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► **To cite this version:**

Sandeep Bakshi. Past matters: Queer contestations of colonial masculinity in Leslie de Noronha's *The Dew Drop Inn* and Shyam Selvadurai's *Cinnamon Gardens*. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 2015, 51 (5), pp.543-555. 10.1080/17449855.2015.1066411 . hal-01964447v2

**HAL Id: hal-01964447**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01964447v2>**

Submitted on 11 Jan 2019

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PRE PRINT

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**Past matters: Queer contestations of colonial masculinity in Leslie de Noronha's The Dew Drop Inn and Shyam Selvadurai's Cinnamon Gardens**

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Sandeep Bakshi (2015) Past matters: Queer contestations of colonial masculinity in Leslie de Noronha's The Dew Drop Inn and Shyam Selvadurai's Cinnamon Gardens, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 51:5, 543-555, DOI: [10.1080/17449855.2015.1066411](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2015.1066411)

Past matters: Queer contestations of colonial masculinity in Leslie de Noronha's *The Dew Drop Inn* and Shyam Selvadurai's *Cinnamon Gardens*

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This article addresses the colonial encounter, which often appears as the primal scene in the field of colonial discourse analysis and postcolonial studies, with specific reference to South Asia. Through a thorough reading of two texts, Leslie de Noronha's novel *The Dew Drop Inn* (1994) and Shyam Selvadurai's second novel *Cinnamon Gardens* (1999), it provides a critical framework of queer/postcolonial analysis within which to comprehend the novels' contestations of predominant literary tropes of the Raj. In examining colonial relations between men and same-sex interracial desire through a reorientation of contemporary queer research it thus works against the master narrative of European imperialism, which evacuates South Asian subjectivity even while attempting to portray it. To read queer self-definition (s) from a postcolonial perspective provides a significant nuance to the frame of interracial desire in the colonial era. The article contends that both novels reference, challenge and contradict colonial forerunners, in the form of novels by Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster and Paul Scott. By considering such postcolonial narratives as a counter-response to literature of the Raj, it attempts to recover the queer South Asian subject as an agential formation rather than an object of colonial desire.

Keywords: Leslie de Noronha; Shyam Selvadurai; queer; masculinity; interracial desire; the Raj

The following discussion offers a critical assessment of the intersection of male homosexuality with the ambivalence of interracial desire in the colonial period. Providing insights into the homoerotic anxiety that defines the male cross-cultural dimension of the colonial divide, it identifies the queer-interracial frame as "a historical archive for both individuals and communities, one that is excavated through the very act of desiring the racial Other" (Gopinath 2005, 1). My analysis engages with postcolonial representations of the "queerly" colonial episode in Leslie de Noronha's *The Dew Drop Inn* (1994) and Shyam Selvadurai's second novel *Cinnamon Gardens* (1999) by arguing that both texts rework and rearticulate the political anxiety surrounding interracial male homosexuality which was routinely thematized in historical fiction from *Kim* (1901) to *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966). I suggest that Noronha and Selvadurai's novels interrogate Kipling and Forster's tropes of interracial desire by queering the story of same-sex male desire in interracial experience. In this regard, I extend Leela Gandhi's (2002) assertion that "any coherent understanding of homoerotic articulation and disarticulation in such [Indo-Anglian] literature requires that we return, once again, to the scene of the colonial encounter" (88). The two key questions that impel this article are:

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can an examination of homosexuality and colonial history open up a new interstice of queer self-definition(s) from a postcolonial perspective? Do Noronha and Selvadurai's narratives function as a counter-response to colonial texts, given that they acknowledge but simultaneously revise, challenge and contradict established literary tropes in historical/imperialist fiction?

Colonialism was not a monolithic category, nor did it produce unidirectional effects on the colonies. However, imperialism and sexuality were intimately connected in the colonial imagination, wherein the fantasy of the homosexuality of South Asian natives coincided with the threat of the non-European (heterosexual) rapist. The varying responses to the imaginary colonial construct that I present in this article point to the fractures of class, race, language, sexuality and gender that the British colonizers wilfully disregarded in order to control sexualities and maintain the "myth about the integrity of cultures" (Burton 1998, 4). The Indian and Sri Lankan postcolonial responses to the fiction of the Raj decentre the colonial narrative of native sexual practices through a rewriting of it from the perspective of native and biracial homosexual bodies, which functions in contrast to the non-European heterosexual rapist of imperialist fiction mentioned above. Refusing to be constrained simply as objects of colonial desire, the colonized queer males become intelligible as desiring subjects within South Asian specificities of race, class and language.

