

**UN-FIXING IDENTITIES :
THE NATION AND MUSLIM IDENTITY IN
INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION**

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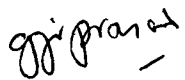
CERTIFICATE

This dissertation titled **Un-fixing Identities: The Nation and Muslim Identity in Indian English Fiction** submitted by **Muhammad Najeeb Mubarki**, Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, JNU, New Delhi 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 other University.

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Preface

The rise of communalist discourses and attempts to redefine historical and cultural nationhood has foregrounded the question of identity in India. This preoccupation with conceptions and categories of the nation has been marked in recent Indian-English fiction. This study proposes to examine constructions of 'nation' and 'nationhood' vis-a-vis formulations of Muslim identity in three Indian-English novels, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass*.¹ These texts display the construction of the nation as an imagined, arbitrary concept, which allows possibilities of negating homogenizing and essentializing discourses. The nation as a site for contesting ideologies, constructions, and unfixed identities makes apparent the ruptures inherent in any conception of the nation. The nation thus is a gestative, undefined or shifting political and spatial structure and these texts display the conscious building or suffering from the lack of this construction of the nation. Central to any discussion of 'nation' and an attendant 'identity' is the problem of placement of Muslim identity. Communalist interpretations, seeking to transfer an essentialized identity onto Muslims as part of an agenda to construct a 'golden Age' prior to the advent of the 'alien Muslim', has been framing contemporaneous debates about nationality and identity. An

¹ References to the texts shall be from the following editions; Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, Avon Books, New York, 1982. First pub. 1980. Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, Ravi Dayal, Delhi, 1988. Mukul Kesavan, *Looking Through Glass*, Ravi Dayal, Delhi, 1995.

engagement with these tropes is central in the discussion of nation in these texts. These three novels also incorporate the disruption that is engendered by partition in the body and notion of the nation as a central event and trope to define contemporary 'Muslim' and 'Indian' identity. The Muslim, then figures as the site of contesting constructions of the nation, and also figures as the locus of the failure of that nation. All three texts acknowledge the focus on Muslim identity within narratives of the nation, as also a critical engagement with the spillages and boundaries of nationality.

In *Midnight's Children* Saleem Sinai acts as a motor force in history of the nation, he "invents" it and his personal history mirrors that of the nation. Foregrounded in this 'Muslim family's history' then is the intermingling of familial, personal and national history - and the focus on Muslim identity in this history and definitions of nationhood. *The Shadow Lines* also figures the anxiety of nationhood about the Muslim 'other', and partition becomes a means of investigating borders, locations of identity and the nation itself. *Looking Through Glass* foregrounds the discussion of nation and Muslim identity within the central event of partition. The endurance of the memory of partition and the attendant problematisation of placement of Muslims are played out against the narrative of the nation. All these texts attempt a discussion of nationhood that is informed by a cognizance of the ruptures within that nation, and the centrality of the problematic of the Muslim body. Chapter one, giving

a brief overview of some theories and frameworks for analysing the nation and nationalism seeks to provide a framework for the discussions of the texts. The notions and ideas of the discourses of 'nation' is presented, together with the problematic of defining these terms. Chapter two starts with an introduction of the relation of the novel form to the nation, the framing of the nation in Indian English novels and tries to study the formation and problematisation of the 'nation' in the three texts. Chapter three analyses the role of communalism and partition in this discussion of the nation and attempts to delineate the links between discussions of the nation, partition and Muslim identity. As a reflection of cultural categories of Muslimness and the nation, cultural tropes presented in two novels, Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* and Anita Desai's *In Custody* are analysed,² and the problematic of Muslim identity within the framework of communalist narratives and narratives of the nation is sought to be mapped out.

² All references to the texts will be from the following editions: Ahmed Ali, *Twilight on Delhi*, OUP, Delhi, 1991. First pub. 1940. Anita Desai, *In Custody*, Heinemann, London, 1984.

CHAPTER ONE

The Nation as a Whole

Nearing the end of a turbulent century, our 'national' life continues to carry the burden of a crisis-ridden history. As contemporaneous events only underline the continuing conflicts over definitions and categories of the 'nation', the communal faultlines between contending communities - or more appropriately, what communalist structures would like to believe are 'contending communities' - are redrawn along discourses that seek to 'frame' historical and cultural 'nationhood' and attendant identities.

Beyond historical accounts, researchers in sociology or cultural studies, when defining the terms 'nation' and 'nationalism' seem to fall into two general camps. Benedict Anderson, (Anderson, 1991) is something of a modernist in pronouncing the nation as an essentially modern creation with few roots in pre-modern times. A primordialist view, would however believe in the historical longevity of nationalism and ethnicity. Here the argument is that ethnic identity has existed for thousands of years, and nationalism can only be understood as its modern articulation. Here nations are seen as essential, basic units of social cohesion - a universal attribute of humanity. One can also posit a challenge to a modernist/ structural theoretical framework that sees ethnicity only as by product of modernization. The argument would go that myths of kinship and common origin are crucial to the genesis of nationalism.¹ What is of importance here, is that to

¹ A strong semiotic bent can also be suggested for this genesis, revolving around the concepts of land, youth, blood and sacrifice.

an extent ethnicity and nationalism seem to be used as overlapping categories, thus rendering both 'concepts' devoid of much complexity. For example, the standard sociological definition of ethnicity is a "collectivity...having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared past, and cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements which define the group's identity, such as kinship, religion, language, shared territory, nationality or physical appearance." [Bulmer, quoted in Gilman, 1998: 19]. Thus the discourse of ethnicity that focuses on this primordial aspect would lead to the argument that every so-called 'nation' has constructed for itself a sense of national identity, built up partly on its observations and stereotypes of both its own people and of other nations. Though, perhaps, subject to alteration and development, it is these stereotypes that form the web of collective myths and memories that are the stuff of national identity built up over centuries and as old as human society itself.

The importance of this theoretical background becomes manifest in any discussion on identity formation processes and concomitant constructions of the nation, and shall serve precisely that purpose in the analysis of the core texts that will follow later. Contemporaneous theories of ethnicity and nationalism would agree with much of the primordialist view, but place the concept and process of nationhood in the specific context of modern society. Nationalism could, for example, also be seen as a phenomenon arising out of deeper social mechanisms. It could be posited as being a tool used by elites to pursue economic or

political goals. Ernest Gellner's work, one of the standard sociological introductions to the field, argues that the need of modern industrial economies for a mobile and interchangeable workforce requires complex new skills and social formations beyond the resources of family and kinship ties. This necessitates a public education system that requires vast resources and standardization integrated by a (preferably) single language and a centralized political, economic and educational system [Gellner, 1983]. This definition stressing the constructedness of a nation is echoed by E.J. Hobsbawm in his *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (1990) "...with Gellner I would stress the element of artefact, invention and social engineering which enters into the making of nations."² [Hobsbawm 1990: 10]. For Benedict Anderson, ethnicity and nationalism are essentially artificial constructs, capricious 'imagined communities' that float out of the new forms of media that accompany economic modernization. Anderson's description of a nation as an 'imagined political community' has been widely quoted. It is imagined, he posits, as irrespective of the 'size' of the nation, members of that community can never possibly know most of their fellow-members, interact with them individually, yet there's an imagined construct of each - an image that lives in each member's mind. [Anderson, 1991]. He, of course, notes the different stages of the development of nationalism in modern times, from the Americas through Europe until the 'final stage' of nation

² Hobsbawm here uses Gellner's definition in his analysis of nationalism preceding nations, in that states and nationalisms make nations and not the other way round.

building in Africa, Asia and the former Soviet Union. The problematics involved in any description of a 'nation' has been dealt with by most modern researchers concerned with the historical evolution of the concept. For example, E.J. Hobsbawm refuses to start off with any set categorisations. "...this book assumes no a priori definition of what constitutes a nation. As an initial working assumption any sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as members of a 'nation', will be treated as such." [Hobsbawm, 1990: 8]. Indeed, the complexity and ruptures involved in defining these terms has confronted most ideological frameworks seeking to tackle this most important of modern-world phenomenas. For Marxists, the power of nationalism is something they have great trouble reconciling with their core beliefs of the primacy of class conflict and economic exploitation of society. They would then, seek to explain nationalism as a deliberate ploy by the capitalist class to sow 'false consciousness' in order to divert the proletariat from the class struggle.

Implicit in all these debates is the structuring of a national identity. An individual as denoting the collective and 'personal' identity being inscribed into a national one. The rupture - or perhaps progression - between earlier such definitions and more contemporary discourses on the subject are manifest. In Ernest Renans' 1882 essay *What is a nation?* - a seminal, foundational text on the subject - national identity is seen as a creation of a national 'memory':

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle....and among all its cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. More valuable...is the fact of sharing, in the past, a glorious heritage and regrets, and of having, in the future (a shared programme) to put into effect." [Renan, in Bhabha, ed., 1990: 19].

This idea of a shared past, of collective sorrows and joys that bind a people, can, of course, lend itself to widely different, and mutually antagonistic interpretations. In India - as shall be discussed later - both Hindu and Muslim communalist discourses play upon this very 'sharedness' vis a vis an exclusion. The 'ties' - historical (even if spurious), cultural, linguistic and of religion - are emphasised to suggest and articulate the idea of a 'nation' and national (and therefore individual) identity within each community. These tropes are deployed while being defined as excluding, indeed, being in opposition to the other community. It is then this 'otherness' that defines the identity of each group. This is obviously a negative identification of ethnicity. Identity, seen this way, is logically and historically the product of the assertion that A is an X because he is not a Y - which proposition makes it extremely easy to identify X-ness. It is this background that shall serve as a means of discussion of the fragmentations, ruptures, spillages and complexity of Indian, Hindu, and Muslim identity as exemplified in the novels chosen for study. The intention in quoting Renan here, was to show the remarkable antiquity of the

argument that communalist discourses in India take up - with 'modern' contexts and examples - in an effort to legitimize an exclusionist identity of the nation. That the idea of forging a common, unifying past based on memory tends to be extremely selective in its choice of histories was pointed out by Renan himself: "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation". [Renan, in Bhaba ed., 1990: 11]. Thus, the nation is mapped out on a carefully selected view of history that marginalises - indeed seeks to wipe out - any opposing body of views. The nation and its identity as exemplified by each member then is a process of violence. The violence that is directed at effacing the identity of marginal groups, or is simply a result of yoking together disparate identities under a unifying, homogeneous identity. In contemporaneous times, with specific regard to India, a working hypothesis could be arrived at by an understanding that nationalism is supported by the modern international political system because it emphasizes the market, democracy and secularism all of which derive from a set agenda for 'achieving' a national identity with the ostensible purpose of focusing on national well-being. However, nationalism is also tied to chauvinism which is a resultant of nation-states seeking a national identity on ethnic grounds.³

³ It could further be argued that modernity's economic and political conditions foster chauvinism, an idea of national self-government, national self-determination and national identity - all factors in nationalism and the nation state.

In India, of course, the condition of post-coloniality forces one to reframe these debates.⁴ Colonialism reshaped, more often than not violently, geographical boundaries of subjected countries, their physical territories, the 'social terrains' as well as human identities. The concept of the nation, as an agenda for anti-colonial struggles then has obvious importance for nationalists. The need arises to 'forge' (literally burn out, reshape by violence and coercion as part of this forging) powerful, potent new identities that can challenge the colonial idea of identity and nationhood for the colonised people. This was a necessary part of the agenda of nationalist movements in combating colonialism at political, intellectual even emotional levels. As Ania Loomba says in *Colonialism/Post Colonialism* (1998), "In widely divergent contexts, the idea of the nation was a powerful vehicle for harnessing anti-colonial energies at all these levels." [Loomba, 1998: 186]. As many theorists have suggested, the root of the concept of modern India, or the Indian nation-state was indeed a production of the British imperialist agenda. Thus the nineteenth century figures as a crucial point for the emergence of the current nationalist, communalist ideas of nation and identity. It certainly served as a great epistemological break in 'Indian' minds in that the

⁴ With regard to the subject of discussion here - that of Muslim/Hindu/National identities, one can of course say, as a lot of secularist discourse in India has - that communalism was an 'invented' ideology introduced by the British as part of their colonial agenda. However, I intend to problematize this view - as well as the whole notion of identity as framed in the novels chosen for study.

administrative unit of the empire - India - was sought to be brought under a unifying experience of the past, of collective history and shared memories as part of the anti colonial struggle. As Sudhir Chandra says, "In foisting upon our nineteenth century forbears the dichotomy of a West, with its civilizing mission, and an East that needed to be 'civilized' colonial mediation helped create in Indian minds the idea of a traditional India" [Chandra, 1992: 5]. This could lead to the conclusion that the nationalist struggle was a derivative of the 'civilizing mission' itself, in that the confrontation with the colonisers - and the imbibing of modes of education and thought - led to the idea of a nation state.

Partha Chatterjee in *The Nation and its fragments* (1993) has tried to focus on the complexity of this exchange between the colonised and colonisers, and identifies what he calls the 'ideological seive' through which nationalists filtered European ideas. This is achieved through an emphasis on the rupture between nationalism as a political movement which challenges the colonial state, and nationalism as a cultural construct that serves as a rallying point for the colonized to emphasize and project their difference and autonomy from the colonial masters. [Chatterjee, 1993]. The attempt is to create a domain of sovereignty within colonial society by demarcating the world into a material world of state craft, science and technology dominated by the West and the inner domain of culture, including religion, customs and the family

- claimed as the essence of national culture.⁵ The colonial encounter does, of course, change this world too:

In fact, here nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not Western. If the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being. [Chatterjee, 1993: 6-7]

Though Partha Chatterjee stresses on the dichotomy between the colonised intellectuals' education in the Western tradition and their fervent attempts to claim their own indigenous languages and a national culture, what is of importance here is that in this 'contest' a sense of the national and individual 'Indian' identity takes root, an 'imagining' of the nation due to the nationalist agenda occurs. This 'image' is what frames some of the debates in Indian English novels about 'the national identity', where the contending claims, sites of discontent and erasures of other identities at the altar of a 'national' one are sought to be mapped out. The notion of an emerging 'culture' which Partha Chatterjee suggests, thus becomes central to nationalist discourses.

It is this imagined cultural core, this domain of spirituality that emerges as the site for the construction of national identities.

⁵ This dichotomy in world-views can be seen in texts which ostensibly deal with the cultural paradigms in India such as Ahmed Ali's *Twilight In Delhi* (1940), and Anita Desai's *In Custody* (1980).

These 'constructions' are undertaken by a wide-ranging political, ideological anti-colonial spectrum. The notion of a shared past or a cultural essence (that arises in groups and communities that are 'imagined' by nationalist struggles) often invoke a synonymy with a racial or religious identity. This seems to overlap with the colonialist version of national identity for the colonised peoples, where race and religion are essential components of the colonising-civilising mission. Thus, "nationalism engages in a complex process of contesting as well as appropriating colonialist versions of the past". [Loomba, 1998: 196]. Therefore, from the very inception (assuming the nationalist movement in India to be the defining point) of a nation-building process, the racial-religious, even political imagining of the nation is rarely an incontestable, simple or unitary idea. Contained within its apparent singularity are contesting, contending interpretations of what it means to be that nation. Various forms or conceptions of the nation thus contest for space and political expression - despite the pretence to permanence and claims to an immemorial history.

A resultant of this racial, religious inscribing of identity onto groups within the nation (thus the whole state as such) was a new kind of political ontology which...

made possible a membership of individuals in abstract religious identities like Hindus and Muslims, and by corollary a new kind of impersonal and abstract violence, as people began to ascribe to them an untraditional capacity to have intentions and undertake action. Once this new ontology of

social/political being comes into existence, it becomes impossible to escape the logic of its consequences.” [Kaviraj, in Dunn, ed. 1995: 117-118].

