

**NATIONALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS:
A STUDY OF FOUR INDIAN
NOVELS IN ENGLISH**

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The responsibility for errors and shortcomings in the text is entirely mine.

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CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Home and the World: A study of <u>Waiting for the Mahatma</u>	21
3.	Things Fall Apart: A study of <u>Midnight's Children</u>	46
4.	No Longer at Home: A study of <u>English August</u>	67
5.	In Another Country: A study of <u>The Shadow Lines</u>	88
6.	Conclusion	107
7.	List of Work Cited	110

Chapter 1

INTRODUCING THE NATION

Of late there has been a sudden interest in the politics of culture, ethnicities and nationalism throughout the world, a thrust that is evident also in the writings and criticism emanating from the non-western world. According to Mark Juergansmeyer, "(a)s political ideology recedes with the collapse of Communism, the politics of identity and community, of religion, ethnicity and gender have begun to occupy the space vacated by the political ideology."¹

As a result of this change the old categories and assumptions are being rethought and interrogated. This study looks at the ways in which the concept of nations and nationalism are reflected in a few recent Indian novels written in English.

In India as in other countries which had served as colonies for the western nations, well developed indigenous cultures and world views existed well before the advent of colonialism. The traditional world order had to wage a continuous war against the westernized, 'scientific', 'rational' and bureaucratic notion of nation which was borrowed and imposed from the colonialist's paradigm. To examine whether this dominant nationalist idiom is

interrogated by the texts chosen is one of the aims of this project.

The new states which were transformed from the colonies had two different worlds of modernity and tradition within themselves though the nationalistic elite tried to elide over this chasm by claiming that the modern, western and scientific ideas were universally applicable and progressive. The modernist elites of these states laid stress on unities and commonalities which subsumed differences in order to create a grand narrative of nation, reflecting largely the western model. But beneath this world as imagined by the elites lay the subalterns' world, governed by the dictates of tradition, religion and local knowledge.

As a result of this, tension between modernity and tradition is a characteristic feature of many of these states. The idea of a nation, in so far as it is a modern idea, often sits uncomfortably with the varied, traditional and localized cultures of these countries.

Modernity and its attendant phenomenon tries to impose uniformity and order. Differences if any lie across the borders in other nations, which in turn are peopled by homogenous and like minded citizens. Modernity with its

awesome tool of science and technology not only disdains difference and disorder, but has tremendous potential to neutralize them to a sameness which can be studied, quantified and ordered. According to Shiv Vishvanathan in "Science, Hegemony and Violence",

Underlying the notion of the modern state and the notion of science is a monolithic world-view. The nation-state cannot permit ethnicities which serve as competing sites for power and modern science cannot tolerate the legitimacy of folk or ethnic knowledge. Both kind of ethnicity violate the modern conception of order. The Hobbesian project which encapsulates modernity as a creation myth was literally a contract between state and science to manufacture the idea of a mass society of equal and uniform individuals.²

If the peoples of the non-western world have alternative world views then they have to be herded to the only rational and modern way and for their own good have to be weaned away from traditional practices and world order. "The variegated traditions of the third world - the tribal, the nomadic, the pastoral and the peasant - have to be bulldozed into a flatland called modernity - and there is little time for consultation."³

In the third world nations, traditional, local and regional culture often emerge as alternate sites of resistance to modernity and nationalism as modernism, according to Irving Louis Horowitz can sometimes involve "destruction of local and regional cultures in the name of

national culture and the elimination of native language clusters in the name of national identity."⁴

While the westernized native elites of the colony were receptive to the national idea, for many others it remained an alien concept. According to Edward Shils.

The separation of the uneducated masses immersed in their traditional cultures and the 'Intellectuals' who have had a modern education is representative of some disjunctions observable in the social structure of practically all the new states. Almost everywhere the societies consists of relatively discrete collectivities - ethnic, communal, caste, religious or linguistic - that have little sense of identity with each other or with the national whole.⁵

Intellectuals in these new nations therefore have an additional burden of 'inventing' a new nation imaginatively in addition to being true to their local reality and the two agendas are often incompatible with each other. To imagine a nation from an erstwhile colony, the political thinkers have often to take recourse to the great tradition which is alien and even antagonistic to the various local ones. The nationalist writer often invents national identities which take their coordinates from the metropolises rather than from the colony. Richard White writes:

National identities are invented within a framework of modern western ideas about science, nature, race, society, nationality.... The very idea of national identity is a product of European history at a particular time... The national identity is not 'born of the lean loins of the country itself' as one ardent

nationalist put it, but is a part of the 'cultural baggage' which Europeans have brought with them and with which we continue to encumber ourselves.⁶

For many of the people of the new states the nation is a foreign concept compared to the more meaningful ones like "race, ethnicity, religion, and language... whereby people identify themselves, organize their community, find meaning in their sentiment and express their beliefs."⁷ Hence people are easily mobilized on the basis of primordial ties. According to Clifford Geertz primordial discontent strives more deeply and is satisfied less easily compared to civil discontent. "If severe enough it wants not just Sukarno's or Nehru's or Moulay Hasan's head, it wants Indonesia's or India's or Morocco's."⁸

In the new nations of Asia and Africa and Latin America, the nationalist writer is often called upon to create a homogenous community in which all differences are subsumed for the sake of national unity and is often obliged to connect this to a hoary mythical unfractured past of a nation. In the words of Timothy Brennan, "the nation is a gestative political structure which the third world artist is very often either consciously building or suffering the lack of."⁹

That literature or more precisely the novel has been deeply implicated in the process of nation formation is

today clear after Benedict Anderson's book Imagined Community. But what has become apparent after the boom of the Latin American writing and the emergence of the third world fiction in the world's arena is the phenomenon of novel deconstructing the nation. Jean Franco in the essay "The Nation as Imagined Community" notes this development in the context of Latin American fiction: "Novels which in the nineteenth Century had offered blueprints of national formations, more and more became a sceptical reconstruction of past errors. The novel made visible the absence of any signified that could correspond to the nation."¹⁰

Unlike the European writer writing in the heyday of nationalism, for many of the writers from the newly emerging nations of Asia and Africa the term nation was a problematic one, not naturally given. According to Hórowitz, the nations of western Europe were 'naturally' transformed from feudalism because of changes that came about as a result "not of invasion or of foreign conquest but through the internal break down of the older landed classes, a general disintegration of agricultural societies or through the initiatives and creation of new life styles."¹¹

The new nations of Asia and Africa were created from colonies of the European nations, most of which were "highly arbitrary and in a sense, artificial creations whose borders

part like from like as often as they embrace unlike peoples under a single state system. There is not a single symbol capable of being attached to 'Uganda', for instance which can compare with those that could be attached to 'Poland'...¹² Thus many of the third world nations were carved and created by the former imperialist powers under the convenient assumption which equated colonies with nations. Conor Cruise O'Brien in "What rights should minorities have" writes

In the Post-First World War division an attempt was made to build the new states as far as possible around historical, cultural and linguistic groupings, such as we have been accustomed to describe as nations. In the case of the Post-Second World War division hardly any corresponding effort to sort out peoples was attempted and arbitrary assumption was made... that the various colonial administrative territories, all of short duration and some of vast extent now constituted nations and were exercising self-determination...¹³

As a result of this, the new states of Asia and Africa, according to Edward Shils,

are not based on a society that is co-terminus with the boundaries of the states... the constituent societies on which the new states rest are taken separately not civil society and taken together do not form a single civil society... They are constellations of kinship, groups, castes, tribes, feudalities, even smaller territorial societies but they are not civil societies. The sense of identity is rudimentary even where it exists. The sense of membership in a nation-wide society and the disposition to accept the legitimacy of the government, its personnel and its laws is not great.¹⁴

Similarly S.C. Dube writes about the pitfalls of "particularism and parochialism" for the newly independent states which make the national bond uniting different segments "feeble and tenuous."¹⁵ In his book Tradition and Development, he writes about the newly independent countries

Latent within the national framework were particularism and parochialism of a wide variety... The emerging national stream had not blunted the edge of primordial loyalties; their lying low for the time being only gave a false sense of security to the national leadership. These particularist interest were temporarily subsumed in the strong current of nationalist aspirations aimed at dislodging foreign domination. But they were not dead by any reckoning.¹⁶

Apart from this, poverty tended to dull any nationalistic fervour in these states. "...it would be futile to expect these deprived and degraded sections to show strong attachment to a theoretical construct the nation."¹⁷ Thus in the third world nations persists the strong hold of traditions, parochialism and religion which are often at odds with the modern secular nation state as envisaged by westernized or western thinkers. While modernity creates a nation (often an image of and successor to the colonial state) tradition draws its sustenance from 'givens' like religion, family, kinship group.

In spite of the heterogeneous composition of these nations which encourages pluralism they go through the formality of inventing a national identity as nations

presupposed homogeneity and commonality. The formerly colonized Australia is obliged to fabricate an authentic identity for itself even though this identity is a chamera as Richard White argues in Inventing Australia

There was no moment when for the first time Australia was seen as it really was. 'There is no real Australia waiting to be uncovered. A national identity in an invention. There is no point in asking whether one version of this essential Australia is truer than another because they are all intellectual constructs neat, tidy, comprehensible and necessarily false. They have all been artificially imposed upon a diverse landscape and population and a variety of untidy social relationships, attitudes and emotions.'¹⁸

Similarly India was an image, a signifier, signifying different things for different people. Men have imagined invented India with an eye as it were to their own culture and circumstances. Thus India is not something tangible 'out there' but a compound of fantasies, dreams and imaginations. An Indological discourse is therefore not a veridic discourse but an arena in which a conversation is going on between two images: the image one has of India and the image one has of one's own society. India as a discursive field is marked by a complex welter of images, many of them contradictory, but which could be selectively used to support various versions of Imagined Indias.

