

**THE NATION AND ITS GHOSTS: TRACING INDIA IN THE
WORKS OF VIKRAM CHANDRA AND ALLAN SEALY**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirement
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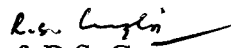
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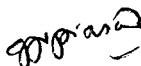
CERTIFICATE

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This is to certify that this dissertation entitled, *The Nation and its Ghosts: Tracing India in the works of Vikram Chandra and Allan Sealy*, submitted by **Mr. Rennis Joseph**, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is his own original work and has not been submitted as far, in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other University/Institution.

We recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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July 20, 2001

This dissertation entitled by, ***The Nation and its Ghosts: Tracing India in the Works of Vikram Chandra and Allan Sealy***, submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University/Institution.



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Chapter I

Introduction: The politics of Aesthetics

Experience of being, nothing less, nothing more, on the edge of metaphysics, literature perhaps stands on the edge of everything, almost beyond everything, including itself (Derrida 1992: p. 44).

Any claim to literariness is a claim to the world itself, due to the peculiar nature of the institution called literature. The literary space allows tremendous freedom to its occupants due to the flexibility afforded by this space. Writers who lay their claims to this space almost try to distill the world into the words on the page, distilled through possible filters set by the requirements of the epistemological formations within which the writing takes place. Vikram Chandra, writing *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*(1995) and Allan Sealy in *The Trotter Nama*(1999) too stake their claim on the world, but within the focus of what they call 'India'. In what Vikram Chandra calls an epic (see Appn.) and Allen Sealy calls a "Grass on India" (Preface) both these writers approach a certain epistemological space — a samskara, or culture, or civilization or a nation — assumed to exist in a given geographical stretch, followed by the occupants of this space. In their attempts to 'grasp' this space these novelists try to reduce this space into the 'graspable' at various levels - the genre, the language, the plot, the characters, cultures, etc. — and produce/reproduce different allegories of the 'concept'.

'India', a concept evolved through multitudes of influences from outside and a product of numerous cultures within, emerged through diverse struggles and synthesis, and still continues to be in an amorphous state. It has been described and defined by various people at various levels, appropriating it to suit their needs. From Orientalists scholars to 'national reformers', and through the 'national movement' and the resultant

awakening to 'freedom at the stroke of midnight', the nation still remains baffling for the definers and the defined. From colonial historians like Mill and Grant Duff to nationalist historians like Bipan Chandra, and subaltern historians like Ranjith Guha, various efforts have been made to trace the evolution this elusive nation. The continuous interpretation of the constitution in the courts, the debates in the parliament, election manifestoes and campaigns, T.V. serials and news programs, surveys, national songs, slogans, and history and cultural studies continue the process of tracing the structures of this 'imagined community'. The paradoxical statement 'unity in diversity' has been used to define the confusion that is assumed as a nation. Every attempt to define this 'state' of affairs would result in a newer form producing still diverse forms to the readers who try to relate themselves to this concept depending on their relative positions. This paper is an attempt to analyse the way Vikram Chandra and Allan Sealy imagine 'India' in their novels *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* and *The Trotter Nama* respectively. Reading these novels from the relative position that I occupy, these analyses can never be considered 'neutral' or 'truthful'.

Vikram Chandra's claims to an epic status to his work (see Appn.) and Allan Sealy's claims to a mock epic status to his work (Preface) are certainly attempts to define the object of their study -- India. Their visions are certainly products of the various forces that work in the definition 'India'. However much one tries to explain the 'aesthetics' of these works one cannot ignore the forces that construct the definition of 'aesthetics'. The

stances they take in relation to the forces of culture, of literary institutions are overtly or covertly are influenced by the 'strategic location'¹, which they occupy.

When Derrida calls literature as 'almost beyond everything' he intends to include all the forces that has produced it, at the same time emphasizing its uniqueness:

A work takes place just once, and far from going against history, this uniqueness of the institution, which is in no way natural and will never be replaced, seems to me historical through and through. It must be referred as a proper name and whatever irreplaceable references a proper name bears with it. Attention to history, context, and genre is necessitated, and not contradicted, by this singularity, by the date and signature of the work: not the date and signature which might be inscribed on the *external* border of the work or *around* it, but the ones which constitute or institute the very body of the work, on the edge *between* the "inside" and the "outside" (1992: p.67-68).

This paper attempts to delineate the forces that constitute the 'acts' of writing engaged in these novels, which claim to be an epic or a mock-epic.

Replying to Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's article on writing in English in India (*The Hindu* Feb 18, 2001 p.xiii), Vikram Chandra acknowledges the politics involved in art.

However, he protests against attempts to reduce the aesthetic to the solely political:

But the attempt to reduce the aesthetic to the solely political, and only that and just that, is to ignore that beating pulse. And this is not merely annoying, it is turning away from the merry and lovely complexities of life itself. So, at the close, let us turn to life itself, to desire (*The Hindu* April 8, 2001: p.vi).

But throughout the article he fails to explain what he calls 'life', 'desire', and the 'merry and lovely complexities'. Referring to Cixous' 'other' on whom writing takes

¹ Said uses the term 'strategic location' to describe the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about (1978: p. 20). Here I use this term to refer to the ideological stances, both conscious and unconscious in a text, which is a result, as well as a part of the forces that generate 'cultures' - like education, history, arts, literature, etc.

place, Vikram Chandra finds this other in 'god', an elusive term which appears in his novel as well. In the article he explains desire as dependent on the 'other', which is identified as 'Vac':

It is in the space between the self and the goddess, between the self and god, that the spark of desire catches fire and becomes a *ghazal* a call to a beloved who is both fleshy and divine. In this *ghazal*, the agony of the beloved's absence is transmuted into the ecstasy of the beloved's presence, and into the ecstasy of a communion with Vac (*The Hindu* April 18, 2001: pvi).

These absences of the 'other' are enacted through the choices of the author, the institutions that generate him and the forces that sustain such a union. Considering India's vast diversity, both vertically and horizontally — based on castes and territory — one has to take note of the choices that Vikram Chandra makes and narrates through the memories of a reborn monkey who was a Brahmin poet, though born of British and Indian parents. The choices that the author makes — like the character Abhay, a U.S returned Indian, the geographical location, the cultural symbols — are mystified in order to disown authorial responsibilities and attributed to the play of the goddess "Vac". One of the narrators in the multi-layered narrative in *Red Earth*, Sandeep, invokes the goddess to tell the story: "Friends, friends, we struggle, we scream, we dream, but forms make us, metaphors break us, names are mantras (hide them) and the goddess Vac, queen of speech, is the hidden mistress of the world; but come, to work again" (p. 120). This goddess is later related to Vedas, which are revealed only to the initiated (p.104) who are equated with the twice born - a status assumed by the powerful (p. 17). This study is an attempt to analyze the relations between power, the twice-born who claim knowledge, 'Vac' and their subject, India, as narrated by Vikram Chandra and Allan Sealy.

Allan Sealy states the purpose of his writing in his claim that *The Trotter-Nama* is a mock-epic, 'true with a grotesque narrator'. In the preface he openly admits the influence of *The Tin Drum* and the confusion about his desire to beat an Indian March on a borrowed drum; which finally found its beat on the model of *Akbar-Nama*. The claim to mock-epic status suggests the existence of epics or epic traditions, which are intended to be satirized in his attempt to do a "Grass on India", as suggested in the preface. In spite of its singularity of the work there are sufficient suggestions on the limitations of the very institutions that this 'mock-epic' occupy. To mark the aesthetics in a sacred thread displacing it from the condition of life that determine the aesthetics would be like the delusion of the freedom of a disc jockey that Spivak speaks about. Considering the trends of present day cultural production, Spivak calls our attention to the ironies of technocracy that control the society:

We are rather, the disc jockeys of an advanced capitalist ethnocracy. The discs are not "records" of the old-fashioned kind, but productions of the most recent technology. The trends in taste and the economic factors that govern them are also products of the most complex interrelations among a myriad factors such as international diplomacy, the world market, the conduct of advertisement supported by and supporting the first two items, and so on. To speak of the mode of production and constitution of the radio station complicates matters, further. Now within this intricately determined and multiform situation, the disc jockey and his audience think, indeed are made to think, that they are free to play. This illusion of freedom allows us to protect the brutal ironies of technocracy by suggesting either that the system protects the humanist's freedom of spirit, or that "technology", that vague evil, is something the humanist must confront by inculcating humanistic "values" or by drawing generalized philosophical analogues from the latest spatio-temporal discoveries of the magical realms of "pure-science", or yet by welcoming it as a benign and helpful friend. (1987: p.110).

Humanist tradition, which plays a larger role in maintaining the power-structure of the society, also acts within the 'choices' and the assumed freedom of

the authors. Vikram Chandra and Allan Sealy, in their approach to 'India' are restricted within the forces that led to the evolution of this concept itself. It is however a very difficult task to analyse the multitudes of forces that have generated the nation and sustains it through the narratives stretched from a historically imagined past to a projected future.

What Vikram Chandra calls 'Hindustan' or Allan Sealy calls 'India' is not an immortal concept extending its roots to an indefinite past. It has been a fragmented and vague title given by foreigners to identify the land that lie between the Himalayas and the Indian ocean, which was assumed to be a homogenous culture, distinct from any other culture². Never before the advent of the British was there any integrated territory with a ruling centre in Delhi that had a pan-Indian spread. There are evidences of limited interactions between the urban centers, which traces could be seen in the remnants of the debris of Buddhist movements or the existing traces of Sanskritic traditions, through negligible. With the British administrators attempts to find a common code to rule their East Indian territory and their attempts establish a uniform system of governance, certain traces were privileged and imposed to create a sense of homogeneity over the territory they occupied. This was legitimized and secularized through the education and administrative system, patronized by the British and internalized by the newly created Indian intelligentsia. The rise of nationalism and the cultural demarcation in Europe, and

² Irfan Habib analyses the etymology of the term 'Hindustan' an Iranian word, which is used by the cultural nationalists as through it is a Sanskrit word denoting the 'land of the Hindus'. The cultural affinities of an Indian people' could be marked only by its difference from others who are alien to the diversities that underlie the concept of an Indian people'. If we consider a territorial unity as suggested by the Mughal Empire, it was a very limited territorial and administrative entity. It was certainly the under the impact of various British administrative institutions set up in their East Indian territory that a national consciousness emerged (Irfan Habib, 2000: p. 18-29).

the demarcation of the colonial rulers from the ruled slowly led to the emergence of a pan-Indian identity among the new intelligentsia. The upper-caste in India legitimized the British rule by being the informants to the colonial attempts to understand India and also by supplying the administrative requirements of the British. The novel as a genre emerged in India as a part of these influences. The nationalists in India received a boost with the finding of colonial historians searching for Aryan roots,³ which later provided the material to their claim a legitimate national identity. Slowly this identity was normalized through various representations as in literature, newspapers etc., that assume to represent the culture.

The last decade witnessed a change in India's political spectrum which resulted in the wrangling over institutions of learning such as schools, colleges, universities, ICHR, ICSSR, etc. (Bipan Chandra 2000: p. 24). This has brought the significance of the institutions of history writing and culture and their value ladedness in focus. In this context one cannot ignore the values that underlie various claims to culture. While reading novels that use history⁴ as their material, and claim to represent India, one has to

³ The Western concept of history and the values that enlighten such an approach to the past has been internalized and accepted to be neutral by the Indian intelligentsia. This is evident in the rich tributes paid to Oriental historians by Indian scholars. In the introduction to *India Today's* Millenium series (Vol. 2) on History, its deputy editor, Swapan Dasgupta eulogizes the contributions of Lord Curzon and his sense of history, oblivious of the colonial intentions or its impact. See the article " Will We Ever Learn?" (2000: p. 8-10) for details.

⁴ Hayden White and E.H. Carr bring out the value-ladedness of any historical knowledge, which tries to trace a past in the present. In Hayden White's words, "the very claim to have distinguished a past from a present world of social thought and praxis, and to have determined the formal coherence of that past world, *implies* a conception of the forms that knowledge of the present world also must take, in so far as it is *continuous* with that past world" (1974: P 21).

take into account the 'strategic formations' that these novels form a part of⁵. This dissertation tries to delineate some of the power structures and their underlying 'values' that are implicitly suggested in *Red Earth* and *The Trotter Nama*.

The second chapter analyses the cultural traits that are assumed to be normal by the authors in their choices of characters, languages, cultures etc., as represented in the novels. Both the novels acknowledge the impact of the British in their choice of Anglo-Indians to represent their versions of India. On the other hand they take for granted the nationalist claims to represent 'India' by privileging the brahminic culture, which are attributed the Indian parts of the parentage of their Anglo-Indian characters. This chapter tries to delineate certain traits of the 'knowledge' that 'enlighten' the novelists' vision of India – the characteristics of their 'inspiration' or 'Vac' who is assumed to play through their narratives.

The third chapter attempts to study the role of these novels in generating an identity, 'India', and how vital the urge to claim an identity is to the structure of these novels. Eustace, 'the grotesque narrator' of *The Trotter Nama*, urged by the Great Trotter, tries to cast a shadow of his own or a shadow for his community. This to a great extent is used by Allan Sealy to as an allegory of 'India' in his claim to attempt a 'Grass on India'. But Eustace in *The Trotter Nama*, as well as Sanjay in *Red Earth*, is conscious about their inability to belong, the absurdity to claim an indigenous identity. In Allan Sealy's attempts to expose the hollowness of the claims to Indianness, or Vikram Chandra's

⁵ Said uses the term 'strategic formation' in this work *Orientalism*. He explains 'strategic formation' "as a way of analysing the relationship between text and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, dignity, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large" (1978: p. 20).

assertive attempt to 'put together' an Indianness, both the novelists seem to inherit their 'histories' from colonial historians and the Orientalists.

The fourth chapter is an attempt to trace the characteristics of the 'Indian' as well as the 'British' culture, as represented in these narratives. Allan Sealy and Vikram Chandra at various levels reproduces, and innovate upon, the differences attributed to the two cultures. The Orientalist scholarship studied 'India' from an imperial Western understanding. Some of the recurrent images are symbolized in the traits of 'Alexander the Great'. These features that are assumed to be the features of the West -- materialism, scientificity, historicity, masculinity, order etc. – are placed in opposition to the cultural traits like chaos, spirituality, femininity, mysticism and childishness, attributed to India. These are represented in *The Trotter Nama* through the experiences of the Great Trotter, and generations of Trotters who followed. Vikram Chandra presents them through the juxtaposition of Sanjay and Skinner, as well as through the experiences of Abhay in the U.S. The novelists do not obediently follow any given set of cultural stereotypes, but approach them from their standpoints. These novels, which run through generations, or centuries, employ various tactics to suit their ends. My attempt to analyse them is very limited considering the limitations of an M. Phil dissertation, as well as the limitation of the ideological positions that I occupy.

These novels have been chosen, as they were rather recent claims to define 'India', made in the last decade of the twentieth century. Moreover, both the narrators employ Anglo-Indian characters to represent their versions of 'India'. Vikram Chandra's claims to an epic status as well as Allan Sealy's, claims to a 'mock-epic' status provide contrasting approaches to the nation.

Considering these differences it is hard to say that this study has exhaustively dealt with the individual novels. There lie vast areas of representations in these novels that fall outside the area of this study. I have tried to concentrate on the period -- from the arrival of the British and the resultant meeting of cultures -- that is represented in these novels. Keeping with the vastness of these novels and the powerful and overt claims to deal with India, other works of these writers were not dealt with, as they do not seem to deal explicitly with culture and history as these novels do. Moreover, considering the vast amount of studies carried out on 'India', this dissertation is rather limited in its scope.

Chapter II

The Givens of the Novels, Received Gratefully: The Inheritances of the Novels in/on India

The narrator of *The Trotter Nama* concludes his story calling it a 'Raj Novel gone wrong'. Eugene goes on to enumerate 'How the Raj is done'.

I wish to show how the Raj's done. This is the play of children good adept rest easy. You must have the following ingredients. (It matters, little if one or another be wanting). Let the pot boil of its own.

An elephant, a polo club, a snake, a length of rope, a rajah or a pearl of price (some use both), a silver moon, a dropped glove, a railway junction, some pavilions in the distance, a chota peg, a tent peg, a learned brahmin, a cruel king, a chapatis (or chaprasi), a measure of justice, gun powder (q.v.), equal portions of law and order, a greased cartridge, a tamarind seed or else a cavalry regiment, a moist eye, some high intentions, two pax of Britannica, glucose biscuits, an ounce of valour, something in the middle, a Victoria Cross, a soupcon of suspense (q.v.), a bearer, a dhobi (or dhoti) a chee-chee, a deckchi (or deck-chair), a pinch of dust, a trickle of perspiration, a backdrop with temples or mosques (some use both), a church pew, a little fair play, a boar, some tall grass, a tiger, a rain cloud, a second snake or mongoose, a flutter of the heart, a sharp sword, a bared ankle, walnut jiwce or burnt cork (some use both), a boy of British blood unsullied, a locket.

The sharpest of adepts will notice that all the above ingredients are present in my book — except the last but one. Some will quibble that this last (but one) lack in sufficient of itself to disqualify my book and I admit the lack is grave. I begin to wonder, but it is too late. The fault is mine alone.

The sharpest of adepts will note another lack, namely, something in the middle. In my *nama* there is nothing in the middle. (p.561).

The narrator seems to recall the Raj novels done over a period of time, legitimising the western rule and performing the theatre of power. The Raj novels were attempts to legitimize the British rule and power and celebrated the pomp and grandeur of their culture, like the elaborate coronation of Victoria as the empress of India in the

Imperial Assemblage of 1877¹. These performances became the markers of differences between the rulers and the ruled, juxtaposing the 'Indians' with the British². All those novels, perform their respective roles from some fundamental faith in the middle, a faith in some kind of national culture. Exposing them through a grotesque narrator and a fragmented narrative, Sealy draws the attention of his readers to the hole in the middle, "In my nama there is nothing in the middle" (p.561), like the narrow hole in the courtyard of sungam:

If you stared hard enough at it, it has a full stop expanding to infinity and drawing you down into its vortex so that it had to be covered with a grill. At the rim was a flange of fulgurite where the earth must have resisted the impact for a fraction of a second. Below that it was unscored by the slightest imperfection — or for that matter imperfection — neither black nor white nor gray, devoid of all qualities, unless lightlessness and emptiness were significant attributes of a window onto nothing (p.562)

In constructing a story out of nothingness the narrators and the readers participate in a framework of beginnings middle and end, applying their own meanings, in relation to the subject of their work. A nationalism created in response to British imperialism perpetuated its power and standards through its institutions. Vikram Chandra writing his epic novel participates in this theatre of power and tries to establish an Indianness, with a past, present and the future; a beginning middle and an end. This chapter is an attempt to

¹ M. Keith Booker(1997) discusses the various ways in which the Raj novels maintain and justify the British rule and the superiority of their culture.

² Sealy is conscious of the large body of fiction that has been performing these functions and implicitly suggests the text and their constructs. In fact, in his mock epic he includes the Indian stories that perform these functions within the new state. The novels like *Serpent and the Rope* (a snake, a length of a rope), *Shadow of the Moon* ('silver moon'), *Bhowani Junction* ('a railway junction'), *Far Pavilions* ('some pavilions in the distance') and *A Passage to India* ('a backdrop with temples or mosques [some use both]), are suggested and *TheTrotter Nama* is juxtaposed to them, both in content and purpose. The juxtaposition of the mock-epic to these acclaimed novels demonstrates the constructedness of these novels and their purpose.

study the constructedness of various institutions that were imposed on India by colonial rulers and which were later accepted and innovated upon by the post-colonial rulers.