This article, following Christopher Lane (1995), combines "the aim of an established field of colonial inquiry and a growing body of literary and historical work on same-sex representation" (xi). Subsequent to the publication of Ronald Hyam's extensive work on sexuality in the colonial period in *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (1990), Lane's seminal analysis of colonial homosexuality in *The Ruling Passion* (1995) and Joseph Bristow's account of homoerotic writing after 1885 in *Effeminate England* (1995) have initiated academic interest in the intersection of queer theory with colonial discursive practices. Hema Chari (2001), for instance, points to the "predominantly heterosexual frameworks of postcolonial theory" (208) resulting in the elision of same-sex desire in the otherwise invaluable contributions of notable postcolonial theorists. Her critique of Foucault's oft-cited account of the birth of the homosexual is particularly helpful in reading Noronha's and Selvadurai's narratives, since it links the construction of the colonial other as sexually deviant to the establishment of the category of homosexuality in Europe. Further, the article extends the recent scholarship on colonial/postcolonial masculinity in India that was initiated by Mrinalini Sinha (1995). Departing from the historical frame of colonial heteromascularity and the concept of "muscular nationalism" (Banerjee 2012), it generates critical conversations around the ongoing discussions of "labelling and naming" in the context of Indian homosexual practices (Bhaiya 2007, 69). Foregrounding these interactions, its reading of Selvadurai and Noronha's novels highlights the significance of a South Asian response to interracial same-sex desire during the Raj.

Selvadurai and Noronha reverse the imperial homosexual gaze by appropriating and contesting dominant representations of the colonizer/colonized binary which occlude the subjectivity of the latter. However, their response to representations of interracial same-sex desire cannot easily be defined as a singular and/or synthetic whole. British colonialism was not "internally coherent", nor did it generate "a single and self-evident colonial homosexuality" in British literature (Lane 1995, xi). Critical interpretations of the imperial attitude to homosexuality include the homophobia manifested in the legal prohibition of homosexual activity in Britain and its colonies. Nevertheless, the ambivalence of colonial dictates fostered homosocial bonding. Robert Aldrich (2003) explains

that “British law codes made homosexual acts illegal in India, though they did not forbid intimacy between men that might have a homosocial component” (276). Further, whereas Radhika Mohanram (2007) describes the colonial indictment of homosexuality as a “disavowal of ‘black’ behaviour” since black male sexuality indicated degeneration and perversion (84–85), Gandhi (2002) asserts the creation of “a counteractive form of dissident or radical homo/bisexual[ity]” as a derivative effect of aggressive colonial homophobia (88–89). Thus, different interpretations of interracial same-sex desire in South Asian literature lead to a multiplicity of representations. The two novels therefore portray different and contradictory embodiments of male homosexuality. Although both engage with the complexity of same-sex desire, their articulation of queerness in the colonial/postcolonial context differs, from the gradual acceptance of homo/bisexuality after a sustained period of internalized homophobia in *Cinnamon Gardens* to the recurrence of homophobic guilt that leads to suicide in *The Dew Drop Inn*. The novels’ postcolonial South Asian response to historical and imperial fiction seeks to re-centre interracial same-sex desire in the colonial era, and enact a subaltern re-situating of sexual identities and a more vigorous understanding of masculinity.

Given the complexity of concerns raised by the novels, a critical examination of both texts is timely in terms of repositioning colonial masculinity studies and cross-racial homosexual relations. In the only published review of *The Dew Drop Inn*, Peter Nazareth (1995) compares Noronha’s thematic concerns to Salman Rushdie’s exploration of “colonialism, neo-colonialism, classism, and racism” (871). Both Noronha’s narrative, set in pre- and post-independent India, and Selvadurai’s fictional account of late-1920s Sri Lanka re-inscribe the themes of same-sex and interracial desire in post-colonial South Asia. A queer reading of the novels articulates what Gayatri Gopinath (2005) has called “the barely submerged histories of colonialism and racism” (2). Noronha’s (1994) account, for instance, is located in the transition from the end of the British Raj to independence when “the Union Jack on the Flag Pole on the crest of Gun Hill was replaced by the Indian Congress Flag” (17). Set in both independent India and Britain, it intertwines the stories of a wide array of people, and functions, in a manner akin to Scott’s novels, as an archive of the end-of-the-Raj society. The novel’s key focus is the life of an Anglo-Indian, Steven, in both Britain and India, whose rape and ultimate suicide marks a turning point in the narrative. The biraciality of Steven and the novel’s dual setting – in part in Britain – function as important aspects of the South Asian responses to homosexuality. Considered, when residing in Goa, as a closeted homosexual by Claude, Edwin and Jake (the three gay Indian residents at the inn), Steven is overcome by feelings of guilt related to his latent homosexuality. This guilt leads ultimately to his death, which symbolizes the overarching theme of the demise of the Raj, of which he is the most ostensible signifier on account of his biracial heritage, as will be argued below.