Even before the colonial attempt to hold together the vast diversity of India in its imperial embrace many attempt

were made to attribute a unified essence to its heterogeneity with the help of the great tradition.¹⁹ S.C. Dube writes about the propensity to selectively marshal icons from the great tradition and present them as pan-Indian essence:

Cultural consciousness in India suffers from elite bias and projects the essence and the dominant themes of Indian culture as they are portrayed in the sacred texts... This culture awakening has been generated by the discovery of Indian culture by those coming from the west, it lacks historicity and analytical depth. The stereotypes created by pioneering orientalists and Indologists have moulded the vision and thought patterns in respect of the ideational and structural dimensions of Indian culture... When we speak of Indian culture we often envision in it a degree of unity and integration that is really not there.²⁰

In Europe the great tradition was broken down, secularized and nationalized by the nationalist movements. The sacred Latin language held together various disparate local cultures of Europe and made the religious community of Christendom 'imaginable'. According to Benedict Anderson "the fall of latin exemplified a larger process in which the sacred old languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized and territorialized."²¹ In the words of Timothy Brennan, "the rise of vulgate tongues... dismantled the pernicious imperial unities of Rome and Church, such that imperialism itself was seen as a forced or artificial unity of distinct and independent cultures."²²

In India however, the great tradition was co-opted by the colonial state and protected from the local pressures and the fate of the European great tradition. As the little traditions were locally circumscribed only the great tradition could lay a claim to embrace the concept of India. The great tradition was seized and invoked by those who sought to imagine India though this tradition of high textuality though widespread, was elite, intricate and often alien to many as McKim Marriot notes:

The most authoritative or top layers of the civilization tended often to be most widespread; these 'greater traditions' were often also the most specialized, being embodied in archaic language or complex ritual forms that required professionals to preserve and apply them and to translate their contents into forms intelligible to the layman. Conversely the lower layers of the civilization - the vernacular cultures or the little traditions tended to be the most diversified from place to place.

The Bharat or India of the great tradition of brahmanic ideology was a construct many parts of which influenced the Orientalists' consideration of India which in turn provided the grist to the mill of the nationalist.²⁴ According to Sudipto Kaviraj "Indianness... is also an historical construct... it was European writers writing on India as a part of counter-Enlightenment movement who constructed this India and presented it to Indians looking for an identity."²⁵

Though the great tradition (where they exist) are valorised in the third world nations yet the little traditions are not easily eliminated though the homogenizing imperatives of the state demand that. Thus while for the writer from the first world the term 'nation' is an unproblematic given, for the third world various categories contest for allegiance and the nation is but one of the many focal points, though often a very modern and abstract one. For example "an India of a national community, simply did not exist before the nineteenth century" as Sudipta Kaviraj notes."²⁶

Similarly in case of Pakistan, the strong presence of various regional cultures militates against a recent national culture,) as Jameel Jalibi in Pakistan - The Identity of Culture notes 'we do have regional cultures but we do not have a national culture that unites these regional cultures in a deep spiritual bond. This is in itself a matter of serious concern for without a national culture we have no right to call ourselves a nation."²⁷ This of course does not mean that the nations of the first world have no regional culture or no tension between the region and the nation but merely that the hold of the former does not interrogate and threaten the later. In the third world countries however, "Fears that local, regional or tribal

patriotism are liable to result in the break-up of the state altogether are often well-grounded. The governments in the new states are inclined to maintain as much central control as they possibly can..."²⁸

Thus the concepts ordained by the colonialist and later taken over by the nationalists bank heavily on the great tradition and so they often remain alien to those whose mentality remain seeped in traditional ideas and local ethos. Ronald Inden makes the same remark in Imagining India,

The nationalist constructs all too easily collapse back into the position of the predominant constructs they aim to criticize... The very 'facts' which the European scholars and rulers had revealed about India had the advantage of being easily appropriated and turned against their makers...(However the nationalist's notion of) an India unified in accord with the exclusionist metaphysics of the nation-state could stand only by looking to some principle of unity that could miraculously overcome division (but could actually do that only by silently excluding or subduing other groups... This left India with a nation-state that remains ontologically, political, inaccessible to its own citizens. Its government continues to be just like its immediate British Indian ancestor, merely a neutral enforcer of unity on a moreselized society, continually in danger of being pulled by centrifugal forces.²⁹

As the nationalist superstructure was erected on the base of the colonialist one so there remains a gap between an 'imposed' state and the indigenous society. According to Asha Kaushik, in India, there remains a "hiatus between the

social and the political worlds, which was sought to be bridged by the unifying force of nationalism which re-emerged as a challenging chasm as soon as the independence was achieved. The definition of political community was now seriously hampered by another kind of ambivalence generated by conscious import and adoption of the western, political structure."³⁰

Similarly in the cultural 'hodgepodge' of Indonesia under a post-colonial but non-indigenous state (as it was a successor to the colonial one) the smooth transition to modernity was hampered, as Geertz notes in The Interpretation of Cultures,

Much of the symbol-mongering that went on under the Sukarno regime... was a half deliberate attempt to close the cultural gap between the state and society that, if not altogether created by colonial rule, had been enormously widened by it. The great crescendo of slogans, movements, monuments and demonstrations which reached a pitch of almost hysterical intensity in the early sixties was, in part anyway, designed to make the nation-state seem indigenous. As it was not indigenous, disbelief and disorder spiraled upward together, and Sukarno was destroyed, along with his regime, in the collapse that ensued.³¹

As the nation is a new concept in the new states of Asia and Africa the government remains because of its modernity "the instrument of an agent, a 'divinity' that stays beyond the reach of its people and institutions"³² according to Inden.

The study deals with four Indian novels written in English all concerning the concept of nation and nationalism. The object of inquiry is whether the writers deconstruct the dominant, monolithic definition of nation and thus posit an alternate one. To what extent do these writers reflect the post-modernist denunciation of abstract, totalizing and homogenizing essentialism, would be probed in this dissertation. An eclectic, interdisciplinary method is used to study the texts, very often "against the grain" as it is assumed that a plurality of interpretation can exist for a text and there is no call to canonize one as the only true one and thus establish a hierarchy in the galaxy of meanings.

The term 'third world' has come under severe criticism lately and if the term implies homogenizing all these nations to a similarity which is rare even among the European nations then the charge is justified. However a study which deals with nationalism, tradition and modernity has to rely on this term albeit with a caveat that 'all is not same in the third world'. While nationalism is the most important political phenomenon of the modern world it has rarely been accorded the importance it deserves by literary critics. The metropolitan and imported notion of nation has been accepted by the nationalist writers who have in fact invented and constructed a past which is extrapolated from

the modern idea of a nation.

The modernist, structuralist and nationalist world-view was a great one for homologies and unities which encompassed the wide diversity into a single structure. However behind the grand narratives the postmodernist, poststructuralist thinking has revealed the "heterogeneity, contradictions, fragmentation and differences". Behind History lie several histories, gaps disorder and fissures. This study by teasing them out shows that the received notions are often contested in the post-colonial Indian novels written in English.

The modernist impulse in literacy criticism sought sameness, universals and homologies. However for those dissenting from the hegemonic western order have to "take a leap from the era of locating 'universals' and 'identity' to the era of recognizing and elaborating difference",³³ in the words of Gurbhagat Singh who calls for jettisoning the "systematic, monolithic, or universalist modernist approach with a Platonic hangover to obliterate or minimize difference."³⁴

The four political novels selected for scrutiny deal with the concept of nation and nationalism. The concern, by no means new to the Indian novel in English has turned into an obsession in recent years and this is evident from the

fact that three out of the four novels under study were written in the same decade. Though R.K. Narayans Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) may seem at first sight as belonging to a different class, yet written in what Selig H. Harrison calls the most dangerous decade' it reflects the 'nationalism of mourning' just as its distant successors. Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1980), Upamanyu Chatterjee's English August: An Indian Story (1988) and Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines (1988) are the other texts which would be studied in this dissertation.

END NOTES

1. Quoted from "Modern Hatred" in Frontline (June 18, 1993., Vol. 10 No.12), p.101.
2. Shiv Vishvanathan "On the Annals of Laboratory State' in Ashis Nandy (ed.) Science, Hegemony and Violence: A Requiem for Modernity (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1988), p.279.
3. Ibid., p.280.
4. Irving Louis Horowitz, Three Worlds of Development (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.87.
5. Edward Shils in Clifford Geertz (ed.) Old Societies and New States (Delhi: Amerind, 1963), p.3.
6. Richard White, Inventing Australia (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1987), p.ix.
7. David Apter, "Political religions in the new states" in Clifford Geertz (ed.) Old Societies and New States (Delhi: Amerind, 1963), p.80.
8. Ibid., p.111.
9. Timothy Brennan, Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of Nations (Hampshire: MacMilan, 1989), p.4.
10. Jean Franco, "The Nation as Imagined Community" in A.H. Veesser (ed.), The New Historicism (New York, Routledge, 1989), p.205.
11. Horowitz, p.6.
12. J.E. Goldthorpe, The Sociology of the Third World: Disparity and Development (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.248.
13. Conor Criuse O'Brien in "What rights should minorities have" in Ben Whitaker (ed.) Minorities - A Question of Human Rights, (London: Peragon, 1984), pp.15-16. "The New State in Asia and Africa", Marc Weller writes in Breaking up is hard to do New Statesman and Society, (23rd Aug. 1991) Vol.4, No. 165 "regarded it (self-determination) as a one way ticket to independence. Once the metropolitan countries had been ejected, the principle was no longer applicable to ethnic

minorities trapped within the former colonial boundaries. The states of the third world denounced their borders as having resulted from evil colonialism but they still proceeded to defend them vigorously."

14. Geertz, p.22.
15. S.C. Dube, Tradition and Development (Delhi; Vikas, 1990), p.202
16. Ibid., p.202.
17. Ibid., p.204.
18. White, p.VIII.
19. According to McKim Marriot, "a consciousness of common culture then could exist only by reference to the top of the civilization and then only to a limited extent". See Geertz (ed.), p.31.
20. Dube, p.57.
21. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, (London:Verso), p.
22. Brennan, p.45.
23. In Geertz, p.
24. "Indian nationalism was proposed by and articulated and represented the ideological intent and political interest of cosmopolitan (read: pan Indian) 'bilingual' intellectual. The intellectual sought give their vision of the Indian nation, a political form that derived more after than not, from colonial-imperial notions of India". V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai in "Interrogating India: A Dravidian perspective" in Seminar, 387, November 1991, p.41.
25. Sudipto Kaviraj "Imaginary Institution of India" in Chatterjee, Pandey (eds.) Subaltern Studies, Vol.VII (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992), p.14.
26. Ibid., p.16.
27. Jameel Jalebi, Pakistan - The Identity of Culture, (Delhi, Alfa and Alfa) p. 46.

