in how individuals in the novel, like Mala, Otoh, Tyler, and Hector, gain confidence or hope, overcome notions of shame or fear. The cereus cuttings and the emergent blooms also seem to offer some sort of possibility for queer

desires and kin formations, a possibility that is absent in the public sphere. The cereus plant, either the blooms or the cuttings, begin to hold value and significance in the desires that form between Sarah and Lavinia, Otoh and Tyler, Mala and imaginary Pohpoh, and even Tyler and Hector's platonic connection.

I find this mobility of the cereus plant, between the public and private, as an allusion to a form of hybridity. Cereus is native to Latancamara but unknown to many residents, in fact the original cutting came from the missionary home. Tyler themselves claims they first saw it when studying abroad in the Wetlands. Formations of hybridity seem to be cultivated in the garden and can also ascribe to the ambiguity of the space. In the essay *Alien Soil*, Jamaica Kincaid describes historical accounts of gardens kept by white colonizers in Antigua during slavery and occupation. These gardens being highly stylized and obsessively shaped, give off a feeling of sterility and control. She describes her memory as a child in Antigua and how these influences remained in certain ways. There was a certain class privilege shown through growing a flower garden over a vegetable garden. As the opening passage suggests, much of Mala's garden originated from the Thoroughly's garden- the source of all colonial influence in the novel, this "demonstrates tenaciously that the presence of hybridity is not necessarily evidence of anticolonial resistance; rather, intermixture and promiscuity are signs of imperial success through transplantation." (Aravamudan, pg. 409). But Mootoo does take this idea of hybridity and pushes it further, and creates a site of resistance in Mala's garden. Mala's use of the garden space and how this subtlety, and at times palpably, affects others in the novel push this notion of hybridity into a mode of resistance. An example of this would be Ambrose's constant sleep, resisting colonial

logics of productivity. It isn't until Mala is forced to leave the garden that Ambrose reawakens. The garden is a reterritorialization of what is considered home space. It is a "private open space", not being fully public nor fully domestic (George, pg. 29). This creates multiple forms of hybridity to emerge from these liminal possibilities.

Mala's open secret also exists within liminal space due to the two forms of ignorance present in the novel. Her story is private and public, and the reader is starkly aware of this. The violence she faces from her father is outright, but the complicit silence of the town in effect becomes compounded as another form of violence through their willful ignorance (May, pg. 110). The villagers of Paradise who have known of Mala's abuse refuse to intervene becoming complicit in the colonial legacy and violence, "One of the most evident and painful forms of willful ignorance in the novel can be found in the form of the open secret: the community's knowledge of Mala's suffering years of rape by her father." (May, pg. 115). The passive role of the community, with their knowledge of Mala's abuse, highlights how passivity is a key tool in domination projects.

Mala enacts a different form of ignorance, one of strategic ignorance, in where she becomes resistant to the colonial logic of being, "forging and nourishing a decolonized imagination." (May, pg. 110), as demonstrated by her end to using spoken words and her queer domesticity within the garden. The open secret of the Ramchandin home is a form of liminality, informing hybridity as the different modes of ignorance intermingle as Mala's story is told. In Kincaid's *Alien Soil* she writes "When these people (the Antiguans) lived under the influence of other people (the English), there was naturally an attempt among some of them to imitate their rulers in this particular way- by rearranging the landscape- and they did it without question. They can't be faulted for not

asking what it was they were doing; that is the way things work” (Kincaid, 1993, pg. 2). The town of Paradise becomes an amnesiac archive, similar to how Kincaid describes. They do not question and they do not act, they remain silent- ‘that is the way things work’. The space of her garden becomes the site for remembrance while the villagers of Paradise have chosen to forget.

The garden is a liminal site that catalyzes different formations of hybridity between the private and the public spheres. The cactus cuttings move between homes, affect the village with their sight and smell, and signify queer formations of kin that appear in resistance to colonial logics and domination. Mala herself becomes hybridized in her resistance- making the garden her home and enacting queer domesticity. The open secret of the Ramchandin home exists as another type of liminality in this novel. The multiple modes of ignorance that maintain this secret represent either complicity or resistance. In the space of liminality that this secret exist there is possibility for these modes to hybridize and effect both private and public realms. The colonial influence remains in ways that may not be explicitly evident, but the legacy of violence and domination subsists in both the home and the public. Thus, why the garden becomes such an essential site of resistance in *Cereus Blooms at Night*.

## **CONCLUSION**

*Asha, if these words have already found your eyes, for the sake of your sister who worships your memory please return and pay her a visit... She expects you any day soon. You are, to her, the promise of a cactus-scented breeze on a Paradise night. (Mootoo, pg. 249)*

Through the South Asian Diasporic cultural productions analyzed in this paper, the garden is imagined as so much more than merely adjacent to the home. It becomes an archive- a silenced story waiting to be recognized. The garden becomes a vital site to work out the logics of loss and trauma mobilized against colonial projects.

Mala makes the garden her home. In this act it becomes an allegorical site of colonial resistance, forming a queer domesticity. The garden also becomes queered in this new domesticity. Queer as capacious, in all the excessiveness and ambiguity of the garden. The memory of loss is also intimately entangled to the space of the garden, as demonstrated in *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *Mississippi Masala*. The garden offers a sort of refuge to work out this trauma. In effect, the garden then becomes an archive in the way it connects to memory- as a personal history. The garden becomes bountiful in possibilities, in part due to its' liminality. This liminality sows forms of hybridization that affect both the private and public spheres. As the garden spills out and travels- as shown by the mobility of the cereus cuttings- new understandings or desires for ways of knowing or being are realized. As Kincaid puts it, 'history can be an open wound' and this is what the garden remembers. This form of remembrance is crucial in expanding the understanding of diasporic experiences within Mootoo, Nair, and Kincaid's work. The ruptures of possibility cultivated in the garden work out modes of colonial resistance amid the colonial landscape, as the "Imperial cultivation produces anticolonial revolution as its rebellious fruit." (Aravamudan, pg. 411). Analyzing fictional and personal narratives is crucial and can render space to integrate or reclaim certain narratives of diaspora and trauma when considering the possibilities of the garden as a site of resistance.

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