In *Cinnamon Gardens*, the parallel narratives of Balendran Navaratnam and his niece Annalukshmi Kandiah centre on the desiring South Asian subject. Annalukshmi’s desire for social and sexual emancipation mirrors the sexual transgression of Balendran’s immensely brave gesture as he accepts his desire for his former lover, the Englishman Richard Howland. Balendran’s and Annalukshmi’s desires are profoundly connected to the other underlying theme, that of the decolonization of Ceylon (the colonial name for Sri Lanka until 1972). The political backdrop of the Donoughmore Commission of 1927, which dealt with the question of constitutional reforms in colonial Sri Lanka, serves to underscore the protagonists’ struggle for independence. Balendran’s lover Richard is a member of the Commission, which purports to review the limited franchise

accorded to Sri Lankans in 1921. Balendran's desire for Richard and the constraints of his family life, since Balendran is married to Sonia, parallel the social movements of decolonization. Queerness therefore functions as a relational text, sutured to themes of colonialism, independence, and Annalukshmi's participation in the struggle for women's enfranchisement, and class politics.

In *Cinnamon Gardens*, same-sex desire connects to the colonial frame through Balendran's expression of sexual attraction via colonial imagery. Waiting in his study for Richard to arrive as a member of the Donoughmore Commission from England, Balendran's discovery of Edward Carpenter's novel *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta: Sketches in Ceylon and India*,<sup>1</sup> disrupts his normative life as a married man with a son. It forces him to reminisce about his past relationship with Richard in England, and "the trip Richard and he had made to see Carpenter after reading his *Intermediate Sex*. [ ... ] There, for the first time, he learnt that inversion had already been studied by scientific men who did not view it as pathological" (Selvadurai 1999, 53).

For Balendran, the affirmation of queerness as non-pathological becomes available through the colonial parameters of scientific men. As Philip Holden suggests, "it is [ ... ] a moment that is quickly incorporated into a very colonial rationality, Balendran naming his sexuality as identity through the support of scientific men" (2003, 295). In other words, the articulation of same-sex desire paradoxically yet implicitly depends upon the availability of colonial science, which is directly responsible for the subjugation of the South Asian subject through its coding of racial hierarchy.<sup>2</sup>

Balendran recalls his astonishment when, with Richard, he visited Carpenter and his lover George Merrill: "Balendran had been amazed and then intrigued by the way they lived [ ... ] the way they had carved a life out for themselves, despite such strong societal censure" (Selvadurai 1999, 54). Balendran's position as a racial subject, however, renders a biracial union impossible. The narrative disrupts the identification of queerness for the colonized South Asian subject by unequivocally pointing to the mechanism of subjugation produced by the very colonial rationality that Balendran evokes to understand his sexuality. Despite his class privilege, the image of "the shabbily dressed Indian gentleman" with "an excessive deference" (55) is a constant reminder to Balendran of his own status as a colonized citizen of the empire. In such a scheme, imitation of paradigms of European emancipation does not guarantee liberation for the South Asian homosexual subject.

Elucidating the reasons behind the break-up between himself and Balendran, Richard tells his new lover Alli that Balendran's father turned up at their flat in England to put an end to their relationship. Richard explains that after Balendran's precipitate departure, Balendran's father "threatened to have the police charge me with sodomy" and adds that, "after all, it hadn't been that long since the Wilde trial" (Selvadurai 1999, 128). The evocation of the emancipatory queer moment in the Carpenter-Merrill episode stands in direct contrast to the violent effect of the imperial law against homosexuality in the Wilde trials. The trials bear witness to the widespread homosexual panic of the period and highlight the prominence of what Stoler (2002) calls the "affective grid of colonial politics" (7) in which intimate sexual relations became central to imperial rule. The novel therefore shows the ramification of the trials as a means of exposing the ferocity of colonial laws, which prohibited homosexual activities under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (1860) and Section 365A of the penal code of Sri Lanka (1883). These laws were enacted to shift British attitudes towards the colonies after the 1857 uprising in India "wherein it was imperative that the rulers maintain their sexual, social and racial 'purity'" (Bhaskaran 2004, 80).

The result of the change in imperial governance was manifested in the penalization of homosexuality in the colonies and the adoption of “peculiar Purity laws and conventions” in Britain in the 1890s (Hyam 1990, 88).

In this regard, Richard’s memory is significant since it locates the queer subject, both British and South Asian, as an embattled identity. Colonial science simultaneously incorporates racial hierarchy and heteropatriarchy. It certainly empowers Balendran’s father, the patriarch, to arbitrate between both his son and Richard. Therefore, the violent repercussion of colonial dictates on the lives of Balendran and Richard suggests that Balendran was mistaken in hoping for queer emancipation through colonial science.