28. J.E. Goldthrope, p.253.
29. Ronald Inden, Imagining India, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p.191.
30. Asha Kaushik, Politics, Aesthetics and Culture: A Study of Indo-Anglian political novel, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988), p.75.
31. Quoted in Vincent Pecora "The Limits of Local Knowledge" in A.H. Veesser (ed.) The New Historicism, (New York: Routledge, 1989), p.250.
32. Inden., p.197-98.
33. Gurbhagat Singh (ed.) Differential Multilogue: Comparative Literature and National Literatures (Delhi: Ajanta, 1991), p.
34. Ibid., p.11.

Chapter 2

HOME AND THE WORLD

"Waiting for Mahatma makes one thirsty."

Waiting for the Mahatma

In R.K. Narayan's world the more the things change the more they remain the same. The South Indian town of Malgudi, in spite of the accretions of modernity, remains basically attached to its traditional moorings. The idea of a nation transcending the boundaries of Malgudi seems new-fangled and alien to many common folk in Malgudi. Modern ideas in Malgudi are either rejected or subverted in most of Narayan's novels. "Almost all of Narayan's novels", Meenakshi Mukherjee notes, "are constructed around the pattern that can be formulated as 'Order - Dislocation of order - Reintegration of order'. In a way which is almost puranic, Narayan sees change not as a fact of history but merely as an illusion, a bubble that must sooner or later burst with the normal order of life reasserting itself."¹

For example, in The Man-eater of Malgudi (1961) though the westernized outsider Vasu threatens the traditional pieties of Malgudi, yet he carries within himself, as it were, the seeds of self-destruction which would leave the old sanctified order unvanquished, without yielding place to the new. Thus the "extraordinarily fortunate and secure

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113



position"² of the apparantly apolitical Nataraja the press manager and the "great feeling of security and stability"³ of his world are maintained.

The demon who threatens to demolish the venerated order is programmed to self-destruct and conversely the traditionalists lead a charmed life and can survive all ordeals. Thus while demons like Ravana, Mahisa and Bhasmasura⁴ are born to lose as they are opposed to the traditional system, Kumar the elephant is never in any danger as "our ancestors" have shown through the parable of Gajendra that "an elephant has a protected life and no one can harm it."⁵

According to V.S. Naipaul Narayan elaborates a myth and moral in all his stories which sees Indian history as a series of invasions (Mughals, British, Chinese) which are thwarted, paradoxically, by the apparently supine and passive India.⁶ As a fabulist, Narayan preaches a sentimental religious nationalism. The active foreign aggressor is neutralized by the local, traditional forces. The contest between tradition and modernity is infact no contest in the world of Narayan as the dice are loaded against the latter from the beginning.

If Malgudi represents the traditional order, Vasu

stands for the 'rational', modern and westernized world-view. His very entrance breaks down the time-honoured regimen of Nataraj's way of life. "He came forward practically tearing aside the curtain, an act which violated the sacred traditions of the press."⁷ His championing of Nehru links him to the modern secular Indian nationalism and scienticism many of whose steps dented the traditionally accepted concepts. Vasu according to Viney Kirpal "represents a secular westernized Indian or modern man in general. He invades the peace of Malgudi threatening its traditional and religious life and violating the mores of the people."⁸ Vasu's mockery of the religious rites of the people of Malgudi is similar to Nehru's impatience with religion. Garuda, who to Nataraj is the vehicle of Vishnu is to Vasu a commodity to be sold in the market by being scientifically packaged. For Vasu all that is sacred melts into air:

Don't you realise that it is sacred? That it is the messenger of God Vishnu?

I want to try and make Vishnu use his feet now and then.⁹

This rationalistic attitude towards religion links him with Nehru's as reflected in The Discovery of India

Religion as I saw it practiced did not attract me.. It seemed to be closely associated with superstitions practices and dogmatic beliefs and behind it lay a

method of approach of life's problem which was certainly not of science. There was an element of magic about it, an uncritical credulousness, a reliance upon the supernatural...¹⁰

Vasu stands for "culture" as opposed to "nature" which he rivals professionally. "We have constantly to be rivaling Nature at her own game",¹¹ he tells Nataraj. His impatience with nature, past and religious ceremonies echoes Nehruvian modernism:

They (religions) have tried to imprison truth in set forms and dogmas and encouraged ceremonials and practices... Instead of encouraging curiosity and thought they have preached a philosophy of submission to nature, to established churches, to a prevailing social order...¹²

If Vasu and Nehru are connected to the modern scientific temper they are also allied to the emergence of the modern Indian state, which valorized the use of science and economy to undermine the local, cultural and traditional barriers as posed by places like Malgudi. Ashis Nandy notes the nexus between science and the Indian nation-state:

The Indian state representing the wishes of a powerful section of the nationalist movement and being lead in the early years of independence by Jawahar Lal Nehru, a gentleman Fabian steeped in the nineteenth-century vision of human liberation through science... ensured that the scientific estate had a direct, privileged access to the state... Nehru, the modern elites which gathered around him, and the Indian state began to build science as a major source of justification for the Indian state as well as for their political dominance.¹³

Though Vasu's claims of being a democrat are suspect, he uses the rhetoric of democracy and modernity. "Don't make yourself so superior to the rest of us. These are the days of democracy, remember."¹⁴

Thus in the novel there is a binary opposition between modernity, Indian nationalism, Nehru and Vasu on the one hand and tradition, Malgudi, and Nataraj on the other. The notice announcing the completion of the poet's oeuvre which coincides with the spring festival at Krishna temple brings out the two antagonistic strands in the novel. The announcement written by Sen the journalist describes "the greatness of the tale of Krishna and our cultural traditions" which is pitted against the Nehru government on which Sen makes a few "spicy" remarks.¹⁵

The political stand which Narayan takes is in favour of the local, religious culture as opposed to the impersonal, modern, bureaucratic and largely western model government, reiterates a dichotomy noted in India and in many third world countries by Geertz, and Inden, as we saw earlier.

Similarly the Malgudi poet accuses the Government of failing to recognize "real literature" and of wasting funds by giving awards to every "Tom, Dick and Harry."¹⁶

Nataraj represents local values and regional virtues

which are deeply rooted in the soil of Malgudi as opposed to Vasu who is deracinated and trans-regional i.e. national. If the former can be seen as a symbol of feudal values, the latter stands for the bourgeois values. While Vasu can "nestle every where, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere" the culturally circumscribed Nataraj "might eat all the buns of the world but without a handful of rice and sauce my wife made could never feel convinced that I had taken anything,"¹⁸ Vasu's lust for lucre and power takes him to places as far apart as Junagarh and Mempi Forests.

Whereas Vasu would rather create a grand narrative of nation which overlooks regional differences depriving the people of an autonomous vision and a way of life, Nataraj speaks for letting people alone, without imposing a scientific and hence modern culture on them. "You should leave others alone; it will make for happiness all around",¹⁹ he says.

If the Maneater of Malgudi showed the triumph of the tradition over modernity, Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) shows the uneasy transition between the two. It strips the nationalist movement of its halo and rhetoric in order to describe the reaction of the common people. The novel depicts the apathy and indifference of the ordinary citizens

who are more involved in local issues than the grand matters of national concerns. Just as Bertold Brecht in Mother Courage's and her Children, deconstructs the glorious ideals of the holy war to reveal the mercenary motives that underline it "(To hear the big chaps talk, they wage war from fear of God and for all things bright and beautiful, but just look at it, and you will see they are not so silly; they want a good profit out of it")²⁰ so too does Narayan reveal mundane motives behind nationalist movement.

When Mahatma Gandhi arrives in Malgudi, Sriram (whose father had died defending the empire in Mesopotamia) goes to attend a meeting and gets a glimpse of a girl called Bharati, who is a follower of Gandhi. Sriram the school dropout spontaneously decides to follow suit as this would give him an excuse for being close to her. If the love-lorn Sriram's patriotism is initially motivated by extraneous factors, for many others too it is seasonal concept as it is observed in the meeting that "Some people conveniently adopts patriotism when Mahatma arrives."²¹ Many join the nationalist movement to advance their careers. Sriram's teacher thinks that he is a "smart fellow" in spite of his poor marks, because he has aligned with Gandhi. He advises him to "join the Congress, work for the country, you will go far" (35).

However, the diversity of opinions and motives are channelized and mobilized towards uniformity, unity and discipline by the Mahatma. "I want to see unity it. I want you all to do it with a single mind"(27). Gandhi's desire to see and seek unity, similitudes and homologies connects him to the modernist project which claims to master mega-narratives by getting at their alleged essences and centres. According to Lyotard, for example, the grand narratives of modernity built up a system of totalative view of life that assimilated all differences.²² The modernist impulse must seek unity and order in order to master the universe and cannot rest content with uncertainties. Bernard-Henri Levy argues that only moderns were able to invent the idea of empire because "they no longer believed in nature or geography but in the infinite, uniform and homogenous space reduced to a single law of identical temporality."²³

In literature too, modernism looks for an image of total order, according to Alan Wilde: "Whether the image is of another world (Byzantium) or of some symbolically sufficient enclave in this one (Howards End) or only temporarily realized (Lawrence 'star balance', Woolf's lighthouse) etc. the emphasis falls on unity in which all disunity is comprehended and dissolved." ²⁴

Gandhi's modernist "attempt at the universal",²⁵

according to V.S. Naipaul made him "an oddity among the established politicians, to whom 'Indian' was only a word, each man with his own marginal and caste power base."²⁶ In fact, "the modernity (in India) of so much of his (Gandhi's) thought"²⁷ was so alien to the masses that it had to be "submerged"... in the end by old India."²⁸

Gandhi's radical modernist reforms and his championing of the cause of the 'untouchables' pits him in opposition to the traditionalist grandmother for whom "Mahatma was one who preached dangerously, who tried to bring untouchables into temples and who involved people in difficulties with the police."²⁹ This is in consonance with the argument of Sankaran Nair, a liberal contemporary of Gandhi, that "There is scarcely any item in Gandhi's programme which is not a complete violation of every thing preached by the foremost sons of India till 1919."³⁰

Narayan shows the chasm between the Gandhian discourse and the common people of Malgudi. They are puzzled by the Gandhian slogans Sriram is told to paint all over the place. 'What does it say sir?' they ask him, unable to imagine the governance of the country without the British. "What will happen sir, if they leave? who will rule the country?" For the villagers the future independence of the country can only be visualized in terms of the past, with the Mahatma

supplanting the British Emperor. "Will Mahatmaji become our Emperor, sir"? they query.³¹

Many villagers are critical of the "seditious programmes" of the nationalist, when not indifferent to it. The teacher for example, counsels status quoism and quietism instead of new-fangled ideas which irritate the 'sircar'. 'What we need in this country is not a 'Quit programme but a 'Quiet India' (104). Later the master states that he does not want the British to leave, a sentiment which wins the approval of a "part of the crowd". A carter flays the politicians, "Gandhi folk", for stirring up trouble for the common people. "These politicians, Gandhi folk they wont leave anyone in peace. Why do you come and trouble us here"?(106).