The idea of India itself has been inherited by 'Indians' from their colonial rulers, though not exactly on European terms; they had to adopt the British epistemologies in Indian terms or invent Indianness were it was found lacking³. If the Raj novel legitimized the British rule, the fictional works by Indians legitimize the new order. It is in this light that one has to read what Vikram Chandra means by 'givens of a novel' (see Appn.). This new system (political, economical, and administrative) called for the creation of new epistemes and origins as could be seen in the trends of nationalist historiography. Like the British, the new rulers imposed their hegemony by claiming or imposing a certain extent of consensus. The consensus is achieved in what is called the cultural realm – Keith Booker quotes Antonio Gramsci to demonstrate how the European bourgeoisie gained and maintained its power through a complex system of political and cultural practices by the rulers and the ruled, that were made to accept as natural and proper:

The legitimacy of bourgeoisie hegemony resides principally in their ability to obtain the "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life, by dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production (qtd. in Booker 1997: p. 4).

³ Spivak (1990) speaks about Indianness: "... Indianness is not a thing that exists. Reading Sanskrit scriptures – I can't tell that Indian, because after all, India is not just Hindus. The Indic stuff is not India. The name India was given by Islamic conquerors. The name Bharat, which is on the passport, is in fact a name that hardly anyone uses, which commemorates a mythic king" (p.39).

This world of production extends to the cultural modes of production, which includes the perpetuation of the various assumptions of the culture through numerous institutions like education, history, literature, cinema etc. Vikram Chandra and Allen Sealy, writing on India, assuming certain 'givens of the nation', participate in the culture of the dominant group that claims the position of national culture.

In *Red Earth*, Sanjay, a Western educated Brahmin, comes to represent the nation itself. On returning from his severe penance and meditation⁴, where he offered himself bit by bit, till he chopped off his head to defeat Yama, finds that, "...all the cuts he had taken in the cave were matched and even bested by the daily insults that others had felt outside (p.434)". Thereafter Sanjay is portrayed as the spirit of nationalism, leading the revolt of 1857. Its development and failure are assumed to be the contradictions within Sanjay. Sanjay's life has been caught between the British and the Brahminic traditions. It is felt in his parentage. It is on the demand of Skinner, the British resident that he along with his uncle Ram Mohan, begins to write down the Vedas. Later as he fights the British, he is fighting a system of knowledge in English, based on which he conceives his own identity. The battles that he fights could be fought only on British military techniques and culture. Later narrating the story, as a monkey in his next birth, Sanjay is trying to defend the lives of men like Abhay, who have been forced to affirm their identity, faced with the taunts of the West. In *The Trotter Nama* Allan Sealy tries to expose the hollowness of any claims of an authentic, indigenous Indianness.

⁴ It is interesting to note that the word 'Thapsya' (with lots of variants within the Indian context itself) does not have an equivalent in English. This certainly raises the question of Indian writing in English, how much it could represent India and what kind of India. Susie Tharu and Lalitha (1991) discusses the problems of translation in their work.

These contradictions lie in the intellectual positions inherited by the writers, which are reflected in their choice of genre, language and modes of publication, which cannot be separated from the themes of their fiction, India. Like the authors, an Anglo-Indian and a U.S. settled Indian, their characters too are products of the collision of cultures. In trying to do a 'Grass on India' or an epic on India, these narrators are trying to trace their own identities; the worlds they live in the their relations to that world. As both the narrators acknowledge, their identity is not so easy to define, as it is neither English nor Indian. Both the authors narrate the story of Anglo-Indians – Sanjay, Sikander and Chotta in *Red Earth* and seven generations of Trotters in *The Trotter Nama* – who are all sired by the meeting of the occident and the orient. It would be inappropriate and rather absurd to call their parents as 'English' or 'Indian' as both these concepts are too vague to define, mutually contributing to each other's essence.

Allan Sealy seems to be conscious about the problems of identifying the cultures. The great Trotter is portrayed as a French man who turned English for the sake of survival. Sealy's characters are baffled by the contradictions seen in what came to be called India. On the other hand, Vikram Chandra is rather confident in his division of the West and the East, the West projected through Alexander the Great (madman to Sanjay's father and uncle), Aristotle and later Sarthey, and the East through Begum Sumroo, Sanjay and Sikander. But his divisions fail due to the inherent contradictions of the classification itself⁵. Both the narrators, talking retrospectively on what is assumed to be a nation cannot escape the trap of historiography.

⁵ The images of the East and the West that are found in the novels are discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

In order to understand the images of India and how they came into existence one need to look into the evolution of these ideas molded over two hundred years of contact with the British. Had it not been for the British rule Indian writing in English itself would not have emerged as a substantial body of writing as it is today⁶. This would not have been the case with novel as a genre in India. Meenakshi Mukherjee traces the development of novel in India, expounding how the narrative traditions in India were transformed under the influence of the British. She cites O Chandu Menon's dedication of the novel, *Indulekha*, to demonstrate the influence of English writer, as well as the incompatibility of the new genre to the culture and traditions of the peoples of India "As stated at the outset, my object is to write a novel after the English fashion, and it is evident that no ordinary Malayali lady can fill the role of the heroine in such a story. My *Indulekha* is not, therefore, an ordinary Malayali lady" (1985 p.8). This novel, which tries to portray an English educated *Indulekha*, foretells the tale of novel as a genre itself. Chandu Menon's optimism, that years later there would be thousands of *Indulekhas*, turned prophetic under the influence of the cultural changes induced by British. Meenakshi Mukherjee traces the British patronage behind the introduction of novels in Gujarati by Nandshankar Tuljashankar Mehta, who was urged by the education inspector of the Surat state, Mr. Russel. Similarly the first Telugu novel was a response to the prize announced by Lord Mayo to a prose fiction depicting the customs and traditions of society. Though the new genre was adopted and innovated by Indian authors and themes, novel as a genre stands apart as a symbol of the interface between cultures. Thus, like the

⁶ The extent of its growth could be understood from such claims like Rushdie's, that Indian writing in English is far outstanding than all the other literatures in India, expressed in his introduction to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing: 1947-1997* (1997).

Anglo-Indian characters in *The Trotter Nama* and *Red Earth*, the genre too assumes an important role in depicting the themes intended to convey.

If novel in India was an indirect result of the spread of English education and consequent exposure to Victorian literature, the prose in which these novels came to be written, as well as, the means to produce prose works for larger circulation were also devised by the British. Bernard S. Cohn considers the years of 1770 to 1785 as the formative period during which the British successfully began the program of appropriating Indian languages to serve as a crucial component in their construction of the system of rule. This period saw more and more British officials learning the 'classical' languages as well as the 'vulgar' languages spoken in their East Indian territory:

This was the period in which the British were beginning to produce an apparatus; grammars, dictionaries, treatises, class books, and translations about and from the languages of India. ...[T]he production of these texts and others that followed them began the establishment of discursive formation, defined an epistemological space, created a discourse (Orientalism), and had the effect of converting Indian forms of knowledge into European objects. The subjects of these texts were first and foremost the Indian languages themselves, re-presented in European terms as grammars, dictionaries, teaching aids in a project to make the acquisition of a working knowledge of the languages available to those British who were to be part of the ruling groups of India (Cohn 1997: p.21).

The chaos caused by the vastly diverse cultures of their Indian territory was defined and categorized into decipherable and manageable categories for the convenience of the British rule. The earlier studies were limited to the ruling classes as it was more convenient to control the new territory within the existing power structure. The European observation with the written word found Sanskrit and Persian text reliable and convenient to be translated into European structures. The epistemological space once occupied by various Indian scholars, teachers, intellectuals, scribes,

merchants etc. were translated into British administrative structure in India represented by an 'army of babus, clerks, interpreters, sub-inspectors, munshis, pundits, quazis, vakils etc., who ran the day to day affairs of the British Raj under the scrutiny and supervision of white sahibs; which in the beginning was mostly the accumulation, classification and verification of 'Indian' texts.

The white Sahibs' interest in all that in Indian was more out of a need to find an administrative system based on texts to be established in India, similar to that in Britain. This is very well suggested in Warren Hastings statement regarding the relation of knowledge to power made in 1784:

Every accumulation of knowledge and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise dominion founded on the right of conquest is useful to the state... it attracts and conciliates distant affections; it lessens the weight of the chain by which the natives are held in subjection; and it imprints on the hearts of our countrymen the sense of obligation and benevolence... Every instance which brings their real character [i.e. that of Indians] home to observation will impress us with a more generous sense of feeling for their natural rights, and teach us to estimate them by a measure of our own. But such instances can only be obtained in their writing and these will survive when the British dominion in India shall have long ceased to exist, and when the sources which once yielded of wealth and power are lost to remembrance (qtd. in Cohn 1997: p.45).

The British found it convenient to take control of Persian texts as the language of Indian Politics from the Mughals. This could gain legitimacy as Persian was the language of power in the Mughal courts. Following the Battle of Plassey the British found a knowledge of Persian necessary to recruit and train an Indian army and to develop a system of alliances and treaties with native independent princes and powers so as to protect the 'rich and fertile territories' in Coromandal, upper India, and Bengal which the company had conquered (Cohn 1997, p.22). Confronted by a powerful class

of Brahmins the British were forced to codify a Hindu code of law. This along with the curiosity about the 'Gentoos' among the Europeans led to the codification of Sankritic texts. William Jones and others who set about with this task believed that, there was historically in India a fixed body of laws, codes, which have been set down or established by the law givers, something that resembled the precedent based case law of the British tradition⁷.

The learning and religious thought of the Hindus that the British codified, came from the discussions with Brahmans and other high-caste Indians, or from Persian or 'Indostan' translations of Sanskrit text. If on the one hand the British needed a structure and a set of texts, which could be comprehended, on the other hand they needed to win the support of the ruling classes in India to implement their systems. For this they adopted the social power relations that were existent within the territory and placed themselves at the top. Earlier linguistic explorations were intended to appropriate these power relations. Gilchrist and William Carey who led the spoken languages group introduced the young officials to the manners and customs of Indians among whom they were going to work. Gilchrist's first set of Hindustani conversations published in 1798 or Carey's *Dialogues*, which appeared at about the same time, taught the Sahibs the graded grammatical systems of polite forms and forms of various degrees of familiarity and respect so that they could maintain their position high in the existing hierarchy.

⁷ Jones' intentions to become the Tribonian of India is obvious from the statue in Calcutta: "Jones did not live to see the completion of his ambition to become the Tribonian of India, but to this day he stands in stone in St. Paul's Directors, dressed in toga, with pen in hand and learning on two volumes which were understood to mean the institutes of Menu "(Cohn 1991, p.30).

These new forms of knowledge were imparted to the new administrators through Lord Wellesly's ambitious plan for a college at Fort William. In codifying the Gentoo codes on European terms the British had to set themselves in Indian terms to be accepted by the existing social structure. In imposing the Gentoo codes through a set of courts and such legal institutions the British effected a structural unification. Bureaucratization of scattered upper-caste ideology replaced the multiple warlord aristocracy without affecting their position. In G. Aloysius' words,

The social base and the political superstructure became continuous, although under the aegis of colonial regime. By transforming the dominant castes within society, who had hitherto maintained their hereditary hierarchical dominance through religio-cultural ideology in the scattered politics, into a unified bureaucracy for administration with effective power, the British abridged the gulf between social dominance and state power and also provided the former with a new secular legitimating ideology" (1997:p. 45).

The codification of the Sanstkrutic tradition brought those sections of the society, which had been outside the brahminic hegemony and those who had resisted it, under the ambit of Hindu law by glossing over the crucial difference between the two terms – Hinduism and Brahminism. The British policy of non-interference vis-à-vis the ancient regime in India by the British resulted in actively up-holding and supporting the caste order.

As the British administrative network became elaborate, the Brahmins and the moulavi's who provided the textual base for this system were absorbed into the bureaucracy. The new administrative order was perpetuated through educational institutes, which would preserve and perpetuate the 'knowledge' and to provide training for future law officers of the company. Thus Warren Hastings supported the

establishment of a Madrasas for the instruction of young students in Mohammeden law and other sciences under a famous teacher and scholar Muiz-ud-din. Similarly the Sanskrit college in Benaras was established under the initiative of Jonathan Duncan, the British Resident in Banaras. Thus began the establishment of an educational system which would take over the established upper caste order without affecting it. Incorporating the Brahminic elements into administration slowly secularized these ideas. Institutions like the Asiatic Society of Bengal established in 1784 under the initiative of William Jones were slowly duplicated by the newly educated Indian intelligentsia in the form of society for the Acquisition of General knowledge (established 1838), The Tattvabodhini Sabha (established 1839), the Bethune Society (established 1851) and the Bengal science association (established 1867) traditionally empowered groups who transformed themselves into the new intelligentsia furthered the cultural uniformization based on Brahminic ways of living and thinking⁸.

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Western impact on Brahminic ideology found organizational and associational responses in Brahmin Samaj, Arya Samaj and The Theosophy Movement. The rediscovery of the vedas, shastras and of various brahminic practices slowly assimilated into national renaissance and regeneration. Application of comparative philology after William James' discovery of the connections between Sanskrit, Persian, Greek and Latin gave a scientific legitimacy to the rise of Brahminic nationalism. In the European search for the origins of things the roots of ancient Indian civilization became inseparable from the whole theory of an antecedent "Indo-European" civilization which was conceived as

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⁸ Partha Chatterjee discusses the various institutions of learning and administration and the ways in which they contributed to the colonial designs in his article "Discipline in Colonial Bengal"(1995: p.1-29).

the origin of all origins: "The study of Sanskrit thus became central to any understanding of the Occident or the Orient: the Orientalist, a white male, could not conceive of defining himself without defining it in the same discursive space as his dark other "(Vinay Dharwadker 1994: p.176). Indologists like Max Muller considered the knowledge of Sanskrit indispensable in discovering the first germs of the language, religion and mythology of European forefathers. The Orientalist scholars' theory and research on Aryanism, the real and imposed glories of Aryan race, provided intellectual substance and scientific legitimacy to the upper caste claims to their superiority, especially the identity of their origin with that of colonial rulers.

Exploring the literary and linguistic forms texts were collated in order to construct a linear chronology by which the Europeans like James Mill, constituted the 'true history' of India. In Cohen's words, "They were now prepared to give to the India the greatest gift they could give anyone – the Indians would receive a history "(1997, p.54). The cyclic time was replaced by chronological linear time, fatality by linear progression. In constructing a history of India, things ideas and institutions were analysed in comparison with the standards of the Orientalist observers, who were the conquerors as well. From an assumed authentic state of European cultures, Indian culture was studied and its 'progress' was analyzed in its movements through stages of glory or decay or regression or revival. The decline model was preferred by European to legitimise their presence in India and to justify their efforts to reclaim the lost glory, something that could be re-

established by the authentic and pure versions of the great sacred works of the ancient Hindus.⁹

In the introduction of a uniform administrative set up in India the upper-caste men who were employed in re-claiming the culture were slowly introduced into bureaucracy. This was effected through a series of educational institutions. The intentions of the colonial educational policies could be summarized in Macaulay's off-quoted statement.

I feel that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indians in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western world, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population

The education programme slowly introduced Western epistemological space in India and the acculturated middle class became the ideal legitimizers of this vision. The educational policy transformed India into a cultural province of the colonial metropolis with the neo-literate Indians as its compradors.

The religious reformation taken up by reformers, like Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda etc., inherited the new culture and were responding to it from their own viewpoints. Though in varied forms, they internalized the linear history of Hinduism suggested by the British historians, and found it essential to reclaim

⁹ The Protestant ethics, which idealised adulthood, considered it their duty to educate and save the childish cultures in the 'dark' corners of the world. Ashis Nandy discusses the images of European adulthood which was assumed to be the desirable state of civilization to which all the other cultures should be led to (1983. P.16-17).

the pure Vedic and authentic Hindu traditions, which were somehow lost¹⁰. The golden age, which they were seeking, was what they found in the superiority of the Aryan qualities of the Westerners. Ashis Nandy examines the reformation call given by Swami Vivekananda, and Dayanand and concludes that:

... the main elements of their Hinduism were ... an attempt to turn Hinduism into an organized religion with an organized priesthood, church and missionaries; acceptance of the idea of proselytization and religious 'consentization' (sudhi, the bete noire of the Indian Christians and Muslims, was a semitic element introduced into nineteenth century Hinduism under the influence of Western Christianity); an attempt to introduce the concept of the Book following the semitic creeds (The Vedas and the Gita in the case of the two Swamis); the acceptance of the idea of linear, objective causal history; acceptance of ideas akin to monotheism (Vivekananda even managed to produce that rare variant of it: a quasi-monotheistic creed with a feminine god-head as its central plank); and a certain puritanism and this worldly asceticism borrowed from the Catholic church and partly Calvinism (1983, p.24).

Though adulthood was considered the ideal from the maturity claimed by the metropolis, youth was eulogized in the colonies. Youth here meant the neo-literate who would lead the childish colonies into maturity. "Youth meant, above all, the first generation in any significant numbers to have acquired a European education, marking them off linguistically and culturally from their parents generation "(Anderson, 1991: p.119). The impact of European policies on the neo-literates could be seen in the rise of youth movements that spread in India at that time. The success of British imperialism lies not in their physical power but in their control over knowledge, a space created and legitimised by British policy maker. The effect of their policies who evident in the imagination Madhusudhan Dutt, Bankin Chandra and a host of writers who imagined

¹⁰ K.N.Panikkar discusses the rise of neo-literates in the section "Search for Alternatives: Meaning of the Past in Colonial India" (1995,p.108-122).

India in Western terms: "... (Their) aggressive criticism of Indian tradition was in the style of the major reform movements of India; it was not merely an attempt to explain Indian culture in Indian terms, or even in Western terms, but was an attempt to explain the west in Indian terms and to incorporate it in the Indian culture as an unavoidable experience" (Nandy; 1983: p.22).

The codification of Indian traditions gained acceptance with the establishment of a uniform administrative system equipped with an education system that formed 'a class who became interpreters between the British and the masses they ruled. The upper caste Brahmin traditions thus reached the far corners of the colonial territory. The development of advanced modes of transportation and the growth of print had a homogenising effect on the culture. The new class of people who became the translators of culture was mostly bilinguals who on the one hand could communicate with the European and on the other with the local cultures. The emphasis on Sanskrit and the advantageous position of the Brahmins and the upper caste people necessitated them to be literate in codified the codified Sanskritic traditions as well. This in course of time evolved as the great Indian slogan 'unity in diversity'¹¹, where no unity could be established beyond the assumed

¹¹ The political implication of the slogan is studied by Aloysius: "Unity and diversity in the concrete context of the socio-cultural development of the sub-continent are not two value neutral aspects of what constitutes pan-Indian society; they are not political terms. Unity represents the dominant and uniformizing culturo-ideological and mythical Brahminic factors and is thus oppressive: Vedic Brahminic Hinduism as the only acceptable form of Hinduism, Sanskrit as the basis of all languages, Brhamins as the caste to be found all over the sub-continent, and Varnashrama Dharma as the traditional order, representing the dominant and oppressive, ideal social order of the ruling and vested interests. Diversity on the other hand, stands for the movement away from these uniformizing factors, the tendencies of resistance of the sub-altern and the locally rooted castes and communities in general; the growth of the vernaculars and their cultural communities, and the scores of attempts at creating culturally specific non-Brahminic myths and popular religions, are, in a sense, the defiance of the commoners against the imposition from above. Finally, the actual and attenuated realization of the Varnashrama Dharmic ideal in the different regions of the subcontinent represent a history of resistance and uneven success(1997:p.186-187).