The dispute between Richard and Balendran’s father exemplifies the ways in which postcolonial operations of power validate and reproduce colonial oppression. Balendran’s father, the Mudaliyar (the chief), is representative of the nation’s elite, whose privilege is dependent upon colonial rule, which reinforces the imperial binary between colonizer and colonized. As a member of the upper echelons of colonial Colombo, he lives in the affluent enclave of Cinnamon Gardens and aims to participate in the birth of the independent nation. However, his violent encounter with Richard attests to the continuation of colonial authority in reproducing masculinized homophobia.

The paralysing weight of colonial law equally affects Balendran’s formulation of queerness, which is regularly disaffirmed through recourse to clandestine liaisons. His discreet encounters with Ranjan, an army recruit, function as a continuation of the colonial class privileges afforded to wealthy men, as Balendran takes advantage of this prerogative to assure Ranjan’s discretion through monetary benefits. The transaction is at least partially a malign consequence of colonial law, as the penalization of homosexual activities produces covert homosexuality through which homophobia becomes internalized. As Vera Alexander (2006) remarks, “if homosexuality is banned in England, it certainly is a dark secret worth keeping in Ceylonese society” (156). Historically, the Labouchère Amendment (1885) banned acts of “gross indecency” between men in both the public and private domains. Bristow notes that the repercussions for homosexual practices were particularly significant: “this pernicious piece of legislation until very recently created a climate of secrecy and fear in the lives of men-loving men” (1995, 1). In *Cinnamon Gardens*, surreptitious homosexual relations become a part of articulating queerness as they give rise to Balendran’s internalized homophobia. Even though the narrative unfolds as a gradual dissipation of the homophobic guilt generated by colonial law, Balendran’s discreet same-sex meetings with Ranjan are paradigmatic of the feelings spawned by the panic involving illegal homosexual activity. His “terrible anguish” (75) after routine meetings with Ranjan suggests that homophobic guilt is a logical effect of the colonial statute against homosexuality.

The enduring connection between colonial logic and the homophobic impulse to disavow same-sex desire is further complicated in *The Dew Drop Inn*. Just as the British Empire provides a colonial backdrop to *Cinnamon Gardens*, the narration of “The Book of Steven Murray” in Noronha’s novel commences “in the 1920s and 30s when the British Raj was paramount and English colonial life-style was supreme” (1994, 118). Although his Anglo-Indian heritage challenges the injunction of racial purity in the empire disseminated by the Purity Campaigns of the 1890s, Steve, as Steven is called in the novel, paradoxically comes to represent Englishness through his Anglo-Indian origins. Noronha asserts that Anglo-Indians “were piously Christian, anglicised, Western in dress and habit, clean, and spoke English” (121). Similarly, Steve “in the tradition of a community that completely identified itself with the British [ ... ] thought

of himself as an Englishman” (133). In her work on the interconnections between race and sex, Mohanram contends that “if sexuality is predicated on notions of difference, then the bodily difference that race provides is fundamental not only to desire but to the perception of sexuality and sexual practices” (2007, 83). Steve’s homophobic containment of his sexual drive is an instance of how his “perception of sexuality” is mediated through his racial difference. His rape by Claude, Edwin and Jake, and his eventual suicide, function as a rejection of homophobic colonial Englishness that he embodies through his biracial heritage. The novel dramatizes his repression of homosexual desire by linking it to his racial descent.

Steve’s non-acceptance of his own queerness is intimately connected to the indeterminacy of his racial genealogy. His Anglo-Indian heritage recalls that of Kipling’s famous hero Kim, the often-cited model of cultural hybridity: “though he was burned black as any native; though he spoke the vernacular by preference, [ ... ] Kim was white” (Kipling [1901] 1989, 49). However, where Kipling’s purpose, as Edward Said’s (1994) reading of *Kim* emphasizes, “is in fact to show the absence of conflict” (146), Noronha’s response consists of highlighting “the tragedy of the community, the legendary Eurasian or half-caste descendants of casual liaisons between British Tommies and the local prostitutes” (1994, 118).<sup>3</sup> Hyam (1990, 115–117) suggests that the tragedy of the Anglo-Indian community was a direct outcome of British policies in the colonies whereby the East India Company reversed its position on intermarriage following a violent uprising against white rule in the French colony of Saint Domingo in 1791. Noronha’s text, unlike *Kim*, does not eschew the violence of colonial rule; it foregrounds that violence in the particular tragedy of the Anglo-Indian community.