Sriram's argument that the timber merchant should not strip the Indian forest for a war which Britain is fighting fails to move the rich man for whom personal wealth is more important than abstract and distant ideals. In fact Sriram himself starts feeling the hollowness of his rhetoric in the face of rigid resistance to change. "You are no doubt making a lot of money, but it is worth nothing unless you develop some spirit of - of'. He fumbled for words. He wanted to say, 'National Service', or 'Patriotism' but he was tired of these expressions, they smacked of platform speeches ³²

However Sriram goes on writing "Quit India" in a machine-like manner which the loyalists amend by adding a 'Don't' to his slogan.

Narayan's portrayal of the Englishman gives the lie to the nationalist image of the Other. After a hard climb, when Sriram meets Mathieson, the British plantation owner, he turns out to be an innocuous and amiable man unlike the armed Dorai with bulldogs he had imagined. Mathieson offers him orange juice to drink which he in spite of his protestations, drinks. If "waiting for Mahatma makes one thirsty"(25), the Englishman's orange juice refreshes the mind and the spirit: "The passage of the juice down his throat was so pleasant that he felt he could not interrupt it under any circumstance. He shut his eyes in ecstasy. For a moment he forgot politics, Bharati, strife and even Mahatmaji"(113).

In Solor, the shopkeeper who sells English biscuits is impervious to Sriram's appeal to patriotism and pride: "If you have any pride as an Indian you will throw the entire stock in the gutter and won't let even a crow peck at it". (177). Sriram's histrionics are also of no help to affect a boycott of the unpatriotic shopkeeper. On the contrary he makes a pleasant spectacle of himself for the people to enjoy - "It seemed to him that the people here liked to see

him lying there on the ground and were doing everything to keep him down"(121). When he is unable to wake the people from their unpatriotic slumber, an acquiescent resignation comes over him:

All his activity seemed to him meaningless. He might as return to the cosy isolation of Kabir street... What did it matter whether the shopman sold British biscuits or Scandinavian ones or Chinese crackers or French butter? It was only a matter of commerce between a conscienceless tradesman and a thick-skinned public. All this sitting in the mud and bothering and fighting was uncalled for (124).

In letter to Gandhi he reveals his disenchantment with the political and nationalist apathy of the people:

I do not know why we should bother about these folk. They do not seem to deserve anything we may do for them... They will thank us for leaving them alone, rather than telling them how to win Swaraj. They simply don't care. At this very moment I find them engrossed in preparing for a loyalists' meeting (126).

Narayan's picture of the villagers' indifference to modern nationalism is similar to what ^{Worsley} found in some Latin American countries where the

peasantry... clung to the ancient solidarities of ethnicities and class. In Gallica they rejected the nationalist intelligentsia even when the latter advocated abolition of serfdom, just as the Italian peasants rejected nationalist advocates of agrarian reforms because of their age-old suspicion of upper-class gentlemen who were bearer of those new ideas.³³

Encountering lassitude all around him, Sriram's patriotic fervour wanes: "He didn't seem to think he owed any duty to

the country"(136). The only reason he wished the British to leave was that he could then marry Bharati and return to Kabir Street. By the time he completes his jail term, he had already lost his patriotic aim (200).

However the ultimate alienation of the Gandhian ideals from the people is depicted by the fierce communal violence that breaks out even during Gandhi's lifetime. The dream of Gandhi dies much before he himself is felled by the violent forces of divisiveness and revanchism whose import he had tried to curb, control and even deny. Gandhi's sentimental vision of a non-violent homogenous and tolerant society could be for many only a utopia devoutly to be wished and worshipped for.

Gandhi's modern nationalist programme required a denial of differences among cultures, religions and peoples. According to Ashis Nandy

Certainly he (Gandhi) was no cultural relativist. In the thousands of pages of his collected works, there is hardly a sentence to suggest that he believed in fundamental or irreconcilable differences between cultures. And there is positive evidence that he put all his faith in universal as distinct from cross-cultural forms of social theory. The assumption of universal values was so deeply ingrained in him than civilizations for him always cut across conventional boundaries of cultures.³⁶

However for micro-discourses based on past traditions and ethnicities such a stance seemed to threaten their very

existence. His well-intentioned belief in the truth of all religions, according to Ainslei Embree

had the wholly unintended effect of alienating Muslims whose fundamental dogma was an explicit denial of Gandhi's exclusiveness... the estrangement of the Muslims sprang partly at least from Gandhi's inability which he shared with most Hindus of understanding that Muslims, like Christians find their identity (or in religious terms their salvation) through membership in a community that is by definition the guardian and arbiter of truth. Their ultimate loyalties must be to this community, neither to the swaraj of Gandhi nor to the secular democracy of Nehru.³⁷

In the novel Narayan shows Gandhi engaged in denying differences in a bid to create a monological nation.

While Narayan salutes and adulates Gandhi as a person, his relationship with Gandhi's followers as exemplified by his characterization is ambiguous to say the least. The commitment of Sriram to the cause is deeply suspect and he is shown to be a rather shallow character, "not having any definite aim" (19). His grandmother, considering how 'well' he had fared in his examination, wishes that he had inherited his grandfather's brain so that he would not behave as if he was half his age(8). The traditional granny who dissuades S.riram from joining the Gandhi entourage is described by an old woman as a wise speaker, whose conduct should be emulated by the girls of today (13).

Granny and Gandhi represent the two poles of orthodoxy and new-fangled ideas. For Granny the canvas chair is of no use because she believes "this is some kind of leather probably cow hide and I can't pollute myself by sitting on it" (20). She would not let the "scavenger approach nearer than ten yards and habitually adopted a bullying tone while addressing him"(31). She and others look at Gandhi as one who has come to destroy the settled and accepted way of life and are sceptical of the Gandhi business. The response of the jaggery shop owner to the donation seeking campaign of Gandhi is cynical - "who will not collect money if there are people to give"? The real object is to tap the excess money which people can part with, he implies and hints that he parted with his rather reluctantly: "I too had to give some cash. We have to. We can't refuse"(24).

Many vignettes in the novel show the chasm between the Gandhian discourse and the common people of Malgudi. Indeed at times Gandhi reveals an impatience at the people's 'indiscipline' and an urge to dominate them and dictate to them. When the crowd questions the programme schedule Gandhi tells them to abide by it as it has his consent irrespective of whoever has framed it: "Never mind by whom. It has my approval. This is how it stands... You will have to listen to what he (the chairman) has to say because I very much wish to"(42). Gandhi's stress on order, uniformity

and unity is an index of his distance from the masses.

According to Ranajit Guha, Gandhi

and the indigenous bourgeois for whom he spoke shared with the colonialists a prejudice common to all elites in regarding any mobilization of the masses on their own initiative as indiscipline. In this sense, the voice that asked the questions about disciplining the habitually indisciplined though not quite the same as sergeant-major's was still the voice of one who stood outside and above the ranks he wanted to bring to order.³⁶

In this meeting Gandhi tries to play down the linguistic difference and concentrates instead on the 'national' issues of the struggle between the 'the Indian people' and colonialism.

He addresses his South Indian audience in Hindi but it is translated into Tamil and not in English as the latter is "the language of our rulers. It has enslaved us"(27). By positing English as a common enemy Gandhi seeks to create unified community as "it is always possible to bind a considerable number of people in love so long as there are other people to receive the manifestation of aggressiveness."³⁷

In contrast to the fictionalized and simplified account of Gandhi meeting in this novel, we have other historical accounts that document complexity and dissent. Selig Harrison in India: The Most Dangerous Decade, recounts

Gandhi's 1946 visit to Madras which was a 'fiasco not uncharacteristic of north Indian encounters below the Vindhyas'.³⁸ Gandhi's meeting in Madras was interrupted as an Andhra man demanded that the his speech should be translated into Telugu too and Gandhi declared that "There would (henceforth) be no translation of his speech in Tamil or Telgu. Those who did not care to know Hindustani should afterward gather from newspaper or from friends". On the second day he tried to induce his audience to join in singing a prayer song. According to Harrison, "Gandhi recited the song in advance, complete with instructions on how to handclap to the rhythm, but the bulk of the crowd sat in uncomprehending silence..."³⁹ Thus Narayan's account seems to be too idealized even though Narayan does not shy away from pointing out the vast gap between the populace and Gandhi in many matters. For example, the young untouchable child comes to Gandhi only when he addresses him in Tamil 'Ingava' and not in Hindi - "Av-av" (47).

In the Gandhian discourse there is constant emphasis on discipline, collectivity and unity in order to overcome anarchic and divisive impulse. Thus Gandhi calls on people to clap vigorously and rhythmically to demonstrate the unity and hence the nationalism. According to Ashis Nandy, "in an unorganized society Gandhi had to stress collective action

as a means of politicization and nation building. He therefore emphasized sociality at the expense of individuality." ⁴⁰ Likening the assembled people to an army, he tells them to strive to discipline themselves: "An army is always in training and keeps itself in good shape by regular drill and discipline... an army has to practice (28). On the one hand Gandhi assumes the presence of an India which is already bequeathed and 'given' and on the other hand he is consciously trying to fashion an 'India' which is unified only through practice, training, discipline. On the one hand there is the concept of Mother India to which English will always be an alien tongue and Tamil and Hindi 'our sweet languages' and on the other hand is the conscious creating of a nation through effort, discipline etc. an effort which for Nehru became a preoccupation and profession as he candidly said "My profession is to foster the unity of India"⁴¹ In order to strengthen the national super structure Gandhi denies the presence of any division of difference within it "Bapujee forbade us to refer to anyone in terms of religion as Muslims, Hindu or Sikh (244).