Sanskritic traditions and the administrative system. A standardized and centralized administrative system constituted out of bilinguals fostered human interchangeability across vast cultural differences. Interchangeability, which brought in a companionship developed a consciousness of connectedness which was strengthened by a single language of state: "Out of this pattern came that subtle, half-concealed transformation, step-by-step, of the colonial-state into national - state, a transformation made possible not only by a solid continuity of personnel, but by the established skein of journey through which each state was experienced by its functionaries "(Anderson 1991: p.115).

If administrative pilgrimage and a language of state ensured an even spread of the imposed culture the rise of print ensured longevity for the new tradition. Print could run over the diverse cultures, which were mostly oral, dependent on memory and individual narrators. Creating unified fields of exchange and communication print created a sense of fellowship among the readers, to whom they were connected through a seemingly permanent language capable of virtually infinite reproduction, temporally and spatially. In this secular, particular visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community was formed. In the Indian context, print which, was controlled by an Anglicised- Sanskritised community which enjoyed a culturally dominant position set the stage for a modern nation. The general introduction to *Modern Indian Literature: An Anthology, Vol.1*, published by the *Sahitya Akademi*, the national Academy of letters, reveals the predominance of Anglicised Sanskrit based literariness followed by official nationalist policy makers. Regarding English, the introduction states:

Even after India became free, English continued as an official language and the most effective link language in our national and international exchanges. In the political set-up its neutrality is an additional merit...English in fact, the closest the world has to an international language

Sanskrit, placed next to English is considered,

... The symbol of our seniority among the nations of the world... Moreover, it is a microcosm of all that is essentially Indian "(George 1992:p.7).

Vikram Chandra, writing an epic in retrospect, seems to have internalized this imagined tradition when he speaks of 'the givens of the novel'. Both the writers, in their choice of language have taken the neutrality of English and the Sanskritic tradition as the symbol the nation in their conception of India.

It is in the course of this transition of Indian culture that novels appeared. Its heritage is well expressed in the O.Chandu Menon's dedication cited earlier. Novel as a European genre, was in a way the result of the development prose as a medium for writing in India'. Till the end of the eighteenth century literature in India' was synonymous with verse composition. If with British rhyme gave to reason, one has to analyze Indian writing in English with an awareness of the symptoms of what was considered as reason. Prose made its appearance with the translation of the Bible and such missionary activities. The early works in prose were associated with Fort William College and hardly anything was outside this circle. It is in this light that Meenakshi Mukherjee considers the fiction written by Christians as a recognizable product of mid-nineteenth-century (Mukherjee 1985: p.20). This was later taken up by the writers who wrote in order to reform the society. The model of culture which was supposed to be imbibed through reformation, the realistic mode that came to be established and the

patronage and the appreciation that were sought, all these demonstrate how these writings were the outcome of the social changes that took place over a century¹².

It is with an awareness of the 'author function' as well as the implied reader that one should read Vikram Chandra and Allen Sealy. While reading the story of Sanjay or generations of Trotters, the pleasure that is generated is not merely a play of a literary goddess, but is a result of the currents in the society, its inheritance and the future that is projected and shared. It is in this regard that an awareness of the inheritance of the institutions of literariness assumes importance.

If 1770 to 1785 could be looked upon as the formative period of British appropriation of Indian languages as a part of their project to construct a system of rule, the result of this project began to appear by 1850. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the appearance of novels in vernacular languages, marking the internalization of the new system that evolved out of the meeting of cultures. Early nineteenth century saw the emergence of nationalism and national cultures, with vernacular languages elevated as the markers of cultures in Europe. Propelled by print capitalism certain dominant versions of cultures and languages of states assumed iconic status

¹² Spivak, in her article "Burden of English", discusses the implied reader of Tagore's short story "Didi". (1993: pp.134-157). This is the story of a woman (Shoshi) who saves her younger brother (Nilomani) from the tyranny of her husband by entrusting him to a British magistrate. She questions the pleasure generated by such a story with its Sanskritized Bengali and an implied faith in British justice to escape from the ruthlessness of Indian patriarchy. British literature, like the Gentoo code of law, or the dictionaries and schools was intended to help the 'Indians' trace back to their pristine and pure ideal of a part which ironically is a Sanskritized and Any lived construct of India. Tagore's story becomes an extended metaphor of the literary scenario in India, to a great extent. "The magistrate (Brit Lit) (perhaps) understands but of all that Shoshi must sacrifice herself to her own culture, but takes charge of Nilomai (The indefinite future): a crude but recognizable model for what the "best" students manage saying "yes" and "no" to the Shoshi function, as it were in our Brit Lit. classes" (Spivak: 1993: p.141).

in imagining nations. At the fall of feudal system and the weakening of sacred languages and religious pilgrimages, national cultures turned to literature to substitute the role of religion. The new system of flexible class divisions, which was a result of industrialization found in literature and education a cement to bind the society through feeling of shared culture and national goal¹³. Confronted by German and American capitalism in the late nineteenth century as well as the newly discovered cultures in their colonies, Britain had to stake their claim for cultural superiority in order to feel morally secure in their colonising ventures. Literature was introduced in the civil service examinations in the Victorian period so that the new recruits could sally forth overseas armed with a conveniently packaged various of their own culture, secure in a sense of their national identity, and able to display that cultural superiority to their envying colonial peoples (Eagleton 1983: p.28-29).

Literature was invoked to define the cultural realm in England, bestowing national status to Shakespeare and Milton. In India the national status was attributed to the Sanskritic traditions, which was later normalized by the neo-literates. The sense of an organic national tradition was generated by novelists. Its characters moving in a calendrical, homogenous, empty time imagined in a sociological landscape fixed the

¹³ Terry Eagleton quotes George Gordon, an early professor of English literature at Oxford to demonstrate the role expected of literature: "England is sick and... English literature must save it. The churches (as I understand) having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature has now a triple function: still I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the state "(qtd. In Eagleton 1983: p.23).

world inside the novel with the world outside it¹⁴, setting normative patterns of social authority. In Said's words, "The novel is an incorporative, quasi-encyclopedic form. Packed into it are both a highly regulated plot mechanism and an entire system of social reference that depends on the existing institutions of bourgeois society, their authority and power "(Said, 1994: p.84) Jane Austen, George Eliot, Gaskell, Dickens, Thakray and the whole range of novelists defined and established the standards for English gentlemen and women. The neo-literates in India initially ('inspired by', to be euphemistic) translated the 'realities' that they saw into the novel form. Depicting the 'reality' that evolved under the British scrutiny, though with their own innovations, the novelists have been paying tributes to the complicated and complex forms of knowledge produced under the colonial enterprise¹⁵.

As nationalism grew intense, the differences were marked explicitly; the Raj novels justified the colonial superiority, the nationalist novelists began to assert their identity and their claim to nationhood. Ironically, the nationalist novelists, even while marking themselves off from the west duplicated the western conception of India as well as that of the West. This was obvious in the titles like the "Scott of India", "Shakespeare of India" etc. bestowed upon them¹⁶. Bankim Chandra and Rabindranath Tagore openly

¹⁴ Benedict Anderson, discusses the changes in the cultural realm that happened with the appearance of nationalism and the role played by novels and newspapers in Chapter 2 of *Imagined Communities* (1991, p-36)

¹⁵ It is no way a one way traffic, India importing western forms per se but an adaptation of the western forms of knowledge within the Indian social structure. There was no conscious preservation of the spiritual domain as Partha Chatterjee argues (1993). In his efforts Chatterjee in a way normalizes the cultural trade to of the neo-literates.

¹⁶ Moreover the lure of the potential market abroad plays a definitive role in determining the genre in India. See Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan (*The Hindu* Feb. 18, 2001).

acknowledge their gratitude to British historians like Todd, Grant Duff and Cantaur. Tagore recommends :

We had to learn with dates, the detailed account of how India was always been defeated and humiliated by other races from the time of Alexander to the time of Clive. In this desert of shame, the only oases were the stories of Rajput Valour. Everyone knows how in those days Bengali novel and drama eagerly milked every drop of inspiration that Tod's *Annals of Rajasthan* could provide. This reveals the extent to which we were starved of something that would sustain our self-esteem (qtd. In Meenakshi Mukherjee 1985: p.45).

A nationalism that inherits these traditions, where, its national song was composed by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and its national Anthem by Rabindranath Tagore, would certainly have inherited the traits of their ideological positions. The role of their writings could be surmised from the position that is held by these men in imagining the nation, India. The rise of national fervor in the twentieth century led to the demarcation of cultural traits, where the dominant ideology – Anglicised - Brahminism as in the case of India – was exalted to be the centre of national culture. The more the Indian culture is defined, the more it acknowledges its courtesy to its colonial legacy. Warren Hartings' or Macaulay's intentions might not have come true in the literal sense, but Gandhi's call for "a new generation of 'educated' Indians, that is, educated according to European standards, who were prepared to go out to the people throughout the country and serve them in a number of ways, including the spread of a national language" (Lelyveld, 1993L p.190) is not far from the future envisaged, by colonial policy maker.

If the essential ingredients of a Raj novel could be listed as Allan Sealy does, the nationalist fiction too follows certain set patterns in response to the popular national imagination. By the very act of exiting, these novels strengthen and further these myths.

In calling the Delhi centredness, Brahminism, Masculine Rajput Chivalry, the invisible unity in diversity as 'the givens of the novel', Vikram Chandra is in a way paying tribute to the colonial inheritance that have been discussed here. Allan Sealy's 'grass on India' so long as it fails to invoke the forgotten experiences in its critique, end up substantiating this legacy. The chapters that follow shall try to analyse the various assumptions that are implied in the novels of Allan Sealy and Vikram Chandra and, so far as possible, trace their contributions and innovation in imagining the nation.

Chapter III

Dharshans of the World: Inventing Identities and Histories

Speaking on his novel *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, Vikram Chandra acknowledges the influence of Indian epics; “The Indian epics – the Ramayana and the Mahabharat – were there not only in my conscious level, but also at the root of my mind. Those were the first stories told by my mother”(Appn. p.100). To Vikram Chandra, the epic novel that he has written represents a particular ‘darshan of the world’, a darshan rooted in the epics and their functions in the present world. Similarly, in the preface to *The Trotter Nama*, Allan Sealy traces the genesis of his novel to Abul Fazl’s *Akbar Nama* (Preface). On his novel, he comments, “I was writing the epic (a mock epic, true, with a grotesque narrator) of the Anglo-Indians”. Both these novels run through centuries – *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* from the year 1768 (by Augustan Calendar) to the 1990s, and *The Trotter Nama* from 1899, the year of the birth of Justin Aloysius Trotter, and continuous to live through numerous Trotters. In the course of these novels, the two authors traverse the vast concept called India in their own ways. This chapter is an attempt to analyse the ‘strategic location’ and the ‘strategic formation’ of these novels, especially in relation with the history of the concept, which they call India.

M.H. Abrams defines an epic as

A long narrative on a great and serious subject related in an elevated style, and centred on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose action depends the fate of a tribe, a nation or the human race. The traditional epics were shaped by a literary artist from historical and legendary materials which had developed in the oral traditions of his nation during a period of expansion and warfare (1978:p49).

Vikram Chandra acknowledges the conscious use of the conventions and patterns as suggested in Joseph Campbell’s *Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Appn.). The novel, *Red*

Earth employs these conventions in the semi-divine birth of its heroes and their action in the struggle for the independence of the nation, India. In his choice of these conventions Vikram Chandra represents 'a darshan of this world' and claims that "all our darshans have a logical consistency within them" (Appn.). The 'darshan' and 'logical consistency' should be analysed within the position of Ramayan and Mahabharat, the 'great epics' that have influenced Chandra and the dialogue that the novel engages in with the epics, their functional status in the concept of nation and the institutions which legitimise the epic status vis-à-vis the numerous myths and legends that traverse the nation.¹

In the prologue to *The Trotter Nama*, Allan Sealy states his purpose:

Take up the Grey Man's Burden,
To vie be nothing loth:
Where beauty calls or guerdon
Stand up! Stand up! for both. (p.1)

Whom he calls the Grey man is interesting since this is the situation faced by the people occupying the territory called India, especially those like Nehru or Ram Mohan Roy who are at various levels elevated as the founders of Modern India.²

Nehru's statement, "But in my country also, sometimes, I have an exile's feeling" (1947, p.596) is echoed in the Anglo-India search for identity. As it has been discussed in the last chapter, this identity is occasioned by the colonial rule and the resultant efforts to define 'India' in the Sanskritic and British traditions. This somehow carries Macaulay's optimism to create 'a generation of persons Indian in blood and colour; but English in

¹ The rise of the nation on Brahmanical lines and the institutionalisation of Hinduism are discussed in the second chapter. Nandy et al. discuss the Ram Janmabhoomi issue and show how the epics and the myths were used for communal purpose (1995).

² See also Panikkar (1995:pp.1-34)

tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect'. Similar sentiments are ironically echoed in the speech of Boy-Girl in *The Trotter Nama* on the occasion of Indian independence, "And between these borrowed stools we will fall. And even this fall will be a parody ... And here in Nakhlau we will imitate the imitators" (p.499). Taking up the Grey Man's Burden the 'grotesque narrator' of *The Trotter Nama*, Eugene, who is a plagiarist painter, is trying to delineate an identity of his own, to 'cast a shadow of his own' (p.224).

Both the narrators are driven by a need to ascertain their identity, Vikram Chandra to trace the epic-history of India and Allan Sealy to trace the 'chronicle' of Anglo-Indians. He is threatened by Carlos to reconstruct miniature paintings and urged by the great Trotter to reconstruct the past: "But then he began to appear. Not him the skinny one. Him. The Great Trotter Himself (Peace be His). Saying: Eugene, write" (p.9). The ghost of the eighteenth century French man haunts him all over. This ghost is more of a need for identity narrated through the predicament of numerous Trotters through generations. Being an epic (Mock epic) of Anglo-Indians, Sealy narrates the meeting point of the two cultures, the margin at which the exchanges took place. But writing about it in the present, Sealy is reconstructing a history³. Having been caught right in the middle of confusion he is aware of the pitfalls of history when Eugene tells his cupbearer, "I cast no shadow: I am the light" (p.107). The historicity of history is raised in the mock-epic style. At the end of the narrative he tells his cupbearer, "Tell you the truth I made up the whole line – I mean joining up all those Trotters like that. Funny bloody story, more

³ E.H. Carr analyses the constructedness of history (1987); "The facts of history are indeed facts about individuals, but not about actions of individuals performed in isolation and not about the motives, real or imaginary, from which individuals suppose themselves to have acted. They are facts about the relations of individuals to one another in society and about the social forces which produce from the actions of the individuals results often at variance with, and sometimes opposite to, the results which they themselves intended" (p.52).

holes than a cheese in it. In fact there is a whole right in the middle” (p.572). By the hole, he means the Middle Trotter or the anti-Trotter who is a historian keen to order the life of the first Trotter. *The Trotter Nama* in one sense in meta-history as it consciously works upon the holes in history attempting to be conscious about it. But on the other hand Sealy seems to be unaware of what falls out his consciousness or national history that is taught in India and recreates in his own way the traditional history, partly Oriental and partly nationalistic. But by his conscious narrative technique, Allan Sealy in a way disowns his personal attachment and responsibility to such a history and brings out the possibility of other stories that contend for the position of the legitimate history.

If we consider Vikram Chandra’s claim to epic lineage, it appears that he intends his text to perform a larger historical function of mapping the world as an Indian in an Indian way; “Most of my meetings with the people and my readings did not appear explicitly in the book. Even though I did not put them, they create my world of writing, my map”(Appn.) Even the narrative structure, which he contrasts with the ‘Aristotelian linear structure’ (Appn.) is employed with this purpose. On the lines of the *Katha Sarit Sagarah*, Vikram Chandra uses a complex structure, whereby stories are interwoven into stories. The epic is narrated by a Monkey, which is shot by Abhay, a U.S. returned Indian to ward-off death acting on an agreement made with Yama in the presence of Hanuman. The monkey who was Sanjay, a poet, in his last birth re-creates the story, and in this, he is supported by Abhay. Both the characters are linked up in their anxiety about their identity. Sanjay, the poet, was an Anglo-Indian born out of many parents, both firangi and Indian, symbolically representing the foundation of modern India. Sanjay is born out of one of the mysterious ladoos send to Jhanvi—the Rajput woman forcefully married by

Skinner—by George Thomas. While Udhay Singh, the commander of Skinner is carrying it to Jhanvi, he is stopped by De Boigne who spits into the superstitious ladoos. One of those ladoos is swallowed by Jhanvi's neighbour, Shanti Devi who conceives Sanjay. That is why Udhay Singh says; "The old man, Thomas, Begum Sumroo, I, de Boigne, you, all of us. All of us except the father" (p.151.) If Sanjay, Sikandar and Chotta are fathered by the meeting of cultures in the colonial India, Abhay is an Indian who is forced to explore his identity after his wanderings in the US as a student. Thus both the epics speak of Anglo-Indians, on a larger scale they are the neo literates who imagined the nationality of the colonial territory in an Anglicised-Sanskritised epistemological space. Vikram Chandra, though conscious about historicity sets out to answer the anxiety of a nationalist, like Abhay walking through Bombay; "To the south, in the crowded lanes and bazars of Jankpur, his past waited, eager to confront him with old friends and half-forgotten sounds and smells. Abhay hesitated, nagged by a feeling that he had been away for several centuries, not four years, afraid of what he might find lurking in the shadows of bygone days, and suddenly felt his soul drop away, felt it withdrawing, leaving him cold and abstracted" (p.4).

In his narration Sanjay admits the way he creates the story; "I won't tell what happened... I'll make a lie. I will construct a finely coloured dream, a thing of passion and joy, a huge lie that will entertain and instruct and enlighten. I'll make The Big Indian Lie" (p.14). But this lie is called an epic, a lie constructed along the 'givens of the nation', which has been discussed in the previous chapter. The truth, if there is such a possibility, cannot be reclaimed, as historiography in India itself has been initiated by

Britain and later used to establish nationhood itself under the nationalist bourgeoisie leadership.⁴

This lie is Sanjay's way of warding off Yama. This storytelling, "In the most obvious way has to do with the narrative experience of human beings themselves. We cannot live without telling stories, without making stories of everything – our perceptual apparatus is set in such a way that we make narratives of everything. The other side is that if you cannot tell a story you are dead" (Appn.). This story is a continuation of the stories that were in currency over the centuries. One cannot exactly fix the origin of these narratives. According to the witch of Sardhana, "the brahmins say creation is without beginning and without end ... The Great Cycles follow each other, the small cycles within, wheels within wheels, creation, construction, chaos, destruction. Many Universe exists beside each other, each with its own Brahma; this is the wheel, immense, beyond the grasp of conception' (p.72).⁵ This concept of time overwhelms Reinhardt and George Thomas who calculated it to 4,320,000,000 and surprises them by its endlessness; "Nothing dies. Surely that is good" (p.73). Vikram Chandra cites the authority of brahmins, a strain that persistently appears throughout the novel. The witch of Sardhana, is attributed with "the magic of the brahmins" (p.66).

Cyclic time has been used by Brahmanic historiographers to legitimise their sense of *Kaliyuga*. *Kaliyuga* is the word that is used by the main characters of *Red Earth* to describe the changes that took place during the British rule. Similarly this has been used as a fatalistic excuse to explain the 'decay' that the 'national culture' is undergoing. This

⁴ See chapter 2.