Noronha carefully addresses the apparent lack of colonial conflict in *Kim* by describing a crisis of cultural identity in the Raj. While Kim is able to conceive of his loyalties to both the British Empire and British India, the Anglo-Indian community of Byculla in Bombay in *The Dew Drop Inn* identifies itself with the British and regards the Indians as natives. In *Kim*, the question of allegiance is rapidly subsumed under the colonial logic of a successful empire, but in Noronha’s text it signifies the disparity between real/geographical home and a fantasized homeland: “the Anglo-Indians were totally and always unquestioningly loyal to their King, Country (England) and the Union Jack.” Thus, when “the Sun was setting over the mighty British Raj”, Steve and his mother Beth, like several other Anglo-Indians, leave for Britain which “they fondly imagined was ‘Home’ ” (de Noronha 1994, 131).

Steve’s sojourn in England attests to the defeat of the positive images of the empire that fuel Kipling’s text. Noronha’s representation of Steve undermines the colonial logic of coexistence that marks *Kim*. Steve’s double crises of identity in terms of racial/cultural and sexual identification confound the legitimacy of the empire by showing it to be in profound disorder. Although he carries a British passport, he fails to comprehend how “a passport nationality and a ‘country of origin or birth’ nationality could be different” (de Noronha 1994, 133). Unlike Kim, Steve’s cultural and racial hybridity threatens to dissolve his perception of identity into chaos. He undergoes what Frantz Fanon (1988) in his work on colonial alienation describes as a process of “absolute depersonalization” (53), such that he feels estranged from his Anglo-Indian origins. His incomprehension at being part of a community that called Indians black or disparagingly referred to them as “niggers” or “natives” underlines the force of the imperial gaze in producing a racially split subject in Steve.

The racial split in Steve induces him to suppress his Indian heritage in his hyphenated Anglo-Indian identity. He gives up the “unequal struggle” in order “to believe he



really was English, grandparents and Byculla conveniently forgotten” (de Noronha 1994, 134–135). This anxiety of difference leads him to a denial of the other half of his identity – the Indian heritage. It further catalyses an internalization of racial hierarchy in which the Anglo-Indian subject becomes the object of contempt. His mother Beth’s internalized shame at being an Anglo-Indian herself is manifest in the verbal assaults on her son: “You filthy, dirty, half-caste bugger, guttersnipe, you bloody bastard!” (146). As a consequence, he constantly reminds himself of his English nationality. When Reverend Taylor offers him the post of physical instructor in a residential school in India, he consciously suppresses his Indian origins, even though the reverend assures him that Anglo-Indians are considered Indians after independence; Steve asserts that “My passport is British and I’m a British citizen” (148). His evocation of a British passport is his protest against the anxiety of difference.

Steve’s internal conflict can be interpreted as a critique of the absence of colonial conflict in *Kim*. Noronha further accentuates this racial conflict by connecting it with the crisis of Steve’s sexual identity, and foregrounding questions of racial identity as key signifiers in his denial of same-sex desire. The indeterminacy of Steve’s racial origins (“half-caste bugger”) is replicated in his disavowal of homosexuality. The novel suggests that his mother’s promiscuity leads to his repulsion at heterosexuality. As such, “sex with women, even the picture of a nude woman” repels Steve to the “point of deep nausea” (de Noronha 1994, 157). Although Steve is convinced that he is indifferent to same-sex desire, he relives the pleasure of the forced sexual orgy with Claude, Edwin and Jake, his co-residents at the inn. After his rape,

he actually stretched his limbs languorously to again feel that muscular pain of strain and bruising that was almost erotic, as it was a subconscious re-statement of virility by a strong athletic body. And with that vaguely erotic feeling, there came another shocking realisation. *He had wanted it. He had enjoyed it. He wanted more. And more. Endlessly.* (169; emphasis in original)

In a manner similar to Balendran’s feelings of shame and agony in the sexual encounters with Ranjan in *Cinnamon Gardens*, the articulation of homosexual desire is expressed in the contradictory incorporation of pain within the act of pleasure.

Additionally, like Balendran’s homophobic guilt, Steve’s internalization of homophobia is constructed around the operations of colonial power. His suicide, which effaces desire, is provoked by the guilt of betraying his father. The erotic pleasure after his rape crystallizes to become a “newly-discovered, still dimly recognised need in him” (de Noronha 1994, 170). However, the emergent recognition of queerness is immediately pulverized by the evocation of racial genealogy and colonial science: “The genes of an unknown father, an Englishman, surfaced. The unknown father had bred these seeds of honour in him.” Steve, the son of an Englishman, is regarded as “the bastard son of a whore” in the system governed by a colonial logic of racial control and stratification (170–171). The thoughts about his father uncover the racial/biological essentialism in colonial discourse – a discourse that, through the colonial law against homosexuality, equally forecloses the possibility of an affirmative queerness. Therefore, his suicide, indicative of an internalized homophobia, is firmly sutured to his racial guilt, produced by the colonial exchange.