The ambiguity at the heart of the nationalist project is manifest. As a mutually contending political agency is ascribed to Hindus and Muslims the concept of the ‘nation’ falls into an unchosen, contested category. The decisive advantage of the attributes of subscribing to the ‘Indian nation’ was a glossing over of differences (real or imagined) as against the shared resentment for foreign rule. Thus among the earliest writers to create an anti-colonial sensibility an ambivalence as to the ‘real’ identity is apparent. Among the first Bengali nationalist writers, a confusion and indecisiveness about whether the nation they belonged to was Bengali, Hindu or Indian is clear. [Ibid].⁶

The point which Sudipta Kaviraj makes (as discussed earlier) about the new ontology engendering a logic of communal identity - political identity specifically - is that the ambivalence and contesting space for Hindus and Muslims that was introduced as being part of the discourse of the ‘nation’ becomes something ‘permanent’. Under the conditions of modernity - symbolised by the ‘new’ nation envisaged in nationalist discourse - the bodies of Hindus and Muslims are drawn in a new, unconventional way into political discourse, invested with a new invention of political

⁶ The point shall later be elaborated with regard to narratives, nation and communal identity vis a vis. the writings of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.

agency. The need for the new nation-state to be homogenous (by definition at least) culturally, did not fit in with the cultural reality of the Indian sub-continent [ibid.]. Therefore one of the most important and central divisions within nationalist ideology was between a homogenizing and pluralist trend. It was Gandhi and Nehru, most importantly, who had an agenda of upholding the distinctively pluralist idea of the nation.⁷ The Indian state came about as a translation of this political imagination, the founding institutions were sought to be formulated from these parallel but mutually reinforcing pluralist principles. The agenda of secularism was to 'tolerate' other ethnic identities within limits, and Indianness was presumed to compose of a complex multilayered identity which encompassed other identities without erasing them.

Attendant upon this agenda, at the dawn of the new nation-state in 1947, was the crisis that was to dominate the secular agenda. As Muslim and Hindu communalist discourse seeking a disparate, contending identity for members of their respective communities was based upon a negation of the secularist-nationalist agenda, each began to define what the nation was and

⁷ This has of course been contended by Muslim communalist ideology, which regarded the entire agenda of the Congress as a dubious one. The rise of the Muslim League among the Muslims and the communalist overtones within the Congress, shall be a major point of discussion when detailing the 'progress' of communalist historiography within narratives of the nation. Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass* (1995) discusses this strongly, and in a way hardly any other Indian-English novel has. The texts will be the object of study in the later chapters.

should be.⁸ Partition was, of course, the defining moment for this ideology. But the crisis, for the Indian state did not end here. The deep anxiety about the future of the secular agenda confronts the nation-state to date "...despite ongoing processes of secularization and deliberate efforts to promote it, secularism as a widely shared world-view had failed to make headway in India." [Madan, 1987: 749]. Contemporaneous events, such as the rise of strident Hindu communalist discourse have again underscored that the nation is still being defined, and other contestants (such as the West or Islam) are seen as foreign elements that threaten to pollute the nation. Thus the nation as a community is created by not merely forging certain bonds but "by fracturing or disallowing others; not merely by invoking and remembering certain versions of the past, but making sure that others are forgotten or repressed." [Loomba, 1998: 202]. The anxiety about defining the nation underlies not only the communal but also certain secular conceptions of 'Indian' nationalism. Discussion of identities is usually carried out within the context of a monolithic, all-encompassing Indian nationalism. The underlying assumption is that there was, and still is, an essential opposition between these identities and Indian nationalism. [Chandra, 1992].

⁸ This was certainly not the beginning of communalist discourse, as has earlier been hinted at (and shall be examined in detail later). The anxiety about forms the nation should take preceded the partition, and communalism was seen as being engendered in a pre-colonial Muslim era (for the Muslim right) and even earlier, before the introduction of the Muslim era for the Hindu communalists.

The increasing communalization of Indian polity, thus makes it more important to try and understand the tropes, discourses and methods communalist ideology seeks to use in order to define the nation. Then texts which figure the problem of the nation as a category to be defined, also become the site for examining the inscriptions of communalist or exclusionist ideology. The attempt in this chapter has been to try and structure a framework for the discussion of the core texts that shall follow. A brief, concise outlining of the ideas, discourses of nation and identity was presented and the problematic of defining these terms was sought to be introduced. The discussion to follow shall try to examine some of these ideas in greater detail, together with a reading of the core texts.

CHAPTER - II

Narrating the Nation

“Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye.”[Bhabha, 1990 : 1]. What is being suggested here is that the emergence of the nation as a potent historical idea - almost in combat with the ambivalence which surrounds the idea of a nation - is deeply linked to its being ‘imagined’, ‘written’ down as a system of cultural signification. That is why, as Bhabha points out, nationalist discourses persistently try to produce the idea of a nation as a ‘continuous narrative of national progress’.[ibid.]

While the study of nationalism, or the structuration of national identity has been marked in disciplines like sociology or history, cultural study - or the study of imaginative literature - has come to the fore to understand the nation-centredness of the post-colonial world. Though usage of rubrics like “third-world literature’ are contested and have been argued against for their homogenizing, monolithic tendency, it is undeniable that post-colonial writing has been dominated by a sense of building - or rediscovering the nation. It could be surmised as being part of the nationalist, anti-imperialist agenda to re-claim one’s own (national) identity which colonial structures had sought to efface.

In fact, it is especially in Third-world fiction after the Second World War that the fictional uses of ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ are most pronounced. The ‘nation’ is precisely what Foucault has called a ‘discursive

formation' - not simply an allegory or imaginative vision, but a gestative political structure which the Third-world artist is consciously building or suffering the lack of. [Brennan, in Bhabha, 1990: 46-47].

Literature then, redeploys this 'longing' as it were, this desire of the nation to achieve a sought-after state of identity - a 'national longing for form' that literature enunciates or seeks to bring to fruition. This would again bring us to the concept of the nation as an imagined construct - something that is dependent or a resultant of a system of cultural structures wherein literature - or imaginative literature - plays an important, even decisive role. Here then, we have the idea of the nation as a community narrated in a particular print-language. The nation then becomes a kind of modern 'text' and nationalism a form of political discourse rather than an ideology.¹

In India, the nationalist project was faced with the problematic of varying - often contending - regional identities that had to be harnessed to form a national one. Thus, there was an agenda of constructing a past, a history that could talk about the collective self and even bring it into existence. "History", says Sudipta Kaviraj "on

¹ The obvious, and crucial, implication here is the 'invitation' to read this text of the nation. The intention, of course, is not to argue that the 'key' to the explanation of the concept of a nation lies in this reading, in a literary analysis of the meaning and devices employed by the writer (or a nationalist) - but rather that the very act of inscribing the nation leaves it open and vulnerable to deliberate or intended glossing over of differences and ruptures within that particular construction of identity. The category of the 'nation' thus become all the more ambivalent and slippery.

an influential view is a species of narrative... fiction is also a narrative.” [Kaviraj, in Chatterji ed., 1989: 226]. The uses of involving a shared past, memories - history - in forging ethnic identity or on a larger scale to make it inclusive of a national identity have been hinted at earlier. The point in this ‘fictionalising of history’ - as the texts to be dealt with are - is not that the question of ‘truth’ is excluded altogether from historical accounts (as Kesavan’s and Rushdie’s texts can be made out to be), but that this narrativity cannot be subjected to simple - ‘true’ or ‘false’ - binary divisions. While it could be argued that “history instead of being distinguished by the truth of its story becomes marked by the storyness of its truth,” [Ibid.], the point is the importance of the illocutionary act - the ‘why’ of the narrative, or why it was told the way it was. Nations and nationalisms and the attendant structures of identity then are closely linked with narrative structures. There is no a priori truth on which to rest a definition of nationalism, but it rests on the firm ground of narratives. In the case of India, the hunt for the beginning of this narrative that constructs a self-image of the nation would begin in the nineteenth century. There would have been earlier narratives of opposition to British rule, but in the late nineteenth century, Bengali intellectuals began to fashion a narrative about their collective self, which was perhaps the dawn of the modern nationalist agenda - its early beginnings. This would become the self-identifying and constituting narrative story of Indian nationalism [Ibid.].

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In the formation of the nation, history was recognized by the earliest nationalist writers as being of prime importance. It had, of course, a dual purpose, one, of the happenings of time - including the despair, humiliation that past historical events had given rise to, and, more importantly - history as a site of recovery - stories about what had happened could be explained, modulated to serve the nationalist struggle. History here became the means of talking about the collective self, and bringing it into existence. It was in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's narrativizing of the nation that India was becoming for the first time an imagined community. The problem of defining the nation was resolved by an all inclusive 'jati' to denote as a generic term all those communities, starting from castes to religious communities to the nation. "To enter into the last novels of Bankimchandra is to enter a peculiar time, a time constructed in imagination confused with the past, a time of myths." [Ibid., 232]. The importance of Bankimchandra lies in the fact that apart from one of the earliest attempts at defining the nation and putting to use a selective use of history, the ambiguity of India and Indianness is thoroughly confused with a more Bengali/Hindu identity. The rhetoric of communalist discourse is foreshadowed here. The purpose of both communalist discourse and Bankimchandra's writings is not to give a concrete sense of an historical period, but the point is to somewhat falsify history. "They try deliberately to probe and use counter-factuals, to extend those lines which were not actually

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followed up, explore the peculiar terrain on history's non-actualized possibilities." [ibid., 233]. The distinction, perhaps, between more strident communalist discourse and the Bengali novelist's is that the latter cannot in most cases totally falsify the historical events themselves, but the attempt is more to place fictional narratives in their midst and try to shift and displace their meaning. "By this narrativity, this deceptively simple act of telling and not telling, the narrator can gerrymander events - not by directly falsifying them, but by the most unanswerable of his narrative weapons, his right of closure." [ibid., 243]. The narrativity constructs Mughal - and by implication Muslim - presence in India as a foreign one. The importance lies in the fact that the attempt at constructing a national identity - ostensibly against the colonial British empire - here takes use of the past and structures it so as to build a community that designates the Muslim as the outsider - a presence that is equivalent to the British in that 'old' Indian (Hindu) traditions and virtues are threatened. Even though, as Sudhir Chandra points out in his *The Oppressive Present*, Hindi writers of the period too were grappling with the problem of accommodating the Muslim presence within the national fold - dictated largely by the context of organized national efforts to deal with political subjection - yet while grasping the correlation between Hindu - Muslim unity and the country's destiny, they "could be perfectly venomous against Muslims, cutting at the root of their own efforts." [Chandra, 1992 : 119]. The stereotype of

Muslim rule as one of plunder, conversion, pillage and destruction of an earlier golden 'Hindu' age turned invariably into the stereotype of the Muslim. The ambiguity and this grappling with the problem of communal relations within constructions of the Indian nation could sometimes be strange, even amusing. In a short play, *Bharat Mein Yavan Raj* (1879), another writer, Radha Charan Goswami, falls prey to depicting Muslim rule in India as a chronicle of rape, abduction of women, the slaughter of cows, destruction of temples etc, and yet - apparently anxious for Hindu - Muslim unity - he assured Muslims at the beginning of the play that it was not meant to offend them, only the play was trying to portray the bravery of Muslims as opposed to the cowardliness of the Hindu! [Chandra, 1992: 122]. This of course dovetails with and foreshadows contemporaneous communalist doctrine about the Muslims. To reiterate the point already made, such 'nationalist' agendas and writings were trying in their own way to construct a 'new' identity for the nation and in that structure to fit in the body of the Muslim.²

While more shall be discussed later about the tropes and structures employed by communalist writings (and their own conceptions of identity and the nation), my purpose here was to

² This would obviously serve as background of several cultural significations employed when talking about Hindus and Muslims. My point is that the ambiguity about the Muslim informs much of the earlier nationalist agenda as it does the texts under discussion which in their own way are again trying to frame the nation.

briefly indicate the ambiguity surrounding the 'nation' even in the earliest of novels like Bankimchandra's. The importance of the novel when 'talking' of the nation becomes manifest, as perhaps more than any form it seeks to frame the nation and attendant identities.

"It was the novel that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the 'one, yet many' of national life, and mimicking the structure of the nation..." [Brennan, in Bhabha, 1990: 49]. As an important tool (with the newspapers) of the national print media, its presentation was an invitation to allow people to imagine the national community. An important facet, obviously, was the changing of the concept of 'realism' along with the rise of the novel. The paradox, of course, lies in that the leisure, education needed for reading a novel make it a somewhat elitist and minority form. This becomes all the more important when considering Indian-English fiction; for all its importance and power, catering as it does to the educated, English-speaking elite in India, the English novel forms a small minority in terms of the readership available in 'regional', Indian languages.³

³ It is not the purpose or the intention of this study to go into an examination of the colonial impact vis a vis English in India, or of the debate about the 'status' of English at present in India. For an examination of the issues involved see: Svati Joshi ed. *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History*, New Delhi. Trianka. 1991, Gauri Vishwanathan *Masks of Conquest: Literary study and British Rule in India* London. Faber and Faber. 1990.

As was hinted earlier, the novel in third-world literatures might be a form of claiming the nation. This has led to a dichotomous opposition, namely between 'first-world novels' and 'third-world novels.' According to literary theorist Frederic Jameson, the third-world novel, while not offering the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce, still has the power for political and social critique. Thus, Jameson argues, all third-world texts have to be read as national allegories. Therefore, the connection between nationalism and the novel exists only in the early novels of the West and in the third-world novel of today. Obviously, his homogenizing rhetoric is flawed, as Aijaz Ahmed has convincingly shown.⁴ The 'third-world' category is untenable, the texts Jameson writes about form but a minor fraction of the total number of texts that could be found in Asia and Africa, and most would not have even been translated into English. But, keeping the debate about the 'Indian-English' literature and relatively broad national elite that uses English in India in mind, it is interesting to note that the notion of the 'national allegory' fits better with Salman Rushdie's postmodernist 'magical realism.' Rushdie's work is deeply allegorical (considering the text to be discussed *Midnight's Children*) in the sense that its spirit is, to use Jameson's words, "profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneties, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogenous representation of

⁴ For a complete debate of the issue see *Jameson's rhetoric of otherness and the 'national allegory'* in Aijaz Ahmed's *In Theory*, O.U.P. New Delhi, 1995. (Second Impression).

the symbol.” [quoted in Van der Veer, 1998: 183]. While, undeniably, the novel as a genre has traditionally been implicated in the structuration and construction of the idea of the nation, in so much as it within its discourse of the nation maps out what constitutes that community - from and in opposition to what it is not,⁵ it is also widely believed that the Indian novel in English is historically concerned with defining a national identity. As Meenakshi Mukherjee says, “It may not be a coincidence that the novel in English emerged in India in the 1930’s, the decade prior to Independence, when there was an urgency to foreground the idea of a composite nation.” [Mukherjee, 1993: 2609].

While the ‘anxiety of Indianness’ or of defining the nation could be seen in the works of the older writers in English in India - such as Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan - in their case it is more of a desire to be rooted. [Ibid : 2610]. While for the younger generation (and all three primary texts under study belong to this category) it may be a coalescence of accessibility in the global market, an anxiety of Englishness that effaces out other, more major Indian languages, or simply a generation for whom only English can provide the literary text that can define or seek to construct a national text [Ibid]. As noted earlier, this discussion is not within the scope of this

⁵ The English novel from *Robinson Crusoe*, to *Tom Jones*, *Mansfield Park* etc is such a chronicle, representing the totalisation of British culture with meanings and tropes associated with ‘English nation life’.

study, and the purpose is to purely examine the texts for their tropes of nationhood and identity, the anxiety of the Indian-nation state vis-a-vis the identity of minorities - particularly Muslim (and here partition assumes importance) together with a historiographical background of the texts and the nationalist/communalist debates that surround discussions of identity and culture in India.

If the construction of a nation always demands the erasure of differences within one's own borders, and emphasising the differences beyond them - Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) is the only text out of the primary texts under consideration that brings - very significantly - the non-Indian-subcontinental world into play. For this is a book that seeks to literally 'map out' the fluidity of demarcating borderlines, the 'imagination' induced borders between countries - that the resultant ideas of national space, identity and one's nation are an arbitrary, even geographically illogical mental construct.