The hold of this constructed Indian identity is but tenuous and precarious on the folks of Malgudi. They are apt to revert back to the age old inherited way of thinking rather than the acquired one. For example the first response

of Sriram when he wants to marry Bharati is not a romantic but a traditional one "How old are you"? What caste are you? Where is your horoscope? Are you free to marry? (22). Before enrolling as a Gandhian volunteer he had almost thought of dropping it all in order to stick to the well trodden path chosen by his granny. He had almost turned away from the company of Gandhi and Bharati "his mind completely made-up to earn the concrete goodwill of a granny rather than the doubtful and strange favours of bigwigs like the Mahatma and snobs like Bharati"(65).

Later when he visits granny after having joined Gandhi, he feels guilty and sad at having broken ties with his grandmother: "He suddenly felt depressed at the sight of it all. He was oppressed with the thought that he was leaving these old associations, that this was really a farewell party. He was going into an unknown life right from here"(84-85). Hence Sriram's commitment to the nationalist cause is never deep. Bharati's and Gorpad's commitment may be traced to personal reasons rather than ideological ones since both of them lost their fathers in the hands of British.

Many of those who espouse nationalist causes are governed by not so noble considerations. The Chairman Natash for example replaces the pictures of the English royalty

with those of nationalist leaders when Gandhi enters his house. Fully aware of "Gandhi's bias towards Bhagawat Gita"(45) he manages to procure a picture of Krishna discoursing to Arjuna on Bhagawat Gita. The elevation of Gita as as discourse par excellence by Gandhi was itself decreed by nationalistic reasons as Mckim Marriot notes.

The most prominent universal and accessible but not necessarily the most sacred or authoritative items were often chosen for emphasis by political leaders... Certain parts of the popular epic literature and particularly one ethical text from the Mahabharate - the Bhagavad Gita - were exalted beyond the hundreds of contending holy books. The Gita gained something like the status of a unified Hindu "Bible" where none had existed before.⁴²

Thus there is an element of artifice in the nationalist project which make people governed by local, and regional affiliations, regard it with suspicion. For example when Sriram arrives in the national capital of Delhi, he finds himself among an alien group who "seemed to live in a different world. He spoke Tamil and English and they understood Hindi, Hindustani, Urdu or whatever it might be"(234). A group of men looking for Muslims "to be thrown out of the running train" in vengeance shows that the non-violent goals of nationalism were far from being accepted by many. Cut off from Malgudi Sriram feels that he is in a "strange, fantastic world". He in fact prefers the South Indian prison to an independence where "the human voice

conveyed nothing but jabber"(235).

Unlike Narayan, writers influenced by the western model see a simple reflection of the unidirectional western nationalism in India. Many Indian historians, according to Nirad Chaudhuri "try to represent it (nationalistic movement) as a planned and continuous movement for national independence and glorify the active phases as acts of rebellion brought out by the volition of the leaders. The nationalistic movement was no such thing."⁴³ The nationalistic movement was not an awakening of sleeping entity but a valorisation of one above a multiciplity of others." Indian freedom movement must be thought of less expressing the aspiration and mobilizing the energies of an already existing entity and more as a force of ideas and organization attempting to create that entity."⁴⁴

Narayan's reading of history with its emphasis on localism, contradictions and differences seems to be close to that of the New Historicism and the project of the Subaltern Studies group. The studies of the latter have shown that "in the course of nationalist struggles involving popular mobilization the masses often put their own interpretation on the aims of these movements and proceeded to act them out. Sometimes... their actions were in violent contradiction to the stated goals and methods of the

national leadership." ⁴⁵ In our discussion of the novel we have seen that Narayan brings out the reluctance of the people to move towards modern, untried goals and the pitfalls and pangs it presents to those who want to galvanize people into action.

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Chapter 3

THINGS FALL APART

"....he learnt that India - like radium - had been 'discovered' by the Europeans."

Midnight's Children

With Midnight's Children¹ one notices a flight towards internationalism leaving behind the close connection with soil, region and tradition which had preoccupied writers like Raja Rao and Narayan. If for Raja Rao and Narayan, Kanthapura and Malgudi represent the unchanging, organic societies, Rushdie's post-modernist India is replete with 'cracks', complexities and changes. The modernity of nation is accepted and there is no effort to connect it, as Raja Rao does, to an authentic indigenous past. According to Mark Williams, "for Rushdie, nations have become so open that they are unstable as political facts and as concepts".² While Narayan uses a small town's perspective to interrogate the grand concept of India, Rushdie uses the "post-modernist obsession with the fragmentation of contemporary cultures"³ to perform the same task.

The dominant theme in Raja Rao's Kanthapura is that of a community united in its struggle against the 'red-man's' - government. In The Maneater of Malgudi this solidarity is displayed to protect and preserve the age-old ceremonies. In

Waiting for the Mahatama there is a collective reluctance to move towards modern nationalism. In spite of certain dissenters like Bhatta the overall picture in these novels is that of consensus and unity, though at local level. But in Rushdie, gaps, differences and fissures dominate.

While Raja Rao and Narayan concentrate on local and village level happenings,⁴ Rushdie tries to embrace an entire sub-continent and its forty-odd years of history within its narrative ("Is this an Indian disease this urge to encapsulate the whole of reality? Worse: am I infected too?")⁵. With this panoptic vision, tensions present beyond the level of village emerge which had been blacked out by the 'parochial' vision of Narayan. Rushdie is thus a 'national' and hence a modern writer compared to the 'local' and hence traditional writers like Narayan and Raja Rao.

India for Rushdie is something 'created' and 'invented' and not a 'given', as he says "a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which although it had five thousand years of history... was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land..."(129).

For Raja Rao and Narayan, Kanthapura and Malgudi

represent organic communities where traditions are venerated, though beyond their boundaries lie modern ideas which seek to disrupt close-knit societies. In Rushdie's world, organic communities, certainties and close connections rarely exist. Instead there is a scepticism, a distrust of the world created by the politician, which is antithetical to the open world created by the artist. According to him, "if the writers leave the business of making pictures of the world to the politicians, it will be one of history's great and most abject abdication."⁶

Unlike Kanthapura and most of Narayan's novels, which devolve mainly around and village or a small town, Midnight's Children leaps over various urban centers to settle in the rootless city of Bombay which was quite literally a creation of the British.

Though for Rushdie, India is a modern concept, yet the pre-nationalist longings do persist and compete with the modern, secular and pluralistic concept of the nation. While the modern nationalist project tried to combat the 'backward looking myths' with the 'progressive' ideas and science', the task was not an easy one as "myth is a fundamental component of human thought. One has only to consider... the power of divided historical origin and cultural traditions to set modern communities - in Ireland

or Israel, Sri Lanka or the Lebanon tearing themselves apart to see that myth has lost neither its imaginative purchase nor its living power as a historical force today.⁷

The picture of India Rushdie paints is not devoid of these pressures, and thus differs from the idealized portrait assumed by the politicians. The children of India's independence

...however magical, are not immune to their parents; and as the prejudices and world views of adults began to take over their minds, I found children from Maharashtra loathing Gujratis and fair skin northerners reviling Dravidian "blackies"; there were religious rivalries; and class entered our councils. The rich children turned up their noses at being in such lowly company; Brahmins began to feel uneasy at permitting even their thoughts to touch the thoughts of untouchables...(306).

Rushdie's India is riven apart by intra-national loyalties which interrogate the myth of organic nation to which all citizens must kowtow. For the nationalists the only legitimate identity is that of a citizen of a state; other affiliations, if any, are always suspect as the nationalist Eric Williams declared at the independence of Trinidad and Tobago, "There must be no Mother India for those whose ancestors came from India... There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origin... There can be no Mother England and dual loyalties... The nation like an individual can have only one Mother. The only Mother we

recognize is Mother Trinidad and Tobago.⁸ For the nationalist the individual is no longer definable as embedded in a complex of multiple loyalties but in terms of a single one, namely his nationality.

However the tension between modernity and primordiality cannot be wished away by a politicians decree. In the new states of Asia and Africa, according to Geertz, "the tension between primordial sentiment and civil politics probably cannot be entirely dissolved. The power of the "givens' of place, tongue, blood, looks and way of life to shape an individual's notion of who, at bottom, he is and with whom he indissolubly belongs, is rooted in the non-rational foundations of personality."⁹

In India too the pre-colonial legacy casts a long shadow over its post-colonial present, as Rushdie writes

the past of India rose up to confound her present; the new-born secular state was being given an awesome reminder of its fabulous antiquity, in which democracy and votes for women were irrelevant... so that people were seized by atavistic longings and forgetting the new myth of freedom reverted to their old ways, their old regionalist loyalties and prejudices, and the body politic began to crack (294).

The nationalist attempt to transfer the allegiance of the people from the local, and the traditional to the modern and national proved an arduous task as the past cannot be ignored: "In a kind of collective failure of imagination, we

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learned that we simply could not think our way out of past" (136-37).

In Midnight's Children the nationalist-modernist camp is represented by the westernized Doctor Aadam Aziz who is pitted against Tai the locally rooted and traditional Kashmiri boatman: "Tai for changelessness opposed to Aadam for progress"(124). In the next generation the plebian Padma and Shiva act as a foil to the cosmopolitan Saleem. If Shiva stands for primitive energy, Saleem the "rich boy" stands for its lack and impotence, the antagonism is evident in Saleem' words: "I didn't like Shiva. I disliked roughness of his tongue, the crudity of his ideas" (271).

In contrast to the disintegrating and impotent Saleem is the solidity, fertility and earthiness of Padma, who represents like Shiva, the local autochthonous forces. According to Brennan she stands for the "conservative fixity of tradition"¹⁰ and is "naturally a preserver of traditions".¹¹ Governed by the logic of "what-happened-nextism", she is "jealous of written words" and of high textuality on which Saleem has been reared.

