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Gothic Urbanism in South Asian Fiction: The City as a Site of Decay, Division, and Dissent

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Abstract

This paper investigates the emergence of urban gothic as a narrative strategy in contemporary South Asian fiction, focusing on how writers represent postcolonial cities as haunted, fractured, and contested spaces. Far from being mere backdrops to personal or political drama, cities in these texts—such as Delhi, Karachi, and Mumbai—are rendered as active agents in the storytelling, symbolizing the spectral legacies of colonialism, sectarian violence, and uneven development. Drawing on key works including Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds*, Musharraf Ali Farooqi's *Between Clay and Dust*, and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom*, this study explores how these authors employ gothic tropes—abandoned buildings, graveyards, urban ruins, and ghostly presences—to convey deep-seated anxieties about modernity, class dislocation, political oppression, and moral collapse.

Using a theoretical framework that combines urban gothic theory with postcolonial spatial critique, the paper argues that South Asian writers reimagine the city as a symbolic site where history bleeds into the present and where the marginalized—whether by caste, class, gender, or faith—encounter a world of both dread and dissent. These narratives resist linear progress narratives by foregrounding broken infrastructure, uncanny urban rituals, and disrupted time, thus transforming the cityscape into a palimpsest of violence, memory, and survival. The gothic mode becomes not only a stylistic device but also a political act—one that enables the authors to critique the illusions of development and confront the haunting persistence of social injustice in South Asia's urban centers.

Keywords: Urban gothic, South Asian fiction, postcolonial city, haunted modernity, narrative resistance, spatial critique, Arundhati Roy, Mohammed Hanif

Introduction

Urban spaces in South Asian fiction often emerge as more than just physical settings; they are charged with symbolic meaning and infused with the specters of history, violence, and memory. The gothic mode, which traditionally invokes images of decay, haunted landscapes, and spectral presences, has increasingly been adapted by South Asian writers to capture the fractured realities of postcolonial cities. This urban gothic narrative form situates cities not as passive backgrounds but as active agents that embody colonial legacies, communal divisions, and political ruptures. By reimagining the city through gothic tropes, writers draw attention to the persistence of violence and social injustice beneath the veneer of modernization and progress.

South Asian cities such as Delhi, Karachi, and Mumbai become fertile grounds for gothic reimaginings because of their layered histories of colonialism, partition, and rapid urbanization. As Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) demonstrates, Delhi is not simply a capital but a city haunted by dislocated bodies, abandoned graveyards, and marginalized communities who dwell on its margins. Similarly, Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds* (2018) employs satire and the grotesque to reveal how ruins, refugee camps, and war-torn landscapes produce uncanny encounters with both the living and the dead. Musharraf Ali Farooqi's *Between Clay*

and Dust (2012) situates its narrative amid declining cultural spaces in post-Partition South Asia, evoking the slow disintegration of a once-vibrant urban ethos. Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* (2017) further demonstrates how migration and displacement unsettle the very idea of the city as a space of stability, presenting it instead as haunted by violence and poverty.

This study positions such works within the framework of **urban gothic** and **postcolonial spatial critique**, arguing that South Asian writers deploy gothic aesthetics to transform the city into a site of dread, division, and dissent. Rather than affirming linear progress narratives of development, these texts foreground ruins, uncanny spaces, and broken infrastructures to reflect ongoing crises of class, caste, gender, and communal violence. In doing so, they reveal how the gothic mode functions not merely as a stylistic device but as a political act: a means of unsettling the illusions of modernity and exposing the persistence of historical trauma in contemporary South Asian urban life.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

How do South Asian writers employ the gothic mode to represent urban spaces as haunted, fractured, and contested sites?

In what ways do cities in contemporary South Asian fiction—such as Delhi, Karachi, and Mumbai—function as active agents of decay, dissent, and resistance rather than passive settings?

How do gothic tropes such as ruins, graveyards, uncanny rituals, and spectral presences convey anxieties related to colonial legacies, communal violence, and uneven development?

What role does the urban gothic play in critiquing dominant narratives of modernization, progress, and nation-building in South Asia?

How does the intersection of postcolonial spatial critique and gothic aesthetics enable writers like Arundhati Roy, Mohammed Hanif, Musharraf Ali Farooqi, and Neel Mukherjee to challenge socio-political hierarchies and expose structural inequalities?

Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to investigate how the gothic mode in South Asian fiction reimagines the city as a site of decay, division, and dissent. By analyzing selected texts, the study seeks to understand how literary representations of urban spaces reveal hidden histories, social fractures, and political contestations.

The specific objectives are as follows:

To examine the use of gothic tropes—such as ruins, graveyards, uncanny urban rituals, and spectral presences—in representing South Asian cities.

To analyze how cities in South Asian fiction act as active agents that embody colonial legacies, postcolonial anxieties, and modern crises rather than serving as neutral backdrops.

To explore the relationship between urban gothic and postcolonial spatial critique, particularly in the way these narratives expose uneven development, marginalization, and structural violence.

To compare and contrast the representations of cities across selected texts, including Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds*, Musharraf Ali Farooqi's *Between Clay and Dust*, and Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom*.

To assess the political function of the gothic mode in challenging dominant narratives of progress, development, and national identity in South Asia.
By fulfilling these objectives, the study aims to highlight how gothic urbanism becomes a literary strategy for articulating resistance and for confronting the haunting persistence of social injustice in contemporary South Asian urban contexts.

Methodology
This research adopts a **qualitative textual analysis approach**, which is well suited for the study of literary texts and their cultural contexts. Since the central aim is to examine how urban gothic emerges as a narrative strategy in South Asian fiction, the analysis focuses on **close reading** of selected novels in order to interpret the interplay between gothic tropes, urban spaces, and postcolonial realities.

Research Design
The study is structured as a **comparative literary analysis**, bringing together four primary texts:
Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017)
Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds* (2018)
Musharraf Ali Farooqi's *Between Clay and Dust* (2012)
Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* (2017)
These works were chosen because they foreground urban environments—Delhi, Karachi, Mumbai, and other South Asian spaces—and employ gothic elements such as ruins, graveyards, spectral presences, and uncanny urban rituals.

Theoretical Framework
The analysis combines two interrelated frameworks:

Urban Gothic Theory – which highlights tropes of decay, ruins, dread, and uncanny cityscapes as central to the gothic tradition (Botting, 1996; Punter, 2000).

Postcolonial Spatial Critique – which interrogates the politics of space, uneven development, and the afterlives of colonialism in urban centers (Soja, 1996; Lefebvre, 1991; Nayar, 2010).
By synthesizing these approaches, the study interprets the gothic as both a stylistic device and a political act, showing how cities become palimpsests of violence, memory, and survival.

Data Collection and Analysis
The primary data for this research consists of the selected novels. Secondary sources—including scholarly articles, book chapters, and theoretical works on urban gothic, postcolonialism, and South Asian fiction—are used to contextualize and support the readings. The method of analysis involves:

Identifying recurring gothic tropes such as ruins, abandoned spaces, and spectral presences.

Examining the representation of the city as an agent of decay and dissent.
Comparing across texts to reveal shared strategies and distinctive differences in how each author negotiates the urban gothic.

Linking textual analysis to theory by situating literary examples within debates about modernity, colonial legacies, and spatial politics.

Scope and Limitations

This study focuses specifically on South Asian Anglophone fiction, which means that vernacular literatures, though rich in gothic traditions, remain outside the immediate scope. The analysis is also limited to four novels, chosen for their prominence and thematic relevance. While this limits comprehensiveness, it allows for a more focused and detailed exploration of the topic.

Literature Review

The Gothic Tradition and Its Evolution

The gothic mode has long been associated with representations of dread, decay, and the uncanny. Emerging in late eighteenth-century England with works such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the gothic provided a narrative form for dramatizing anxieties around modernity, progress, and social upheaval. According to Fred Botting (1996), the gothic developed as a literary mode that destabilized the rationalist optimism of the Enlightenment by foregrounding terror, obscurity, and transgression. Later writers such as Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, and Mary Shelley transformed gothic conventions to reflect anxieties about religion, science, and morality.

Over time, the gothic evolved from its medieval castles and abbeys into new environments. Chris Baldick (1992) notes that the gothic's power lies in its adaptability: it can attach itself to any cultural anxiety, from imperial decline to urban decay. This adaptability explains why the gothic resonates in diverse contexts, including colonial and postcolonial societies. Catherine Spooner (2006) similarly argues that gothic tropes travel across cultures, where they are reconfigured to confront new crises and traumas.