In his readings of same-sex desire in British colonial representations, Lane considers how “sexual desire between men frequently ruptured Britain’s imperial allegory by shattering national unity” (1995, 4). His argument is apposite when considering the South Asian counter-response to narratives of cohesion of the British Empire. In the

novel, members of the Anglo-Indian community expose the limits of allegiance as their shifting identifications challenge any conceptualization of national unity. Although they identify with the white British and leave India after independence, the English regard them as blacks. As a violent outcome of the colonial policies of racial purity, Steve's death renders visible the false coherence of the imperial project of which masculinized heteronormativity was an integral element.

Additionally, in his dual heritage as an Anglo-Indian, Steve represents the alleged harmonious unity of the colonizer and the colonized in the empire. This imperial/national concord, Anne McClintock (1995) suggests, is predicated on the "metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial – the 'national family,' the 'global family of nations,' the colony as a 'family of black children ruled over by a white father'" (358). Steve's racialized body becomes significant, however, as it disrupts the very narrative of congruent "social hierarchy" by pointing to colonial aporia in relation to violence within the empire. The narrator in *Cinnamon Gardens* rightly asserts that dominant interpretations of colonial rule disregard "the crippling poverty and illiteracy, the terrible health and sanitary conditions" in the colonies (Selvadurai 1999, 104). Steve's rape and suicide emblemize the eruption of discordant elements in the empire through which hegemonic colonial narratives are undermined. His final act of sexual pleasure with "his erection pounding, followed by a violent ejaculation" represents the brutality of the empire (de Noronha 1994, 171). The violence of the colonial encounter becomes instrumental in the annihilation of Steve's homosexual and biracial body in order to make the affirmative postcolonial homosexuality of Claude, Edwin and Jake more visible by contrast.

The multiple issues and themes in both novels function as South Asian attempts to address the absence of disorder in imperialist fiction. Although some representations of chaos and instability do appear in British fiction of the Raj, they do not incorporate issues of auto-subjectivity by South Asians themselves. In her reading of *Kim*, Paroma Roy (1998) notes Kipling's "wilful forgetting" of the 1857 Mutiny "in a novel about the everyday vigilance necessary to sustain India as British" (76). In the technique of "remembering to forget", India remains "transparent and knowable" despite its differentiations in terms of language, religion and caste, and it appears as "an unproblematic landscape" (76). In another instance, J.G. Farrell's novel *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) centres around the events of the 1857 Indian Rebellion, but its narrative from a specifically British point of view creates an imbalance of sympathy, such that colonial agents almost appear as victims of their own violence. Selvadurai and Noronha's texts undermine such narratives of masquerade by referencing decolonizing movements in Sri Lanka and India. South Asian fiction departs from its western counterpart by incorporating moments of hostility as an integral attribute of the colonial encounter. The exodus of Anglo-Indians from India, the women's movement in Sri Lanka, the struggle for Home Rule, and Steve's rape and subsequent suicide are signifiers of the inherent instabilities of colonial rule.

Steve's rape in *The Dew Drop Inn* draws upon the textual figuration of the tension between the colonizer and the colonized, in which rape functions as a "concept-metaphor for imperialism" (Sharpe 1993, 140). Interracial rape became a recurrent trope in Anglo-Indian fiction after the Indian Revolt of 1857. In an instance of intertextuality, both *The Dew Drop Inn* and *Cinnamon Gardens* reference the two most significant works in the imperialist fiction canon that deploy the metaphor of rape as a defining feature of colonial relations: Forster's novel *A Passage to India* (1924) and Paul Scott's *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966). Both Forster's and Scott's narratives dramatize colonial

tension in the literary trope of interracial rape.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in *The Dew Drop Inn*, Noronha locates Steve's rape in the context of interracial rape, resulting from the violence of colonial intervention. Additionally, Annalukshmi's refusal in *Cinnamon Gardens* to read *A Passage to India*; the interiors of the Inn, that resemble "a movie from a Paul Scott novel", and the search of Charlotte Merrywood, a historical romance writer, for the authentic history of colonial Goa in *The Dew Drop Inn*, all suggest the presence of canonical works of fiction of the Raj (254).