⁵ Anderson explains the shifts in changing concepts of time from that of cyclic time in sacred communities to the 'calendrical, homogenous empty time' of modernity. The narratives of sacred communities were replaced by novels and newspapers (1991:pp22-36).

is marked by the loss of their privileges and the rising awareness of the Brahmanic oppression among the lower caste. In her article 'The Time as a Metaphor of History' Romila Thapar explains the significance of this concept; "The *Kaliyuga* symbolises the breaking down of caste ranking as a determining feature of social activities. Mention is made of *mleccha* rulers, corrupt *brahmanas* and upstart *sudras* taking on the airs of *brahmanas* and performing priestly functions" (2000:p.22). Allan Sealy satirises this through his character Munshi Mishan Chand who complains of *Kaliyuga*.

Red Earth and Pouring Rain narrated by the monkey, Sanjay, who speaks about his past lives, is not a story to save his life alone. It is the story of generations which claims continuity from the time of Lord Ram. The challenge faced by Sanjay is to hold his audience for if half of them are lost it, would result in his death. The story is not the burden of Sanjay alone but the burden of the people. Sanjay is supported by Hanuman who lives on through the stories of grandmothers, to their grand children as he was blessed by Rama who told him that, "As long as men and women tell your story, you will live, indestructible and invincible" (p.13). In the novel, constructing the part of a nation in its struggle for independence, Chandra weaves stories into stories through multitudes of storytellers in dialogue with the concept of the national culture and its givens, trying to find the lineage and to define the forces that sustains this nation. If the story is occasioned by the shooting of Sanjay by Abhay and Sanjay's growing awareness of his past life it is supported by Abhay as they are imagined to be related through the same narratives; "we are related through stories. The mirrorings between them and the symmetries between the journeys are exactly what I [Vikram Chandra] conceptualised. Finally, to the end, they save each other by telling the story; Sanjay gets the strength to die and Abhay gets the

strength to live” (Appn.). Through the narration the audience who multiply outside would also be strengthened in their faith in the narratives of national culture.

While Allan Sealy’s epic deals with a people at the point of the collision between the two cultures the characters in *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* are not too different. They too have to identify their position. “The mirroring between Abhay’s story and the nineteenth century story are almost obvious”, as the author admits it, “Even the nineteenth century characters are in this collision between cultures. That is on the metaphorical level, or the structural level at which the narrative work” (Appn.). Abhay, a student of a University in the US wakes up to hear the death of his grand father, which sends him in a frenzied search for roots. His despair is accentuated by the provocative headlines in *New York Times* lampooning the Orientalist image of India. Another headline speaks about ‘the charm of the British Raj’ (p.47). Within the space of one page of the novel or two imagined hours in the day of Abhay, he is provoked by one of his classmates who eulogise the British for the changes that they introduced in India. These incidents placed in the beginning of the novel, whose burden is shared by Abhay in the twentieth century, suggests the motive of this novel. Vikram Chandra, who is settled in the US might also be provoked by the “geo-fucking-politics” (p.48) and called on to answer the image of India in the US.⁶

Born in a Brahmin family, Abhay is brought up in the traditional way. Under the influence of modern education he refuses to have his *upanayana*. His refusal to wear the sacred thread is a reflection of his inability to find meaning in the traditions under the

⁶ This obsession to prove India to the West seems to operate behind A.L. Bhasham’s book *The Wonder That Was India* (1954). The preface says, “This book has been written to interpret ancient Indian civilization, as I understand it, to the ordinary Western reader who has little knowledge about the subject but some interest in it.”

influence of what is taught at school. He is a representative of bourgeois nationalism that Aijaz Ahmad, K.N. Panikkar and G. Aloysius speak about in their works,⁷ a product of the upper-caste reformation which later went to wrest freedom from British.

Teresa Hubel (1996) discusses the attempts made at defining India by various people like Rushdie, Naipaul, Edwin Arnold, Kipling, Nehru, etc., in the emotional realm.⁸ Vikram Chandra and Allan Sealy are two recent contenders to claim the land called India. Chandra's attempts to define this nation is more in an upper caste mould of homogenising the culture. The choice of epic mode on the lines of Ramayan and Mahabharat should be understood in this light. His main characters – Abhay, Sanjay, Sikandar and Chotta – are all tied together by the sacred thread. No other religion or race has any place within the framework of this 'Great Indian Lie'. Abhay who is lost in loneliness in the American University, draws from Sanjay's story the strength to live whereas Sanjay dies courageously after having handed down the story of his nation. On the absence of other sections of people in the narrative, Vikram Chandra says; "These were the givens of the story. The question of putting in either the geographic expansion or the demographic expansion would have been interesting. But finally it would have detracted from the specifics of the story. In some ways, I think, that kind of politically correct art, where people are dragged into as a token of all such things is more patronising than anything else. Unless the character himself enters the story and function in an important way, shoe-horning them would be useless" (Appn.). Though he is

⁷ If Aijaz Ahmad (1991) and Panikkar (1995) discuss this through the Brahmanical movements for independence, Aloysius talks about it in terms of 'power as resistance', the resistance against Brahmanism.

⁸ Teresa Hubel, like many other western writers analyses an East-West tussle, considering the existence of a unified East represented by men like Nehru and Bipan Chandra, ignoring the diversities that exist within the construct of East.

conscious of the presence of these sectors of people, he finds the place of these people beyond the bounds of the givens of the story. In imagining a nation, Vikram Chandra follows the elitist notions that have been identified due to various reasons as the image of the nation itself without any consideration for the larger section, more than eighty percentage, of the population. Brought up in a culture where sanskritised English traditions set the standards, Vikram Chandra assumes these inequalities to be normal. Perhaps this could be the case with most nations as Anderson puts it in *Imagined Communities*; “it [a nation] is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 1991: 11).

Responding to the ‘Grey man’s burden’ Allan Sealy does not consider the significance of other castes, races or languages. The origin of Anglo-Indians, who exist at the meeting point of cultures, is considered to be a result of the meeting between the few European warlords and a few upper class Hindus or Muslims. It could never have been so. The narrator in *The Trotter Nama*, though he does not overlook the possibility of the part played by other races as in his suspicion of his mother’s relation with the Boy-Girl, excludes the existence of such people. In tracing the lineage of the Trotters from the great Trotter through seven generations, the narrative passes through Sans Souci, through the palaces of regional kings and their armies, and later through the different departments of government and various private entrepreneurs. There are occasional glimpses of the stench of the *Ganda nala*, the nilchis at war and the invisibility of the lower caste men who passed before them everyday, the invisible hands that pull the fans or Dukhi Das who helped Thomas Henry and the British to raise the siege on Nakhla. It is out of such

a consciousness that the mock epic is constructed. In narrating the story of the Anglo-Indians along the lines of nationalist history, Sealy is conscious about the invisible.

Though it was Dukhi Das's courage that won the Victoria Cross for Thomas Henry, Dukhi Das is never recognised. Thomas Henry while narrating his historic feat towards the end of his life acknowledges the courage of Dukhi Das:

And where would the Residency garrison have been without the guide of Nakhlau? For a moment there flickered at the edge of Thomas Henry's vision a blue hand. The Guide's guide, Dukhi Das, Dhobi & Dyer, had received no Victoria Cross for his exploit. A small pension was his, and in better days Nakhlau Trotter had been known to fulminate at the Nakhlau Club that his companion deserved better of the government. (History had not been kind to Dukhi either; the very year of his night time exploit saw the production in Europe of synthetic indigo, and already demand for his dye had slackened) (p.388).

It is perhaps out of this consciousness that Allan Sealy opted to tell his story as a mock epic. But the satire is very subtle and does not penetrate much in to the 'lie', except in occasional admittance of contrary views, and that way fail to bring out the possible truths.

Vikram Chandra as well as Allan Sealy is conscious about the written history of the nation. Both the novels begin at the fall of Mughal Empire and the arrival of European future hunters.

The decline of the Mughal Empire and the consequent emergence of autonomous states resulting in the absence of a strong political and military power over large parts of the country provided a golden opportunity to free booters, both European and Indian, who plundered and ravaged the countryside in many areas. Before the avarice and rapacity of these plundering hordes – the skimmers and George Thomases, Amir Khans and Karim Khans, Chittus and Scindhias and Holkars – the country lay prostrate and helpless (Panikkar 1995: p.20).

It is at this juncture that Benoit de Boigne appears in *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*. Inspired by the tattered copies of "The Romance of Alexander, with Stories of Aristotle,

by a Prussian officer named Blunt, La Borgne read and dreamed of hidden treasures, turbaned warriors and princess in distress; he played strange, wild music on an out of tune piano, took fencing lessons and surprised his master with the ferocity and determination of his thrusts” (p.24). Alexander and Aristotle are intentionally introduced in the beginning to contrast two dominant symbols of Western philosophy with that of the Eastern as Vikram Chandra suggests in the interview (Appn.). This comparison is carried out further by the foster-father of Sanjay, Arun and his uncle Ram Mohan, who are brahmin “... love poets of the first order, reduced to writing about a homicidal madman because our [their] majesty is fascinated by Skinner’s bluff tales’ of conquests” (p.121). In their anguish that, “Our name will die out with us”, the anguish of the novelist is also expressed; the anguish that his identity would be lost. It is to regain this identity that the stories are narrated in what is assumed to be an Indian way. But in narrating an exotic tale Vikram Chandra is re-telling the Orientalist story of an exotic India. The image of a mysterious and superstitious India is consciously employed through what Vikram Chandra calls magic realism; “Many have objections to magic realism, that it perpetrates a mysterious India. For me a large part of India is still mysterious. I do not mean the religious feeling or fervor, but the way people conceive the world. I do not mean that life is mysterious somewhere in the interiors of Madhya Pradesh or some such place, but here in Delhi or Bombay. I look at the world with a texture of faith and belief” (Appn.).

De Boigne is followed by George Thomas who takes up the name ‘Jahaj Jung’. George Thomas adopts the Indian way of life while his companion Reinhardt chooses to be British. Suggesting the inevitability of a hybrid culture the witch of Sardhana choose to marry Reinhardt than the Indianised George Thomas and dismisses George Thomas

saying, “You’ll do for a lover, but if I must have a foreign king, let it be him” (p.100). De Boigne and George Thomas are followed by the East India Company which is represented by Skinner. Once the British presence is officially established as an empire, the counter rhetoric also appears through Arun, Ram Mohan and later through Sanjay. Vikram Chandra is conscious of the European part of the ancestry of modern India. Skinner in the novel too marries an Indian woman who failed to commit *sati* at the time of conquest. This woman, Jhanvi, is symbolic of the defeat of Indian culture at the hands of masculine Europe, and would breed a hybrid culture, which is equally masculine as she conceives through Jahaj Jung: “My Karma is bad, so I must live. But if I must have children by a *firangi*, let it be that one. If I must have sons, let them be fathered by Jahaj Jung. Go to him. Find him, wherever he is. Tell him I said, if I must have sons, let it be you” (p.142). Thus Vikram Chandra adds another novel to perpetrate the image of the defeat of a feminine India before masculine Europe, perpetrating the traditional Orientalist rhetoric and the counter-rhetoric.⁹

Out of this intercourse, Sanjay, Sikander and Chotta are born. Sikander, the Indian version of Alexander, is the answer to the invaders. Through Sanjay, Sikander and Chotta, the novel traverses almost a century including the outburst in 1857, called the first war of independence or the Sepoy mutiny, depending on the point of view. After his failure at the siege of Lucknow where he is armed with the British alphabet, Sanjay takes on to magic and sanyasa. It is with this power that he fights and defeats Sarthey, the British doctor and scientist, in London:

The world that I depict in this novel is one in which extra scientific belief and extra scientific actions are part of life. But I do not know whether it is

⁹ This is discussed in the fourth chapter. Ashis Nandy (1983) discusses the gender codes followed in Britain which were attributed to the Oriental cultures in his book *The Intimate Enemy*.

actually true or whether it actually works.... I guess that science too is a kind of faith. I think it is Asimov who points out that, any technology sufficiently advanced, that we do not understand, looks like magic. I guess that I was playing with this idea that a faith of different sort can also give you another kind of ability. Sarthey is also changed by what he does (Appn.).

What the Europeans called mysterious, due to their failure to understand has been internalised by the generations of Indians or the neo-literates. Such a trend emanated with the German romanticism which was seeking a refuge from their own pattern of life. European scholars and Indologists like Max Muller through their discovery of ancient philosophy and Sanskrit literature stressed the non-modern, non-utilitarian aspects of Indian culture with a religious tradition of over three thousand years, where Indian pattern of life was concerned with metaphysics “India now became the mystic land for many Europeans, where even the most ordinary actions are imbued with symbolism”. (Thapar 1966: p.16). In the fight between Sanjay and Sarthey we find the clash and the eventual defeat of materialistic Sarthey by a spiritual Sanjay. “This theme [Indian Spirituality] was taken up by a section of Indian thinkers during the last hundred years and became a consolation to the Indian intelligentsia for its inability to compete with the technical superiority of Britain” (Thapar 1966: p.16).

The statement in the beginning of *The Trotter Nama*; “This book is entirely a work of fiction. All of the characters, events and places are fictitious, and any resemblance to places, events or person, living or dead, is purely coincidental and unintentional”, appears to be intentional and a part of the mock epic structure. Allan Sealy’s novel is intensely conscious of the nationalistic trends in Indian history and no one would miss the references to historical events. The narrative that begins with the birth of Justin Aloysius Trotter, which is claimed to be on the twenty-first of June, 1719,

is in fact a journey through the development of colonialism from the French to the British and takes the readers through the freedom movement to the present. The very emergence of Anglo-Indians, to whom the novel is dedicated to, is not an occurrence isolated from the meeting of cultures out of which the race emanated. It was not so easy to define as a meeting of just two cultures, but is a complex affair that involves more than what could be imagined. Trotter, who arrived in India as a French man, 'Trottoire', changed his name to 'Trotter' as the French were defeated by the English in the Carnatic wars. On reaching Calcutta he chose an English name and joined the 'free booters' and moved to Nakhla; "... for there are many opportunities up-country and fortunes to be made in war and trade".(p.118) The 'Frenchman-turned-Englishman' was accepted by the Nawab of Tirnab as "...he knew Paris and spoke French, his axletrees were miserably stunted, his own commander-in-chief was ailing, and the French artilleryman's reputation ran ahead of him" (p.120). Surprised by the differences of the land, Trotter slowly grows accustomed by the country to the extent that he follows certain Indian traditions, like food habits, dress, etc. contrary to the Nawab who was turning European everyday. The differences of the land struck him to the level of ignorance out of which he tried to create an image of a country as opposed to his own country: "This country is old and feeble, being hot and wet and hot and dry by turns. It is everything that we are not, so that any object you are like to touch upon at home might be fairly argued to have its opposite here" (p.118).¹⁰ As in *Red Earth*, here too certain ideas regarding India are compared with that of Europe and the collision resulted in something altogether new like Sans Souci:

... the gardens were laid out on classical lines which cut across contours of the land, regardless of salient and dips and showing little concern for texture whether in the grouping of trees or the shrubbed grading of a bank.

¹⁰ The European conception of the Orient is discussed in detail by Said (1978).

'Formality, regularity, uniformity', the French firangi lectured his team of puzzled gardeners, '- only hurry!' The gardeners dispersed to join his will to their desire, and the plans were subtly changed (p.139).

At the end of a fierce legal battle for the inheritance of the Great Trotter, Mik, the second Trotter, who had been all over India fighting for British and Indian masters, appears at Sans Souci. In his character and the Roseboys we find resemblances to the Chiria Fauj led by De Boigne in *Red Earth*. Through various incidents that run into generations Allan Sealy takes the readers through the evolution of India. The narrative depicts the exploitation of India, the siege of Lucknow, Ilbert bill, 'the small frail Indian from South Africa', salt marches, to partition and violence and continue to what emerged as independent India. Sometimes through direct references and occasionally through names resembling historical figures, a picture of India is presented which is mostly centred in Delhi, Nakhla and Calcutta. The geographical structure and the 'Delhi-centred view' of Indian History have been analysed by K.N. Panikkar and Romila Thapar. The vast Indo-Gangetic plain usually promoted vast empires unlike the southern half of the sub-continent which was cut off into smaller kingdoms due to the geographical features of the country.

In an age of empires as was the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the larger kingdoms of the north attracted the attention of historians. Periods when large kingdoms flourished became the 'Golden Ages' and those which saw the growth of smaller regional states became the 'Dark Ages'. The history of the peninsula received for less attention, except during those periods when it could boast of empires (Romila Thapar 1966: p.21). Later the nationalist historians in imagining a unified country adopted this picture to prove the existence of a unity that stretched from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Very few historians ever talk of the western and the eastern stretches of the nation; the eastern stretch has always remained a silent wonder with its large collection of tribes, languages

and cultures that have failed all the efforts of standardisation. Historians like Bipan Chandra who gloss over the vast differences, speak about a national movement on the one hand and acknowledge the need for a nation building on the other.¹¹

In the journal entry of Great Trotter he speaks about on his arrival:

But what is this India? Is it not a thousand shifting surfaces which enamour the new comer and then swallow him up? It allows him the many titles of victory while obliging him to accept a single right function, that of conqueror. The very divisiveness that allowed him in enmeshes him. How is he to grasp what cannot be held – what in fact holds him fast? Is this a perverse and passive strength? How is he to fire a weapon whose triggers are so numerous and interlocked? This man is a Gentoo, that one a moor; this stray beast is sacred to one, is freely slaughtered by the other – who will consider himself polluted by still another creature; other sects delight in sacrifice, still others wear masks across the mouth and nose lest they kill the smallest germ (p.134)

In his task to forge an army of these multitudes the great Trotter falls back on the ideas that he had acquired in Europe; “The nearer I approach this land the further I am driven back into my already formed ideas, and I conclude by studying – despite my intentions, my love – not India but Europe, or Europe’s India which is the same thing” (p.134).¹² To him India is a bride veiled in mystery, condemned to be seen through a gauze of idea brought from Europe. The nation begotten of such a union inherited the British administrative structure and the culture of its upper caste followers.

A similar approach to history could be viewed in the words of George Thomas who tries to grasp the vent diversity: “I listened ... and thought of how it must be, with the French to the South, the Marathas and Rajputs to the West, the Sikhs in the North, the

¹¹ “The first and the most important task was to preserve, consolidate and strengthen India’s unity, to push forward the process of the making of the Indian nation and to build up and protect the national state as an instrument of development and social transformation”, says Bipan Chandra (1999,p.1).

¹² This is close to the search for the original text of Hindoo Laws by William Jones and Warren Hastings, to establish a legal system similar to the precedent based legal system of Britain discussed Cohen (1997).

British in the east, and the Moghuls in the middle (shattered and haunted by memories), and all the others, all those Kingdoms, the Kings and princes and generals and soldiers, Maharajas and sultans, queens and commoners, all uncertain, frightened and rapacious, the centre gone” (p.84). Out of this chaos with out a centre George Thomas intends to build an empire. The allusion to a gone centre presupposes the existence of a unified nation, and when considered with the ideas foregrounded in the novel, this centre was unified by a brahmanic knowledge structure – an Aryan power. This was supposed to have been shattered by the 'Moghul barbarians'. Such a view of history as it is demonstrated in the chapter “What Really Happened” (p.430) suggests a division of Indian History into three major periods, Ancient, Medieval and Modern. In such a division historians traced a degeneration of culture from Aryan Ancient period through the Muslim medieval period which finally surrendered the country to the British. Such a view was used by the Hindu revivalists to reclaim what was considered a golden period that was lost.¹³

Most of these views were aimed at projecting an imaginary order and unity that is claimed to have existed through the stretches of this country, which the nation is supposed to re-establish with North Indian upper caste traditions at its centre as a part of 'nation-building'. But “... the break-up of the Mughal Empire was a fragmentation of political power, not political disintegration. Disintegration of a centralised empire is not necessarily a misfortune, nor is it politically retrogressive” (Panikkar 1995: p.36). Panikkar tries to highlight the distinctiveness of the culture that flourished in various centres during this period of disintegration.