Saleem Sinai's plea for an unfissured facade to present a united front ("Do not let this happen! Do not permit the endless duality of masses and classes capital and labour,

them and us to come between us"(306) remains merely a dream. Saleem realizes that his "dream of saving the country was a thing of mirrors and smoke; insubstantial; the maunderings of a fool" (493). Saleem whose life according to Nehru is a mirror of the nation's, is himself repeatedly referred to as cracking, exploding and disintegrating:

Please believe that I am falling apart... I have begun to crack all over like an old jug... I am literally disintegrating.... I shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust (37).

The chasm between the regional and the national is indicated by Dr. Aziz's injunction to his religious wife to "forget about being a good Kashmiri girl. Start thinking of being a modern Indian woman (33).

Rushdie takes the familiar nationalist topos of identifying the nation with an individual or a mythical deity in a human form to its logical, ultimate and absurd limit. Nationalists in the third world have tried to reduce the multitudinous diversity of the nations to a set of narrow paradigms and essences which is embodied in the national type, symbol, literature and culture. The nationalist discourse is an essentialist discourse as it is based on "an idea that humans and human institutions, for example the 'individual' and the 'nation-state' are governed

by determinate natures that inhere in them in the same way that they are supposed to inhere in the entities of the natural world.¹² In the words of the nationalist Swami Vivekananda for example, "Each nation like each individual has one theme in this life, which is its center, the principle note around which every other note come to harmony".¹³ During the swadeshi movement in Bengal, the concept of Bharat Mata was invented which was said to personify the spirit of India.

Rushdie creates another myth of a modern India with Saleem standing for India only to show that it cannot sustain itself as Saleem, pummeled by too much history, is left to disintegrate into a million pieces.

Saleem Sinai is born at midnight on August 15, 1947, the moment India attains independence and thus is "mysteriously handcuffed to history," his "destinies indissolubly chained" to that of his country. According to Zagallo the schoolmaster, even Saleem's face reflects the shape of India: "In the face of these ugly ape you don't see the whole map of India?" (277). He asks and then proceeds to demonstrate the correspondences. However this Zagallesque straining at correspondences leaves out large areas which cannot be accommodated.

Standing on the threshold of modernity and tradition, midnight children occupy an ambiguous position. "They can be made to represent many things according to your point of view; they can be seen as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation, whose defeat was entirely desirable... or as the true hope of freedom" (240). Midnight's children while being Indian, also have a history of their own which causes dissensions in their solidarity. The magician's ghetto for example is racked by the problem endemic to all Indian parties. "Within the confines of the colony could be found in miniature the many divisions and dissensions which racked the (Communist) Party in the country" (476). In the world of midnight's children, "Quarrels began and the adult world infiltrated the children's; there were selfishness and snobishness and hate"(364) and "our ancient national gift for fissiparousness had found new outlets" (476).

Midnight's children are as "motley, as raucous as undisciplined as any bunch of five hundred and eighty one ten year olds" (272) united only by what Rushdie calls an "optimism... that what-we-had-in-common would finally have outweighed what-drove-us-apart" (358).

If modernity, as we saw earlier, has tried to reduce or ignore differences, what Rushdie calls 'optimism' performs

the same function in the Indian context. In Midnight's Children the optimistic belief in a unified nationhood irrupts periodically. When the British are about to leave "optimism bug" (55,58) infects Doctor Aadam Aziz who "contracted a highly dangerous form of optimism" (39) as did many others in spite of the British authorities attempt to stamp out "this virulent disease" (39).

Doctor Azia, whose nationalist friend, Mian Abdullah is responsible for spreading the "optimism epidemic", (40,44,55) starts as a Kashmiri but turns into an Indian after a bruise in the chest. The modernist doctor however remains cold to religion and is "not much of a Muslim" (40).

Rani of Cooch Nahen too is a "victim of cross cultural concerns" (46) and her skin reflects the "internationalism" of her spirit. According to Viney Kirpal, the Rani's disease "represents colonial mentality, the blind aping of the West that began with the colonization and has continued everafter.¹⁴

Likewise Nadir Khan "too suffered from the optimism disease" (47) like others of the coterie of Rani who wanted to transcend the narrow religious nationalism of Muslim League in favour of grand, secular nationalism or internationalism. "Like Aadam Aziz, like the Rani of Cooch Naheen, Nadir Khan loathed the Muslim league" (47) and

dubbed its members mad: "they are mad. Otherwise why would they want to partition India" (47).

These deracinated intellectual elites according to Rushdie, are engrossed with great projects and out of depth with reality. "In the throes of the optimism epidemic" (48) the German and Persian conversing friends of Aziz lost the idiom of the common people. And so "none of the Hummingbirds optimists were prepared for what happened. They played hit-the-spittoon, and ignored the cracks in the earth" (48).

"The disease of optimism" once again reaches epidemic proportion" when India goes to war with China and as the result of this public optimism India "never had it so good" in terms of "Emotional Integration, Industrial Peace and People's faith in the Government" (359). Just as the Hummingbird's optimists were unable to see the "cracks", so too blinded by optimism the nation is unable to see the "reefs": "Adrift in the sea of optimism, we - the nation, my parents, I floated blindly towards the reefs"(359). If in the earlier bout of optimism the nationalists were pitted against the British, now the Chinese become their new targets. "In the clutches of the optimism disease, students burned Mao Tse Tung and Chou En Lai in effigy, mobs attacked Chinese shoemakers... Burning with optimism the Government even interned Indian citizens of Chinese descent"(359).

Even among the midnight's children, optimism emerged so that "what we had in common retained the possibility of overpowering what forced us apart"(364).

A symptom of the optimism disease is the urge to hold together or the belief that one is held together in spite of differences. This "Indian disease, this urge to encapsulate" infects the "internationalist" Rani and the anti-partitionist Hummingbird. Similarly the deracinated and watered-down Muslim Aadam Aziz is infected by this malady.

Among the various changes associated with modernism, according to Edward Said are the breakdown of normal generative capacity, of long held 'natural' traditions and a religious world view. In order to compensate for this loss, a new order called 'affiliative' by Said is created.¹⁵ A by-product of this new order is the nation, supported by modernist intellectuals like Aziz. As "Aziz with a 'hole' in the middle represents the Western educated Indian caught between two cultures unable to lead an integrated life", conception of a nation which subsumes 'natural', religious or linguistic ties is congenial to him.

The optimists are the apologists of modernity, science and homogeneity and reduce the diversity to the manifestation of a unitary principle. According to the

Widow's Hand for example, "Indians are only capable of worshipping one God" (521) which is Om though there may be millions of gods but they are all forms of Om according to her.

However, in spite of the optimists' attempt to valorise continuities, cracks abound pessimism prevails and differences dominate. "Kashmiris are different... We are not like Indians, always making battles"(32) Tai the boatman says. Even Aziz initially "does not feel Indian" but after hovering in the borderlines for sometime ("he did not know whether he was Kashmiri or Indian" (124)) he throws his lot with India but "the alienness of the blue eyes remains". Tai however maintains till the end the autonomy of Kashmir, "Kashmir for the Kashmiris: that was his line".(36) He is "infuriated by India and Pakistan's struggle over his valley" and is gunned down when he protests against it.

The optimists are supremely confident of surmounting the sectarian, linguistic and religious divide, which it is assumed would wither away soon. Smitten by the optimism of youth, they refuse "to look on the dark side", where for example, men like the "fighting-cock people" lived. The Sindhi and Bengali in the muhallah both "detested the interposed Hindu. They dropped on his house from their rooftops. They hurled multilingual abuse at him... They

flung scraps of meat at his door... while he in turn paid urchins to throw stones at their windows..."(81).

In spite of the declaration of the secular state, this was not translated into practice by the people, according to Rushdie: "We are a secular state', Nehru announced, Morarji and Patel and Menon all agreed; but still Ahmed Sinai shivered..."(162). Similarly "the police in 1947 was not to be relied upon by Muslims"(80) as "This so called secular state gets some damn clever ideas"(157) in the words of Dr. Narlikar.

Apart from the ravenous Ravana gangs, religious riots, and the "mass blood-letting... where nations are washing themselves in one another's blood"(130), there are other boundaries which divide the house against itself. "Language divided us. Kerala was for speakers of Malyalam... in Karnataka you were supposed to speak Kanarese... and the amputated state of Madras known today as Tamil Nadu - enclosed aficionados of Tamil" (225). The protagonists of Marathi and Gujrati clash violently and riotously. The first of the language riots which Saleem accidentally triggers off leads to 15 deaths and over hundred wounded.

Rushdie's India is riven and racked with cracks and fissures and thus differs from the politician's India. Whereas for the former history and reality are open to

interpretations and change, for the latter it is fixed, closed and monolithic. If Rushdie revels in anarchy and difference, the politician seeks to reduce and simplify it to sameness and conformity. The hostility between the politician and the artist is shown by their attitude towards the number 1001, which is, according to Rushdie, "a number beloved of poets and detested by politicians for whom all alternate versions of the world are threats" (259).

If for the politician reality is positivistic and factual, history objective and nations with clearly defined borders and past, for Rushdie "reality is a question of perspective" (197) and version sanctified by the politician need not be the only true one. The politicians seek to maintain the status quo and often hark back to an imaginary past in order to legitimize the status quo. Nehru for example alludes to the "awakening of a soul of a nation long suppressed" (134) thus canceling history by ruling out any change in the "soul" of the nation over the years. The Widow's attempt to sterilize *Midnight's Children* can be seen as another attempt to thwart change. But for Saleem, instead of ossifying the present, "The process of revision should be constant and endless" (549).

Similarly the politicians of Pakistan try to hold on to its eastern wing and try to prevent change that is

incompatible with their interest, and "unleash the war-hounds of unity" (427) on the Bangladeshi people. Thus while the politicians try to impose unity and uniformity the artist Saleem revels in "destroying the unities and conventions"(283). Saleem for example "enters the illusion of the artist" and thinks of "the multitudinous realities of the land"(207) as grist to the mill of his imagination.

In the 'multiverse' of Saleem there is no call to elevate any version of history and reality as the only true one. Truth is often fabricated and varies from nation to nation as "Nobody, no country has the monopoly of untruth"(389). There is thus a questioning of reality and truth as presented by the politicians of which "one is supposed to swallow and digest only permitted parts of it, the halal portions of the past, drained of their redness, their blood"(64), with the result that "what's real and what true aren't necessarily the same"(90). In the topsy-turvy world of the politician nothing is real as Mr. SP Butt says "If they can change the time just like that, what's real any more? I ask you, what's true" (90).