The Shadow Lines as a text differs from the two other core texts Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass* and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in that there is no apparent anxiety about the nation or identity here. While the narrator cannot escape the implications of the understanding of borders, nations and identity mapped out in the text, there is no "betrayal of an anxiety because it attempts to prove nothing and interrogates rather than defines the concept of a

totalising India.”[Mukherjee, 1993: 2611]. A speculative, almost tentative exploration of ideas of human relationships across space, boundaries and time, and of freedom informs the whole book. The structure of the book - memories and experiences in a non-chronological framework - mirrors the unnamed narrator’s quest for seeking out connections, for recovering lost information and suppressed memories of people, places and time. The quest is for a coherence of memory, explanation and reason that shall make sense of the narrator’s own life and that of the nation inscribed in the text. The narrator is the repository of memories - familial, personal, national - almost always making people remember, reminding others in his search for meaning. The search is for a logic, an understanding of people and places. Recognising the importance of memory, even as a child, the narrator is constantly asking people to remember “don’t you remember?” is a constant refrain throughout the text. Whether it is ‘remembering’ lanes in London, or as in one of the first instances of asking that question-to Tridib at this favourite ‘adda’ at Gole Park in Calcutta - reminding the obviously jesting Tridib that he hadn’t gone anywhere, and was making a mistake in saying he had been in London, “Tridib-da, you’ve made a mistake! I met you last month, don’t you remember? You were in your room, lying on your mat, smoking a cigarette...” [p. 12]. The anxiety of the child here consists of some panic at the thought that Tridib is somehow mixed in his memory. Memory, whose shaping force in the text is an extremely

potent and productive thing, but also constitutive of differences, of expanding and limiting the imagination and concept of space at the same time, of enabling relationships across geographical distance and enforcing hostility in the neighbourhood. In fact, distance is a constitutive of memory itself, while remembrance can turn someone in London into a fond friend, it can engender hostility and potential disruption and chaos in a geographically closer area. “*The Shadow Lines...* is a slow brushing away of some of the cobwebs of modern Indian memory, a repeated return to those absences and fissures that mark the sites of personal and national trauma.” [Kaul, 1994: 126].

This is where the nation is mapped then, in the memory, in its fissures, erasures, absences, silences - they are what constitute the Indian nation in its modernity, and even the identity of the sub-continent itself. To believe and learn to recognize this is not an easy task, for places and spaces can signify something entirely different to others. The places the narrators wishes to visit - to confirm his memory of them - his imagined constitutive space, like Cairo to “see the world’s first pointed arch in the mosque of Ibn Tulun, and touch the stones of the Great Pyramid of Cheops...”[p. 20] means nothing to Ila, for her Cairo is merely a place where “the Ladies is way away on the other side of the departure lounge.” [ibid]. Ila’s memory, of a childhood spent at various departure lounges, is what constitutes her conception of each space, country and nation. The geographical destination merely being where the toilet is located:

I had a glimpse at that moment, of those names on the map as they appeared to her: a world-wide string of departure lounges, but not for that reason, at all similar, but on the contrary, each of them strikingly different, distinctively individual, each with its Ladies hidden away in some yet more unexpected corner of the hall, each with its own peculiarity... [Ibid].

That is how Ila has her moorings, these places at each airport are her fixed points at various different landscapes.

The text maps out the development of conceptions of Indian citizenship, nationhood and identity, “Central to the narrator’s self conception is his sense of the strange, not-quite dialectical logic of identity and difference that matches his growing up.”[Kaul, 1994: 127]. Even while being physically rooted to Calcutta as a child, his imagination has no bounds, no borders, for him Tridib is the medium of transportation to places on the map, of experiencing them with a powerful immediacy. “...Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with...”[p. 20]. For him, the places pointed out by Tridib on his “tattered old Bartholomew’s Atlas” [ibid.] are something of magical talismans evoking the space itself. Borders, nations, and the concomitant identities are then fictions people choose for themselves, a place, nation cannot “merely exist, it has to be invented in one’s imagination...” [p.21]. The narrator is very much rooted in his particular, Bengali, cultural and spatial milieu but it is the “spatial imagination and the passion for entering other lives that

the narrator imbibes from Tridib, [that] enables him to be mimetically situated in a specific cultural milieu.” [Mukerjee, 1995: 259]. It is not fairy lands that Tirdib teaches him to be interested in, but rather a precise use of his imagination. Tridib teaches him that nothing can be known without desire, an acute, real, tormenting desire to long for something that was not in oneself, that acts as a carrier, or perhaps catalyst, that can carry one beyond geographical, spatial boundaries, “... to a place where there was no border between oneself and one’s image in the mirror.” [p. 29]. Spatial, or geographical distance is something to be overcome, through imagination alone can then space dissolve. The actuality of seeing or perception is not so important as the ‘imagining’ of that seeing. The construction of identity of nations then, is something contingent upon inventing the notion of the nation or identity, this, of course, is an important task in itself, for inventing for oneself is also a freedom from being dictated to in terms of identity; not ‘imagining’, fashioning for oneself, free of other’s perceptions is the way out or “we would never be free of other people’s inventions.” [p. 31]. Reality has to be constructed for oneself, and the dangers are that appropriation by other realities and narratives can lead to an absolutism of views, a rigidity of opinions.

This is the case with Ila - who thinks she can be a part of European narratives by merely joining rallies and demonstrations in London, and - in some ways her counterpart - the narrator’s grandmother, who is symbolic of the militant nationalism that believes in

borders and the demonising of those who live on the other side - the 'other' is a clear-cut category for her. Tham'ma - the grandmother- is the one who has experienced - to some degree - the nationalist dream and her "faith links the national and the domestic, public service and personal activity." [Kaul, 1994: 135]. She has the rigid, authoritarian, militaristic view of nationhood, pushing her grandson for physical exercise to build a strong country. She dreams of being able to help the unobstrusive classmate who turned out to be a militant nationalist, her personal history has shaped her sharp sense of nationhood. Her borders are built with blood, marked by sacrifice and war. Of Britain she says to her grandson:

It took those people a long time to build that country, hundreds of years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood... war is their religion. That's what it takes to make a country. [pp. 77-78].

Her youth was spent in desire of a freedom achieved through violence - if the need arose, and she extends the same exclusivist logic to construct the nation and her identity. War, for her, is a unifying agent, a common enemy marks the boundaries, and the rupture between ideological, religious and ethnic oppositions moulds an internal - national - collective identity. This view is what the text opposes, the view that nationhood can be consolidated through wars, hatred for the other and bloodshed. This construction of the 'other'

also happens on a smaller scale, the larger constructions of nation, religious or ethnic identity can be replayed on a family scale - which only manifests the illogical, arbitrary, imagined construction of one's own identity as an opposition to the 'other'. In Dhaka, where Tham'ma lived as a girl, the property dispute between her part of the family and Jethamoshai's results in the old house being divided down the middle. With no contact left with her relatives, the other side of the house becomes the demonized, oppositional 'other'. "I'd make up stories about that part of the house. Everything's upside down over there.... at their meals they start with the sweets and end with the dal, their books go backwards.... They sleep under their beds and eat on the sheets...(etc)" [p. 125]. This, of course, mirrors the partition and the demonizing of the 'other' in the sub-continent, where familiar surroundings and people are, out of 'duty' to one's own community, family and nation, turned into a oppositional, defining thing. It is through the body of Tham'ma that a failure of this exclusivist nationalism is mapped out. She comes to a realization that borders, even if they are marked with blood, have an impermanent existence. Borders are imaginary lines, perhaps more real on maps than on the ground, they merely mark the will and the violence of the nation-state, the state that cuts an unnatural boundary to mark its territory.

Once she learns that old Jethomoshai still lives in the old house in Dhaka, she begins to think of rescuing him, the image of one of 'us' in a hostile land (formerly her own) takes over, "I'm worried about

him: poor old man, all by himself, abandoned in that country, surrounded by..."[p. 136]. The resolution takes root to save him from his enemies and bring him back where he 'belongs', her own invented country. So, in 1964, as she plans to fly to Dhaka, she wants to know if she'll be able to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane. When told by her son that it isn't anything like a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other - like a school atlas - she's really puzzled. "But surely there's something - trenches perhaps, or soldiers, or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land..." [P. 151]. She's told she might be able to see some green fields, "her musing response sums up the pathos of an exclusionary nationalism that, in the period after independence, discovers its own shortcomings." [Kaul, 1994 : 137].

But if there aren't trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, what's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same, it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then - partition and all the killing and everything - if there isn't something in between." [p. 151].

The 'truth' as it were, is that the border exists at the airport itself "when you have to fill in all those disembarkation cards and things". [Ibid.] The modern nation state creates boundaries that confuse in their coordinates. Tham'ma is confused as she'll have to fill in 'Dhaka' as her place of birth on that form, and to a mind that

believes in lines drawn across the surface of the earth, in the sanctity of the state-drawn maps, that's an odd, perplexing thought. Her place of birth is "messily at odds with her nationality". [p. 152] So the 'story' that the grandmother had chosen to live in, proves to be false, as imaginary and constructed as all conceptions of territoriality and race. The imaginary 'other' land fails to materialise. Arriving at the airport she cannot 'see' Dhaka, the imagined has not materialised, the conception of the old 'other' fails to find utterance. She's as much a foreigner - having drawn borders in blood, inviolable, solid boundaries, she finds herself lost: "Yes, I really am a foreigner here - as foreign as May in India or Tagore in Argentina." [p. 195]. Tham'ma's memory of Dhaka is what she 'sees', and not finding the place she's known as remembered in her memory, she's nonplussed. The new Dhaka, not figuring in her memory cannot be Dhaka for her, it is only when she goes into the older part of the city that memory begins to actualise, her certainty is finally coming back - even a signboard can be 'fixed' - "No" she says "it's the same signboard, I remember." [p. 206] But even this remembrance can be suspect if things do not fall exactly into place, if they're not exactly as remembered. Told that her old house is full of motorcycles (a mechanic lives there now), she retorts, "It can't be true... It must be a lie." [p. 208]. Here lies one of the important 'lessons' that characters learn in *The Shadow Lines*, That actuality, reality is merely a matter of mental faculties, 'truth' can be a lie if not remembered. This is what

the grandmother has to learn, she who believed that “nostalgia is a weakness, a waste of time, that it is everyone’s duty to forget the past and look ahead and get on with building the future.” [p. 208]. This is a classic nation-building rhetoric, the future, she thinks is complete rupture from the past, for her the past has no function, there is no shaping agency ascribed to it, no seepages into the present. Her notion of the past, of nations and borders is shaken by the senile uncle - Jethamoshai - whom she’s come to ‘save’. She asks him to move out of the old house, for Tham’ma the old man no longer belongs here, he should be in his ‘real’ home - India, Tham’ma had made the borders irrevocable and iron-clad, for her the former home is an alien land, but the old man refuses to go:

Once you start moving you never stop. That’s what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don’t believe in this India-Shindia. It’s all very well, you’re going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to ? [p. 215].

This is a supreme moment of lucidity from an apparently doddering old man. Partitions and borders on which the nation’s - particularly the bloody borders of the sub-continent -are built are forms of political organisations of the state, and yet they are entirely contingent, arbitrary and imagined. For Jethamoshai, these spaces that nations delineate are fluid, yet dangerous in their closure to all the others on the opposing side - simply put, lines drawn across maps

cannot ensure a stability of identity and nationhood. Always, across the border lies our own mirror-image, the image that can confuse, perplex and diffuse our own identity.

This is something the narrator has to understand too, the understanding the text seeks to detail about nations and identity comes to him too. He...

...like all the children around me, grew up believing in the truth of the precepts that were available to me: I believed in the reality of space; I believed that distance separates, that it's a corporeal substance; I believed in the reality of nations and borders, I believed that across the border there existed another reality. The only relationship my vocabulary permitted between those separate realities was war or friendship. There was no room in it for this other thing. And things which did not fit my vocabulary were merely pushed over the edge into the chasm of that silence [p. 218-219].

Implicit here are the silences and erasures that mark any conception of nationhood and self-identity. For each imagined construct there exists a contrapuntal, that by virtue of being a likeness - a mirror image of the other, negates and diffuses all identities built on a binary opposition. What the narrator has to realize then, is that the exclusivist, separatist and demonizing-the-other- logic of political nation-states cannot erase cultural sameness. 'Difference' that is the fulcrum of any oppositional identity can

collapse if the 'borders' are crossed. Boundaries can be enforced by the state, but once crossed cannot enforce a non-existent cultural difference, there will always be 'this other thing', which though pushed out of memory into a dark, enforced silence, never really lets go. It always exists as a negation of one's conceptions and constructs, the linkages between Calcutta and Dhaka, Indian and Pakistani, Hindu and Muslim are always extant - indeed they are one's own mirror image.

The state justifies and legitimises violence in order to build the nation. Indeed, for people like Tham'ma wars are the crucial step to demarcate borders, to build a collective national self. That this identity built in opposition to the 'other' across the border is fractured is what the book sets out to map. The nation, riven by cleavages within its demarcated borders thus become a failed state. For the separateness that endorses the state to launch wars and draw bloody borders is subverted and negated by violence and engendered ruptures within the state, these are the riots within the nation - at its very heart. These riots more than anything demonstrate the absurdity of claiming a singular, monolithic national identity. The narrator, while at a library in Delhi, gets drawn into a discussion about significant events of the year 1964 - and the riots that he witnessed as a boy in Calcutta obviously, for him, are a definitive

shaping event.⁶ For him that memory is an event of 'silent terror', but surprised that no one else seems to remember those riots, he is "unnerved by the possibility that that I had lived for all those years with a memory of an imagined event." [p. 222]. What he discovers is that an event in far-away Srinagar can spark off riots in East Pakistan that in turn spread to Calcutta. That geographical distance precluding any possibility of influencing events is nonsense is what he discovers. Tridib can be killed by a mob in Dhaka, as a direct result of the Prophet's hair being stolen in Srinagar, the terror of the riot that shapes the narrator's memory originates in an event taking place in an area that apparently has no relationship with his life. Distance, space, then are meaningless - borders are purely imaginative, as are the nations and identities they hold within them. "Ironically, it is through self-destructive violence that the people of the sub-continent assert a common inheritance and affiliation; in the near-symmetry of their killing of each other they deny that they might be different in the first place." [Kaul, 1994 : 139]. In fact, the sameness displayed by people via the macabre 'bonding' of a riot also emphasises the lack of difference in spite of mutually antagonistic political organisation. For

⁶ The tropes and mapping out of violence that the three primary texts present will be dealt with in the next chapter. That *Shadow Lines*, as the other two texts, contains and enunciates, the fluidity and ambiguity of the nation-state vis a vis the 'core' event of partition shall be discussed, as the fact that 'partition' as a locus of the problem of placing Muslim identity within the 'national' collective always acts as a primary site for discussions of the building of a nation, or its failure.

on both sides there is a dread of the logic of riots, and a sanity that they must be stopped, this bond then is also what binds people together, irrespective of the lines running through and between their respective 'maps'. It is that "indivisible sanity that binds people... independently of their governments. And that prior, independent relationship is the natural enemy of government." [p. 230]. Nations and collective identities that are 'bound' by borders are sustained and built by laying claim to all possible relationships between people. That is precisely the reason why nations exist - that relationships and contacts with the 'other' across the borders are not possible. States play out identities via the generals who fight at the borders. They preclude and dismiss any memory, remembrance or possibility of the 'other' in the mirror, the self which exists across the borders.

It is the 'modern' political organisation of states that forms the construction of identity. An irrational division that limits the imagination and draws borders that refute the fact that "Chiang Mai in Thailand was much nearer Calcutta than Delhi is, the Chengdu in China is nearer than Srinagar is..." [p. 232]. The circle drawn by a compass on a map shows up the realm of imagination that has been circumscribed by borders and States. Then the nation becomes a fuzzy category, for spatially, geographically, it is an illogical and arbitrary construction. This construction wipes out the people it is supposed to contain and 'protect', "It seemed to me then that within

this circle there were only states and citizens; there were no people at all.” [p. 233]. The administrators who hope that the borders will separate the people, that the land will somehow become an immense opposition to the other side, forego the logic that each city on the other side is simply an inverted image, these borders are nothing but “looking-glass borders.” [Ibid.] This crystallises the legacy of partition in the sub-continent, a symbiotic dependence on each other fostered by the very violence that split us apart. These are the bonds that bind us after independence and the dawn of freedom.