¹³ Aloysius (1997) analyses Nehru's *Discovery of India* and demonstrates Nehru's adherence to Brahmanical norms.

Allan Sealy and Vikram Chandra are conscious about the various trends in Indian history and culture and suggest their discomfort throughout their novels. Yama advises Sanjay; "Straight forwardness is the curse of your age, Sanjay. Be wily, be twisty, be elaborate. Forsake grim shortness and hustle. Let us luxuriate in our curlicues" (p.20). A similar view is expressed in the chronicle of the Trotters narrated by a plagiarist painter who creates a story to protect the history of Trotters from historians like Montague. However, in spite of their consciousness they create another story on the lines of what has already been told, in their choice of material and their prioritising of facts either to substantiate it as in *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, or to draw attention to 'the hole in the middle' as in *The Trotter Nama*. The story has to be continued to sustain this imagined community, which is neither vertically nor horizontally related. As the witch of Sardhana says: "All stories have in them the seeds of all other stories, and she is no true storyteller who would keep this from you" (p.96). These stories inspired by the stories of the great Indian lie, would in turn generate new stories either by inspiring others or through critical responses.

Chapter IV

Memory and Forgetfulness: Reproducing/Producing the Narratives of the Nation

All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives (Anderson, 1991:204).

Narratives of nations are full of amnesias, especially of the experiences out of which it is born. It is an awareness of these amnesias that seem to inform what Eugene calls 'a hole in the middle' of his narrative, *The Trotter Nama*. This chapter is an attempt to analyse some of the experiences that lie at the centre of the definitions of India as it is portrayed by Vikram Chandra and Allan Sealy. If the second chapter is an attempt to delineate the colonial experience which gave birth to the idea of India that these novelists try to depict, the third chapter attempts to explain the historiographical trends that forms the subject of Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth* and Allan Sealy's *The Trotter Nama*. This chapter is an endeavor to analyse the various conceptions of India that seemed to have molded the imagination of these writers.

If the colonial administrators tried to establish a well-defined system of governance, the resultant intelligentsia tried to mark themselves off claiming a pan-Indian identity. The codification of Sanskrit texts in an attempt to establish a gentoo code of law, the efforts of comparative philologists to codify Indian languages, the colonial education system envisaged by policy makers like Macaulay, and the neo-literates who were educated to form an army of sepoys to run the British empire in the sub-continent, all these contributed to the establishment of a national consciousness across a land which is called India.

The unification of the Indian subcontinent under the British rule led to the internal interchangeability of men and documents, which in course of time created a sense of a pan-Indian cultural integration. The diverse stretch of land surveyed and portrayed on the globe by an imperial dye to mark the territory of the East Indian colony was internalized by the Indian intelligentsia and given the colour of national culture. This was later propagated and secularised by an upper-caste national movement equipped with the homogenising power of print-capitalism.

The rise of nationalism in Europe through the nineteenth century led to the demarcation of cultures in Europe. National cultures were differentiated as "...the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form a imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for modern nation" (Anderson 1991: p.46). The new intelligentsia who were from the upper-caste communities of India, educated in the British systems too was forced to identify themselves with the culture and standards of their British Masters. The politico-economic or structural changes that arose out of the meeting between the cultures gave birth to the ideological context for the rise of nationalism in India¹. According to Aloysius two aspects were most important in the rise of nationalism in India:

The first is the set of beliefs and articulations of the British concerning the subcontinent's society and culture. The numerous ways in which 'they' represented India provided the ideological environ within which the nationalist self-perception took shape. The second is the set of beliefs and articulations again of the British, concerning their own national society and culture, i.e., the ideal nation; the number of ideological premises,

¹ The structural changes are clearly evident if one traces the evolution of the constitution of the country, through the demands of the new intelligentsia and the enforcement of various administrative reforms granted by the British. Nationalist historians like Bipan Chandra consider the upper caste leadership that usurped the national movement as natural and patriotic.

often implicit, that underlay the new juridico-administrative infrastructure also provided the environ within which the self-perception of the nation took shape" (1997, p.132).

The process of piecing together the cultural nation began with the historical cultural discoveries of the early Orientalists centred around that William regarding the Aryan myth, the Sanskrit language, and the sacred texts. The new middle class, who were groomed under the educational policy, initiated by policy makers like Macaulay and Bentick, slowly transformed India into a sort of cultural province of the colonial metropolis shaping into a powerful proto-nationalism identifying itself with the Sanskritic Brahmanism. A minimalistic approach to the national culture – Vedic Brahminism – applied with territorial maximalism – pan-Indian spread — slowly engulfed the sub-continent, creating a pan-Indian religio-cultural nationalism on the models of pre-modern Islam and Christianity.² If the European cultural identity was defined in opposition to the Orientalist other, the emerging cultural nationalism in India defined itself in opposition to the presumed nature of the West:

...the values and principles of the social organisation were to be derived and defined through a presumed polar opposition to those of the west, Europe, and British imperialism or simply modernity. If the West was materialist, we were spiritual, if individualist, then we were corporate, if competitive and conflictual, then our culture was organic and harmonious (Aloysius 1997: p.132).

Literature, which is assumed to be the reflections of the culture, reproduces this conflict more than any other icons of culture. This is especially true in the case of novels, which translate Indian realities into a Western concept of time and a medium of writing

² Ashish Nandy (1983) and Aijaz Ahmad (1992) discuss the semiticization of Hinduism in detail.

— prose. The conflict between the West and the East has appeared in various novels at different levels: "The definition of 'East' and well as 'West' varies from novel to novel, but each tries in its own way to grapple with the problem that has continued to concern the Indo-Anglian novelist..." (Meenakshi Mukherjee 1971: p.66). Indian novels in English cannot be otherwise even in the most seemingly political novel, since every word is a struggle between the cultures. As Meenakshi Mukherjee says,

Almost every educated Indian today is the product of the conflicts and recognition of two cultures, although the consciousness of this tension varies from individual to individual. What is generally true of the educated Indian is especially true of the Indian writer, because a writer is concerned with the springs of human action and with the motivation behind human behaviour. Thus he is more aware than others of the elements that make up his personality. At the present point of Indian history, a writer's analysis of his self-necessarily involves the evaluation of his own attitude towards these two aspects of being-one inherited through birth, the other imbibed through education" (1971, p.65).³

In the case of 'historical novels' written in India, the East-West conflict is inevitable, even when it is not set in the colonial period. The historical consciousness itself has been an outcome of the meeting of cultures. As Vikram Chandra acknowledges in the interview, "They [the British] are part of their [The characters - Chotta, Sikandar and Sanjay] birth, as you and I are in the post-colonial context. I look up to them as my own ancestors. In the popular media, the construction of the image of the West is such that we are made to believe that they came to India and were never a part of it" (see Appn.) In spite of this awareness, *Red Earth* works within the East-West opposition. Allan Sealy working at the borderline of these two cultures, tries to mock at the concepts

³ The expression "imbibed through birth" is questionable as the culture itself was changed (produced) by the colonial impact. Born in cultures that have been standardised by the imperial policies one cannot even imagine as 'Indian reality' indigenous in itself."

of East and West. A brief look at the rise of historical novels in India would reveal the contradictions that lie at the very foundation of this genre.

Meenakshi Mukherjee lists some of the factors that may have contributed to the emergence of this genre:

...(a) a general exposure to other cultures through the study of English; (b) awareness that Indians were different from the British and a consequent curiosity to understand the past that would account for the present; (c) rediscovery of Indian history in books that the British wrote about India; (d) a desire to rewrite these accounts from an indigenous point of view (1985: p.40).⁴

In order to emphasize the role of British in the rise of a nationalist feeling and historiography that was manifested in the historical novels, she further quotes Pandit Hariprasad Shastri's account on Bankim: "He wished that there might be regeneration of life in Bengal along the lines of the European renaissance. He hoped one day to write the history of Bengal" (in Mukherjee 1985: p.40). Bankim's contemporaries – Romesh Chandra Dutt and Harinarain Apte – acknowledged their admiration for Sir Walter Scott and their indebtedness to the British historians like Grant Duff.

Even though the novel emerged out of the influence of the British, faced with the differences and cultural superiority assumed by the West, the 'Indians' imagined their culture along the presumed opposition to the West.⁵ Part of it was a result of the internationalization of the oriental stereotypes. Allan Sealy craftly introduces the inability of the west to perceive India through the confusion faced by the Great Trotter. On reaching Calcutta he writes to his mother:

⁴ Though Meenakshi Mukherjee is conscious about the impact of West in the evolution of a national culture, she seems to apply the cultural minimalism of Vedic Brahminism to a territorial maximalism – an assumed pan-Indian culture – in her use of the words 'India' and Indian.

It is so very different, Mama, the town, the trees, the creatures, the inhabitants. The men are as black as the sand in white and wear many yards of untailed cloth. The women are still more encumbered but their garments are brightly coloured. They keep their heads covered and their faces hid, so I cannot tell whether they are beautiful or not - though they could never hope to match my dear mama. We have been ordered to keep clear of the bazaar, which was called the Black Town by the English, I cannot hope to describe them further... (p.116).

Laden with western ideas, Trotter can only see things black and white. Not only that, what ever he conveys home is assumed to represent 'India', whereas all that he describes is Calcutta. Through out *The Trotter Nama* there is a sense of an assumed Indian culture. Even though that is satirised, there is hardly any occasion when Sealy steps out to picture the various other cultures of this sub-continent. Though the novel is set in Lucknow (Nakhla as in *The Trotter Nama*) there is hardly any occasion in which the rest of India makes any trace. The great Trotter continues with his vision of India seen through his Euro-centric eyes:

I have now had greater opportunity to examine the country in which it seems fate has cast my lot. It is not like America. One marvels that the Spaniards called those people Indians, for those people are primitive and handsome. This country is old and feeble, being hot and wet and hot and dry by turns. It is everything we are not, so that any thing you are like to touch upon at home might fairly argued to have its opposite here. There cats are thin where ours are sleek, the rivers muddy where ours are clear, the bread flat where ours is risen. Winter is their pleasant season! Our washer women beat the clothes with paddle; their washermen beat the paddle with the clothes... much the same with the natives temper. Where we are accustomed to dealing forthrightly he prefers the roundabout way, now obsequious, now remote, for no man will trust another who is not the same *caste*. This is a word from the Portugese, meaning pure. For all that, he is easily managed and brought round. I conceive it is not impossible to amass fortune in any trade so ever, the soil and climate being conducive to culture all the year round and the people most tractable (p.118).

⁵ Partha Chatterjee's claim regarding the 'inner realm' in his book *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993), to a great extent is a kind of reproducing the Sanskritized - Anglicized versions of India, where he assumes the existence of a proto nationalism with a pan-Indian spread.

The great Trotter in search of a fortune finds it easy with the power of guns. It is easier in a land where the territories of the different states kept changing depending on the various alliances and clans. Added to this the Nawab of Tirnab was a great admirer of the 'French'. The importance of military might is interestingly stated in the passage 'concerning the Great Trotter's Guns', "'Guns are wonderful locks for protecting the august edifice of state; and befitting keys for the door of conquest'. The great historian Abul Fazal, who was quite fat, has put it so eloquently that I can do no more than echo him. Machiavelli, too speaks well of guns, and there are some others" (p.122-23). Sealy gives us glimpses of the wars from the Carnatic war through, the defeat of the Mughals, Shivaji, Tipu Sultan and finally the revolt of 1857.

Another interesting occasion where Sealy brings out the Euro-centric vision is through Marazzi, the Italian painter who paints the music hall. Since he was not present during the construction of Sungum, he relies on what he assumes to be his memory:

It is all still there, Monsieur Trotter... I am faithfully reproducing (or you might say producing) it. Only, since I was not present at the time of building (I lay bleeding at Borromini) I am compelled to rely upon memory. And memory (especially memory of what one has not seen) is a most ----- thing; wanton, one might almost say (if one might say)" (p-142).

Marazzi in Sealy's allegory stands for the Orientalist scholars and historians who imagined themselves to reproduce what they traced through their European memory and who in the process produced an image of the nation. Sans Souci is called to represent the various influences on the Indian culture arranged in Trotter's rigid order; "Formality, regularity, uniformity" (p.139). Such a formal, regular and homogenized version of India was to instill the faith in the people who occupied this territory in the long run. Marazzi arranging painting on the basis of memory says,

I was obliged to paint her as she might have been (especially when it might yet be) (but probably will not) is a most elusive thing; spectral, one might almost say (if one might say). Let us say (may we?) it might have been a place of experiment, of vision, of breadth, but the people who lived there did not have enough (how to say) faith (?) in themselves" (p.142).

Allan Sealy seems to satirically suggest the rise of an 'Indian identity' that was yet to take place. The Oriental disciplines in exploring the past that is assumed to have taken place were charting 'what might yet be' Sealy seems to imply this when he speaks of Marazzi, "He spoke as one looking back to future."

The transformation of 'Indian' culture is allegorized through the character of Sultana, The Great Trotter's first wife. She breaks free from the rigidity of her orthodox Muslim family disappointing her pious father and brother, and eloped to Sans Souci. Her journey to Sons Souci was an exposure to another world, which was denied to her by religious orthodoxy. In the new world, faced with a new epistemological space she has to list the thing in the world around her and define them. Like the Brahmins and the upper caste Muslims who were the informants of the oriental scholars she discovers her surroundings in a new light and in the process loses the space that she once occupied. Even as she fades away the Great Trotter is barred from any understanding and wonders at this malady without a name and a son without any name. The Anglo-Indian identity in suggested in the namelessness of their son; "Our son also lacks a name, though he grows bigger and stronger each day." (p.133).

Sultana's reproduction of the world in her tower is beyond the Great Trotter's grasp:

... she will not be persuaded to give up her collecting until she has reproduced the world. But what chaos there! It is like the Nawab's army - gunners marching with swordsmen spahis rushing in pell-mell, an elephant preceding a horse. Nothing in its proper place – that place continually

invaded by a host of ill-assorted identities. Each object warring with the next, yet every creature accommodating its neighbour, the substantial trafficking with the insubstantial, the contrary rubbing shoulders with the same, that which agrees seducing that which clashes, change surprised by permanence, exclusion and concurrence running together, effect stealing a march on cause. What is one to say of a world put together by some giddy tailor bird? Our magpies are models of order beside this hotchpotch happenchance nest. And yet where it does, the whole cemented with an invisible glue. In all that welter my wife knows readily where any object is found (p.134).

The invisible glue is in fact a result of his strangeness to the culture and has been deduced from his own European concepts of culture and territory and appears similar to the vision of philologists like Gilchrist who attempted to study the language of 'Hindoostanies' without realizing the existence of different languages.⁶ The Great Trotter's elaborate listing of the 'ill-assorted identities' that are later bequeathed to Mik symbolically suggest the Orientalist formation of knowledge.

The character of Mik is an allegory of the establishment of an education system and the further codification of the territory occupied by the East India company. Mik on a tour of India with his Tibetan master joins the Upper Military Orphanage where, "They beat into him the geography of this country and the history of a country and the history of a country on the other side" (p.172). Though he is an Anglo-Indian he is not white enough for the Sahibs there.⁷ Thereafter he and his master set out on a tour of India setting the government offices on fire. On reaching Madras he joins Dr. Bellow's

⁶ David Lelyveld discusses Gilchrist's attempt to study Hindustani in order to aid the British administrators(1994: pp. 189-214)

⁷ Mik appears to be an inversion of Kipling's character Kim. If Kipling in his anxiety to establish his identity chose to be a British who provided myths of India, the child-like savages who deserved to be ruled, Mik found England hostile. Ashis Nandy speaks about Kipling's contradictory psychological tracts; "The antonyms [That construct the contradiction] were masculine hardness and imperial responsibility on the one hand, and feminine softness and cross-cultural empathy on the other. The saxophone won out, but the oboe continued to play outside Kipling's earshot, trying to keep alive a subjected strain of his civilization in the perceived weakness of another" (Nandy, 1983; p.70). Mik too faces these problems and is rather forced to be an 'Indian' by the European rejection of 'the other'.

Academy where; "It is said they favour numbers over history. They make surveyors of the best boys..." (p.173). Through his expedition he becomes the symbol of the European surveyors who measured the sub-continent and set it into columns on a map. The British Education policy and its intentions are suggested in the mock-epic fashion through a letter by a European justifying the harsh treatment needed out to the students.

This mode of treatment to orphan children is, in my opinion, the best that can be adopted in India; it makes them hardy, and it takes away a good deal of that high and foolish notion which the youth on this side generally imbibe the moment they leave school. It would make them fit for any employment and they would cheerfully be resigned to any state, should circumstances, after filling a higher station, reduce them hereafter" (p.175).

India as a land of chaos has been a myth that was partly a product of the European explorer's failure to understand the multiplicity of this land and partly a justification to rule this country on the pretext of setting it right. As Edward Said suggests, it is quite natural for one culture to impose complete transformation upon other cultures as their untreated strangeness would be an assault on them. It is out of this that cultures impose corrections on others, which in their strangeness appear as raw reality, changing them into units of knowledge. To the westerner:

...The oriental was always like some aspect of the West; to some of the German Romantics, for example, Indian religion was essentially an oriental version of Germans-Christian pantheism. Yet the Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the orient from something to something else: he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture, in some cases for what he believes is the sake of the oriental. This process of conversion is a disciplined one: it is taught, it has its own societies, periodicals, traditions, vocabulary, rhetoric, all in basic ways connected to and supplied by the prevailing cultural and political norms of the West." (Said 1978: p.67-68).

Abhay in *Red Earth* is faced with the Oriental image that is attributed to him by the whiteness in the U.S. William James, Abhay's girl friend's (Amanda's) father believes that the British Raj had been good for India, from what he has read in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. To him the British had brought, "Unification, railroads, the political system of democracy, the custom of tea-drinking, and cricket, all these benefits occurring to the benevolently governed" (p.351). 'Awakening' is the word he uses to describe this.⁸ Amanda's mother relies on *The Far Pavilions*, *Kim* and *A Passage to India* to read about 'mysterious' India. Though Abhay is disgusted when William James suggests that the British rule was the right remedy for the 'chaos' in India, he himself finds it chaotic when he lands in Bombay, a 'city without any straight lines'. It looks as though a homogenous India existed (and to a great extent it still exists) only to the outsiders as in the Raj novels. Ironically, Vikram Chandra also relies on Skinner's autobiography for his material on India and to a great extent reproduces the oriental images and, from a privileged upper-caste anglicized position, the East-West conflict that underlies the nationalist image. In the post colonial world no study could be otherwise, since the representations lie at the root of modern nations themselves and are sustained through various academic disciplines that study their subjects through European language and methodologies. Even the adaptations of the western epistemologies would only reproduce them from the privileged point of view, as the Sanskritized reproductions done by *Sahitya Academy* or the *National Council of Educational Research and Training*. Interestingly Sealy and Vikram Chandra narrate the early phase of colonisation through the eyes of European narrators or experiences - through the Great Trotter in *The Trotter Nama* and through De

⁸ This is the word that is used by nationalist historians as well. *The National Council of Educational Research and Training* also uses the term 'Awakening' to describe the transformation of the cultures in the

Boigne and George Thomas in *Red Earth*. Our introduction to De Boigne is in a Parisian drawing room where we are told that he sits muttering, "My life has been a dream', he meant that he had encountered, in that faraway, unreal world called Hindustan, the unbearably real sensations and colours of a dream, had felt unknown forces moving him as if around a chessboard, had felt the touch of mysteries impelling him from one town to the next, from one field to another" (p.24). The image of a mysterious and fantastic Hindustan recurs in the novel presupposing a unitary culture that was existent. Such an image is further suggested in Moulin's story where De Boigne kills a perfect and mysterious horse to receive the treasure (p.200). The narrator seems to imply that the romantic past was slayed for the sake of the fortunes by the West. But thereafter De Boigne moves from conquests to conquests till he returns with sadness; "I cannot dream, Moulin, I cannot dream..." (p.202). His fortunes are made over the ruins of the fantastic, like the "... ten thousand incredibly handsome men, the flower of the chivalry of Rajputana, ten thousand men who claimed descent from the sun, men of the clan which claimed to have forgotten the feeling of fear," (p.32) all of which are shattered by De Boigne's gun.