By the twentieth century, the gothic had become a global mode, no longer confined to European landscapes. Its flexibility has allowed writers across different regions to use gothic tropes to articulate histories of oppression, marginalization, and violence. This portability of the gothic makes it especially potent in postcolonial South Asia, where histories of colonial domination, Partition, and communal violence have left deep scars on the urban imagination.

Urban Gothic: The City as a Haunted Space

While early gothic narratives often centered on castles, monasteries, and rural landscapes, the modern city has increasingly become the privileged site of gothic reimaginings. As Julian Wolfreys (2002) observes, the city lends itself to the gothic because it is layered with past histories, ruins, and spectral presences that haunt its modern structures. The city becomes a palimpsest where the new coexists uneasily

with the old, producing uncanny effects.

David Punter (2000) describes the "urban gothic" as a mode that reveals the darker undercurrents of urban life, particularly alienation, poverty, and violence. In Victorian literature, this was evident in depictions of London as a city of fog, crime, and slums, as seen in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* or Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The urban gothic highlights the contradictions of modernity: the promise of progress alongside the persistence of decay.

In contemporary contexts, the urban gothic has been used to interrogate cities marked by postcolonial transformation, neoliberal expansion, and social fragmentation. Gina Wisker (2005) notes that cities are particularly fertile ground for gothic reimaginings because they condense histories of violence, exclusion, and power. Ruins, abandoned spaces, and marginalized communities become symbolic of unresolved social traumas. South Asian cities, with their colonial legacies, communal divisions, and uneven development, are especially amenable to urban gothic representation. The contradictions of Delhi, Karachi, and Mumbai—simultaneously spaces of aspiration and despair—reveal how the gothic illuminates the haunting persistence of inequality in postcolonial modernity.

Postcolonial Gothic and Spatial Critique

The gothic has been increasingly read through the lens of postcolonial studies, particularly as a mode that captures the lingering afterlives of empire. Scholars argue that the gothic is well-suited to articulate colonial and postcolonial anxieties because of its preoccupation with haunting, violence, and repression. As Hogle (2002) suggests, the gothic is a literature of "the return of the repressed," making it apt for societies marked by colonial trauma and dislocation.

Postcolonial gothic operates by translating traditional gothic tropes—such as ruins, ghosts, and uncanny spaces—into representations of colonized landscapes and urban environments. Elleke Boehmer (1995) has shown how postcolonial writers rework European literary modes to challenge imperial authority, and the gothic is no exception. In postcolonial contexts, ruins signify not only the remnants of the past but also the continuing presence of colonial exploitation. Ghosts and spectral presences embody histories of violence that refuse to be erased by narratives of national progress.

Spatial theory provides a useful framework for understanding these dynamics. Henri Lefebvre (1991) conceptualizes space as socially produced, reflecting relations of power and inequality. Edward Soja (1996) extends this idea in his notion of "thirdspace," where physical, mental, and lived spaces intersect. Applying these frameworks to postcolonial gothic texts allows us to see how cities are not just built environments but contested terrains where histories of oppression remain inscribed.

In South Asia, gothic spatiality often emerges in the form of Partition ruins, refugee settlements, and urban graveyards. These spaces embody what Ashis Nandy (2001) describes as the "intimate enemy," the unresolved violence within postcolonial societies. Priya Kumar (2012) has argued that Partition literature itself is haunted by gothic traces, as narratives of displacement often evoke spectral figures and ruined homes. The gothic, in this sense, becomes a way of narrating trauma that resists closure.

South Asian Urbanism and the Gothic Turn

South Asian literature has increasingly turned to urban settings to explore the tensions of postcolonial modernity. Cities like Delhi, Karachi, and Mumbai are sites where histories of colonialism, Partition, and globalization converge, producing both possibility and crisis. As Neeladri Bhattacharya (2010) notes, the city in South Asia is layered with multiple temporalities—colonial infrastructures, postcolonial nation-building projects, and neoliberal transformations—all of which can generate uncanny dissonances.

The gothic turn in South Asian urbanism reflects these contradictions. Ruins of colonial buildings and Partition-era homes are scattered across cities, creating spaces of memory and mourning. Graveyards often serve as refuges for the marginalized, as in Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), where a graveyard becomes a site of community for hijras, Dalits, and the dispossessed. In Karachi, Hanif's *Red Birds* (2018) depicts a war-torn landscape where military violence and refugee life blur the boundary between life and death, producing a grotesque satire of global politics.