It is also ironical that the violent moment of recognition that borders cannot contain memories and hence identities also fully contributes to our fashioning anew those very boundaries. At the instant when the violence of negating memory is figured by Tridib's death at the hands of a mob in Dhaka - (triggered by an event in Srinagar), Tham'ma's recognition that her memory of her birthplace cannot be in opposition to her conscious citizenship, her identity - is mutated into a violent, pathological hatred of the other. 'They' who killed her nephew, who are a part of her own memory and were suddenly revealed as being a mirror-image have to be demonised in order to get over the confusion and shock of recognition. The mob only confirms her hatred and conception of the 'other'. In 1965, when the war between India and Pakistan starts, she gives away her prized gold chain to the war effort. “For your sake,” she tells the narrator,

“for your freedom, we have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out.” [p. 237]. Comfort and refuge is sought in the bloody borders of a war, it is a secure and unproblematic space to occupy. For her, as for the nation, the war is a purge, a resolution of the messiness in self-identity that the mirror-image of the ‘other’ causes. Memories have to be suppressed as they are disruptive of the national agenda.

It is indicative of a patriarchal set-up, that the major sites for contesting notions of identity, national and international, are played out on the figure of the woman. In this text Ila and Tham'ma serve as counterparts, each seeking refuge in a constructed spatial, imagined boundary. For Ila, leaving India and choosing to stay in London offers some residual freedom: “Do you see now why I've chosen to live in London? Do you see? It's only because I want to be free... free of your bloody culture...” [pp.88-89]. What she fails to understand is that the price of an air ticket cannot guarantee freedom from the past, her memories that are constitutive of her self. Ila, of course, also presents a conflicting point of sexuality in the novel, in so much as desire (to see, and imagine others) is a major constitutive in the text, but presents no resolutions:

The novel offers a radical critique of political boundaries, vapourising their rigidities into shadow-lives, but its account of the relationship between women and culture is less hopeful - for them there are no transformations of

cultural frontiers, only inelegant transgressions.” [Kaul, 1994 : 143].

In *The Shadow Lines* it is the male narrator’s body that becomes the site of the complex of imagination, understanding and exploration of identity, nationality and memories. In it we are presented with a potent and powerful account of nationalism - here Indian national/self-identity discovering its complex structure, its limits, its borders and maps - that in the narrator become a play of the boundaries that divide the sub-continent. What it sets out then, is that the nation as delimited by borders is a mirage, as is the constitutive identity that people build. Memory seeps and leaks into our conceptions of self and other - it is indivisible. Freedom, then is an impossibility, living as we are within demarcations, memory ensures that there is no break from the past, freedom from the ‘other’ is not achievable, we remain with the confines of remembrance that negates all attempts at erasure.

Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980) - an earlier text than Ghosh’s - also deploys the trope of memory in its figuring of the nation. Indeed, the whole novel is a piecemeal setting out of the history of the sub-continent, and could (in some parallel with Ghosh) be seen as setting out the various possibilities that exist in opposition to a binary division of memory, remembrance and experience across nations and borders. Both also detail the constitutive apparatus that

forms the nation and identity.⁷

In fact, Saleem Sinai, in a role as narrator of his story, history and the familial history is the nation. More than any other text the narrator is totally implicated in the history of his nation - these are the metaphors that abound in the text. He is his nation's narrator and history itself, he is, as he says, "mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country." [p. 3]. And it is through this figure that the nation's vicissitudes and terrains are mapped out. The novel could be taken as a dramatic account of the life of the nation from independence to the declaration of Emergency in India - done through the life of the mammoth-nosed-reared-in-a Muslim-family-Saleem. But the book is anything but a mere questioning or interrogation of identities and history. It can be construed as a direct attack on a clearly identifiable class - the rulers of the sub-continent or South Asia. It is a devastating indictment of the political class who rule, and therefore also of the people who placed them in that position. Throughout the novels, there is a continuous effort at synchronising the national and domestic, so that the journey of the Azizs' and Sinas' is the journey of the nation from

⁷ My intention is to merely discuss the texts in relation to how they deal with notions of nation and identity and not to detail the multifarious possibilities these texts offer in terms of say, history. The problem is compounded by - particularly, Rushdie's text - which is a huge, but minute detailing of the constructing of nation - to discuss its various possibilities is not the intention here. Only how the nation is figured in terms of 'self-other', and in the next chapter how partition plays a role in that figuring.

1915 to about 1978-79. This utterance of history as it were, led to “the characterization of Salman Rushdie’s book... as a ‘continent finding its voice’...”⁸ [Ahmed, 1992 : 98]

The body of the narrator, becomes very much that of the nation, where the dread of fragmentation (partition) and splitting is symbolised by a cracking and fissuring of human bodies. In fact images and metaphors of fragmentation, cracking, mutilation, permeate the whole novel - from the perforated bed-sheet to the country breaking up into pieces. “[The novel] is also constructing the idea of a nation - an India that is inclusive and tolerant - the novel is beset with an anxiety about the fragility of this concept of India.” [Mukherjee, 1993: 260] Memory, that was so important to Ghosh's construction of identity, is fundamentally operative here too:

Memory’s truth...It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else’s version more than his own. [p. 253].

Then, both Ghosh and Rushdie underscore the importance of the constituting power of memory. Memory constitutes one’s reality

⁸ Aijaz Ahmed here, of course, is referring to the unnecessary valorization of English writers in India by the West, that negates all other literatures in Indian languages. My point here was to hint at the encompassing history that Rushdie has been seen as portraying in this text.

viz. ideas of nationhood, history and identity. Again in both texts the importance is on forming one's own memory lest one gets 'trapped' in some other version - the state's, of easy stereotyping of the 'other' - all that reduces the multifarious possibilities that reality presents and goes the way of essentializing (communalist) discourse that rests primarily on structures of homogenizing and monoliths.

Saleem, then bears the burden of the sub-continent's history, the resonances of India's splitting and cracking are apparent in his body: "...I am falling part...my poor body...buffeted by too much history..." [p. 37]. Linked to the nation by birth and a letter, Saleem comes gradually to realize that reality (and hence attendant notions of nation and self) is entirely contingent. Again and again, life is compared to cinema, a Bombay talkie:

Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems - but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible. Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sitting at first in the back row, and gradually moving up, row by row...gradually the star's faces dissolve...tiny details assume grotesque proportions...it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality.[p. 197]

This open endedness of reality, history and truth are reiterated in Ghosh's text. This itself problematizes any monolithic view of history, nation and identity, for all that becomes purely dependent on

your position vis a vis the screen - locational constructs determine one's position. Then, minute, forgotten histories, events, facts become mammoth and of great significance, as the narrator finds in *The Shadow Lines* - of the riots in Calcutta that nobody remembers. Within this 'nation' then, where alternative realities compete, geographical spaces have no meaning. When the states Reorganization Committee's recommendations are accepted, India is split again, fissured into fourteen states and territories, "...the boundaries of these states were not formed by rivers, or mountains, or any natural features of the terrain; they were instead walls of words. Language divided us..." [p. 225]. Then, as Jethomoshai in *The Shadow Lines* said, lines can be drawn anywhere, India can continually slit like amoeba, and all boundaries can be entirely figments of imagination, but very real nevertheless as they cause violence if transgressed. That's what happens to Saleem, trying to get into Evie Burn's head to find out what makes her tick, the young Saleem is pushed downhill, straight into the Marathi language marchers - though, no 'violence' occurs, it is a scene of great latent savagery and symptomatic of the dangers of being 'without' an identity. Saleem has no place between the Gujaratis and Marathis - no 'opinions' but an identity is demanded, and in giving the marcher's a slogan (against the Gujaratis) Saleem, "became directly responsible for triggering off the violence which ended with the partition of the state of Bombay." [p. 229].

Saleem, is one of the midnight's children, who "can be made to represent many things, according to your point of view." [p. 240]. They could be the latent possibilities of a young India, all variegated, multiple realities or "the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation," [p. 240] whose defeat symbolises the modern, twentieth century agenda, where there can be no MCC, no 'democratic borders' or countenance of opposing views. Thus, they must be eliminated if the state has to be strengthened. Like the discovery of the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* all relationships across borders are antithetical to the state - thus if the children represent freedom, that hope "is now forever extinguished". [Ibid.], the state eliminates them, in a monolithic view denial of pluralist identities and conceptions of the nation is essential for constructing the nation-state. The influx of received notions is what disrupts the MCC, though bestowed with magical qualities, the children are not immune to the essentializing discourses prevalent "...the prejudices and world-views of adults began to take over their minds, I found children from Maharashtra loathing Gujaratis, fair-skinned northerners reviling Dravidian 'blackies', there were religious rivalries, and class entered our Council..." [p. 306]. More than anything, Rushdie here demonstrates the closure of mind, the essential ethnic, racial, religious discourses that engender identities along fault-lines, mutually competing, always building in opposition to the 'other'. The nation, again as the MCC, is a failed state, borders

outside are merely a figuring of enforced (and received) borders being accepted within. Saleem, with the gift of entering minds, knowing alternative states and experience - here he again resembles the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* - wants to break down borders, to build the MCC, to sustain alternative visions of nationhood and identity, "I had in mind... a loose federation of equals, all points of view given free expression..." [p. 263]. That's what he tries to tell the other children. Rejected, his conception of history, of purpose is negated, the nation then becomes, a negative annihilating category - where conceptions of history, nation are regulated and contending sites wiped out. Shiva - his alter ego, his other self, becomes with Saleem a trope of the secularist state, where the agenda of plurality is countenanced to an extent, and monolithic notions that supply the nation and attendant identity are ultimately emphasised. As Shiva says to him, "little rich boy, that's all just wind. All that importance-of - the individual. All that possibility of humanity..."[p. 307].

It is Saleem alone who works out his nation's history, and the sub-continent's (the foray into Pakistan seems to suggest the arid-land of a country driven by a monolithic religion, as opposed to possibilities in India) and also works out the nation's anguish and anxiety:

Why me? Why, owing to accidents of birth prophecy...
must I be responsible for language riots...Why should I...
accept the blame for what-was-not-done by Pakistani

troops in Dacca?...Why alone of all the more than-five hundred-million, should I have to bear the burden of history?" [p. 457].

Because, he is, in many ways the nation itself, with all its ruptures, violence and fissures. He is also, more importantly the nation's memory, "I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me..." [p.457]. It is symbolic, that Saleems' son is born, at another significant point in the nation's history, at midnight - the precise arrival of Emergency. Thus the narrative to some extent regenerates itself. For this child too is chained to history, his destiny chained to his country, like his 'father'. Thus the continuity of people being chained to conceptions of nation, history and identity is carried on, "just...as my time of connection neared its end, his began." [p. 500]. Says his father-who is not his father. Drained of his memory, his powers, this child of midnight, Saleem goes through every event in his nation's history, but the danger of his plurality, his opposition to rigid notions of history, race, nation are what the state is after. His powers are drained - in an operation reminiscent of enforced sterilization campaigns during the Emergency - as are those of the other children of midnight - all alternatives to the state's monolithic view are removed and the children disperse. The curse of the midnight's children "to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating pool of the multitudes..." [p. 552] is played out. The future holds no possibilities, Rushdie

seems to emphasize the importance of alternative sites of memory and identity (of self and nation), for to deny them means the destruction of midnight's' children - it means a closure that wipes out all differences and violently fashions a nation. The narrative itself closes at the dark hour of emergency - total symbol of forced views and state power - there is no inclusive position here, the exclusionist principle of nation - building forces out Saleem and hoists Shiva. But Saleem also reaffirms the importance of memory, confides in paper, and tries to encompass the nation by writing it.

Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass* (1995), perhaps as a result of coming at a time when communalist rhetoric was beginning to be deeply inscribed into the polity of the Indian nation, figures the nation and the problematic of defining it more through the trope of partition and Muslim identity vis a vis the national one. Though all three texts talking about the nation figure partition as a central trope Kesavan's makes it more centrally so.⁹ The parallels with and between the three texts are obviously about the nation, history and identity. *Looking Through Glass*, the title reminds us of Ghosh's mirror-image borders, figures a narrator moving back in time. He is something of say, a mixture of Saleem Sinai and Ghosh's narrator, diffident and (almost hardly) interrogative - somewhat like the narrator of *The Shadow Lines*, he is perhaps more than even Saleem

⁹ As referred to earlier, the next chapter shall deal with this 'problem' of partition in the texts.

inscribed into the history of the nation. For he is trapped in a time-zone - just before partition - and his 'future' that this past had built is completely erased. This then, sets out as a trope of the individuals complexity with versions of history, historical events that have shaped the nation he was living in. All three narrators then do not merely figure in constructions of the nation, but their bodies are implicated in it even physically.

Paralleling *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator's grandmother is central to his figuring in the construction of the nation. If Tham'ma served as a rigid counterpoint, then the grandmother in Kesavan's text is the originator of the narrator's 'descent' into the past. Dadi, the narrator's grandmother, is ridden with a guilt, having earlier answered Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha call in 1930 by picketing a liquor shop, she did not take further part in the Satyagraha or the rebellion of 1942. She doesn't want to use the pension the government gives her and gives it to the narrator to be returned, who in turn uses it for his photography. Her expiation consists of imbibing the struggle she wasn't a part of, "She went through every paper of the time to catch up with those heroic days in August that she had missed out on." [p.5]. It is the expiation of the middle class, and this is transferred onto the narrator, going to Banaras to dip her ashes in the Ganga after her death. He's framed himself as he tries to adjust his camera-frame to take a photo, "a man in a kurta much like mine, was looking up at the train through a little telescope." [p. 10]. He is a man from

the past, a past the narrator is hurtled headlong into as he falls over the bridge. The past that was sought to be framed has come back to establish its claim. The narrator had been using the pension money for photography, something that would allow him to capture detail “without the risks of proximity” [p. 18]. Thus his expiation starts when he falls into the past, the ‘details’ are in close proximity - more than anything this figures as a sort of negation of the view that the past is dead and gone. The narrator has to pay the price of the pension money, his own reticence and comfort with ‘given’ details (and a past) to be framed, totalized and made use of.

The text also details the use of myth for nation building, of how events may not have occurred as we frame them now, thus calling into question the notion of the state the narrator has imbibed. He’d been hearing from Dadi, how in 1942, in August “the Raj didn’t exist in north India. There were republics inaugurated in Ballia and Azamgarh...” [p.4]. Later in the text, when the narrator is back precisely in that time, in that area, the disjointedness and randomness of the ‘rebellion’ is important: “...here I was, riding through the United Provinces, where, if Dadi was to be believed, the writ of the Raj had ceased to run for the first fortnight of the rebellion, but I hadn’t yet seen a single revolutionary spectacle...” [p. 96]. Memory and myth had made much of the event, yet it seems non-existent - which only illustrates the mythologising tendencies of the nationalist agenda, of the contemporary nation state. In fact, the

whole text is a proximate look at the events that shaped the present Indian nation-state, of an examination of the power of historical events to shape lives and identity - and even enforce its loss. Nations are selective in their choice of memory, having reshaped memories of certain events, a close-up of that epoch - when the memory was first engendered - can only mean an effacing of identity and current memory, "Once 1942 became undesirable, I chose to lose my memory," [p. 14]. Memory and identity then are utterly contingent, attendant upon factors of space and time, and it is only by reshaping them that we can construct an identity. That is what the narrator seeks in 1942, lost in a chaotic world, of time gone by, his identity is erased and the text maps out this loss and consequent attempts at fashioning one.

Looking Through Glass while emphasising the futility and erasure involved in demonizing any 'other' - in this case Muslims - also reiterates the totalizing, inexorable logic of the nation-state. Even if the narrator becomes privy to the heartland of Muslim League politics before partition and understands the complexity of Muslim's own search for identity, the logic of the state in contemporaneous India demands that this 'other' cannot be humanized. Communalist discourse lays the blame for partition on the 'other' (be it Hindu or Muslim) but the text maps out the absences in this agenda. The spaces the nation state has forgotten or erased as Masroor and other Muslims literally are. But this also means that problematizing the

identity the state confers can mean a complete erasure of the individuals identity - the narrator having humanized (and been humanized) by contact with the 'other' loses all identity and merely becomes adrift, without moorings, without family in an age not his own. The state is the major source of identity and yet rejecting the states essentializing discourse cannot bring about a resolution. Kesavan seems to suggest that the logic of the identity built on binary oppositions is almost a refuge people seek, and all who question it - question the received memory, history or identity risk losing their self in a world that operates on binary divisions.