It is a fascination for the fantastic that drawn George Thomas, who lived in Tipperary, in Ireland, to India: "I lived well, and my family ate and drank to satisfaction, but always I felt a little empty, a little absent, as if something was missing; always, I thought of places I could go where everything would be new..." (p.74). He tries to explain this; "...all I can say even now is that for some the unfamiliar holds the promise of love, of perfection" (p.77). On landing in India he goes through a series of adventures and meets the mysterious Guha and later the Vehi tribe. Out of his love for

this land he adapts the style and culture of the land like his patient adaptation to become a gate-keeper, to win the love of Jhanvi. Later he refuses to fight Sikander, the Anglo-Indian (Indian) soldier of the British saying, "...I will not fight you, I am an Indian, but what are you?" (p.382). This question sounds ironic since it was the 'love' of men like him that generated India and it would be absurd for Sikander, who is a product of a transformed culture to fight him. Similar incident occurs in *The Trotter Nama* where the Great Trotter fights his son Mik. In effect the battles were fought between European forces or Indians supported by either the French or the British, or armies organised an European lines leading the revolt of 1857 can fight only so long as he holds the English alphabets in himself and condemns the fellow army men for the 'disorganization', the haphazardness' and 'the unprofessionalism'

Much of the correction of the orient who done out of what the Europeans thought was generosity and love. It is this generosity that made to whole effort all the more complex as even the Oriental to a great extent came to accept this as a divine intervention. Most of the Europeans believed that they were on a mission like Hercules Skinner who heard the figure on the cross speaking to him; "...He had spoken to me, moving His wooden lips: the mark of man is tragedy, and the world must know this. I was nine, the years passed; I became a soldier, to take the word to the world. In this country there are many, most, have spent their lives without the knowledge, so I have aided those who tell, who speak" (p.194). Most of what Sanjay has learned in his life have been learned from the generosity of men like the printer Markline, as his employee, Sarkar admits, "...Markline is that most generous of men: he given to charities, he sets up

hospitals for the poor, he is angered and maddened by injustice and tyranny..." (p.301).⁹ Markline finds the land incapable of any progress and presents Sanjay with books on Western philosophy as he finds Sanjay handicapped with, "...all the weight of centuries of superstition and plain ignorance." Markline claims to have read all the great works of the East:

And such as man and morass of darkness, confusion, necromancy, stupidity, avarice, I've never seen. Plots meander, veering from grief to burlesque in a minute. Unrelated narratives entwined break into each other. Whole huge battles, millions of men a side, stop short so that some dying patriarch can give speech about duty, a speech that goes on for fifties of pages. Metaphors that call attention to themselves, strings of similes that go from line to line. Characters fall in love or murder, only to have their actions explained away as the results of past births. Characters die, only to be reborn again. Beginnings are not really beginnings, middles are unbearably long and convoluted, nothing ever ends. Tragedy is impossible here (p.283).

The solution he suggests is *The Poetics of Aristotle*; a book, which is considered the origin of all that is good in literature. "It applies the principles of science to the art of the poet, and thus brings the realm of imagination under the clear light of natural logic. It enunciates principle that have been tested by time and have been approved by philosophy"(p.283). He concludes with the words close to Macaulay's, "This slim volume is worth whole libraries of the so-called great books of India..."(161). Allan Sealy brings out the absurdity of the claims of cultural superiority through Qaiyum – the Great Totters librarian and poet-and Marazzi — the Italian painter: "Qaiyum would not

⁹ European concept of justice and order were welcome to the reformers of the time like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, and some went to the extent of calling the colonial rule as Divine intercession. Aloysius quotes Vivekananda's respect for Max Muller, "My impression is that it is Sayana who is born again as Max Muller to revive his own commentary on the Vedas. I have had this notion for long. It became confirmed in my mind after I had seen Max Muller" (1997:133).

allow that civilization existed west of Persia; for Marazzi art east of Venice was a contradiction in terms"(161). The Indians who internalized Macaulay's statement and turned great admirers of West are comically portrayed through the Nawab who scoff at Indian masterpieces, but paid 'astronomical sum' to buy second hand European works.

Sealy brings out the changes induced through force in the great Trotter's treatment of his floor polisher, Munnoo. After coming him for his laps of duty the Great Trotter's writes in his diary; "There is a patience in the native that will endure great suffering without complaint and can spring from one source alone, namely love..."(p.156). All this is done as a partaking in the Divine:

The impression of this man's face upon one in one that the shroud itself could not make, for where the others solicits my comparison, thereby exalting me, this face excites my cruelty, thus increasing my debt. Out of this mysterious bond is born a great love. What is the sweetness in my soul but an assimilation to the All, and what is the exquisite suffering of the floor polisher but a tingling in the presence of the external? I am drawn out of this-ness (and so she) by the ineffable that, that which known our puny selves to be other than they are, and knows further that they are not except as they partake of its roseate substance, the changeless, formless, imponderable one" (p.156)

This love and power slowly spreads to his steward Yakub Khan who was initially confused about the whole idea. Slowly he organises a hierarchy and the whole series of employment and bureaucracy is initiated. Allan Sealy brings out the slow growth of new administrative set up through the Great Trotters inventions of files and cabinets, new posts like the ice-keeper, and later through the various Trotters who seek employment under the British like Thomas Henry who joined 'the un-covenanted civil service' and the numerous Trotters who joined the postal department and the railways and those who became school teachers and nurses. Vikram Chandra is also conscious about the changes that happened, as Sikander and Chotta are asked by their English father to go to Calcutta

to work as a printers apprentice as, "The world is changing. You (Chotta and Sikander) are suspended in the middle, neither English nor one of the others, and no one will let you in, not one side not the other. So learn a new trade, start at the bottom, learn something that will survive in the world" (p.257). Chotta and Sikander, two warriors with Rajput valor become commanders of British forces, who have mastered the country around Delhi for their masters. Sikandar even surveys 'the tribes of Hindustan'.

In *Red Earth*, Vikram Chandra attempts to bring out the epistemological changes that were introduced by the British and their appropriation of 'India'. Sarthey, the English doctor is a symbol of Britain's conquest of knowledge¹⁰. After the meeting of Sarthey and Sanjay the novel is thoroughly allegorical. Sanjay approaches Sarthey as his wife Gul Jahan miscarries several times. The child born with Sarthey's medical support is supernatural, a child burning with light: 'blazing with such inner heat'. Sanjay is repulsed seeing Sarthey examining the corpse of his dead wife. Sarthey is portrayed as a representative of the Western analytical mind that strengthens itself through the knowledge of India.¹¹ As Sanjay runs away with his child he notices that the child begins to fade. On approaching Begum Sumroo – a representative of magical India – he is given

¹⁰ This has been discussed in the second chapter. This is elaborately discussed in Cohn (1997). "The conquest of India was a conquest of knowledge. In their (British) official sources we can trace the changes in the forms of knowledge, which the conquerors defined as useful for their own ends. The records of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reflect the company's central concerns with trade and commerce; one finds long lists of products, prices, information about trade routes, description of coastal and inland marts, and political information about the Mughal empire, and especially local officials and their actions in relation to the company." (p.16).

¹¹ "The scientists, the scholar, the missionary, the Trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he could be there, or could think this about it, with very little resistance on the Orient's part. Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character... [T]he imaginative examination of things Oriental was based

a 'strategic advice', "If you want to defeat the Englishman's power and save your son... burn his books" (p.40). The other option left for Sanjay's is to become a Christian, an Englishman.

In associating Sarthey with Christianity and Englishness, Vikram Chandra adopts the East-West contradiction and places Sanjay as the Eastern counterpart. But, by imagining the bright child to be a representative of India, Vikram Chandra ironically pays tribute to the West for bringing forth 'India' to the world. This is contradictory since he seems to assume a uniting spirit, a kind of Brahminic proto-nationalism to exist before the arrival of the British. Sanjay himself is a product of the East-West confluence, being an Anglo-Indian.

In his attempt to destroy the powerful and destructive Sarthey, Sanjay encounters powerful strands of 'knowledge' on India conceived by the Europeans and substantiated by the surveys conducted by the informants in India like Sikander. Sarthey's relation with the object of his study is like the relationship between science and the object, where the object is studied and made knowable for the sake of the scientist¹². Confronting Sarthey in London Sanjay finds him a disappointed man who was disillusioned by the failure of science as in the increase of poverty and squalor due to industrial revolution.

more or less exclusively upon a sovereign western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged" (Said, 1978 : p.7-8).

¹² Said explains the relation between the scientist and the object to in the case of Orientalism, "The text of a linguistic or an anatomical work bears the same relation to nature (or actuality) that a museum case exhibiting a specimen manual or organ does. What is given on the page and in the museum case is a truncated exaggeration ...whose purpose is to exhibit a relationship between the science (or scientist) and the object, not one between the object and nature. Read almost any page of Renan on Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, or proto-semitic and you read a fact of power, by which the Orientalist philologists authority summons out of the library at will examples of man's speech, and ranges them there surrounded by a suave European prose that points out defects, virtues, barbarisms and shortcomings in the language, the people, and the civilization. The tone and tense of the exhibition are cast almost uniformly in the contemporary present, so that one is given an impression of a pedagogical demonstration during which the scholar-scientist stands before us on a lecture-laboratory platform, creating, confining, and judging the material he discusses" (1978: p.142-143).

But Sarthey still pursues his study to find the most elusive objective, to find life without death. Sanjay's revenge is when he defeats Sarthey who has almost reached his goal, dissecting the corpse of a woman studying her vital organs saying, "See, See, See, India, this is your womb. This is your heart. This is your bone" (p.480).

Throughout both the novels the novelists employ the assumed contradiction between the scientific Britain and the incomprehensible India. If Sealy satirizes the concept of India itself, Vikram Chandra assumes a Sanskritic India, which is represented by the Brahmin poet, Sanjay and the Rajput princes Sikander and Chotta. However, both the novelists seem to employ Aristotle and Alexander the Great ('The Madman' for Sanjay's father) as the representative spirit of the West. Mik, the second Trotter who is a first generation Anglo-Indian is inspired by the stories of Alexander, while Sikander in *Red Earth* is named by his mother Jhanvi, an admirer of Alexander's masculine power. Eugene narrates the childhood experience of Mik;

At night he listened intently to Alexander's tales of wars and conquest, of how, as the oracle tree foretold, snow and fire rained down on the first Alexander's men after they routed the Indian King, Porus, or so the Great Macedonian told his tutor, Aristotle. Or Alexander might plunder the Old Testament for stories, telling of how Samson slew ten thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass and laid bare their corn by releasing into the field twelve foxes with firebrands tied to their tails. The boy listened round-eyed, ignorant of case and syntax, careless of who killed whom with what and delighting only in blood. He was not afraid of the ghost of Al-Iskander, and sometimes stayed up late hoping to catch a glimpse of the bogey, or at least a fiery fox" (146).

Mik who grows up with such fierce emotions finds it difficult to tolerate his son, Charles, who is a painter and quite feminine by 'Alexander's' standards. In his ambition to turn his son, whose sight has deteriorated due to the intensity of his art, Mik sets him on a horse to fight the revolting nilchi's where he meets his end. This episode in a way

seems to represent the loss of the finer aspects of the culture of the sub-continent while it is transformed into a homogenised, linear and masculine nation.

In *Red Earth* Sanjay's father Arun and his uncle Ram Mohan, 'to be blunt, two Avadhi Brahmins' discussing Alexander and trying to cut the *Gordian knot*. They are the victims of the change in the social order, "... love poets of the first order, reduced to writing about a homicidal mad mas because our majesty is fascinated by Skinner's bluff tales..."(123). They are the poets in the court where Skinner is the resident, and are assigned to write a play on Alexander. Failing to cut the knot, Arun curses Alexander's disregard, to the skills behind the knot; "what a disregard for future generations; how many thousands of young people would have made the journey, hoping to solve it, to take it apart, strand by strand, but he reduced it to nothing" (p.123). They fail to find an explanation to the cruelty and the destruction that Alexander spread in his thirst for conquests. But this story fascinates Jhanvi, who was a Rajput lady captured and married by Skinner. Jhanvi's character becomes a symbol of a feminine 'India' that lives in shame for being captured by the white man. In order to take revenge on Skinner and the white men she seeks to the 'sons' of the romantic George Thomas and names her son Sikander. But Sikander by the very contradictions of his birth ends up strengthening the arms of the oppressor, the British.

Alexander the Great, used as a symbol of the Western culture has its Indian counter part in the fictional sadhu in the drama that Arun and Ram Mohan discusses. The Sadhu raises questions about kingship and the madness of war. When asked about the path that he had followed to reach the sublime state of indifference the sadhu answers; "When I feel like shitting, I shit; when I feel like eating, I eat" (p.211). The sadhu

explains Alexander's constipation to be the reason for his madness: "Yogic science has shown that people who hold it in are driven to behaviours like running about slashing at people, besieging towns, and frivolous acts of bravery" (p.211). In the sadhu's and Jhanvi's responses there are shades of the spiritual India versus a masculine and materialistic West. According to Ashis Nandy colonialism in setting certain images of India also determined the modes by which Indians could transgress them by reversing them:

Colonialism replaced the normal ethnocentric stereotype of the inscrutable oriental by the pathological stereotype of the strange, primal but predictable oriental religious out superstitions, clever but devious, chaotically violent but effeminately cowardly. Simultaneously, colonialism created a domain of discourse where the standard mode of transgressing such stereotypes was to reverse them: superstitious but spiritual, uneducated but wise, womanly but pacific, and so on so forth" (Nandy, 1983: p.72).

This sort of an East-West contrast could be seen in the words of the missionaries in *Red Earth*. The final defeat of Sarthey by Sanjay could be seen as a victory of Sanjay's magical power over Sarthey's science.

Vikram Chandra's image of the nation occasionally falls into an act of transgressing the Western attributes of the Oriental 'India', in the magical or superstitious incidents and the representations of Indian philosophy. Allan Sealy too is conscious of the Oriental images and their transgressive modes in bringing in the Great Trotter's religion. The Great Trotter invents his own religion on the lines of Akbar's religion and calls it Din Havai, which is the worship of the wind. The portrait of the religion and its followers, and the great wind satirizes the concept of spirituality itself:

By a trick of the plurality of faith what is a guarantee of the Soul's salvation in another, and where paradise is promised by one faith to the faithful after this life, to another it is twenty millions of incarnations

distant, while to a third it is already within. That being so, no man of reason can espouse one faith unless he secretly despise the others, and those who practice them—men who with equal vigour and justification despise him—of which is born great hatred and sometimes war. For it is with faith as it is with knowledge—men of different parts inhabit esemplastic spheres which they take to be sufficient, lawful, and proven. Yet they will seek to inflate these spheres into universals while at the same time jealously guarding them against rupture from without. One must have lived in this land to take full measure of the cant that men will credit in matters of faith. Far better that they embrace the tenets of Din Havai, which I have set down in another place, where no man's words are weightier than other's, all meeting in the end the same fate (p.179).

The response to the western stereotypes of femininity and childishness attribute to 'India' by some of the national leaders was to project the possible masculinity of Kshatriyahood. As Ashis Nandy puts it:

... [T]he first Indian response to this [The attributed feminity of India] was to accept the ordering by giving a new salience to Kshatriyahood as true Indians. To beat the colonizer at their own game and to regain self-esteem as Indians and as Hindus, many sensitive minds in India did what adolescent Gandhi at the ontogenetic level had tried to do... they sought a hyper-masculinity or hyper Kshatriyahood that would make sense to their fellow-countrymen (specially to those exposed to the majesty of the Raj) and to the colonizers (1983: p.52).¹³

He cites Swami Vivekananda's prescription of the three Bs (beef, biceps and Bagavad-Gita) for the Hindu salvation to show how the call for Hindu re-awakening by some of the reformers was a response to the British tag of feminity and childishness of India. Similar trend could be seen in Sanjay's disappointment with his people in his bargain with Yama: "We lose because they are better. We lose because we live in a world of

¹³ It is hard to pin point the definitions of masculinity. But it was imagined with most of the attributes of British culture. Nandy quotes Nirad. C. Chaudari's desperate India's state of subjugation to the British: "The current belief is that the Hindus are a peace-loving and non-violent people, and this belief has been for to fortified by Gandhism. In reality few communities have been more war like and fond of blood shed.... About twenty-five words in an inscription of Asoka have succeeded in almost wholly surpassing the thousands, in the rest of the epigraphy and the whole of Sanskrit literature which bear testimony to the incorrigible militarism of the Hindus." (qtd. in 1983: p.50). Similar beliefs could be seen in the early historical novels by Bankim Chandra and Romesh Chandra Dutt who, used the Shivaji stories and Rajput stories as materials of their novels.

dreams, we lose because we are as women, as children" (p.424). The whole novel moves around Sanjay, who is also the narrator, one of the three 'sons' of Jhanvi, conceived through the mysterious ladoos sent by George Thomas (Jahaj Jung). The acceptance of a European masculinity is suggested through her strong desire for sons, though conceived of a firangi. The eulogization of Rajput valour, Jhanvi's sati, her desire for sons, celebrate the masculinity of the 'Indian' culture, which is sustained at the expense of the feminine. Allan Sealy too presents 'India' through generations of Trotters following a patriarchal lineage, satirizes it in his narrative by following the grotesque and the trivial.

In applying the cultural minimalism of Vedic Brahminism to a territorial maximalism the divergent culture, tribes and castes become expendable. The Delhi centredness of both novels in imaging the nation is discussed in the third chapter. While the nation emerged around the assumption that there existed a pan-Indian Sanskritic culture, which bound the people of the British colony by a sacred thread of unity, the divergent cultures were ignored and silenced. Such a trend is followed in what Vikram Chandra considers 'the given of the novel'. Though Chandra tries to bring out the violence that underlies the 'masculine' West, he fails to see the oppression that have been carried out by Brahminism. Sanjay ignores the oppression carried out by Brahminism, which thrives on the invisible and the silent lower castes, and the faceless yet different cultures that are either erased or covered up by in the name of nationalism¹⁴.

¹⁴ Aloysius analyses the national movement discussing Nehru's 'discovery of India' and Gandhian policies which sought to establish the traditional dharma, which was a way of maintaining the status quo regarding the social differences. "The Congress continued to be obsessed all along with the idea of monopoly representation of the nation. It also continued to maintain an ambiguous posture towards the presence of the British, requiring them to protect the nationalist against the masses and the nation" (1997: p.213).