Although *The Dew Drop Inn* acknowledges the debt it owes to Forster and Scott, it departs from its predecessors by queering the trope of interracial rape. In her examination of post-1857 narratives, Jenny Sharpe cautions against a facile reading of rape as a master trope since "rape is not a stable and consistent signifier but one that surfaces at strategic moments" (1993, 2). The alleged threat of native violence against/towards European women served as a justification for colonial military aggression after the Indian Revolt of 1857. The violence of the rebellion transformed the stereotype of the subservient Hindu to that of the savage rapist of British women. Such narratives reproduced normative gender roles, whereby "women's bodies can be sexually appropriated" and coevally enabled a "structured silence" around the violence of Indian men against European men because this would "negate colonial power" (1993, 67). Similarly, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) emphasizes the importance of intimate relationships between men at the centre of the colonial enterprise. She suggests that the trope of male penetration became a "prominent feature of national ideology in Western Europe" by the end of the 19th century, and that it culminated in the "image of male rape" (182). I would suggest that Steve's attack appropriates the trope of interracial rape by revealing the structured silence around male rape. It explicitly shows that although colonialism was an encounter between two communities of gendered, sexual subjects, its description of penetrative violence must also pay attention to the image of interracial rape of men by men.

Furthermore, Noronha uses Steve's rape to explore the vexed question of such violence. In her work on masculinity and heteronormativity in postcolonial India, Kavita Daiya (2006) reconceptualizes how the "narration of violence against men" exemplifies "that masculinity and men as gendered subjects can also become critical sites for the symbolization of nationality and belonging" (1). In Noronha's novel, similarly, Steve's body stands for the empire. Steve's death therefore makes his story an allegory of de/colonization. In shifting the locus of cruelty from the colonizer to the colonized, the novel resists any neat categorization of guilt or victimhood.

As a contrast to Steve's internalized homophobia, Claude, Edwin and Jake accept their homosexuality even though they struggle with patriarchal homophobia to define their queerness. Their stories reveal modalities of alternative/same-sex identity that do not necessarily depend upon their western counterparts for discourses of queer emancipation. Although he is of Jewish heritage, Jake refuses to immigrate to Israel because he belongs to the "mosaic of the cultural, ethnic and religious values" that constitutes the pluralism of India (de Noronha 1994, 100). His position serves as a counter-image of Steve's departure for England. By locating the narratives of Claude, Edwin and Jake in postcolonial India in the 1970s and 1980s, Noronha contrasts Steve's monolithic colonial heritage to the postcolonial mosaic of independent India. The significance of Steve's rape lies therefore in the rejection of colonial regulation of homosexuality of which, currently, Section 377 is the most explicit signifier in postcolonial India.

Steve's suicide in *The Dew Drop Inn* provides a direct contrast to Balendran's emancipation in *Cinnamon Gardens*. Steve's twin crises of racial identification and sexuality originate in and converge (in the image of his suicide) on the issue of colonial contact. In comparison, the affirmation of queerness in Selvadurai's text is a rejection of the colonial dynamic; Balendran's acceptance of his desire for Richard becomes possible once the vestiges of colonialism literally disappear from view, even though the colonial imprint remains pervasive. The reminders include the colonial architecture of Colombo, the fine residences of the elite in Colombo that bear English names, and the Georgian-style house of the Mudaliyar. Although founded on the history of colonial intervention, Richard and Balendran's intimacy reinvigorates through a movement away from places of colonial history. Balendran is able to articulate his desire for Richard when they leave Colombo for a trip to the countryside, where Balendran manages an estate: " 'I refuse to let our friendship end as it stands,' Balendran said to Richard" (Selvadurai 1999, 174). The refusal to accept the silence becomes a point of departure in the affirmation of queerness, as Balendran immediately kisses Richard on the lips. The estate house where desire is affirmed is "a simple building whose architecture was closer to a village hut than a colonial-style bungalow" (172). Given the persistent presence of colonial architecture in the novel, the hut symbolizes the determined presence of the non-colonial.

Even though Balendran's social position as a married man results from the imperative of compulsory heterosexuality, his relationship with Sonia and Richard reveals the complexity of the colonial love triangle. He follows the wishes of the Mudaliyar for an arranged marriage. At the beginning of the novel, he utilizes his male privilege to recommence his affair with Richard, and even leaves Sonia in order to spend days with his lover. The novel signals Sonia's estrangement from her husband by equating their "grand four-poster bed" with "a funeral bier" (Selvadurai 1999, 71). However, Richard's absence in the latter half of the novel is a testimony to the final choice that the male homosexual makes in relation to the other disempowered category, that of the female subject. Although Balendran's ultimate confrontation with the Mudaliyar achieves the liberation of the queer subject, the narrative does not affirm non-normative love. For Balendran, the subsequent erasure of internalized homophobia is dependent upon the realization that queerness cannot participate in the marginalization of women. As a result, he decides to remain with his family, which implies neither a negation of queer identity nor a naturalization of dominant ideology because his independent choice makes him an agential subject.