Implicit in the text also is the idea that the nation and identity is more a battle of memories, a site of contesting remembrance where the states might and inexorable logic forecloses all other possibility. Thus, in spite of having the knowledge of what is going to happen from 1942-47, the narrator is denied any agency, he is a mere spectator, a non-event in an already written history and memory. The narrator is aware of what awaits Masroor's hopes of help from the Congress, his hopes for communal amity - even of the daily headlines and events to come:

...The end of the world they knew was due. In less than five years there would be murder, arson, rape, flight, migration...and here they were...living in the lull and thinking it the storm. It made me feel omniscient: I felt like a historian brought up face to face with some lost cause, some extinct line that he had chronicled. [p. 52]

Coming from the future, the narrator carries the baggage of stereotypes, the totalising discourse of our times that had taught him the placing of identity vis a vis names. Part of the text consists of precisely mapping out the possibilities that could have existed in the past and are denied now, as the logic of the state and our own identity demands it. Haasan is for all purposes a Muslim name, and the narrator thinks just that, in fact, builds up a series of arguments based on his presumption: "I explained to him that his belief that Masroor was in hiding owed much more to his Shia upbringing than to intuition." [p. 69]. In 1942 - or even now, a Haasan can really be a Hassan Yamanachar Narasimhamurthy - Iyengar Hindu not Shia Muslim - but identity formation would dictate the erasure of one of the identities - Muslim or Hindu. Totalizing discourse precludes indeterminate categories, which is another site of contest in this text - it is a detailed mapping out of the erasure and violence that is visited upon these indeterminate categories. The narrator's problematic placing in time and identity, Masroor's indecision between Pakistan and India, Haasan's physical and inherited identity, Parwana and Ashrafi's lesbian relationship - all these people who do not 'belong' in the categories that nationalism or received historical and cultural notions demand are effaced, violently sought to be yoked to some category, and refusal to do so invites lack of agency, an immobilising character and lack of placement in the national/societal structures.

Reality is also presented as being contingent - partly a question of the narrators' placement in time - living in the past cannot be real. But also within the text assumptions about reality are proven wrong. Masroor's plan of blasting the train to prevent a Hindu vs Muslim cricket match results in displacement of the actors in the plan, but as the narrator finds out, the team from Banaras never intended to come to Lucknow - and in fact are the vanguard of the rebellion in the United Provinces. Again events and history are enmeshed, cause and effect have apparently little to do with places and individual perception - this parallels the Srinagar-Khulna-Calcutta riot in the *The Shadow Lines*.

Kesavan's text also presents, like Rushdie's, the framing of reality, or rather the problematic of reality via the cinema trope. Both use it to complicate issues of real and perceived history, in the narrator's case, used as he is to 'frame reality' through his lens - the issue is problematized when that reality becomes 'real' and effaces his notions of self, nation and community. Reality can literally enter through the frame - shooting Gyanendra's porn film, the narrator watches as Parwana jumps right into his window, his frame and enters his life, his reality. "I battled the urge to dive... to check if it was really happening in the viewfinder...It was still no business of mine but this time I didn't have a choice, now that she had walked out of the viewfinder into my life..."[p. 158]. Events force the narrator, so used to notions of the 'real' to come to the inescapable

fact of the fluidity of normality, of what is real, “nothing could be taken for granted...It was just a notion which depended on discrete events occurring in sequence and since no event implied the other...” [p. 192]. The point the text makes is to question the legitimacy of accepted notions of time, events, history. Much like *The Shadow Lines* and *Midnight’s Children*, what is real is an imaginary, invented conception, utterly dependent on locational perspectives. The idea of the nation, also is suspect, Masroor, having lost his moorings in the Congress, finds himself asking people to doubt the construction of the nation, to question its very geographical components. His intention is to foster an idea of the complexity of Indian unity, to therefore cherish that complexity, but within the text it figures as another site of doubt, of questioning whether the ‘map’ can be redrawn according to boundaries along with the identities those spaces on the map seek to contain. His machine has a map of India, its political, linguistic boundaries which can be cut along those lines and the jigsaw puzzle then becomes the symbol of the nation threatening to fragment (these tropes again are figured in *Midnight’s Children* and *The Shadow Lines*). Masroor here wants to “raise consciousness through puzzles”. [p. 230], but being one of the indeterminate characters, with a problematic identity, he is denied agency by history and the state, and the partition he hopes to avoid does actually happen.

For another indeterminate character - the narrator - it becomes a struggle for moorings, his community becomes Masroor’s family and only when he aligns himself to some sort of identity does something

resembling a role in history present itself: "I needed him. He was a third of all the family that I had ... If partition came...they would have to move to Gujranwala.. so the moment he told me about joining up, [the army], I began plotting to de-militarize Masroor." [p. 256]. He does recognize the impossibility of the task, "I had been trying to play matador to a fury that had split a million families down the middle". [p. 284]. There are others who seek a status quo, a desire to see no change in their identity as it is, like Ammi, whose agenda is merely to preserve the present, lest borders erase her (and countless other Muslims') identity. Her charter while running for the election is aimed at keeping the present "I like the world as it is. That's why I listed a dozen things that Indians shouldn't do if they want to keep the world they know." [pp. 336-337]. This is another central trope in the novel, that of the 'present' offering a reality that is desirable. In 1947, change was possibly one of the greatest fears, a change for the worse as partition proved to be, and Ammi argues just against that. Then, the text maps out these individuals of indeterminate categories trying to build and foster a sense of identity and belonging based on the family. But the narrator, his identity effaced, cannot 'belong'. The problematic of identity is unresolved as non-acceptance of the national, communal or territorially based identities enforces a marginalisation. The narrator remains as in the last 'family' photograph, a 'blur', an unidentifiable category, without a coherent notion of self or nation. The text then, while delineating the slippages

and fissures within accepted notions of the nation's past (and therefore present) also presents the problematic of national and self-identity as a fight against totalizing discourses that seek to envelop and appropriate.

Thus, all three texts display in their own way, a preoccupation with categories and conceptions of the nation with the concomitant discourse of identity. As I have attempted to show, the texts work out a questioning of national/self identity that is based on exclusion and binary opposition. The nation then, is a contested category, a site for various ideologies and agendas to be worked out and mapped. A fundamental aspect of this category is the division of communities in India, more particularly that between Hindus and Muslims. Indeed, this aspect is constitutive of all discourse of the nation – as these texts themselves prove – and the self. While the purpose in this chapter was to map out various sites and workings of this interplay and contest between conceptions of the nation, the next chapter deals with the fundamental problematic of Muslim identity vis a vis the nation, and the great, disruptive event of partition.

CHAPTER – III

Partition: The Recurring Problem

As has been discussed, the texts under study articulate and portray the 'state' of a nation as a contested site. All three books show up the discourses of the nation as being built on conceptions of identity, memory and history. The narrators, all three of them, are confronted with an essentially inexplicable, violent and hostile world, this external world offers little space to conceptions of national and personal identity that challenge the totalizing conceptions of state. If the nation is a fluid, ambivalent category, that identity of rootlessness and un-fixed location is shared by the narrators and chief protagonists. They are apparently condemned to a permanent state of - something like - transcendental homelessness. But in this 'failure' of the state, in the lack of meaning and the ambiguity and questioning of the 'identity' and conception of the nation, lies the core event of partition. The nationalist agenda was cleft by this division based on religious identity. It is significant that all three texts, that are talking about the nation and its formations, should figure partition as a central, essential trope. As shall be examined, all discussions of state and nation (such as detailed in the second chapter) are actually based and located squarely within the context of the partition of the sub-continent. Then, keeping in mind the 'two-nation' aspect of partition, the Muslims also are central to any discussion of state and nation. Indeed, while Ghosh's text is also subliminally conscious of the problem of the Muslim presence (and partition), Rushdie figures it more thoroughly and overtly - it is in fact a Muslim family's history, as

is Kesavan's text which is wholly placed in the partition and Muslim identity context. While Ghosh places Tham'ma's concept of the 'others' - East Pakistan - and his own understanding of shadow-like borders within the framework of the Calcutta-Dhaka mirror-image, it is the partition of the nation that figures so strongly as being constitutive of people's conception of self and the nation, in that, partition and the consequent 'otherness' of Muslims is given strong agency in problematising current nationhood. Therefore, the 'past' event is continually relived at each rite of crisis of the nation and self. Rushdie's can be construed to be a 'Muslim' account, Saleem, growing up in a Muslim family, part and parcel of his nation's history, has to actually relive on his body the fracture and partition of the nation. The play of difference and 'otherness' - through the partition trope - is played out through contesting Hindu and Muslim claims. The text charts out the enduring problem of 'difference' and 'otherness' that communalism engenders - in the past through partition and in the current body of the nation. Kesavan plays with current nations of anxiety about self and nation, by positioning the text at that crucial moment itself - 1942-1947. This text, with contemporaneous debates of communalism in the background, problematizes and tries to portray the complexity of 'historically received' or accepted identity vis-a-vis Hindus, Muslim and the nation - again through partition. Thus the event of partition persists, and continues to haunt the nation, and all texts and discourses (as these three novels suggest) of nation and self have to deal with this - as yet- still unresolved

problem. This event then, that engenders the anxiety of nationness, is a recurring trope, or rather a recurring problem the nation has to contend with.

Renewed interest in the events concerning the partition of India in 1947 has resulted in the publication of several books - anthologies, accounts of memories - called Partition narratives.¹ And most critical accounts of partition tend to be conservative-nationalist in character, in that they represent partition from the view point of the state.² What these three texts do is to challenge that perspective. The state views partition as an aberration, a one-time irrational act that came

¹ The charge of erasing the numerous books, stories and accounts of partition that are available in various Indian languages could be used against this statement. This, of course, is purely meant to talk of 'English' accounts. The area of study in this discussion is three texts, three Indian-English novels and the analysis is bound to be limited to these texts. The intention is to see how the colonial legacy that is the English novel, and which seems to lay stress on objectifying-even mimicking-the nation (as hinted at in Chapter Two) deals with the problem of nation and identity vis-a-vis partition. This is not intended to be a study of partition texts per se, but an analysis of how the chosen texts employ partition in configurations of identity.

² The point—about partition literature being confined (the Punjabi-Hindi-Urdu-writings) to the Punjab, and the inadequacy of much of that and subsequent literature in terms of offering a view other than that of the secular, liberal state - is made, among others, by Gyanendra Pandey: "Subsequent literary statements on this theme that have come out of northern India fall much more clearly within the secular nationalist problematic, for which partition was a history gone wrong—a puzzling and inexplicable failure." *In Defence of the Fragment*, EPW, March 1991, p. 560.

as an obstacle to secularization and modernization. As Susie Tharu says, “....partition itself represents [the] loss... of the unity - territorial and imagined - of the nation.” [Tharu in Kaul, 1994: 75]. So partly, these texts question (in a break from others partition narratives) the conservative-nationalist view, in that the whole agenda of secularization and modernization and even the nation’s basic nationalism is questioned and probed. They seek to implicate the nation-state’s origins in the agenda of partition, the state is not a wise, neutral authority that rules by its moral presence but is squarely located within, and is complicit in hegemonic alliances that enforce the alignment of the nation with a particular agenda of forming and modifying identity. The state rehearses a ‘universalising’ liberal humanist rhetoric that glosses over discourses of the elite, communal and patriarchal where definitions of citizenship, national border and identities are concerned. What gets subsumed and pushed to the margins are representations and experiences of ‘everyday’ life, individual memory and history that challenge the totalising logic of nationalism and gesture towards a more contingent, inclusive and polyphonic reading of national identity. The struggle then mapped out in these texts is against the nation inscribing hegemonic nationalism and erasing ‘difference.’

A usual practice of national conservative discourse is to project the violence that accompanied partition as the inevitable and almost logical outcome of communal tensions that had engendered and

precipitated it in the first place. As Gyanendra Pandey's *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* points out, the colonial period saw communalism being perceived by the British as the central problem to be overcome in the development of a self-governing, national and democratic polity in India." [Pandey, 1990: 5]. This erases all complexity that could be attributed to sectarian violence, to its causes, historical and social and political reasons- it becomes, a mere catchword in the states vocabulary 'religious bigotry' 'irrational' etc. As Pandey avers, this at best is an inadequate treatment of communalism, with its historical and sociological reasons. [ibid.]. If one accepts the logic that communalism derives its discourse from a particular colonial construct and context, nationalism has in its own way reinforced those structures and concepts, it has propagated its use as a tool to delineate identities and borders. Though there are divergences between the colonial and nationalist account and interpretations of communalism, it is remarkable in that how both have readily accepted and appropriated the notion into their vocabulary, "what is particularly striking, however, is how quickly Indian nationalists accepted this term..." [Pandey, 1990: 8]. What this allows the state - as it did the colonial government - is to easily 'universalize' and quickly substitute one riot for another without considering the context in which it occurs and glossing over the specificity of the particular event. This allows the state to elide its own role and implication in communalism, a distinction is made between the local and the national, all history

becomes reduced to the history of the state, then an opposition is set up between “the history of local society - wild, chaotic, liable to unexpected explosions - and the history of the state.” [Pandey, 1990: 45]. The state denies all irrationality, all involvement with contextual paradigms. Violence and communalism can easily be classified as not being part of the state. That is exactly what Ghosh, Rushdie and Kesavan’s texts oppose - a clear rupture and opposition is marked out between the state and the individual, personal history and conception of self and nation is sought to be reclaimed. The construction of a national identity involves erasures and violence and this is clearly marked out in the texts. The state’s history is not the individuals history. The texts can be seen as polyphonic resistances to hegemonizing nationalist discourses, the contradictions and resistances that individuals can discern in and employ against the conflation of communal and state identity are mapped out.

With the contemporaneous stridency of communalist discourse, various writers have tried to grapple with the failure or complicity of the state to grapple with increasing binary oppositions. The questions are why and how, a self-professed secularist state has been appropriating communalism. Then the history and tropes that were constitute of the nationalist agenda are called into question. If in the colonial era, a contempt for indigenous religions systems and beliefs precipitated the conviction that an undermining of those religions systems was essential for the ‘civilizing mission, one reaction to this

was the nationalist's building of a trope of Indian spiritual essence that was vastly superior. Rām Mohan Roy's reformist agenda tried to emphasize the monotheistic nature of Hinduism, while there were other attempts, such as Swami Dayanand Saraswati's' (in the 1870's) which were aggressively Hindu. "With the stabilization of colonial structures, the Hindu literati's need to rediscover a glorious past which could provide psychic sustenance for self-assertion became apparent." [Simeon, in Kaul 1994: 228]. Thus, even nationalist projects such as the revolt of 1857 (or rather the first war of independence) were denounced as a conspiracy to re-establish Muslim rule.³ Thus, increasingly a conflation of 'India' and 'Hindu' was taking place, wherein the Muslims were foreign rulers, essentially aliens. This nationalist-communalist agenda ascribed to the period of Muslim rule in India a general decline of the country, then the implication obviously was that communal, religious identities would define who belonged to the nation and who did not. Hindus were then part and parcel of Hindustan who had lost freedom to the Muslims. "Implicit in such a historical construction was a narrowing of the conception of the Indian nation." [Chandra, 1992: 116]. Thus, gradually a mythologisation of 'pristine' or 'pure' and 'uncorrupted by foreign presence' notions took place, this only reinforced hegemonic

³ Among others, Iswar Chandra Gupta, writing in *Sambad Prabhakar*, aligns with the British out of a communal sensibility. [quoted by Simeon, in Kaul, 1994: 228]

structures of the nation as being exclusive of other religious identities - the roots of the current crisis of the nation lies along these very faultlines, and as the texts under study show, the antagonistic and hegemonic structures have been inherited and appropriated in current discourses of nation and identity. The inherited dichotomy about who constitutes the nation was marked in earlier writers of the nationalist era— as discussed earlier. What was important is that these notions of exclusion were passed down, for example Tanika Sarkar while examining the notion of Hindu and Muslim in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's (1838-94) writings says:

... he evolved a model of extremely denunciatory speech about Muslim rule in India in his novels. While his notions of ideal Hinduism informed nineteenth-century Hindu revivalism, the particular language that he, more than any other contemporary, developed to describe the Muslim certainly inflected the rhetoric and aspirations of violent Hindu communalism of the next century." [Sarkar in Ludden; 1996: 179]

The tropes usually employed were a conflation of Arya and Hindu, nation and Hindu — who is 'effeminate' even a 'eunuch', Muslims as barbarians and destroyers of ancient culture and defilers of Hindu women etc.⁴

This becomes important, as the time of production of Rushdie's, Ghosh's and Kesavan's texts saw a reorganization, or

⁴ This argument has been taken from Sudhir Chandra's *The Oppressive Present*, particularly from the chapter 'Defining the nation' which deals the strategies and tropes that earlier nationalist-communalist writers employed in their discourse. [Chandra, 1992: pp. 116-154].

rather increased representation of communal ideology in the form of the BJP-VHP-RSS on the national stage. The point to be stressed is that these questions of religious-national (Hindu vs Muslim) identity that were inscribed by the earliest nationalist writers have been written into the discussions of the nation and identity in the three texts under study. Even the current communal rhetoric of nationhood and identity (which again reshapes the discourse of nation in these texts) owes much to those earliest 'writers' of the nation. As Peter van der Veer says, writing of the Sangh Parivar, "...the tacit assumption by almost everyone [is] that Hinduism is a 'natural given' on Indian soil. It is simply taken to be the native religion of India, while Islam is seen as coming from 'outside...'" [Veer, 1994: 28]. Thus, the linkage between communal hegemonist structures, the anxiety of the nation, partition, and 'current' identity of groups constitutive of the national identity are amply clear. This constitutes the background of my discussion of National and Muslim identity vis-a-vis position as analysed from the these texts.