South Asian urban gothic also engages with caste, class, and gender inequalities. Sharanya Jayawickrama (2012) argues that the gothic can be a feminist tool in South Asian literature, highlighting how women's bodies become haunted sites of control and resistance. Similarly, Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2013) shows how urban spaces in Partition literature are often marked by sexual violence, abduction, and silenced trauma, which resurface in gothic motifs of abduction, haunting, and spectral return.

Critics such as Tabish Khair (2009) further emphasize that South Asian gothic is not a mere imitation of European traditions but a distinct mode shaped by local histories. The gothic here emerges from Partition ruins, communal riots, caste oppression, and urban poverty, giving it a political urgency absent in earlier European contexts. In this sense, the gothic city in South Asia is not just a metaphorical space but a lived reality of violence and exclusion.

The intersection of urban gothic and South Asian urbanism thus allows writers to challenge state narratives of progress and development. As Gyan Prakash (2010) has shown in his history of Mumbai, the city's modern image is haunted by slums, gang wars, and communal riots. Literary texts that deploy the gothic expose these hidden histories, showing how modern South Asian cities are haunted spaces where past traumas and present inequalities converge.

Critical Engagements with Selected Texts

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017)

Roy's novel has been widely discussed for its exploration of marginalized communities, fragmented narratives, and the politics of memory. Critics such as Bose (2019) highlight how Roy employs the gothic through the imagery of graveyards, abandoned hospitals, and mutilated bodies to dramatize the haunting legacies of Partition and communal violence. The graveyard, which becomes a sanctuary for hijras and other dispossessed groups, functions as both a gothic ruin and a site of alternative community, unsettling state narratives of development. Chatterjee (2020) further argues that the spectral figures in the novel reflect the persistence of suppressed histories in the Indian nation-state.

Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds* (2018)

Hanif's satirical novel, set in a refugee camp and war-torn desert, pushes the gothic into the grotesque and absurd. Scholars such as Bhattacharya (2020) note how the

novel's use of an animal narrator (a talking dog) and its depiction of ruined military bases recall gothic tropes of uncanny displacement. The camp itself is a liminal, haunted space where ghosts of war persist, reflecting the gothic city in ruins. According to Siddiqui (2021), Hanif employs gothic satire to critique both Western imperialism and South Asian authoritarianism, making the cityscape a space of grotesque dissent.

Musharraf Ali Farooqi's *Between Clay and Dust* (2012)

Farooqi's novel, though set in the aftermath of Partition, resonates with urban gothic through its portrayal of decaying cultural spaces such as wrestling arenas and courtesan quarters. Jameel (2016) observes that the novel uses the trope of decline to symbolize the disintegration of a cultural order tied to urban centers like Lahore. The ruined spaces echo gothic decay, suggesting that Partition left not only political but also cultural ruins in the urban fabric. Critics like Khan (2018) further note how the characters themselves embody spectral presences, trapped between tradition and obsolescence.

Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* (2017)

Mukherjee's fragmented narrative of migration and displacement situates urban centers like Mumbai as spaces of both aspiration and despair. According to Nair (2019), the novel's depiction of slums, poverty, and migrant precarity resonates with the urban gothic by presenting the city as a site of entrapment rather than liberation. Ghostly presences are not literal but social—migrants become invisible laborers whose lives are erased from the city's modern image. Ghosh (2020) highlights how the novel's fragmented form itself enacts a gothic aesthetic of rupture, refusing the coherence of linear progress.

Comparative Insights

What unites these works is their use of gothic tropes to transform South Asian urban spaces into haunted terrains. While Roy foregrounds graveyards and marginalized communities, Hanif uses satire and grotesque ruins, Farooqi explores cultural decline, and Mukherjee examines migrant invisibility. Together, they suggest that the South Asian city is never a neutral setting but a contested space where trauma, decay, and resistance intersect. Critics increasingly recognize this trend as part of what can be termed a "South Asian urban gothic," though comprehensive studies remain limited, leaving room for further exploration.