Saleem himself is engaged in the process of "rearranging history" (312) and cutting up history to suit my nefarious purposes" (311) but his version is not foisted on others and remains his private microcosmic one only as he

says "It's a dangerous business to try and impose ones view of things on others"(254). The optimists grand dream of encompassing the heterogeneity is jettisoned infavour of local and private realities. "I shall turn away from these generalized, macrocosmic notions to concentrate upon a more private ritual" (130).

The optimistic disease of holding and encapsulating the other gives way to an inwardness, "I am coming to the conclusion that privacy, the small individual lives of men are preferable to all this macrocosmic activity"(518). The optimism of independence gives place to the doom and gloom of a shattered myth, "the nearly thirty-one year old myth of freedom is no longer what it was. New myths are needed..."(546). Whereas the optimists of Hummingbird "could ignore the cracks" Saleem later realizes that "rip tear crunch will not be defeated by a mere ceremony and optimism is a disease" (530).

According to Rushdie, the independence and freedom of the new nation was a myth as the colonial institutions and trapping persisted in the new state. In fact this was not of the pre-condition for the egress of the British rulers. For example, Methwold's Estate is "sold" to the new occupants on the condition that "the houses be bought complete with very last thing in them, that the entire contents be retained by

the new owners"(109). The transfer of Methwold's Estate with its swimming pool "the shape of British India" is an allegory for a transfer of power to "selected suitable persons". According to Viney Kirpal, "Methwold (the British) sold his estate (relinquished India) only on the condition that the economic, political framework of the newly independent country would retain the colonial structure of British time."¹⁶

Methwold not only passes on his estate to westernized elites (leading the servant Joseph D'Costa to observe that "This independence is for the rich only" (120)) but also fathers a son on Vanita who is exchanged at birth and called Saleem Sinai. Thus Methwold's legacy lives long after his departure and Saleem "finds him impossible to forget"(132). Because the colonialist Methwolds presence looms large over the national elite (Methwold's centre parting recurs in the visage of the Prime Minister) there is little cause for optimism for the common people. In the words of Brennan

...a corollary of his (Rushdie's) story is disappointment. So little improvement has been made. In fact, the central irony of his novels is that independence has damaged Indian spirits by proving that 'India' can act as abominably as the British did... he treats the heroism of nationalism bitterly and comically because it always seem to him to evolve into the nationalization demagogue of a caste of domestic sellouts and pawnbrokers.¹⁷

Rushdie's is a post-modernist assault on assumptions of unity, continuity and megasystems. Like the archaeological approach of Foucault, it highlights the contradictions and "does not aim at reducing the diversity of discourses, or at designating the unity of their totalisation but at delineating their diversity in different figures... it does not have a unificatory effect on the contrary it is multificatory,"¹⁸ This emphasis is reflected in the form of the novel which is formless and post-modernist "destroying the unities, and conventions of fine writing". If the nation longs for form and correspondences, the novel displays no such craving but goes rambling on, without inhibitions. Rushdie uses fantasy and 'magic' in order to describe a world which is complicated and multitudinous and different from that of the modernist western writer, as he remarks "if one wishes to remain an individual in the midst of the teeming multitudes, one must make oneself grotesque." (126) For a writer who has to interrogate the western concepts of class, individual and nation transposed in an alien ambience, a mode of discourse deviant to the mainstream is Rushdie, implies, imperative.

END NOTES

1. Salman Rushdie, Midnight's Children, (New York:Avon, 1982). All page references from this edition.
2. Mark Williams "The Novel as National Epic" in Bruce King (ed.) Commonwealth Novel Since 1960 (London: Macmillan, 1991), p.186.
3. Ibid., p.195.
4. According to V.S. Naipaul, "Narayans" concern had always been with the life of a small South Indian town... The writer contemplates the lower life that goes on below: small men, small schemes, big talks, united means: a life so circumscribed that it appears whole and unviolated." See India: A Wounded Civilization, (New Delhi: Vikas, 1977), p.19.
5. Rushdie, p.84.
6. Salman Rushdie "Outside the Whale" in Salman Rushdie Imaginary Homelands (New Delhi: Granta, 1991), p.100.
7. R. Samuel and P. Thompson (eds.), The Myths We Liveby, (London: Routledge, 1990), p.4.
8. Quoted in Peter Worsley, The Three Worlds, (London: Weiden field and Nicolson, 1984), p.289.
9. Clifford Geertz "The Integrative Revolution" in Gertz (ed.) Old Societies and New States (New Delhi: Amerind, rpt 1971), p.128.
10. Timothy Brennan, Salman Rushdie and the Third World (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1989), p.108.
11. Ibid., p.106.
12. Ronald Inden, Imagining India, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell; 1990), p.2. According to John Armstrong, "modern nationalist thought has sought permanent essences of national character instead of recognising the fundamental but shifting significance of boundaries". See Nation before Nationalism, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p.4.
13. Quoted in Mukesh Shrivastav, "Roads not yet forsaken" in H.S. Gill (ed.) Structures of Signification, vol.II (New Delhi: Willey Eastern, 1991), p.511.

14. Viney Kirpal, The Third World Novel of Expatriation, (New Delhi: Sterling, 1989), p.17.
15. Edward Said, The World the Text and the Critic, London: Vintage, 1991), p.17.
16. Kirpal, p.133.
17. Brennan, p.27.
18. H.S.Gill, Abelardian Semiotics and Other Essays, New Delhi: Bahri, 1989), p.234.

Chapter 4

NO LONGER AT HOME

"I maintain that India is too fascinatingly diverse a country for the word to have any precise definition."

English August

In Upamanyu Chatterjee's English August (1988) the Narayanesque valorisation of the local native culture mingle with the Rushdiesque cosmopolitanism. Though Chatterjee is, like Rushdie, one of the "cosmopolitan commentators on the Third World, who offer an inside view of formerly submerged peoples"¹ the Madna he has created is, like Malgudi, a closed society which resists new-fangled ideas and exogenous institutions. The native of Madna are pitted against modernity.

Whereas Narayan sees the struggle from the perspective of Malgudi, Chatterjee shows the thing, wilting of modernity and bureaucracy in the face of traditions, from a cosmopolitan perspective. Both hand the laurels to the local and the regional, but whereas Narayan's works are panegyric, Chatterjee's is a lament, a threnody, an elegy.

English August belongs to a period which is "increasingly witnessing disunity in diversity",² and the earlier nationalist assumptions are being put to doubt.

According to Swaminathan S. Anklesaria Aiyar writing in the Times of India.

We have long assumed in India that unity in a multi-religious, multi-racial, multi-lingual country is a natural state of affairs and that sensible political management can take care of the strains that emerge. International experience now suggests that such optimism was always unwarranted.³

Ramashray Roy writing in the Hindustan Times says

The Constitution founded a political community, to be sure. But it enunciated the most fundamental principles of the community as if neither the society nor the individuals had a history. But the individual is not thrown into the world. He is preformed; he has a history, an autobiography and a definite experience. He inherits a family, a cult and a community. Ignoring this fact we harboured the unreal and unrealizable hope that politics of interest would overcome the political problems created by the burden of history. But the politics of interest, relying as it does on the leverage of power stimulated and aggravated the politics of historical inheritance. The two together now threaten to destroy the polity.⁴

Thus coming at a time when the unitary nationalism is increasingly under a cloud, the novel deals with various dichotomies and distances between Delhi and Madna, between English and the regional languages, between the bureaucracy and the people.

English August is an inversion of the ancient myth of the sage Agastya who was able to cross the Vindhya mountains in order to colonize the areas south of it. The anglicized "profoundly urban" August, unable to surmount the barriers,

unable to 'connect', is left to withdraw to his minimal or narcissist self. For the megapolitan August (son of a state governor father and Goan Catholic mother), Madna is "another world, completely different."⁶ New Delhi and old Madna seem so far apart that there seem to be no common ground between the two: "Madna and Delhi seemed two extreme points of an unreal existence, the only palpable thing was the rhythm of the beast beneath him, a wonder that could link such disparate worlds together" (177).

Concepts originating in the national capital of Delhi find no echo in the regional small town of Madna. Indeed Madna tries to interrogate the paradigms paraded by the metropolis and resists its grasping tentacles. Madna, for example, remained indifferent to the 'freedom movement' which was said to have raged all across the country. "But nationalism and those fifty years had also passed Madna by... Patriotism and its blood-letting had simply bypassed Madna"(229-30). Madna does not partake of the glories of the Indian national history and is not called upon to voice its opinion on great national matters. Madna "seemed to have been bypassed by all that had made history and news, had remained impervious to the Mughals and 1857 and Bande Mataram and the mid-century travails of megapolitan India"(45-46).

The English District magistrate Avery in his letters back home writes about the same thing - "all that you are reading about in the newspapers about Non-Cooperation and the burning of the English goods could be happening in some other country, not a whisper of that in Madna" (206). The indigenous people of Madna, the tribals living a cloistered existence in Jompanna are not even remotely concerned with the grand events happening around them, leading the Collector Srivastav to say: "Sometimes I feel sorry for them, they've never been touched by the Indian mainstream. What do the tribals of India have to show for these decades since 1947" (241).

Madna's indifference to national heroes is symbolically shown by the statue of Gandhi which falls off only a few weeks after it is installed. Because it had to be propped up, the statue resembles a "short fat bespectacled man with a rod coming out his arse"(21). For one of the prospective teachers of Madna who is a graduate, the father of the nation is, not Gandhi but Nehru. For the myriads of inhabitants of Madna, Gandhi's writings for example on hygiene and personal sanitation are ineffectual in changing their lifestyles. Gandhi's exhortation is wasted on the people of Madna as "half these defecators (in Madna) were illiterate, and those who weren't would never read Gandhi, much less implement him" (197).

The Integration meeting at Madna is a parody of the much touted national integration. It is carefully orchestrated charade displaying bon homie between the Hindu and Muslim goondas for the consumption of only the most gullible. The need of the meeting in fact arose because of a big Hindu-Muslim riot in Madna.