If, as Benedict Anderson, argues (as discussed earlier) that nations are 'imagined communities' (which the three texts validate to a degree), then religion plays a vital role in that imagining. It provides particular imaginations of the world and even more particular ritualistic ways of communicating them — i.e. based on ritualistic exclusions, violence and appropriation of myths, ideas and tropes. Then all communalist ideology — in conjunction with the state — would describe these imaginations as given, natural and unchanging — denying all social contextualisation in its agenda of

historical (religious) construction of national ideologies. Nationalist ideology and discourse refers to a commonality of experience that in its view generates uniform, universal identities vis-a-vis the nation, this ideology enforces a view that ideas, experiences, feelings, memories are a 'uniform' in belonging to the nation. In this, all regional characters and identities, local histories are denied agency, it is not so much a replacing of local kinships, but a violent inclusion principle, a homogenizing with larger populations of the nation—which becomes a buzzword "unity in diversity" or 'a family writ large. "Not only are the nationalisms externally antagonistic but they are also internally homogenizing. Nationalism is a selective, homogenizing discourse that tends to demarcate social boundaries sharply and to narrow down the diversity and ambiguity of everyday life." [Veer, 1994: 105]. If then the 'conventional wisdom' of communalist discourse says that there's "an intellectual identification of 'India' with the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism'" [Ludden, 1996: 6], it obfuscates the local divisions in creating a hierarchy of hegemony, Hindus and Muslims are subjected to a categorization that while setting them up as mutually antagonistic communities also erases differences that might exist internally. "The term 'Hindu' came to have a large cultural meaning... 'Hindu' became a category for people in India who were not Muslims, Christians, ..." [ibid.] These are the categories divided by religion and whose descriptions of India we have inherited. Implicit then, in the formation of the nation is the politics of selection, or what is remembered or forgotten, and the consequent hardening and homogenizing of identities leaves little room for contesting or resistance to the national paradigm. It remembers a very

small selection of historical data and forgets the rest, it even creates its own history, its own facts. Then “the Muslim presence in India is either ignored or marginalized,” [Veer, 1994: 196]. A common way, as indicated earlier, in dealing with the huge, considerable fact of Indian Islam is either to argue that the Muslims have an entirely separate culture or that they share basically the same culture as the Hindus. As Partha Chatterjee argues in *The Nation and its fragments: Colonial and Post-colonial Histories*, Indian history was rewritten during the nationalist period around the assumption that a deeply rooted classical Hindu culture was enduring a relatively short repression by successive Muslim and British colonial rulers. These accounts were used to support conservative nationalist claims to historical accuracy and subjectivity and effectively marginalize any history of India that is non-Hindu. This history, written within the conventions of European historical discourse, has a repeated theme of “ancient glory and present misery” [Chatterjee, 1998: 97] of Indian civilization — ‘Indian’ obviously being conflated totally with ‘Hindu’. Chatterjee convincingly argues that “ancient India became for the nationalist the classical age, while the period between the ancient and the contemporary was the dark age of medievalism.” [ibid: 98]. This ‘dark age’ refers to the period of Muslim rule when Hindus were said to have experienced religious oppression. Within this historical framework, Hindu conservative nationalism is constructed in modernist and rationalist terms because, “Like other modern ideologies, it allows for a central role of the state in the modernization of society and strongly defends the state’s unity and sovereignty.” [ibid.: 110] Again Hinduness is defined in these instances in historical rather than religious terms

and therefore includes Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains but excludes Christians and Muslims.

Perception of India's past has come to play an ever-important role in the rhetoric of contemporary politics. Communalization of Indian polity has — together with secular state narratives — stressed that the past be viewed as a golden period, a Hindu golden age in the case of Hindu nationalists and of communal harmony in the case of the state narrative. Interestingly both figure this past in pre-colonial India and transfer all the blame onto the impact of colonisation. Even Muslim communalist historiography figures this very period as engendering the state of Pakistan — as (so they claim) the roots of the 'country of the pure' may already be found in the Mughal period. Rejecting the view of pre-colonial Indian past as a largely harmonious age, Sanjay Subrahmanyam details various instances of sectarian strife between various castes and groups within each community and tries to emphasise the logic of sectarian violence as being embedded in the power-play and politics between states and centres of authority competing to influence other areas. As he says, "some illuminating historical examples do exist that confirm that the sectarian violence (not involving Islam)... was neither solely interior nor imagined." [Subrahmanyam, and Basu ed: 64]. He offers an alternative view, in that ascribing sectarian violence to British rule, and the idea of a golden age is rejected and a more composite view of development of the nation state is sought to be developed. The attempt obviously is to

deal with the failure of the state in its professed agenda of secularism, and the homogenizing tendency that we have discussed, which is part of a nation-building strategy is sought to be refuted in its constructions of the past. The impetus is the renewed look at nationalism prompted by the rapid Hinduization of Indian polity. Part of the nationalist agenda, before and even after independence, was a refutation of communalism. As I have tried to indicate, this was something of a Janus faced operation as the notions and vocabulary of communalism were already engendered in the nationalist project. A resultant of this 'combat communalism' trope was a refashioning of Indian history and identity. "The binary opposition between nationalism and communalism entailed, for the nationalists, a careful re-examination and presentation of the Indian past." [Pandey, 1990: 247]. This reconstructed history tried to show the 'synthesis' of Indian civilization emphasising qualities of tolerance and secularism, and prior unity of India. But again, this over-simplification of the reconstructed past that denied, as Gyanendra Pandey points out, common people any agency, exposed a monolithic version of truth; which in turn excluded problems like communalism from the political domain which paradoxically

"contributed substantially to the counter-construction of the Indian past in more dogmatically community (specifically, religious community) terms. The contest between these alternative views and readings of history, was not settled in the 1920s or the 1930s or 1940s, and it has not been settled conclusively to this day." [ibid: 261]

As indicated in the beginning of the chapter, it is the concern and anxiety about the nation that informs *The Shadow Lines*, *Midnight's Children*, and *Looking Through Glass*. Written at a time when the monolithic past that the state envisages was brought to the forefront due to increased polarisation in Indian polity, these texts foreground their discussions of nation (vis-a-vis individual and local memories, histories and perceptions) within the trope of partition and therefore Muslim identity. Given that the state seeks to homogenize identities into a national one, and its failure to exclude communal ideology in its construction of history and identity — where 'Hindu' is interchangeable with 'India' - the Muslim figure in the nation remains as a problematic to be contextualised into the national framework. These are the debates, of which a general overview was sought to be given, that frame the discussion of nation partition-Muslim in these texts.⁵

The partition of India in 1947, was an indelible mark on the failure of an enlightened nationalism. The rupture in the nation and

⁵ As indicated, the debates about current communal mobilization strategies and their dovetailing into pre-independence communalist and nationalist ideologies is a vast and varied field in itself, as is the Indian-nation state's dealing with the problem of communalism (even in the earlier nationalist phase). These are the subjects of numerous studies, some of which have figured in my discussion, and for reasons of scope it is not possible to give a more detailed discussion of these topics. The historiography of partition, and its impact on these texts will be sought to be briefly highlighted, apropos the discussion on formation and problematic of identity.

communal identity it entailed has still not been bridged, the violence, terror and disorder it generated are still very much a part of the nation's vocabulary. That is precisely why the lack of a resolution to the Hindu-Muslim tensions and anxiety about the Muslim subject still dominate the national life. As Susie Tharu says:

The 1950s and 60s position on partition would certainly include a sense of the culpability of colonial rule and of betrayal by the British. But the extent to which the hold of this interpretation has weakened in the 1980s and 90s is remarkable. The antagonists now are the Muslims, with their "sub-pre-national religiosity" who take on the role of enemy within..." [Tharu, in Kaul, 1994: 75].

This anxiety about the 'loyalty' of the Muslim is part of the communalist discourse that sees the period of Muslim rule in India as a disruption of Indian (read Hindu) civilization. The Muslim then is a figure who is located within the ambivalence of the nation, within the discourses of national and self-identity. Partition then figures as the ultimate, but not final, crisis of the Indian state and nation. As the texts under study show, partition does not resolve the problem of Indian identity but merely precipitates old concerns that are repeatedly renewed as the problematic of 'Muslimness' as the 'other' remains firmly entrenched. The rhetoric of communalism so highlighted since the eighties, has foregrounded this crisis and contestation of Muslim vs Hindus and Indianness, and that is where all the three novels are located

Partition and the religion--based tearing apart of a citizen-humanity, has provided us with a setting and a theme in which the schemes of nationing can be repeatedly renewed. The event is writ large in Indian fiction and is recalled in periods of crisis, more strikingly so in the 1980s and 90's..." [ibid.]

The Shadow Lines details the invention of identities, indeed all perception is seen as an act of invention "... we [cannot] see without inventing what we saw..." [p. 31] says Tridib. Then any construction of identity of the self or the other is an imagined thing, yet the book also details the binary oppositions that go into this act, that the self is made possible only by inventing the 'other'. This is detailed in the account of the riot in Calcutta — and it is here that the Muslim body becomes a problem for the narrator. The narrator's best friend as a boy is a school-mate living in the same area, Montu. Montu is a Muslim—Mansoor. Though perhaps much cannot be read into the change of names and identity tag, it becomes significant as no other character goes through this 'secularization' process. Montu is not a problem name, does not hint at any 'otherness', it is perhaps preferable. Montu's family is of the same middle-class rung as the narrators "... his father was a teacher in the Ballygunge Science College...there was very little we did not know about each other's families." [p. 117]. Yet, as soon as a crisis occurs, the alienness takes hold. The latent ambiguity surrounding the Muslim comes to the fore. The day of the riots, the Tala tank, source of Calcutta's water supply, is rumoured to have been poisoned. A riot is the fundamental crisis

and negation of the nation, of the identities that go along with subscribing to that nation — at these points the self is delineated, and communal identity is foregrounded. The narrator normally does not interact much with the other boys coming in the school bus, but this day there is a shared bonding, a basic herding together based on community (here non-Muslim) feeling:

The bus stopped and I climbed in. There were only a dozen boys in it, and they were sitting on a bench at the back, huddled together... They seemed relieved to see me although they were none of them my friends. Normally we would not have so much as acknowledged one another, but today they moved up as soon as they saw me and made room for me beside them. [p. 199]

This is the fundamental aspect of the nation in crisis, all identity is broken down to essentials. No one articulates exactly who is supposed to have poisoned the tank, but then there is no need to: “we did not ask any questions — not who ‘they’ were, nor why ‘they’ had poisoned their own water...’ we knew the answers the moment he [Tublu] had said it...” [p.199-200]. The unenunciated ‘other’, ‘they’ are firmly established as being the cause of this particular crisis of the nation. The Muslims are, in this logic, an ambiguous lot, and much like a source of danger and potential violence, are immediately demonised. All sameness with Montu’s family is erased, his own—as all the Muslim’s — body is the site for contesting the nation. For they are invested with a disruptive power, a disruption that strikes at the

very root of 'normalcy' and the nation. There is no detailed explanation, for the Muslim as the 'other' is so firmly entrenched in the narrator's and nation's discourse, that they fit in with every other crisis and violence: "Everything fell into place now—the emptiness on the streets, the absence of the other boys — it all fitted. These were no more questions." [ibid.]. What this figures is not just the nightmare of the Indian-nation, partition being 'repeated' — in its violence and destructive categories, but this unenunciated knowledge of Muslims being the cause of danger goes back to partition. This feeling that binds the boys, is one of inherited remembrance, 'memories' of the alienness and danger to nationalism posed by the Muslim subject. The massacres of partition are evoked here in all their terror, and Muslims are the perpetrators of violence to the body of the state. It is the holocaust figured again, the ghost of partition revisited in every Muslim character. Montu's identity is totally essentialized into Muslimness, a potential saboteur of the nation, his identity is dissimulated by an act of violence—all humanness is denied. If the violence of the state and nation consist of wiping out 'human' memories of the 'other' across the border. The violence is etched upon the Muslim identity of Montu. For in denial of his own rhetoric of remembrance and insistence on the faculty of memory, the narrator erases Montu's remembrance, asked by the other boys whether the Muslim Montu is his friend, the narrator denies it. Thus this core event foregrounds the erasures of a potentially disruptive Muslim presence. The narrator relapses into a silence, a silence that mirrors

the silences enforced upon all Muslims and 'other's by a monolithic national identity.

So the disruption of normality, the problematising and the anxiety of nationness is displaced onto the Muslim 'other' in times of crisis of the nation, and this is always done by a recourse to 'remembrance' of partition. That event which "marked a watershed between the colonial and post-colonial, and the riots and programs that marked its passage taught people a terrible fear..." [Kaul, 1994: 140]' The fear, as the narrator says, is the "knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood." [p. 204]. This contingency, fear and latent terror present in the nation is located within the context of the partition of the sub-continent, and consequently upon the body and identity of Muslims, who undergo an enforced alienation "the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror." [ibid.]. The politics of partition, as the politics of communalism is based on difference, the fear of the other that haunts Tham'ma when she thinks of her old uncle in Dhaka "abandoned in that country, surrounded by..." [p.136]' Again there is a silence, an unenunciation that enforces the 'otherness' of people across the border, who happening to be Muslims are also potentially subversive within one's own boundaries, the riots they figure in strikes at the very heart of the nation. Colouring Tham'ma's fear of Jethamoshai's being in a Muslim land is

knowledge and remembrance of difference “There was a time when that old man was so orthodox that he would not let a Muslim’s shadow pass within ten feet of his food!” [p. 210]. That is what makes Tham’ma’s borders of blood, the memory of disruption of the state and her nationality as a result of partition. This is a border, a silence about the effacing of Muslim identity the novel tries to come to grips with, “At the origin of India and Pakistan lies the national trauma of Partition, a trauma that figures fear into silence, and for which *The Shadow Lines* seeks to find a language, a process of mourning...” [Kaul, 1994: 140]. Tham’ma’s anxiety about the nation is figured through partition and the ‘otherness of Muslims, she contributes to the 1965 war effort as “we have to kill them before they kills us.” [p. 237] that is her notion of freedom, the violence is generated by fear of another partition which mirrors the national anxiety about Muslims. For the logic of the nation demands that partition be categorized as a singular, irrational act, one which simply cannot be repeated again, borders contain identities that are co-extensive, yet the threat of that irrational act looms large every time a crisis is precipitated, whenever a riot occurs, each time difference of the ‘other’ comes home with violence. These silences that mark the book are indicative of the easing of ‘humanness’ of the Muslim subject. This fundamental construction of the ‘other’ — that is present across the border and threatens to create more partitions within, frames the discussion about nation and identity. The Muslim, than is the locus of partition, his ambivalence — as the text charts out — is the ambivalence of the

nation; for he is the threat to normalcy and borders. The nation's problematic of 'locating' partition, historically or in a collective memory, is played out on the Muslim today.