Though Sanjay tries to prevent Sarthey's scientific experiments on the body of the Oriental, which Sarthey calls the cost of progress and scientificity, Sanjay fails to see the cost of Brahminic hegemony of which he too is a part. Vikram Chandra's choice of the 'givens of the novel' over political correctness that he speaks about in the interview and the way in which he makes the Anglicized Sanskrit tradition the representative of India clearly reveals his position in imagining the nation. Chandra's concept of 'unity in diversity' is in concordance with the nationalist imagination' which has been discussed in the second chapter. If the territorial unity is taken for granted by Vikram Chandra and Sealy in their ignorance of the diversities, the vertical differences manifested through castes makes occasional appearances. In *Red Earth* Udhay Singh, one of the person responsible for the birth of Sikander, Chotta and Sanjay dies refusing to take the water provided by a lower caste women as it would go against his kshatriya dharma. The only other occasion in which the lower caste people make an appearance is the novel is when Sanjay, Sikander and Chotta follow Skinner to a prostitute's house. Amba, the prostitute tells the boys; "They all come here, brahmins and Rajputs and company men. Here, touch-this-and-don't-touch that and untouchability and your caste and my people and I-can't eat-your-food is all forgotten..." (197). Ironically that women goes on to sing the lives from Kuruntokai by Compulappeyanian, calls it love, the force that binds the upper-castes and the untouchable: the oppressor and the oppressed;

What could my mother be
to yours? What kin is my father
to yours anyway? And how
did you and I meet ever?
By in love
Our hearts mingled like red earth and pouring rain (p.197).

The title of Vikram Chandra's novel taken from these lines celebrating love becomes a metaphor explaining the relationship between the East and the West and between the upper caste and the lower caste on the deeper level. If love that transforms and exploits, binds the West to the East, in India 'love' is used to justify the caste order in the name of dharma.¹⁵ Interestingly Sanjay's uncle, Ram Mohan, attributes the status of 'twice-born' to the British; "In truth, whoever has the power to take the Vedas takes them, never mind twice-born or thrice.... The powerful are the twice-born... and the powerful take everything" (p.187).

The brahminic power and its claim to knowledge could be seen in Vikram Chandra's assessment of history, in the small sections of the novel called "What Really Happened":

...a story is told: human beings were born when Purusha, the primeval human, was dismembered in a great sacrifice; from his head were born the brahmins, the scholars; from his arms, the kshatriyas, the warriors; from his thighs, the vaishyas, the farmers; from his feet, the shudras, the labourers; and each had a different role, a different Leela, the great cosmic play; from each, it might be said, according to his ability, and to each, at least in principle, according to his need.... The years passed, then centuries, and the words of the ancient seers, those discoveries made in solitude, were compiled in the Vedas in the shape of formulae, of verse that reveals little to the uninitiated but nevertheless stirs the heart, because the power of the goddess Vac-speech-is immeasurable; it was she brought forth both the seen and the unseen from potentiality, the external from the immanent. The Vedas slow little, and tell much. Those who can see will see. Sacred knowledge in the hands of fools destroys (p.104).

¹⁵ Vikram Chandra, who is a product of the nationalist historiography seem to have inherited the Gandhian nationalism. Ambedkar questions the Gandhian nationalism and escapist justifications of Varnashrama Dharma: "Instead of surrendering privileges in the name of nationalism, the governing class in India is using or misusing the slogan of nationalism to maintain its privileges. Whenever the servile classes ask for reservations in the legislatures, in the executive, and in public services, the governing class raises the cry of 'nationalism in danger'." (qtd. In Aloysius 1997: p.212).

Vikram Chandra, writing the novel claims to partake in knowledge. Given the equation 'the powerful are the twice-born', one has to consider his privileged position from which he claims the blessings of Vac—the arty goddess – and ignores the rest, what is different from the Brahminic, as foolish and weak.

Allan Sealy's novel too happens at the interface between the powerful - the Europeans and the upper-caste Indians. There are occasional glimpses of the 'invisible army of men employed to operate the fans', and Victoria's comic discovery of the presence of the invisibles like Jivan, the sweeper-and-emptier, and the old lower caste woman who helps Alina in milking the cow. There are a few pages on the revolt of the nilchis and certain sarcasm at the ineligibility of Dukhi Das to history for his contribution to the lifting of the siege of the Residency of Nakhilau.

Sealy while claiming to do a 'Grass on India' satirizes the whole concept within the framework of the Anglicised-Sanskritised nationalist India. Similarly Vikram Chandra's response to the Goddess, 'Vac' ignoring the non-Brahminic — assumed to be weak and foolish – follows the homogenisation that go within the imagination of a nation. In their imaginations, in spite of certain transgressive responses, lies the forgetfulness of the experiences that generates the nation, as well as the presences that are ignored or set-aside in imagining a homogenic culture. The nation's story emerges through choices – conscious or unconscious of limited traits, like its differences from the West; the masculinity, the Rajput valour, the brahminic knowledge, territorial maximalism, etc., depending on the strategic location from which the narrator's speak.

As Anderson says:

...[T]he nations biography snatches, against the going mortality rate, exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts. But, to serve the narrative purpose, these violent deaths must be remembered/forgotten as 'our own'" (1991: p.206)

Chapter V

Creative Freedom within the Institutional Limits:

Possibilities of Transgressing the 'Givens'

This dissertation is an attempt to bring out some of the traces of 'Indian nationalism', its evolution and manifestations, which are reflected in *Red Earth* and *The Trotter Nama*. The focus was mainly on the emergence of an anglicized-sanskritized 'national culture', which was a result of interaction between the dominant trends in the British culture and in India. Imagining a nation in the anglicized-sanskritized tradition and the extent to which that has been naturalized or nationalized is clearly manifested in the introduction to *Modern Indian Literature: An Anthology (1992)*, published by *Sahitya Akademi*, which has already been discussed in the second chapter. Echoes of such a nationalism could be seen in Sanjay's treaty with Yama, signed in Sanskrit and English (p. 19). The epic narrated by Sanjay in his birth as a monkey, to sustain his life, springs from the presumed primary cultures -- the mythified Sanskritic tradition represented by a brahmin poet and narrated by Sandeep, a sadhu, told in a European genre and language.

Sandeep claims to have heard the story from a mystical woman meditating like " ...Our first poet who too had stared at a mystery in cupped hands and found poetry..." (p.220). He compares her with the 'first poet':

"Like Valmiki and Vysa, who are our elders, incomparable and dazzling, she spoke of honour among men, and of true love long remembered as in the stories of kings and demons that are told to children by old people – but do not think that this story is untrue, because it is 'ithihasa: thus it was; let this story appear among you, as it happened long ago, and it will clear your heart and clear your soul, but beware, for it is no story for those with weak stomachs and nervous hearts...." (p. 23).

The function of his work is stated boldly, like Arnold's call to 'Hellenize' the people of the country.¹ Vikram Chandra's expectations of the function of the novel is close to a study of English literature in 1891 cited by Terry Eagleton: "The people need political culture, instruction, that is to say, in what pertains to their relation to the state, to their duties as citizens; and they need also to be impressed sentimentally by having the presentation in legend and history of heroic and patriotic examples brought vividly and attractively before them' (p. 1983: p. 25)². This dissertation has attempted to focus on the features of such abstract terms like 'clearing your heart, cleansing the soul' etc. On a closer look they are powerful utterances in defining the 'nation' as a homogenized, Anglicised – Sanskritised nation, cleansed of all diversities and difference. This is evident in what Sanjay assumes to be the effect of history, to find a synthesis of all the different tongues, ideologies, alliances that would merge into 'one':

“..... and I have discovered that there were dozens of factions, a hundred ideologies, all struggling with each other, there were politics old and deep, alliances and betrayals, defeats and triumphs, revenge and friendship, the old story, you've heard it before, but there was one new thing, one new idea that overwhelmed everything else, and this was simply that there should be one idea, one voice, one thing, one, one, one” (p.18).

¹ Function of the work's has been borrowed from Foucault's essay what is an Author? (1989), where he studies 'author function': the author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and culture.... the author function is.... Characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society” (p. 267). and functioning of certain discourse with in a society” (p. 267)

² This is close to Bankim's statement of the purpose of writing his novels, quoted by Meenakshi Mukherjee: “ We need a history of Bengal. Without this Bengali can never rise to their full stature.... Bengalis who are convinced that their ancestors were always feeble and without substance, that their predecessors never achieved anything glorious – such Bengali cannot aspire to any other than an unsubstantial, inglorious condition, nor would they strive for anything different” (1985: p. 48). It was to instill such a sense of heroism that the stories of Shivaji or Rajput valour were extensively used by Bengali novelist of his time.

Though impressive in its vagueness, one can hardly ignore the assumptions that lie behind the twin layer of 'aesthetics', the oblivions and memories, the suppressions and the resurrections, that would constitute a modern nation based on its assumed Sanskrit past. Considering the power of a novel in propagating the sense of a common culture along an imagined community, one has to be conscious about the 'functions' that these novels perform. It is out of such consciousness that Allan Sealy narrates his story through a grotesque narrator, to bring out the held in the middle. Though he fails to transgress the borders of an Anglicised-Sanskritised culture. He tries to expose the holes from within. Using the story of Anglo-Indians to satirize 'India' seems to be intended to bring out the identity (or lack of it) of the new intelligentsia, who imagine their past and their identity in a western mode. The modernity of the independent India, trying to trace its genealogy in the attempts to reclaim its cultural roots are suggested in Eugene's dream:

A funny city, could be here, could be there, could be both. Narrow crooked mixed-up lanes on one side and on the other side long broad new straight roads. On the old side of the city there are ruins, old-old buildings you know with domes and things like that and plaster coming off. Brownish walls, bit overgrown, jungle like thick grass. A graveyard with graves, some small some big like houses. One big one has funny foreign word on one side like Chinese. Other side is blank. I say, tomorrow I'll see whose grave it was. The other side of the town all modern tall clean gray houses new with glass. Clean green shaven lawns, broad roads like Los Angeles, with busses, not tiny thud-class buses – solid long shiny ones new with glass and computer numbers flirting on and off on and off. No pushing shoving, nothing, a lady pulls the cord and the bus stops. She gets off with her parcels. I say, tomorrow I will follow her and see how she lives. Bus keeps going, keeps going, till it comes to the other side, the old side of the city. Suddenly stops and there's the same big tomb. I get off and see a lady standing with her parcels trying to read the stone. I say, can't you see it's blank, men? And she turns towards me and my god her face is also blank (p. 574).

The faceless woman could be taken as an allegory of the assumed Indian identity trying to decipher 'her' past from blank tombs. This story could also be read as a

metaphor of the social divide that is growing, between the urbanized nationalists³, and the deprived and exploited countryside, the upper caste who adapted themselves to modernity, thriving on the deprivations of the lower-caste and the poor.

The allegory is clearly stated where Eugene relates the 'Anglo-Indian' to the Indian, talking about the migrations to the West:

.... not too many of us left and half of those are waiting to leave. And we're not the only ones. They want to go too. You read their matrimonial columns. American green card holder preferred, only doctor or engineer settled in U.S.A., Canada, Australia" (p. 574).

The narrative, and the grotesqueness of the Anglo-Indian efforts to find an identity of their own inventing and manipulating various institutions like literature, history etc., is transferred to the object of his satire, 'India' or 'Indianness'. The transfer of power and the adaptation of nationhood on European lines are suggested in the Boy-Girl's speech in the midst of the Hindu-Muslim riots, following independence:

Independence! You have my sympathy, my friends, those of you who will live to see the mockery of it. Better to have died two days before, like me, and the quality of your rulers will not improve. Or will you get the government you deserve? ...One or two are always killed – sometimes more, when the commander is Dyer.... At least he and his men were foreigners – now you will want to blame the pinkness, the yellowness. But wait. The same weapons, the same laws, the same powers of detention, the same curbs on the **Nuntio** will be useful when the government is our very own. Then your fight for freedom, for simple ordinary rights will no longer be a patriotic act. Why? Because freedom has already been won! (p. 500).

³ Irfan Habib speaks about the interests of the educated middle class, that assumed the role of nationalist spokesmen: "... these (the interests of the middle class and businessmen) were oftenest the Centre of their (the nationalist) interests became clear from Bipan Chandra's detailed work, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India*. This concern for the middle classes not only represented their own cause, but also that of the unlettered masses, who could not represent themselves" (2000: p. 25). The middle class nationalists' appropriation of the cause of the working class is elaborately studied by Rajnarayan Chandavarkar (1998). Aloysius critically analyses the upper caste mode of nationalism in his book *Nationalism without a Nation* (1997).

For all his sanity he is killed, his speech has to be silenced under the new order that has adopted the order of the Raj under a new leadership⁴. This new intelligentsia, the nationalists, who has inherited or won the power, has to suppress all the dissenters and gag the voices that sound different. Vikram Chandra's character, Sanjay, who is identified with the "Indian spirit" too is a product of the Anglicization of an assumed nation with a Sanskritised national culture. Sanjay, who is shocked by colonial learning at Markline's press tries to mark his dissent through hidden messages typed in a slightly distinct typeface. In fact Sanjay's dissent itself, the assertion of a national culture, the pan-Indian spirit, is marked in English script by a slightly distinct Sanskritised typeface. His sense of culture is evoked only when he is faced with a homogenized British culture. Being an Anglo-Indian, Sanjay is cast in an English type-cast, who inverts Aristotle's, 'Katharos dei eynai ho kosmos' (p. 284)--the world must be clean--and sets out to clean India as he leads the rebellion of 1857 (p.447-457). The contradiction that lies at the depth of his heart is the contradiction that generates the nation, which he represents – a nation that would reclaim itself on British ways after fighting for its independence.

One should not be mistaken to believe that 'India' as a nation is imagined within a British mold replicating itself as a fixed system of functioning.⁵ It is adapted to suit the power structure, innovating along the nationalist culture or compromising where the power structure is threatened. It is for this reason that the Boy-Girl has to die. The

⁴ Mark Tully (2000), discusses, India's adaptation of the bureaucratic trappings of the Raj (p. 60-62).

⁵ Locating nation and nationalism exclusively in the transition to a modern era might miss out the other elements that continue to express themselves in the concept of nation hood, like the ethnic continuities, wars etc. as Anthony D. Smith puts it: "clearly there is more to the formation of nation than nationalist fabrication, and 'invention' must be understood in its other sense of a novel recombination of existing elements" (1996:p. 191). The evolution of India was not a blind adaptation of the British nationalism, but a creative reconciliation of European nationalism within the power structure of the sub-continent.

differences that are wiped out are the price of 'unity'. Boy-girl's status as a Dalit is notable.⁶ The upper-caste rulers who took over control would use the same suppressive measures to silence any demand for the simple rights of the minorities. Chotta and Sikandar, the Rajput warriors armed with British weapons would bind the diverse culture, and Sanjay the Brahmin poet armed with print capitalism would invent *ithihasas*, to instill patriotism and to 'clean' India. Vikram Chandra narrating the story nearly fifty years after 'independence', contributes to the myth of unity and national culture, bound in the wrap of aesthetics. His narrative in a larger sense, affirming the 'givens of the novel', is another claim to inscribe a legitimized anglicized - sanskritized culture, while claiming to reclaim the past. Though critical about the concept of the nation, Allan Sealy too affirms a national culture, by his reluctance to transgress the boundaries of nationalist histories and concepts.

The role and function of a novelist is close to that of a humanist, who explains the official versions of the dominant powers. As Spivak puts it in her essay, "Explanation and Culture: Marginalia", the narrators are assigned the custodianship of culture:

If... the concept and self-concept of culture as systems of habit are constituted by the production of explanations even as they make these explanations possible, our role is to produce and be produced by the *official* explanations in terms of the powers that police the entire society, emphasizing a continuity or a discontinuity with past explanations, depending on a seemingly judicious choice permitted by the play of this power. As we produce the official explanations we reproduce the official

⁶ Aloysius (1997) discusses the nationalist leader's adherence to the ascriptive system. It was justified by Nehru who called Brahminism as the essence of India (p.158) and by Gandhi in his attitude towards caste and dharma. K.N. Panikkar (1987) recalls Gandhi's conversation with Narayana Guru where Gandhi went on to justify the caste differences: "Gandhiji, an obvious reference to Chaturvarna and the inherent differences in quality between man and man observed that all leaves of the same tree are not identical in shape and texture. To this Narayana Guru pointed out that the difference is only superficial, but not in essence..." (p. 88). Considering the Brahminic stance of these two nationalist icons, one has to seriously consider the fate Dalits and the lower cast in independent India.

ideology, the structure of possibility of a knowledge whose effect is that very structure. Our circumscribed productivity cannot be dismissed as a mere keeping of records. We are part of the records we keep (1987: p.108).

The authors, while transgressing the official definitions, or socially accepted modes in carving their regularity, still reproduce the existing system to a great extent. They are never outside it, as they are generated by the limited creativity or dissent provided by the power structure. These transgressions too are only a result of the 'knowledge' that constitutes the author. These institutions are established by the official ideology to propagate itself⁷. Even this dissertation is generated within these official limitations, within the freedom permitted within the institutions.

In my attempt to trace the images of India in the works of Allan Sealy and Vikram Chandra, I too have failed to bring out the existence of the diverse identities that lay outside the nationalist assumptions. Considering the vastness of the nation – territorial, cultural and the vertical caste – divisions, it would be a futile attempt to explain the nation. Any such effort would only end up in generating the opposite of the proposed result, by projecting a limited explanation within the existing epistemological space. Even the most transgressive mode of writing is limited by the strategic location it occupies, the cultural prejudices of the author, faced with vastly diverse cultures.

It was sheer coincidence that I could interview Vikram Chandra. In my failure to find Allan Sealy's opinion on his writing this dissertation might look lopsided. Moreover,

⁷ The effectiveness of past colonial studies taking place in English, funded by the neo-colonial cultural centers also face similar limitations. Joseph Pugliese questions the possibilities and limitations of post-colonial studies in his article, 'Parasiting Post-Colonialism' (1995): "... the practice of "post"-colonialism within the Western academy may be seen to operate on the presumption of a transcendental epistemic locus which generates the illusion that neo-colonial ideologies and investments do not contaminated the academic subjects' cultural production" (p.354).

any failure to deal with the finer aspects of the novels – like Allan Sealy’s treatment of the history of Anglo-Indian, or the aesthetics of Vikram Chandra’s narrative – are not out of negligence, but were consciously not undertaken as they were not immediately related to the topic. Considering the vast amount of writings on the idea, India, this dissertation is rather limited, but the limitations of time and space that an M.Phil. dissertation entails rules out other possibilities.

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Appendix

Nation, History and a Novel: An Interview with Vikram Chandra.

It was on the 10 of August that I interviewed Vikram Chandra at the IIC, New-Delhi. He was on a visit to India. That was a time when I was not very certain about the dissertation. Meeting him was certainly a turning point, as it helped me to focus my study. This interview provided insights into the writer's world and his conception of the nation.

Vikram Chandra started this novel while he was at Johns Hopkins, and continued it while doing an MFA programme at Houston. It was an article on his teacher David Bartheleme, published in *Span* that attracted David Davidar. That was the way the novel found its publisher. It was not an overnight effort, but a result of continuous research and rewriting that went on for years. Certainly his experience in the US has helped in molding this narrative.

R.J: How was your experience as an Indian in the U.S.?