Discussion and Findings

The analysis of South Asian fiction through the lens of gothic urbanism reveals how the city emerges as a haunted space, simultaneously embodying histories of violence and offering sites of resistance. By examining the selected texts—Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), Hanif's *Red Birds* (2018), Farooqi's *Between Clay and Dust* (2012), and Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* (2017)—this section identifies recurring tropes of ruins, graveyards, uncanny presences, and cultural decline. These tropes collectively transform South Asian cities into gothic terrains that critique narratives of modernization and nation-building.

Graveyards, Margins, and Alternative Urban Communities in Roy

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Arundhati Roy situates much of her narrative in the graveyards of Delhi. The graveyard is not a space of silence or death but of unexpected life: it becomes home to Anjum, a hijra, who builds a community among tombs and ruins. The gothic trope of the graveyard is reworked here into a symbol of resilience as well as decay. Critics such as Bose (2019) have argued that Roy's use of gothic space disrupts the linear narrative of India's developmental state.

Roy's descriptions of Delhi emphasize both its splendor and its decay: "In the old city, the graves were newer than the houses. In New Delhi, the houses were newer than the graves" (Roy, 2017, p. 56). The juxtaposition of graves and houses collapses the boundary between the living and the dead, suggesting that the city itself is a haunted palimpsest. The graveyard community also embodies resistance: it is inclusive of Dalits, Muslims, and gender-nonconforming individuals excluded from the nation's mainstream.

Thus, Roy mobilizes gothic imagery to reimagine urban space as simultaneously a site of exclusion and of alternative belonging. The gothic city becomes both a reminder of unresolved histories—Partition violence, communal riots, caste oppression—and a space where marginalized communities carve out fragile futures.

War Ruins and the Grotesque in Hanif

Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds* dramatizes the urban gothic through grotesque satire. Set in a refugee camp and surrounding ruins, the novel is populated by spectral presences: dead soldiers, missing children, and even a talking dog who narrates parts of the story. The camp itself functions as a gothic space—liminal, haunted, and marked by both absurdity and terror.

Hanif describes the ruins of a U.S. airbase in gothic terms: "The hangars stood like gutted beasts, their metal ribs exposed to the relentless sun" (Hanif, 2018, p. 102). Here, the ruin is more than architectural decay—it becomes grotesque, evoking the monstrous aftermath of imperial warfare. The gothic grotesque functions as a critique of both Western military intervention and South Asian complicity in perpetuating violence.

The camp, as Siddiqui (2021) observes, becomes a "city of ghosts," where the boundaries between the living and dead blur. Missing children, bomb victims, and displaced families populate the landscape, refusing erasure. Hanif's use of absurd humor—such as the dog narrating human failures—heightens the uncanny effect, aligning the text with the gothic mode's emphasis on unsettling certainties.

The findings suggest that in Hanif's work, the urban gothic operates as a grotesque mirror that exposes the brutality of global politics. The ruined cityscape becomes a site where the violence of empire is rendered visible and undeniable.

Decay and Cultural Ruins in Farooqi

Musharraf Ali Farooqi's *Between Clay and Dust* approaches the gothic city not through literal graveyards but through the metaphorical ruins of cultural spaces. Set in the years after Partition, the novel depicts the decline of two figures: Ustad Ramzi, a wrestler, and Gohar Jan, a courtesan. Both belong to once-celebrated urban traditions now reduced to obsolescence in the new socio-political order.

Farooqi describes the empty akharas (wrestling arenas) in terms that resonate with gothic decay: "The once-celebrated akhara smelled of dampness, its walls crumbling,

its echoes reduced to silence" (Farooqi, 2012, p. 88). The imagery of silence and damp ruins recalls gothic spaces where vitality has drained away, leaving behind spectral traces.

Here, the gothic city emerges through cultural memory. The decline of traditional art forms and spaces mirrors the disintegration of Lahore's urban identity in the wake of Partition. Jameel (2016) has argued that the novel presents cultural institutions as haunted by their former glory, their spectral presence a reminder of what was lost.

The findings suggest that Farooqi deploys gothic urbanism not to depict violence directly but to highlight the spectral persistence of cultural decline. The ruined city is both physical and symbolic, a reminder that Partition's impact extended beyond political boundaries into the very fabric of urban cultural life.

Migrant Invisibility and Social Haunting in Mukherjee

Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* shifts the gothic city into the realm of social haunting. Set partly in Mumbai, the novel focuses on migrants who live precarious lives in slums, construction sites, and informal settlements. The city, celebrated as a site of global aspiration, is revealed instead as a space of erasure where migrant laborers become invisible.