Both *The Shadow Lines* and *Midnight's Children* can be read as historical texts. While Rushdie's is a text that encompasses a much larger frame of history, the notion of difference, or the 'otherness' of the Muslim subject—made potent by partition—frames this debate about the nation and its history. Kesavan localises his discussion in a particular, critical phase of Indian history, and opens up the notion of monolithic identities being enforced on Muslims. This splitting open of received history of Muslims and partition (and hence the nation) is figured through a problematizing of identity, and the fissures that mark all constructions of self, other and nation are mapped out. The texts figure the trope of violence as shaping identity, this violence can be engendered by the state, notion of self, or simply figured as a necessary act to disclose the ambivalence of identity. In *Midnight's Children* Saleem's grand-father starts off as a Kashmiri Muslim, till he hurts his nose while praying and resolves "never again to kiss earth for any god or man" [p.4], but history, memory and the logic of nationalism demand that a religious identity be figured so as to be later subsumed or woven into a national one, an 'irreligious' figure is, in the context of the novels, a problematic one, so Aziz's decision leaves "a hole in him, a vacancy in a vital chamber". [ibid.] Then, in the Jallianwala Bagh, another act of violence leaves a mark on his

chest that turns him into an Indian [p. 40]. That violence, as Tham'ma believes in *The Shadow Lines*, is a marker of identity is played out in Rushdie's text too. The diatribe of communalist forces is figured in tropes of violence, that, while propagating the identity of Muslims as defilers builds up a 'popular' national imagination of a 'Hindu' nation. While the notion of 'cinema' as portraying reality in Kesavan's' and Rushdie's texts has been hinted at, it also figures as a working out of a 'fantasy' that is desirable, a national-communalist longing for violence unto the 'other'. Rashid, the rickshaw boy, watches his favourite actor Dev in 'Gaiwallah' play a "one-man vigilante force for the protection of cows" [p. 51] the reference to the RSS's cow-protection [here, cow as 'India', or the 'mother' who is desecrated by Muslims) campaigns both in pre- and post-independent India is obvious. It is made clear that "the film was made for Hindu audiences, in Delhi it had caused riot. Muslim Leaguers had driven cows past cinemas for slaughter and were mobbed." [ibid]. Again reality and 'fantasy' of violence are conflated, the imagined can turn real, the violence that accompanies religions identities — both contesting visions of the nation — is the riot at the heart of partition and the nation.

Midnight's Children foregrounds the irrationality—and yet utterly real in terms of terror and violence — of religious identity constituting contending visions of the nation. From the Ravana gang (the RSS) who desire economic benefit from their 'nationalist' agenda

by extracting money from Muslim businessmen, and write racist, communalist slogans on walls [p. 80] to the Muslim communalists, a Sindhi and a Bengali, who cannot tolerate a Hindu's house in between their's [p.81], it is communal identity leading to partition that figures attendant national discourses. That erasures of identity of the 'other' work both ways, i.e. both Muslim and Hindu communalists are implicated, and are constitutive of stereotypes that contribute an identity is also mapped out. In Delhi, Lifafa Das, with his peepshow, has been a well-known figure, but in times of crisis an essentializing discourse is imposed. A small girl, terrible symbol of the imbibing of violent identity, accuses him "You've got a nerve, coming into thith mohalla... everyone knows you're a Hindu." [p.84]. Chants of "Hindu, Hindu" then into "Rapist !Ray-pist" [ibid]. This essentializing is central to discourses of the 'other' in turning normal spaces into alien and potentially disruptive ones. This violence can be worked out purely physically, in that appearance is seen as constitutive of a wider identity that is antagonistic to the aggressor's. A comparison to the above incident can be made by what happens to Haasan in *Looking Through Glass*. Taking on a Muslim identity via its symbols—a beard recently grown, thinned Muslim fashion and a small lace cap..." [p. 82] in order to sell his pickles, proves to be cause of violence. At an eatery, he is assaulted, and a logo of the 'other's' faith, a swastika, is carved on his chest, "He had simplified himself into a cut-out Muslim. The cook had simply gone by appearances" [p.85]. Both texts then, imply the dangers and violence inherent in difference. This difference,

in the backdrop of religious identities being the basis for a historical construction of 'nationhood' and therefore the partition, reinforces the rhetoric of otherness implicit in the nation. In the case of the Muslim, physical features also serve as an antithesis to the 'nation—his very presence incites a violence that reflects the anxiety of the 'national' agenda to appropriate his identity or to erase it. This is again partly illustrated by *Midnight's Children*. When Gandhi is shot at Birla House in Delhi, there is an immediate anxiety about Muslimness: "If a Muslim did this thing there will be hell to pay," [p.169] says Hanif to Amina, this terror inspired by the possibility of violence can only be negated if the nation—in the form of Gandhi—was not attacked by a Muslim. Godse then, is to be thanked as "By being Godse he has saved our lines." [ibid], says Amina. This of course is a historical fact, that a Hindu communist killed Gandhi out of a desire to see his own vision of the nation foregrounded is not important, but that an anxiety exists that leads to an immediate apprehension that a Muslim might have killed him is significant. For a Muslim is seen, in the context of the history of partition — a time when Gandhi was killed — as a threat to the national agenda, and the riots that did not happen as a result of Godse being Hindu are merely a deferring of the eruption of this anxiety and otherness — the tension is a recurring trope, for a Muslim presence means an eternal threat of destabilization.

This threat, and the implications of its historical 'factual' happening is a significant trope in *Looking Through Glass*. The

narrator is thrust into a Muslim family at a time when partition (as he only knows) is imminent and this is a working out of his own received history. For the only indication of what the narrators earlier, i.e. prior to being displaced in time, received discourse about Muslims was given very late in the text. The narrator before falling 'in time, has an unquestioned, unproblematic identity there is no indication of any anxiety. But that this very fact elides a deep-rooted— derived from memory and history— conception of the Muslim as 'other' and disrupter of the nation is symbolised by his going to a time where he can problematize his notions of Muslim separatism and alienness. A particular memory from his childhood brings to the fore his unease about the Muslim figure. At a magic show in school, a snake is turned into a tie and put around his neck. This extreme anxiety about the reality of the tie being contingent, and therefore figuring a larger debate about the 'otherness' of Muslims, is spelt out only when he realises the problematic of a monolithic identity being displaced onto the Muslims. Through Masroor, he realises many Muslims having no 'national' agenda but that of the nationalists feel betrayed. This makes him exorcise an old ghost:

He [the magician] tied (the tie) on me... it was hard to concentrate with a cobra knotted round my throat. That night at home, when Pran Mausaji, my police uncle... spoke darkly of Muslim mischief, I thought of the Pasha's sinister face and shivered. For years afterwards, the Great Gogia Pasha was my private vision of the plotting Muslim. [p. 246].

That the uncle is a representative of state authority and view, and his grandmother is an old nationalist seems to underline the suspicion, anxiety and potential threat that the Muslims represent to the nation-state and the nationalist agenda. The implication obviously is the extent of internalisation of communalist tropes and rhetoric by the 'nation'. Muslims, again are seen as saboteurs of the nation, of normalcy and stability. This obviously means a homogenization of their identity, an erasure, that refers back to a particular view of the past and partition. The mapping out of this past is undertaken by both Rushdie and Kesavan, in order to try and resolve the problem of the Muslim figure represents.

In Looking Through Glass the narrator has to pay the price of an absolutist, unproblematic view inherited from a particular nationalist ideology. Displaced in time, this man, who shrinks from reality has to learn the historical accuracy, or ambivalence, of his views about Muslims. He finds that Ammi, is not just a housewife, she works for Muslim women's empowerment by publishing a magazine 'Khatoon', It is not like other traditionalist 'reformist' magazines that merely reinforce tropes of patriarchal interest, but one that tries to give women 'other lives' by a vision of travelling across boundaries [pp. 16-17]. This is a household considering themselves within the nationalist framework, anti-Muslim League, anti-partition, who cannot conceive of difference of nationalism based on religion. Masroor, active in the arena of political thought, is worried about this nationalist agenda

collapsing. Refuting Haasan's argument that riots can not happen in Lucknow he says, "That's what they said in Allahabad... and in Banaras... but the riots happened anyway. There is always a first time." [p.19] central to Masroor's apprehension is the changing nature of the political scenario. The nationalist movement against the British, spearheaded by the Congress, is at a critical juncture. It was during this phase of the history that is the framework of the novel —1942-47— that the nation came into being and yet failed at its very birth. The failure of the Congress to prevent partition is squarely delineated by Kesavan. Rushdie too, emphasis the role of Muslim nationalist who opposed partition, this presence of a non-communalist Muslim splits open communalist discourse of Muslim separatism and current notions of Muslim's engendering the partition of the nation. The silences surrounding these Muslim figures, and the lack of agency denied to them in retrospect is seen as a failure of the nationalist movement to resist communalism and laying the ground for a particular interpretation and construction, of a Muslim identity.

Writing in *Self-Images, Identity and Nationality*, Mukul Kesavan locates the failure of the Congress to encompass Muslims into its cause as a negation of secular nationalism. It was a "programmatic secularism of the Congress" that led to changing perceptions among the Muslims — a resultant was that "In the decisive provisional elections of 1945-46, the Muslim electors in the minority provinces voted overwhelmingly for the Muslim league..." [Kesavan, in Chatterji

ed., 1989: 91]. Though, as I have indicated earlier, that a religious, communalised view was inscribed into the nationalist programme from its very inception, yet some Congress leaders had, from the 1920s openly state a Hindu agenda, “Some leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lala Lajpat Rai, for example... set up conversion movements and organisations to safeguard the distinct and separate interests of the Hindu community...” (Balachandran, in Basu and Subrahmaniam ed., 1996: 99). There were in addition to this, several factions of the Hindu Sabha within the provincial Congress committees, notably in the United Provinces. [ibid]. Thus there were traits and tendencies within the Congress which would surely have alienated the Muslims. This tendency was located in “the Congress ideological commitment to majoritarian democracy” [Kesavan in Chatterji ed., 1989: 92], which was one of the main reasons for the distance between it and Muslims. Though the Muslim League’s communal agenda was successful in years close to partition, historians see it as a resultant of Congress insensitivity and lack of coordination, “The loss of Muslim support during the 1946 provincial election; and the looming certainty of Pakistan only made the Congress in the United Provinces aggressively insensitive towards the concerns of the Muslim community.” [Balachandran in Basu and Subrahmaniam ed.; 1996: 107] This background, though only briefly touched upon becomes important as the Nationalist Muslim’s concerns were elided—Masroor in *Looking Through Glass* symbolising this erasure. Masroor’s fear of riots, as Jamal Mian’s who for years

continues his daily offering of jalebis in the form of Quranic verses at a saint's tomb, in order to avoid riots and the violence coming to Lucknow, are firmly grounded in a historical trope. The fear was one of being left bereft by the nationalist agenda, of both the Muslim League and the Congress denying them any agency and identity. Coupled with this was a fear among ordinary Muslims which turned them towards the League's sectarianism, "what Congressmen like Nehru saw as a secular arrangement blind to religious affiliation, many Muslims in the U.P. regarded, at best, as an inappropriate model, given the fact of an unsecular electorate, and at worst as a prescription for creeping majority rule." [Kesavan in Chatterji ed., 1989: 100]. So even figures like Mohamed Ali, a controversial figure for posterity, was as Mushirul Hasan says, at one stage emerging "as the rallying point for younger men, for he himself held the opinion that a Congress, ... dominated by moderates embodied the genuine aspirations [of] an educated India..." [Hasan, ed. 1998: 65]. Circumstances led sectarians like him to intensify an agenda of communalism, helped along by the Congress insensitivity [ibid. 73-75]. It was the influence of the Hindu Mahasabha, the Malaviya-Lala Lajpat Rai stock of Congress leaders, the Arya Samaj and movements like the *shuddhi* and *sangathan* that led a host of potentially amenable Muslims away from the Congress. [ibid, pp. 82-83]. Yet while there were elements of the Muslim elite, who, within the League "demonstrated Muslim separatism and inspired communal conflict" [Brennan, in Hasan ed. 1993: 360] and in retrospect a monolithic

view that the Muslims (all of them without exception) supported partition can be taken, it is not without its own homogenizing and ignoring of diversity within Muslims, “Pakistan was not an inevitable outcome of an uncontrollable surge towards separatism by India’s Muslims... for they were no more homogeneous as a group in terms of attributes and interests, than Hindus.” [Balachandran in Basu and Subrahmanyam ed., 1996: 103]. The view is stressed by Mushirul Hasan too, who in *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India’s Muslims since Independence*, emphasises that notions of ‘Islamic Identity’ and the propagation of romanticised visions of a Muslim/Islamic nation were systematically heightened by the League and Muslim communalists so that “The Pakistan idea was embedded in the popular imagination as a religious crusade led by Muslims in defence of Muslims and Islam.” [Hasan, 1997: 87]. But to attribute any monolithic identity, or the assumption that this was a ‘universal’ view among the Muslims would again be a statement implying erasure of differences within this discourse, “Whether they knew the answers or not, the fact is that millions [of Muslims] were indifferent to the colonial and League definitions of a ‘community’ or a ‘nation’. [ibid.: 99]. The ‘historical’ assumptions that, due to a homogenizing tendency, erase all local complexities and pluralities have ensured that the Indian state inherits an idea about the separatism of the Muslim; the idea that the Muslim is a suspect within the nation has informed even ‘secularist’ and ‘nationalist’ writing. “It is notable that the continued concern for community and country should have given rise to the category of the

Nationalist Muslim... that there was no equivalent term for the Hindus speaks eloquently of the paradoxical position of the Muslims..." [Pandey, 1990: 258]. These historical debates, leading upto the present ambiguity about the Muslim and his presence and positioning in the national fabric are what frame these three novels.

This failure of the Congress to take into account non-League Muslims is a major trope and central 'event' in *Looking Through Glass*. The passing of the Quit India resolution without a discussion on the Hindu-Muslim problem is located as the root of the effacing of Masroor's identity. [p. 38]. On the day he reads the news, Masroor is transformed into a figure on an army poster — this violence to his body, identity, as a Muslim is indicative of the effacement of the Muslim subject. "It was not just me who disappeared... there could have been thousands, maybe millions. Everyone who disappeared on the ninth of August was Muslim." [p. 244], says Masroor to the narrator. The inability of the nationalist agenda to accommodate the Muslim presence engenders a core problem of nationhood which persists. The passing of the Quit India resolution on the eighth of August by the Congress Working Committee is located at the root of negation of Muslim presence, even Gandhi's agenda is called into question, his earlier commitment to first resolve Muslim problems was negated and the resolution is passed that "side stepped Muslims in favour of the masses... they concentrated on the Hindu-Muslim

problem and made it vanish. Along with the problem... we vanished as well." [p. 247].