V.C: I was writing a novel within the context of a workshop. This was in the late 80's and early 90's. They were all U.S. students doing the restraining themselves to a certain minimalism. They were very confused by this; they found it too long and melodramatic, and asked me to alter it. As a writer I had to overcome that and resist it. I understood the disjunction between what they thought good art and what I was writing. I just had to ignore it and go on with my work. I had some very good readers at that time, who understood the nature of the project and what it was all about.

R.J: What do you personally feel about the character Abhay in this Novel? He seems to be close to you as a US educated Indian.

V.C: I always say he is a good friend of mine. As a writer you feel certain sympathy to all your characters, even the bad ones.

R.J: In *Abhay* I felt an urge to ascertain his identity, especially when he plays cricket, calling the names of Prasanna and such spinners. How do you explain that? Somewhere he seems to prove that he is better off as an Indian.

V.C. I think it is an anxiety that one sees everywhere, certainly among the people who are on the edges. The questioning of the self is prevalent and real. When someone says, that the stories in *Love and Longing in Bombay* felt like some movie, it sounded as though I have lifted some parts from some movies, I am a great reader of American crime fiction: Raymond Chandler and writers like that. Their feeling for the underworld is amazing. It seems to be specific and accurate. In some American movies, there is a similarity in the tropes. They were similar tropes because of the similarities of the experience that they are describing. In the Indian context we tend to think that such descriptions are stolen or they are second hand, instead of narrating real life like incidence. That kind of anxiety is also prevalent.

R.J: In *Abhay* you find sense of uprootedness. How did you find yourself in the U.S.? Even the friends he has in US seems to have been lost. And how do you relate *Abhay* to *Sanjay* in the novel?

V.C: The mirrorings between *Abhay's* story and the 19th century story are almost obvious. Even the nineteenth century characters are in this collision between cultures. That is on the metaphorical level, or structural level at which the narratives work. I think this feeling of being lost or wandering is very common in the post- modern world. I wanted to relate the commonality of lostness between the people from the Southern hemisphere, the so called third world countries, and the people from the first world who often, it seems to me, are wandering exactly in the same way. I do not say that this experience is common, but that it is pervasive. Also this process of immigration is happening increasingly everywhere.

R.J: Most of us have been some how or the other influenced by other writers . Who do you think have influenced your writings?

V.C: Obviously the Indian epics, the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* were there not only in my conscience level, but also in the root of my mind. Those were the first stories that I was

told by my mother or my grandmother. Then, the generation of Indian writers prominent at the time that I grew up R.K. Narayan, Kushwant Singh and, later Salman Rushdie, Anita Desia and such writers. From the West, writers like Thakaray, Trollope, etc.; not so much of Dickens, since I did not have that much sympathy for Dickens. I admire Thakaray very much. Then the American modernist writers like Fitzgerald, Hemingway etc.

R.J: You do not seem to follow any of them. It seems more like an epic with a monkey telling the story, like Ganesha writing Mahabharata.. Why does this Monkey continue with the stories one after the other?

V.C: That is the part of the structure itself. In the most obvious way it has to do with the narrative experience of human beings themselves. We cannot live without telling stories, without making stories of everything. Our perceptual apparatus is set in such a way that we make narratives of everything. The other side of that is that, when you cannot tell a story you are dead.

R.J: Why should Abhay tell a story and support Sanjay?

V.C: The story telling burden has to be shared. The mother tells him that he had shot the monkey and that he had to support Sanjay. We are related through stories. The mirrorings between them and the symmetries between the journeys are exactly what I conceptualized. Finally to the end, they save each by telling the story; Sanjay gets the strength to die and Abhay gets the strength to live.

R.J: Abhay is always lost. But Sanjay has a cause, he goes on to fight?

V.C: But After that he is lost. That is the danger of great purposes. Great purposes have the tendency to become ambiguous finally.

R.J: Why did you have to make Europeans responsible for the birth of the characters, Sikander, Chotta and Sanjay?

V.C: They are part of their birth, as you and I are, in the post-colonial context. I look up to them as my own ancestors. In the popular media, the construction of the image of the West is such that we are made to believe that they came to India and were never part of it. That seems silly. Even in academia, there is suspicion of the West of what they think about us. Most people have an obsession with the West, which is baffling.

R.J: It is like Said, who says that the two cannot be delineated any more.

V.C: I feel sense of anxiety about India's security, giving so much importance to the West and the differences, and fighting it all the time. They are people like us, and there are no Western conspiracies. There are certain historical or corporate forces at work, like the lust for power. If we had power we would have done the same thing. There is no need for self-condemnation. This is the way big nations work and small nations work. I think, if you want to become even post-colonial, let us not become too anxious all the time, that we have to interpret everything all the time in such a way that they are the West and we are the other. We have to keep our guard. I find my life as a mingling of all that happened two hundred or three hundred years back. I am a descendent of all that.

R.J: Where did you collect all the historical materials that you have applied in your work, like the 1857 revolt?

V.C: The book almost began as though a piece of history grabbed me. When I was in the library at Columbia, I picked up the translated auto-biography of James Skinner. I was suddenly obsessed by his family, his life etc. From that the book slowly grew. The reflections of those larger events in specific human life was there in the book. James Skinner's distance was fairly close, his father being an officer in the East India company, who captured his mother, literally, during a siege. He fought in the Maratha Wars and went over to the British. He was not in the Viceroy's officer or anything. But it was fairly close. The effect of these historical events are felt in his life.

R.J: Some English characters have an Indian touch, like George Thomas who chose the name Jahaj Jung?

V.C: There are some constructions of the West in India miss most changes. The reasons why the English Sahib wore his dinner jacket in the middle of a jungle was that he was terrified of that change. The change nevertheless happened. You cannot live in a place for over three hundred years without being affected by it. Wearing the dinner jacket itself was itself a response to this environment. All these strategies are a part of the dialogue between the place where you are, and things that you are holding to. The Indians in the U.S is not much different; sending their daughters to the Bharatnatyam classes, taking the kids to temples on Sundays etc. This is the way many immigrant communities react. In either directions, the British India or the Indians abroad, the change is unavoidable. Before the imperialisation of British in India, during the period of Jahaj Jung and Metcalf, they learned Urdu, married Indian women and lived here. Once the borderline started setting in, the differences occurred. There is a substantial change, from the people who arrived first and the response that evolved later. Being a minority, they had this anguish that they would vanish in to the larger Indian community.

R.J: In the novel we find that only Sanjay resists change, while Sikander gives in. Why is there difference in their reactions?

V.C: That is the great anxiety, the pain and the paradox. The meeting of cultures can be a happy thing. It could be painful when people start feeling that they were losing certain parts that are central, which are considered non-negotiable. If they are forced to do it they might react violently, with suicide, depression etc. In the case of Indian emigrant families in the U.S., it is only a matter of degrees. If the boys start wearing tattoos and earrings, it would create anxiety. In the case of marriage, it would be difficult to accept him marrying an American girl. If it is the case of the girls, it is much worse. The Indians have these double standards with regard to boys and girls. The question of what is acceptable and how much change should take place are rather serious. There are casualties in it; sometimes people die.

R.J: How do you think is the Indian philosophy different from the Western?. There are certain instances of philosophical comparisons in this novel.?

V.C : It is only a specific aspect of Western philosophy contrasted with a specific aspect of certain Indian philosophy. To compare Western philosophy and the Indian Philosophy is two different entities, are two worrisome. When we speak of the narrative structure, the kind of Aristotelean linear structure is a different one and implies a different kind of understanding than does the Katha Sarit Sagarha. The pleasures of the stories are different and the ways in which one story connects to another is different. The human beings placed in the midst of these are constructed and understood differently. I think that is an interesting way of telling stories. If we use specific modes of story telling, it would be worth considering how our modes reflect the way we understand life. Our maps of the world become different because of that. I was once on a plane going from Bombay to Washington D.C. I met a pastor from Orissa on his way to Washington. He was going to Virginia to attend an ecumenical conference. He was from a very small village in Orissa and had never traveled on a plane before. But somebody from the U.S had visited his church and send him an invitation. So his congregation got together and collected the money, first. He went to Calcutta and got his passport ready. Somebody there told him that he could get cheap flights from Bombay. He caught the train to Bombay. He was travelling with a small suitcase, with some money, his T-shirts and two shirts and a couple of trousers in it. That was all the luggage he had. He kept asking people "How do I do that? Do this?" "How do I get to America"? etc. And people kept telling him. In Dubai, he showed me his papers and asked me, 'Where is this place, Virginia?'; which was way down South. I was surprised and asked him how he would get to Virginia, whereas his ticket was to New York. He would have to catch a bus, or a train, or a flight. I asked him how much money he had. He took out his envelope, and there was a hundred and twenty five dollars. All the other passengers around grew anxious for this guy. He said, "God will show a way. I have come this far." It was mad. But he was right. In his map of the world, to go from one place to another was approaching people and enquiry about things and moving on. And they helped him and showed him the way. Going from Bhubaneshar to a place 100 miles away was the same as going to New York.

Then we got together and worked out a plan. Two of the passengers were from a film crew going to New York to shoot. And they helped and showed him the way. I was afraid of his getting to the bus station, which is in the middle of the city, because New York is a very dangerous place. If you show yourself looking lost, you might end up naked in the middle of some street. He did not understand this. The film crew would take him to the hotel where they stayed overnight. They would drop him at the bus station. In the meanwhile, I rang up Virginia and told them about the pastors. I realised that my map of the world was different from his, because of which I was afraid for him. For me it was a vast wilderness that he was crossing. To him, it was not, and Jesus Christ would take him where he wanted to reach. And it worked; his map of the world worked.

R.J: How did you find the story of Jahaj Jung?

V.C: Once I found Skinner's book, from that I started researching. I had people working in the Army, who had heard Skinner's name vaguely. I prepared a biography and started asking people. Slowly one thing lead to the next and so on.

R.J: So, you consciously did a lot of research?

V.C: I like to do that. Most of my meetings with the people and my readings might not appeared explicitly in the book. Even though I did not put them, they create my world of writing; my map.

R.J: Why did you conceive a divine birth to your main characters, Sikandar, Chotta and Sanjay?

V.C: How can you tell an epic story without any divine intervention?. Joseph Cambell points out in *Hero with a Thousand Faces* and other books, that epic writing has certain conventions and certain patterns which the epic hero's or heroine's life follows. One of this is, if not necessarily divine is, an unusual birth; somehow complicated. When I write within a form, I certainly enjoy the surfaces of the form. If I am writing a detective story, I might be aware of its conventions. But I really like those conventions. They give me pleasure. I like to address them and play with them. But to

discuss them and to disregard them altogether and pretend that you are so daring by breaking the convention, that sometimes seems self-deluding. These forms are a kind of the *darshan* of the world. Inevitably whatever other forms you are taking, you are playing into some other conventions. In fact your convention might not be apparent to you. You might not be conscious about them. In all these various dialogues that pretend to challenge the statuesque, you find some other convention; the conventions of Marxism, or post-modernism, or supposed revolutionarism etc. All our *dharshans* have a sort of a logical consistency within them. I think it is too easy to mock other people's conventions and be unaware of yours. So what I like to do is to have much more of a conversation with the tradition that is handed down to me, than try and pretend that I am not interested in it. I am very much interested in it. When we look in to a detective story, usually the tradition is to have an unattended sign (perhaps a murder), and an outside investigator who investigates it. Through his scientific investigation, he tries and deduces the things and slowly settles back to the order. There is movement towards the restoration of the order. I like to read Sherlock Holmes, confident in the knowledge that he would come to it. In that detective story in *Love and Longing*, I was aware of the conventions. Though I did not make it look too easy, the solution that is suggested is a provisional solution. The bad guy is not punished and he walks away from it. In that way one can have a conversation with the tradition by following it to some extent and still altering it some how.

R.J: What sort of epic styles were you following, consciously or unconsciously?

V.C: The Mahabharat, the Ramayan, the Middle Eastern exchanges and certain recent experiments. I feel a great affection towards them. They feel to me like nourishment. I like to consume them and work with them.

R.J: Where did you learn all these traditions?

V.C: Just in reading. Of course, it all started at home. When I was a small kid I used to pester my mother and others at home to tell me stories. They used to tell me stories from the Ramayan and the Mahabharat. Now looking back to it, it is a weird kind of practice in this politically correct times. The usual fairy tales are violent and

belligerent. But telling a five years kid, the Mahabarat and the Ramayan, that's quite interesting. They usually avoid the violence and such stuff. But I still remember that part, where after the great battle the Pandavas ruled happily for many years. But in the end, somebody, told me the story of them going to the mountains to die. And that part made me scared. Our usual stories end with, "and they lived happily ever after". But here, their going to the mountain with the dog and such stuff, are really baffling. I still remember that strange feeling of understanding that the world is not necessarily a kind place, even to the heroes.

R.J: Did you even feel a call to answer the taunt of the West that, "The East does not have any sense, or culture, or any thing"?

V.C: Within the context of the book, in some sense, there was this feeling. This was an apparent part of the rhetoric, especially the re-constructive rhetoric which was pursued along with the agenda of investigation. The scientific apparatuses in hard sciences and in the humanities, the "discovery" of Sanskrit literature; the translation, the surveying of the physical realm, the explorations were a part of that political rhetoric of what constitutes proper knowledge. That was very much in my mind. In writing this it could not have been otherwise. In some sense it was very clear to me that if I were to tell this story, it should have been in this fashion and not in a particular, conventional, nineteenth century form. I enjoy reading historic novels, reconstructions. *Salambo* is one of my favorite books.

.J: How did Skinner's works help you in this?

V.C: In the English translation I read — it was a functional kind of book, there were not many natural kind of details. It read something like, "I went to Hooghly and lived there for four months as part such a unit and after that, we were detailed to do this. Then I came to Delhi, where my unit was detailed to do this. In Delhi, my unit was detailed to kill the bandits and we did it." So it was not a textured sort of autobiography in the sense that there was not much emotions. There are occasions when his emotions breakthrough. Even when his mother dies, there are just two sentences. It is very factual. In fact, the translator, Bailey Tracer, keeps interjecting. Sometimes his

comments are larger than the narrative on the page. It was a kind of translation, and also a reconstruction and re-shaping, through out. Skinner was an admirably loyal servant of the British.

R.J: There is a feeling that the Europeans are down to earth and scientific, whereas Indian are superstitions and mysterious. Such a feeling comes in your work as well.

V.C: I know that people do have that feeling. Many have objections to magic realism, that it perpetrates a mysterious India. For me a large part of India is still mysterious. I do not mean the religious feeling or fervor, but the way people conceive the world. I do not mean that life is mysterious somewhere in the interiors of Madhya Pradesh or some such place, but here in Delhi or Bombay. I look at the world with a texture of faith and belief. That is a part of my every day living. If you consider the gangsters and such people who live close to death everyday, they are the most faithful people in some weird sense of the word. They wake up every morning and sit before Shambhu Maharaj and pray. They have to go out and kill people or get killed. The world that I depict in this novel, is one in which, extra scientific belief and extra scientific actions is a part of life. But I do not know whether it is actually true or whether it actually works.

R.J: In the end you find that Sarthey too acquires an inexplicable magical capacity. What is this European capacity that you portray?

V.C: I guess that science too is a kind of faith. It think it is Issac Asimov who points out that, any technology sufficiently advanced, that we do not understand, looks to as like magic. I guess that I was playing with this idea that a faith of a different sort can also give you another kind of ability. Sarthey is also changed by what he does.

R.T: Why does Sarthey perpetrate all those crimes London?

V.C: One of the lessons we learn from the last few couple of centuries is that you cannot exercise power in some part of the world without it coming bone to the centre. It think that is what the US has finally realised in Vietnam. The Soviet Union also got a profound lesson in Afghanistan. You cannot project power at another part of the

world and cannot have it rebound on you right in the centre of your heart. That is one of the most profound British experience in the last five hundred years.

R.J: One of the best part of the novel, I felt, was where Sanjay ate his words and his growing gravitational pull as he attacked the British. How did you feel when you put it down.?

V.C: It was extraordinary to write. I enjoyed writing that as a lot of images that preceded came together in that and assumed sense. I liked the fact that he literally swallowed them. I also liked the way the words came back and were collected for the cannon fire.

R.J: Sikandar and Chotta finally give up, as they say they have eaten the salt and they could not fight. How do you feel for them?

V.C: I expected the readers to feel a certain sympathy for them, because people make certain adjustments and compromises. In some sense it is an honorable compromise and it is a way of existing, in a way that is comprehensible and possible, allowed to you in the context of larger powers.

R.J: Parasher is reborn. Why did you introduce this concept?

V.C: How can you talk about the world without rebirth? Nothing ever dies. Even the stories that you think are over, percolate and make their presence in the world, in the present.

R.J: There is a shift in the action from Sikandar the Rajput in the beginning to the crooked poet, Sanjay. ?

V.C: Where there is a warrior there is a poet. I think this exchange is a central part of the story. Then Sikandar says that, "you failed me since you did not tell me what I was supposed to do". I think Sanjay realises this and takes up the role of that invulnerable warrior that he becomes.

R.J: All your characters belong to the upper strata of the society. Sikander and Chotta are Rajputs and Sanjay is a brahmin. How do you explain the silence regarding other sections of the people? Similarly, all the history is taken place from Maharashtra upwards, and there is no mention of the South?.

V.C: These are the givens of the story. The question of putting in either the geographic expansion or the demographic expansion would have been interesting. But finally it would have detracted from the specifics of the story. In some ways, I think, that kind of politically correct art, where people are dragged into as a token of all such things is more patronizing than anything else. Unless the character himself enters the story and functions in an important way, shoe-horning them would be useless.

R.J: There are no Muslim characters in Sanjay stories, except Saira in Bombay.? Did you consciously ignore the communal tensions in the past, or was it that they never existed?

V.C: In Lucknow there are some Muslim characters. Again the story is of a Rajput family. I do not like just shoe- horning things and making a nice suitcase.

R.J: Towards the end, i.e. the story in the present is charged with contemporary politics, violence etc.

V.C: The violence is not communal or any thing. It was political as it always necessarily is. I was interested in that clash of cultures.

R.J: How do you feel about India as a nation? Do you think it can survive as a nation?

V.C: I think we will have to go through some painful readjustments. I think the national idea is an important and necessary one. I think the specific articulation of that has to be changed. We have to take into account the demands for Uttarakhand or Jarkhand or for autonomy. I think the national idea is strong enough, even though people talk about Balkanisation, and point out Soviet Union as a recent example. With all its faults and short-comings, the national idea is still a viable idea; an idea which a lot of people find necessary and important.

R.J: Even in the so-called unicultural nations like France you find dissents and varying voices, which have been suppressed by a projected national character. Don't you think, that attempts to create a unicultural India are a kind of fascism, aping the West?

V.C: I think it is not aping the West. I think it is a human characteristic, a political characteristic. If you look across to Pakistan, under the pressure of regional powers and regional aspirations, facing the sense of imminent disintegration, they tend to find a common political cause. Mussolini in Italy is an instructive example, when he called the nation to conquer Africa. Then you have everyone pointed in a patriotic direction. In this condition dissent could be suppressed. That is happening today too. There are counter forces working against that. Luckily in the democratic system even parties who have this simple idea of India, cannot survive without the support of the local parties. I think the movement from the large transnational parties, to regional parties is a necessary and healthy one. It has its own impacts too, like frequent elections for reasons that are amoral, which weaken the national unity. Whether it requires a constitutional amendment or expecting parties to work in a nature way, I cannot tell definitely. But, we need to think about it.