*Cinnamon Gardens* further reinforces the subjectivity of the colonized/South Asian queer subject by placing Balendran at the centre of the Richard-Balendran-Sonia erotic triangle. Sedgwick's schema of triangulated desire, where the woman serves as a "conduit of a relationship" between two men, is reworked when the issue of colonial exchange is considered (1985, 25). In his study of colonial psychology, Ashis Nandy (1983) states that "the white women in India unconsciously saw themselves as the sexual competitors of Indian men, with whom their men had established an unconscious homo-eroticized bonding" (9–10). The colonial male becomes the item of exchange in Nandy's conception. However, the revision of the erotic triangulation makes the colonizing male the central object of both hetero- and homosexual desire. The Richard-Balendran-Sonia triangle reworks both Nandy and Sedgwick's formulations by defeating the colonial equation of power. The centrality of the South Asian queer subject as the object of desire is significant in two crucial aspects. First, it rearranges the colonizer/colonized binary from the South Asian perspective so that the colonizing male can become intelligible only in his relation

to the colonized male. Second, the figure of the almost routinely absent colonized female becomes the deciding factor in the colonial exchange between men. The centrality of the male subject has an enduring presence in queer experience. In the novel, however, even though Sonia is not necessarily empowered, Balendran's decision to remain with her is exemplary of an imaginative alteration of the colonial dynamic in which both the South Asian queer subject and the colonized woman conventionally appear as disempowered identities.

The displacement of the colonial binary in Balendran and Richard's relationship is significant for the articulation of same-sex desire, which was often figured in terms of amicable attachment during the colonial era. Sara Suleri (1992) observes that friendship fulfils the function of the signifying trope of homoerotic desire in *A Passage to India*. However, the ending of Forster's narrative displays the limits of such a relationship, whereby "the discourse of friendship becomes a figure for how the imperial eye perceives race" (135). If the conclusion of Forster's novel depends on a reaffirmation of the colonial divide, Selvadurai's text shows what the discourse of male friendship might be after such binaries are shattered. In this respect, Balendran's plea for friendship in his letter to Richard does not simply borrow from Forster's narrative, but re-signifies both Richard and himself as independent subjects.

*The Dew Drop Inn* and *Cinnamon Gardens* are significant texts that articulate same-sex desire from the colonized perspective within a colonial context as they recuperate colonized queer identity. The recovery of South Asian queer subjectivity within the parameters of the colonial encounter is relevant not only because it disputes colonial fantasies of aberrant sexuality in the colonies, but also because it makes histories of same-sex desire available to present-day queer activists in India and Sri Lanka. Heather Smyth's (2009) observation that *Cinnamon Gardens* indigenizes and legitimizes "gay sexuality in Sri Lankan space and history" (20) is equally applicable to Noronha's text in its Indian context. In an address to the Canadian Booksellers Association, Selvadurai underscored the contemporary significance of his second novel: "I think of *Cinnamon Gardens* not as a historical novel, but more as a metaphor for the present" (quoted in Alexander 2006, 155n21). My reading of Selvadurai's and Noronha's novels does not salvage the queer agency of the colonized South Asian subject. Instead, it asks whether connecting colonial histories to current homophobic laws in postcolonial South Asia can help dismantle hegemonic notions of heteronormative masculinity.

#### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

#### Notes

1. The novel fictionalizes the friendship between Edward Carpenter and the first president of the Ceylon National Congress, Ponnambalam Arunachalam. Despite the colonial divide and the absence of sexual relations, the two friends shared similar views on colonialism. Carpenter was a committed anti-imperialist whose views were reflective of his intimacy with Arunachalam. Arunachalam, on the other hand, supported Carpenter's radical formulations of "homogenic love" and "the intermediate sex". See Aldrich (2003, 290–298).
2. Stoler (2002) suggests that racial hierarchy, which was integral to colonial science, manifested itself explicitly through the threat of *métissage* and the loss of whiteness (79–95). Hyam (1990), however, emphasizes the instability of scientific principles in relation to the

- question of intermarriage (1990, 115–119). For a detailed account of the complicity of colonial science in the construction of racial inequality and questions governing hybridity, see Young (2005, 85–110).
3. Critiques of Said's account of *Kim* primarily focus on the underlying aesthetic tension in the novel (Taylor 2009, 49–69), issues of race and language (Maibor 2004, 68–82; Roy 2005, 4–8) or the “process of colonial remembrance” (Tickell 2012, 102). Although such analyses offer a nuanced revision of Said's view, I am interested in the ways in which Kipling's novel functions as an advocate of imperial ideology that carefully omits references to colonial violence and hyper-masculinized imperialism. As Anjali Arondekar (2009) argues, “the (successful) pursuit and control of native knowledge” (133) is the key concern of *Kim*.
  4. For a cogent account of the recurrence of “colonialism-as-rape” as an imperial imaginary, see Loomba (1998, 77–81).

### Notes on contributor

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