This then, is the effacement of the Muslim problematic located at the heart of the nationalist protest. Muslims like Masroor who "opposed the League's demand for a Muslim homeland because they were committed to one secular nation" [ibid] are turned into shadows, images in the minor, fractured, split, erased. This trope of resistance to the Muslim communalist agenda that finds no place within the nationalist framework operates in *Midnight's Children* too. In the same year as Kesavan's text figures the disappearance of Muslims, the year of the Quit India resolution, Mian Abdullah, the Hummingbird, creates the free Island convocation. Convinced, like Adam Aziz, about the irrationality of partition, the Hummingbird opposes it, and is killed by "six crescent knives" [p. 49]. He remains the effaced Muslim whose identity, problematic as it was — not conforming to the nationalist agenda or its 'other' — has been erased, not just by his death, but by expunging his story as well. "If you do not believe me, check—find out about Mian Abdullah and his convocations. Discover how we have swept his story under the carpet..." [p. 50]. Here Rushdie refers to the identity built by the nation-state, its history and memory which seeks to erase all record of a Muslim presence that could not be contextualised. Saleem is brought up in an atmosphere free of religious discourse, even his father was rescued from totalizing discourses of a mullah by Adam Aziz. He throws the religious teacher

out because “He was teaching them to hate, wife. He tells them to hate Hindus and Buddhists...” [p. 43]. Adam, having given up his religious identity stands outside the sphere of communalist rhetoric, this passes on to his children. Saleem’s father recognizes the irrationality of partition, quite like Mr. Kemal, who cannot comprehend the illogicality of Pakistan being half-an-hour ahead of India. The Leaguer’s plan to run their clocks ahead: “Here’s proof of the folly of the scheme! Those leaguer’s plan to abscond with a whole thirty minutes!” [p. 89]. But they also have to learn that in a state imbued with a communalist rhetoric, identity cannot be displaced. The national argument of identity is fundamentally based on cognizance of a religious identity, and in times of crisis that is foregrounded. During partition, Ahmed Sinai’s assets are frozen, another instance of the communalization and violence of the ‘secular’ state, “this so-called secular state gets some damn clever ideas,” says Narlikar (p. 157). This violence unto a Muslim body is done in order to force him into a homogenized discourse, put him into a binary opposite by making him run away to Pakistan. That *Midnight’s Children’s* discussions of nation and identity are grounded in the trope of partition and hence Muslimness of bodies has been indicated, even Saleem takes on the role of a prophet, a seer — in parallel to the prophet of Islam’s revelation he foregrounds his text as a Muslim discourse. As Saleem discovers the power of voices in his head, it is symbolic of the dawning of a prophethood [pp. 192-193], a vision of history, remembrance of memory that emphasises the alternative

history of the nation. That this vision, or memory — as is the nation's with regard to partition and subsequently Muslim's — is blinkered, or rather, has barriers, is indicated by Saleem's inability to conceive of any midnight's children in Pakistan. The metaphor symbolises the loss of memory in a state built on purely religious exclusion and homogenizing discourse, for such a state can generate only "... [an] infinite number of falsenesses, unrealities and lies." [p. 38] A religious state can only be based on a homogenization of memory and history that erases all opposition, "Religion was the glue of Pakistan, holding the halves together ... as a homogeneous entity in time, a blend of past and present..." [p. 420]. That the nationalism of the nation-state in India also seeks to essentialize and eliminate difference is presented by the destruction of the MCC. The MCC's parallel's with the Hummingbird's attempts to escape the discourse of 'otherness' embedded in nationalism are spelt out "Once, long ago, the death of Mian Abdullah had destroyed another conference... now as the midnight children lost faith in me, they also lost their belief in the thing I had made for them..." [p. 357]. Then, an escape or refusal to be drawn into binaries posits multifarious possibilities of memory, remembrance, conception of history, self and nation—all challenging the state's monolithic structures. This 'contest' is played out in *Midnight's Children* over contending views of the nation - partition being seen as a defining trope in that contention of identities. Saleem, as the central 'Muslim' figure, also posits ambivalent categories; the state and 'national identity views him as a saboteur and hunts him

down, refuses to see the local context of his identity — fissured and multiplying like the nation itself. The text then posits the discussion on nation as being grounded in tropes of partition and alienness of nationalism ‘other’ — the Muslim figure.

Looking Through Glass presents the ambiguity and fluidity of personal identity in combat with a rhetoric that always seeks to essentialize and appropriate. The appropriating figure could be the state, a notion of history and national identity, or a construction of identity built on purely communal grounds. Like Saleem’s many identities (his many names, many ‘fathers’, and ‘mothers’) the narrator in Kesavan’s text has to go through a process of mutation. The recognition that identities are fluid, not fixed, and that any a priori conception of history demands a fixed, essentializing identity is what the text details. Masroor’s antecedents are Hindu — from Ganjoo to Intezar his father has traversed a whole conception of history. That the discourse of communalism does violence unto an ambiguous, unfixed ‘identity is figured by Haasan’s story. Haasan’s own journey is from thinking that mosques are a hatchery for Muslims [p.73] to ‘becoming’ or moving into a Muslim identity himself. The communal overtones that shaped the nationalist project are emphasized in the rebellion scenes in Azamgarh. Chaubey, the leader, conflates a past Hindu age with an age of freedom, thus automatically categorising — as Hindu communalist discourse does — Muslims as alien. “This is the two thousandth year of the Vikrami epoch”, Chaubey says, “we

are the armies of Vikramaditya and it has fallen to us to ensure that India enters the third millennium of his era, a republic of the free.” [p. 102]. It is the foreknowledge of this communalism engendering partition that the narrator has to bear. Muslims like Masroor, atomized, turned into shadows and pictures by the refusal of nationalism to take them into account, are as Masroor says “invisible... the Congress cannot see us.” [p. 189]. This erasure, forces him into a reverse-essentializing. In order to make the nationalist agenda aware of the Muslim presence, they must shift markers of their identity, for the nation only recognises essentializations. Addressing a congregation he says:

Since our problem is transparency, we must become opaque in the name of Islam... so burn your shirts and trousers and grow your beards. Put your mothers, sister and wives in big, black burqas... force the Congress to look at you in your beards and burqas... because only then will they know we are here. Only then will they see. [p. 190-191].

Only basic, communal identity can offer a place in the national framework, in its totalizing rhetoric that will ultimately create the ‘other’ out of these very Muslims in order to further the national agenda. Ammi’s party, and election campaign are seen as Muslim League, just because she is a Muslim herself “Why did you as a Muslim woman set up a Muslim party when you already have the... Muslim League?” [p. 329] asks the Muslim League journalist. Muslims then, have to suffer the inexorable logic of being Muslim. No other

identity, affiliation, or an independent agency is ascribed to them — framed within communal-nationalist structures their very humanness is negated, they become a ‘trope’ of either ‘belonging’ or ‘otherness. Their identities are fixed as a concomitant of the development or construction of the national identity.

The narrator has to learn that the past, and its memories had shaped his concepts of nation and Muslims, Ammi teaches him “that there was no past or future, just one continuous life where everything happened now.” [p. 352]. This realisation is what is sought to be worked out in the text. This understanding also means that the narrator is not only shifted in time, but history and memory and therefore identity as well. Then, he stands in a different context to the nation, a major break is marked when he in an act of a complete shifting of identity, an act which questions and challenges the very nature of the history he was born into, leaps over boundaries of demarcated identity and is circumcised. This physical turning into a Muslim, changing physical features, while constituting the interrogation of all ‘national’ constructs does not resolve the problematic of fixing his identity. What is affirmed in the text is that undoing the ‘fixed’ quality of identity challenges the notion of national identity. Being in a time before partition he becomes by this act one of the problematic Muslims, who are displaced into the ghetto of Purana Qila in Delhi. But this rupture he enforces into the discourse of Muslims vis-a-vis partition and nation also means a double

displacement. Unfixed from his time he builds a new family and history, but like Muslims who were broken from their bonds, he is again displaced. He remains a character undefined, problematic for the nation, a potential disruption of history—precisely why he is erased like Masroor and the other Muslims. He is no more than a ‘blur’, a vague undefined shape on a photograph [p.378], much like the indeterminate category of the Muslim.

An aspect of the problematic of dealing with the Muslim and therefore the culture he represents can be gleaned from a brief look at two texts Anita Desai’s *In Custody* (1984) and Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight In Delhi* (1940). Both texts deal with representations of an ‘inner’ Muslim culture. And both try to figure the problem of locating the Muslim and the tropes associated with him by recourse to a denial of agency to his culture, conception of history and identity. Ahmed Ali’s text, ostensibly deals with the decay and decline of Muslim rule and culture in India, while Desai figures the problem of this culture—again decaying and in the last throes of death—in the body of Urdu literature. Why these texts are remarkable for their methods of dealing with ‘Muslimness’ is that inspite of a gap of almost five decades, both take recourse to surprisingly similar stereotypes—the Muslim as something of a hedonist wallowing in the past, a culture symbolised by tropes like pigeon-flying (a ‘sure’ sign of decadence), both figure old, decrepit locales of Old Delhi, and both symbolise decay by referring to Urdu poetry. Again, the Muslims are figured in a kind of

potent, but sickly and in modern terms unhealthy state of sexuality—In *Twilight in Delhi* Mir Nihal keeps a mistress, has an affair with his maid Dilchain, apart from keeping a wife. *In Custody* also has Nur as regular visitor to a brothel (it is indicated he met his second wife there). Both texts represent Muslims as living in a backward, impotent state and totally divorced from a rationalist, modern contemporary age. It could be said that Ahmed Ali's text, coming even before partition was trying to locate specific historical reasons for Muslim decline, and that the novel is intended as a critique of this way of life. Given Ahmed Ali's involvement with the progressive writers moment, this certainly can be an 'authorial' intention, but again what comes out is the essential 'fixed-ness' of Muslim identity. Both, as indicated, employ the same tropes to signify Muslim life and cultures, and in doing so, merely reinforce the essentialized nature of perception of Muslims in India.

It is in their figuring of the trope of Urdu poetry that both texts make implicit political suggestions about Muslim and therefore Urdu 'alienness'. Ahmed Ali's novel is littered with quotes from Urdu poems, indeed, the pathos and death of a culture and city is evolved through these poems, even Desai's text, though grounding a discussion of the politics of Urdu in India vis-a-vis the 'language of the Muslims', also employs the same trope of Urdu poetry—one that shows this poetry to be entirely made up of an excessive sentimentalism, maudlin

emotions, a perverse obsession with death, failure and loss.⁶ Aijaz Ahmed points to the classification of Urdu as a 'foreign' language of 'alien' Muslims when he posits that, in post-Independent India "the broad political centre... kept moving closer to the communalist position of identifying Urdu with the Muslim sectional interest." [Ahmed, 1996: 220]. This took, with increasing communalist rhetoric, a new form, in that Urdu itself became a site of identity or belonging. It came to be "The crucible in which [Muslim] loyalty to the Indian Union would be tested" [Kesavan in Chatterji ed. 1989: 104]. In Desai's text Urdu is the marker of not only Muslim identity but of their political fortunes as well: "How can there be Urdu poetry when there is no Urdu language left? The defeat of the Moghuls by the British threw a noose over its head, and the defeat of British by the Hindi-Wallah's tightened it." [p. 42]. Thus it becomes the site for 'otherness' engendered in language. Identify, communal and national is figured onto the body of the language and the communalist discourse against Urdu is seen as yet another erasure of Muslim identity. The agenda of the state to enforce Hindi as the 'national' language is seen as a deliberate ploy at eliminating Muslim presence and identity. Thus the debate of the nation and identity vis-a-vis Muslims again harks back to partition and an eliding of Muslimness

⁶ E.M. Forster's description of Persian Poetry in *A Passage to India* which Aziz so loves as it expresses his basic feelings of 'pathos' being sublime is marked for its parallel.

in cultural paradigms. This effacement of identity and denial of agency—even to the language as it can only produce ‘love’ or ‘pathos’ poetry while the whole, significant body of progressive, modern Urdu literature is ignored—is seen in sexual terms by the Muslims: “Here we live as *hijras*, as eunuchs” [p. 53] says a young admirer of Nur’s poetry in reference to there being no defence of Urdu in India. Urdu then, is figured as a language “doomed the day Muslims departed across the newly-drawn border to Pakistan”[p. 96], the link between the language, Muslims, partition and the consequent construction of identity is complete. Urdu then is used as a trope, not just to signify Muslims, but to symbolise them. In its presence, is another site of failure of the nation, another potential disruption. The lack of agency ascribed to this culture is delineated in *Twilight in Delhi* too, “They were in the hands of the foreigners who did as they pleased, and they had no command over their own destiny,” (p.145), think Mir Nihal and his friends in response to the loss of power of the Muslims. This fatalism in political approach is marked out in the poetry too, an escapist attitude which reinforces the lack of political agency. Ahmed Ali’s whole novel is about the inwardness and exclusion of Muslims from the national life. Both texts present a dual world view, where any scientific reason or progress is not a part of the Muslim’s private or public life, then these texts become markers of the tropes of ethnic identity, an identity based on exclusion.

Of some significance is the 'Hindu' presence in these texts. Deven, the inheritor of Nur's legacy, the one to whom the mantle of an Urdu 'lover' is passed, the one who seems to be the only person with some agency— is shown as a weak, escapist, impotent character — which reemphasises the nature of the poetry he loves. In this apparent linkage of national (Hindu) and Muslim (Urdu) tropes, the nation instead of potential regeneration falls into more ambivalence. For one, Deven is marked out from the start as an ineffectual, bumbling man - and thus he becomes another site of the failure of the Muslim to figure in the 'national' identity. No agency or regenerative possibility is inscribed in this contact between a representative of the 'national' and 'Muslim' , while both categories are, like Rushdie's, Ghosh's and Kesavan's texts, shown to be binary opposites each reinforcing the 'other'. *Twilight in Delhi* is remarkable in its exclusion of all national life, all Hindus. It merely refigures the rupture between the national and Muslim identities. The only Hindu presence is a doctor who is an alternative to the Muslim (failed) world of alchemy and magical or religious charms. Dr. Mitra is, by all indications, presumed to be a 'modern' doctor —which in itself splits open the rhetoric of exclusion and otherness in the texts. The national-modern-Hindu is figured as an antithesis to the decadent-exclusionist-Muslim-world. Then again do the ruptures in the body of the nation become apparent. There is no domain of potential coalescence between the two 'worlds'. The binaries are complete, Muslims are figured as the 'other' not just in terms of opposition to a 'national'

life—but even all that national life represents — progress, ratiocination and agency. The problematic of the Muslim figure remains unresolved.

The anxiety—that has been discussed—arising out of the presence of the Muslim in these texts, is then that of a historical burden. The ghost of partition or disruptive ‘otherness’ is not just the spirit of Muslim complicity, but is a spectre that by transforming all conflicts into a potential ‘partition’ makes the nation’s history a series of crises precipitated by the Muslim presence.

“The Muslim in other words, represents a fundamental anxiety of nationalism itself: of the nation as something unachieved. And as such, every Muslim becomes, at a certain level, the symbol of national frustration and insecurity. This is how she or he enters into the history of independent India. [Devji, 1992: 2].

If nationalism then, is invented as a problematic around the figure of the Muslim/communal, these texts have tried to show the fissures, ruptures and violence inherent in ‘fixing’ any conception of nation and Muslim identity.

CONCLUSION

These texts then, posit within their discussions of the nation the centrality of partition and the historical burden it represents. Indian history, and that of the nation, locates partition as a defining and continuing moment that frames discussions of individual and national identity. The attempt has been to show, how, by foregrounding the trope of partition and Muslim identity, these texts try to locate the problematic of defining nationhood.

The Muslim figure then, represents not only the ambiguity and the erasures involved in all constructions of the nation, but also is located squarely within the 'failure' of the nation. The Muslim then figures the structure of Indian nationalism's narrative around the problem of communalism. These texts, then, question the discourse of nationalism that refuses to see difference as constitutive of the nation, and negates a 'national' self that is built around exclusion, and based on 'difference of the other'. This difference of the Muslim is not seen as being part or a unit of 'Indianness' but is something that creates the nation, makes nationalism possible in the first place. The trope of nationalism's claim of being representative of the 'true' nation is interrogated, and the slippages and violences that nationalism entails are mapped. The Muslim, in a discourse that conflates 'Hindu' and 'Indian', has to bear the burden of the communal and exist as a site of attack and national failure, as a saboteur of the national construct.. The Muslims not only constitute the site of struggle between two

forms of nationalism, they also provide legitimacy to nationalism's homogenization. Their supposed subversion of the nationalist project posits a deep anxiety about the nation, and the Muslim problem is located within the nation's hegemony of discourse - rather they signify the deep ambiguity of this nationalist hegemony. These texts, while framing all these debates, negate the monolithic construction of Muslim identity this anxiety about the nation and the resultant hegemony entails. The essentialized identity imposed upon Muslims is questioned, and this interrogation of 'nation' is framed through the splitting open of enforced identities. If the nation 'fixes' or essentializes identity, these texts by fracturing that essentialization question the nation. This unfixing of identity then, locates the debates about Muslims, partition and the nation.

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