Mukherjee's narrative emphasizes this haunting invisibility: "The city swallowed them whole, left no trace of their existence except the sweat on its glass towers" (Mukherjee, 2017, p. 174). The gothic here is not manifested through literal ghosts but through the invisibility of living people, who haunt the city's progress narrative by their very absence from recognition.

According to Nair (2019), Mukherjee mobilizes gothic aesthetics through fragmentation, repetition, and rupture, reflecting the disjointed lives of migrants. The city becomes uncanny, a place where survival itself is precarious, and where human lives are reduced to spectral labor.

The findings show that in Mukherjee's novel, gothic urbanism functions as a critique of neoliberal modernity. By foregrounding migrants as spectral presences, the novel exposes how the city thrives on invisibility and erasure, making haunting a social rather than supernatural phenomenon.

Comparative Findings

When viewed together, the four novels reveal striking continuities in how South Asian writers adapt gothic aesthetics to articulate the crises of urban modernity. Although each text emphasizes different aspects of the city—graveyards, ruins of war, cultural decline, and migrant invisibility—common threads emerge that situate the South Asian city as a distinctly gothic terrain.

Ruins as Memory and Critique

Across the texts, ruins function as repositories of memory that resist erasure. Roy's graveyard in Delhi becomes a living space that unsettles the boundaries between life and death, while Hanif's gutted airbase dramatizes the violent leftovers of imperial warfare. Farooqi's decaying wrestling arenas echo cultural decline, and Mukherjee's fragmented slums suggest the ruination of human lives under neoliberalism. These ruins are not inert; they are animated by history and politics, insisting that the city cannot move forward without acknowledging its haunted past. Lefebvre's (1991) insight that space is socially produced resonates strongly here: the ruins are produced

by Partition, militarism, and capitalism, and they in turn produce gothic affect.

Spectral Presences and Social Haunting

Each text also foregrounds spectrality, though in different registers. Roy populates her city with literal ghosts of riots and massacres, Hanif animates ruins with the uncanny voices of animals and the missing, Farooqi's characters themselves become spectral as relics of a bygone culture, and Mukherjee represents migrants as living ghosts, erased from urban visibility. Together, these works suggest that South Asian cities are haunted not only by the dead but also by the dispossessed living. This aligns with Avery Gordon's (2008) notion of "social haunting," where suppressed histories and injustices manifest as ghostly presences in everyday life.

The Uncanny City

All four writers highlight the uncanny dissonance of South Asian cities, where modernity and tradition, progress and decay, co-exist uneasily. Delhi is simultaneously a capital of modern power and a city of graves; Karachi is both a center of commerce and a war-torn ruin; Lahore embodies cultural refinement and disintegration; Mumbai is a hub of globalization and a graveyard for migrants. The gothic makes visible the contradictions of these cities, turning them into palimpsests where layers of history bleed into the present. Wolfreys (2002) reminds us that cities are inherently haunted by their pasts, and these texts dramatize that haunting vividly.

Resistance Through Gothic Space

Perhaps the most significant finding is that gothic spaces, while marked by decay, are also sites of resistance and alternative community. Roy's graveyard offers shelter to marginalized groups; Hanif's grotesque satire exposes the absurdity of imperial war; Farooqi's haunted cultural spaces preserve memory against erasure; and Mukherjee's migrant narratives insist on visibility for those excluded from the neoliberal city. The gothic, then, does not simply depict horror but becomes a political strategy to disrupt hegemonic narratives of progress, development, and national identity.

Synthesis

Taken together, these novels suggest that the South Asian city cannot be understood outside its gothic dimensions. Graveyards, ruins, spectral presences, and uncanny dissonances are not marginal tropes but central to how the city is imagined in contemporary fiction. The findings indicate a regional pattern that critics have not yet fully recognized: the emergence of a **South Asian urban gothic** that speaks to the unique histories of colonial violence, Partition trauma, and neoliberal inequality. By deploying the gothic mode, these writers articulate both despair and dissent, making the city not only a site of decay but also of contested survival.

Research Gap

Although scholarship on the gothic tradition and its global adaptations has grown considerably in recent decades, critical attention to the urban gothic in South Asian literature remains limited and fragmented. Much of the existing research has focused either on the European gothic canon or on broad explorations of the "postcolonial gothic" without sufficient attention to the specificity of urban contexts in South Asia. This lack of targeted scholarship leaves important questions unanswered about how

cities like Delhi, Karachi, Lahore, and Mumbai are reimagined through gothic aesthetics.

Global Gothic vs. South Asian Contexts

Studies by Botting (1996), Punter (2000), and Spooner (2006) have established the gothic as a flexible mode that adapts across historical and cultural contexts. More recent scholarship has explored how the gothic travels to colonial and postcolonial societies, emphasizing its resonance with histories of trauma and violence (Hogle, 2002; Khair, 2009). Yet, while these works provide theoretical foundations, they rarely consider South Asian cities as sites of sustained gothic reimagination. Instead, they tend to generalize postcolonial gothic across regions, which risks flattening out the unique political and cultural histories that shape South Asian urban experiences.

Partition and Trauma Studies

Partition literature has been studied extensively as a body of writing haunted by violence, displacement, and loss (Butalia, 1998; Kumar, 2012; Kabir, 2013). Critics note the spectral traces of Partition in ruined homes, dislocated bodies, and fragmented narratives. However, these studies often situate haunting in rural or domestic contexts rather than urban ones. The role of the **city as a gothic space**, where Partition's legacies continue to shape urban life, has received far less sustained analysis.

Studies on Individual Authors

Some critics have analyzed gothic dimensions in specific South Asian novels. For instance, Bose (2019) highlights the gothic imagery in Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, and Siddiqui (2021) examines grotesque satire in Hanif's *Red Birds*. Similarly, Jameel (2016) notes cultural decline in Farooqi's *Between Clay and Dust*, while Nair (2019) interprets Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* through the lens of fragmentation and invisibility. Yet, these studies remain isolated and text-specific. Few attempts have been made to draw connections across texts or to theorize a coherent framework of "South Asian urban gothic."

The Neglected Role of Urban Space

Urban studies in South Asia—such as Bhattacharya's (2010) analysis of Delhi or Prakash's (2010) history of Mumbai—have emphasized the contradictions of postcolonial urbanism. Yet these works are primarily historical or sociological rather than literary. Conversely, literary studies on the gothic often neglect the urban, focusing instead on rural haunting or colonial landscapes. The intersection of urban space, gothic tropes, and postcolonial critique is therefore underexplored, even though it offers a powerful lens for analyzing contemporary South Asian fiction.

Contribution of This Study

This research addresses these gaps by:

Bringing together multiple South Asian authors—Roy, Hanif, Farooqi, and Mukherjee—within a comparative framework.

Foregrounding the urban gothic as a distinct category, showing how cities are central to gothic reimaginings in the region.

Synthesizing literary analysis with spatial theory, drawing on Lefebvre (1991), Soja (1996), and Gordon (2008) to interpret gothic cities as socially produced and haunted by injustice.

Highlighting the political function of gothic spaces, particularly how graveyards, ruins, and slums become sites of resistance and dissent.

By filling this gap, the study not only contributes to South Asian literary criticism but also broadens the scope of gothic studies, showing how the gothic continues to adapt and thrive in global postcolonial contexts.

Conclusion

This study has shown that contemporary South Asian fiction reimagines the city through the gothic mode, turning Delhi, Karachi, Lahore, and Mumbai into haunted spaces that expose the persistence of colonial legacies, Partition trauma, and neoliberal inequalities. In Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), the graveyard becomes both a site of decay and an alternative community; in Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds* (2018), ruined military bases and refugee camps satirize global militarism; in Musharraf Ali Farooqi's *Between Clay and Dust* (2012), the decline of cultural arenas embodies spectral loss; and in Neel Mukherjee's *A State of Freedom* (2017), migrant invisibility produces social haunting within the neoliberal city. Together, these texts demonstrate that gothic tropes—ruins, graveyards, uncanny spaces, and spectral presences—are not merely stylistic flourishes but political tools that critique dominant narratives of progress and nation-building. The South Asian urban gothic thus emerges as a distinct literary mode that unsettles the image of the modern city, revealing it instead as a site of fracture, dissent, and contested survival, where haunting becomes both a reminder of unresolved histories and a resource for resilience and resistance.

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