The institutions of Indian government remain alien to many and its officials from the upper echelons remain remote not only to the inhabitants of Madna but to most others. According to the police superintendent Kumar, "in India from washing your arse to dying, an ordinary citizen is up against the Government" (38-39). Later this is shown graphically when the Delhi Taxi driver makes an obscene gesture the moment Kumar reveals himself a "an SP, an IAS officer":

the taxidriver, looking at Kumar with his red hooded eyes, undid his pyjama and drawer strings, fisted his cock and said, 'This is what I think of you Government types' (146).

Elsewhere the Government is treated as a new intruder thrusting its presence on others. "Government had come to Jompanna but recently"(201). Karanth, the son of Baba Ramanna, explains why they are resisting Government offers to help the lepers home:

Before some German organizations started funding us, none of them (Government officials) came here. Now it seems they can't leave us alone. They want to force a loan down our throats. Forty years later, they want to officially recognize the Home, which means interfere in it (236).

For many the Government is so remote that they can manage without it. Baba Ramanna claims to have done that for his Leper's Home. The Baba has "politely refused government assistance. He says he has managed without Government for forty years (189).

The stationery belonging to the Government is treated as if it belonged to nobody and is thus subjected to abuse. Bhatia observes

Everyone treats government stuff like this. Really valuable stuff sometimes, furniture, old houses, old books all treated like this. For keeping candles on(78).

The gates put up by the government in Madna suffer neglect and disuse accorded to all things governmental - "Like your Gazetteer", said Bhatia, "government stuff, so made to neglect" (103).

The anglicized bureaucracy emanating from the centre remains urban and hence remote to the people living in outposts such as Madna. The bureaucracy was a colonial legacy created as the result of the British attempt to administer vast territories and to create a political unity

which according to Marx was "imposed by the British sword (and)... strengthened and perpetuated by the electric telegraph"⁷ Unlike in China where a mandarin bureaucratic class selected by a pan-Chinese examination system had been in existence for several centuries, in India it was largely a British invention. According to Horowitz, "the civil service ethos increased steadily under the sponsorship of colonial powers. Indeed in India the bureaucracy is often considered a colonial achievement in the underdeveloped areas."⁸ The text acknowledges the novelty of district administration as it is "largely a British creation, like the railways and the English language" (10).

In spite of its indianization, it remains above the masses and still "exhibits the old accoutrement of importance" (10). In spite of Srivastava's description of bureaucrats as the "servants of the people" in a democracy he reminds the narrator of a "king in ancient India" (111).

The word 'nation' refers to the natio - a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging. According to Raymond Williams, "'Nation' as a term is radically connected with 'native'. We are born into relationship which are typically settled in a place. This form of primary and placeable bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance."⁹ However English August by portraying a set a characters who are 'homeless'

and alien in Madna questions the Great Nationalist project which extends the original nation to encompass a sub-continent. The characters refuse to accept Madna as a home but on the contrary withdraw into their inner selves. Thus the message Madna (and the text) sends is: "don't fight the processes of nature... The world outside is not worth journeying for" (8).

Agastya suffers from "homelessness of a kind"(5) in Madna and "felt as though he was living someone else's life"(24). Finding himself a stranger and outsider in Madna, he yearns to return to Delhi or Calcutta. Like most people who are not native to Madna he is out of sync with it and seeks solace in drugs, food, fantasies and onanism. For the "English type" (23) Agastya, Madna, seems a bizarre, unreal world and he wonders.

What am I doing in Madna, will I get to like this sort of life... I miss my old life, I think, mainly because I was attuned to it and it was, well, comprehensible (33).

He in fact wants to throw away his job in Madna and take up other ones in Delhi. To Kumar's observation that "there is no pleasure like going home", Agastya wearily replies "But it's even better never to leave it" (143).

Alienated from Madna he withdraws into his private world:

His secret world became much more exciting and more actual than the world outside. In the afternoons the rooms were dark because the windows had to be closed against an incandescent world and the window panes were painted an opaque pink ('Against the glare' explained one junior Engineer. For privacy' said another). There would be marijuana, and nakedness and soft hopelessly incongruous music (Tagore and Chopin) and the thoughts that ferment in isolation (26).

As one exiled from his country and people, a sense of ennui, solipsism and weariness comes over him.

He realized obscurely that the sense of loneliness was too precious to be shared and finally incommunicable, that men were ultimately islands; each had this own universe, immense only to himself, far beyond the group or interest of others (10).

Tamse the deputy engineer is equally ill at ease in Madna which he describes as his "unwanted second home" (8). Out of his homesickness he recreates and imagines visions of his native place Goa in doggerel verse and paintings. "Away from Goa, my dear home, / On office work I have to roam" (9).

Shankar tries to drown in drink his nostalgia for his native Koltanga, "a lovely place"(33), as "everyone feels wretched in Madna", (33) according to Shiv his brother. The District Judge Mishra hopes to retire peacefully to his home town of Belgaum: "I'll be very happy to get out of Madna. I miss my Belgaum"(88), he says. Similarly Rohini, Mohan Gandhi's wife wants to go back to Alwar, her home town. Conversely, because home has such a

powerful attraction for the people, officials who decide on transfers and leave wield so much authority over the subalterns. The unease and cultural incompatibility the 'outsiders' face in Madna is a sign of the local self identity triumphing over a trans-local construct. This aspect is corroborated by T.K. Oommen who writes

people have self-definition of collective identity and sense of belonging, which distinguishes between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. In fact, the notions of swadesh (native land) and videsh (alien land) are found in all Indian languages. The cultural conceptions are at a variance with the political conception of a single citizenship enunciated in the Indian Constitution. Therefore it is necessary to come to grips with them instead of indulging in the illusion that Indian 'nationhood' will some how fuse all Indians into one people.¹¹

It is because most of the characters are not 'at home' and suffer from anomie in Madna as the nationalists aver they should, a powerful critique of the nationalist project is made by the novel. Drinks, drugs, marijuana and masturbation littered throughout the text are vivid indicators of the alienation to the social world. Agastya's masturbation reveals his cleavage from the outside world as the body gratifies itself without needing anyone else.

English August stresses the local, the regional and the linguistic affiliations which give a lie to the grand nationalist project which seeks to subsume all differences

within itself. It portrays a resistance to the modern nationalist conception to the point of ultimate sexual autarky. The text shows the absurdity of reducing and essentializing the diversity of India into a homogenous whole. The novel interrogates the very concept of India as Mrs. Rajan says "how would you define the word 'Indian'. I maintain that India is too fascinatingly diverse a country for the word to have any precise definition" (187-88).

The text mocks at the project of Tamse who tried to recreate his vision of India in the shape of a lawn. Tamse's India is a travelogue's India, similar to the India-shaped swimming pool in Midnight's Children. It translates into reality the tourists' fantasy and the politicians' dream:

A Gateway of India porch, and a Taj Mahal dome. There's a Konark wheel on the wall inside, but somebody broke a spoke and no one is sanctioning repairs. And a small replica of the Char Minar between drawing room and dining space. Just three soots (sic) in the entire rest house but God knows how much they spent. This entire whorehouse was designed by a bastard of an Executive Engineer called Tamse (138).

In order to make the rest house stand for his India, Tamse puts a monstrous blow-up of the Himalayas covering an entire wall and also of the temples of Rameshwaram, leading Kumar to conclude "That Tamse bastard... wanted to squeeze all of India into this rest House, as though the Prime Minister spends every weekend here and needs to be reminded

of national intergration" (140).

Tamse in his authentically 'Indian' rest house, carries out literally the call of Gandhi to have an India with open windows so that cultures of all lands can flow in. However professions of plurality sit uneasily with the nationalist imperatives which necessarily require fencing of frontiers and acceptance of difference vis-a-vis the Other. Tamse's rest house is so open that it no longer gives any rest to its residents. According to Kumar,

That Tamse bastard... all his fault. He didn't want wire mesh on the windows... because of that Gandhi quotation from Young India, it's written outside somewhere - that my windows should not be stuffed and cultures of all lands should blow around me freely. Tamse's mind to like that so cultures of all lands means mosquitoes and huge grey bugs (140).

Almost as ambitious as Tamse's desire to encapsulate the whole of India into a rest house is the gigantic task of writer writing about the rag-bag that is India. It is a project that is doomed to fail because of its ambition. For example, "No, that won't work. It is too ambitious" (47) is Sathe's comment on a cartoon that is complex and ambitious. Just as the nationalists' claim to discern homologies and common essences entwining the nation, so too does the writer writing on Indian these looks for similitudes, commonalities and universalities which would transcend the regional, parochial and linguistic barriers in order to get at the

alleged Indianness. As writers writing on pan-Indian themes have to bypass many local and regional realities, Sathe finds them unreal. According to him these writers are:

absurd, full with one mixed-up culture and writing about another, what kind of audience are they aiming at. That's why their India is just not real, a place of fantasy or of confused metaphysics, a sub-continent of goons. All their Indians are caricatures. Why is that. Because there really are no universal stories because each language is an entire culture (48).

This cultural relativism and localism articulated by Sathe pervades the text and is indicated by the manifold failure of communication across the cultures causing symptoms of unease, homelessness and 'interiority complex' in Madna. If the nationalist definition of India is criticized by both Mrs. Rajan and Sathe, diversity and regionalism are valorised. For Sathe

this place is a continent, far too heterogeneous. Great literature has to have its regional tang - a great Tamil story, for instance whose real greatness would be ultimately obscure to any non-Tamilian. Haven't you felt that heterogeneity in Madna (48).

The growth of English education in India was connected to the imperatives of the colonial government and hence was alien and restricted to all but the elites. Though it started as a part of the programme to transplant western institutions, it ended up becoming, in the words of Dr. Upadhyay the head of English department, "a parody, a

complete farce, they're trying to build another Cambridge here... English in India is burlesque" (29). According to Dhruvo, what was "something" in Yale becomes a "joke" in Delhi.

In Yale a Ph.D. wasn't a joke. It meant something. It was significant. Students thought before they enrolled. But here in Delhi, all over India... education is biding time, a meaningless accumulation of degrees (3).

English education which was complicit in creating and sustaining a colonial state in India, has also served as a 'steel frame' to hold post-colonial India, which as Aijaz Ahmed notes is successor to the former.

In so far as the metropolitan language - English in our case was the chief cultural and communicational instrument in the centralizing of the bourgeois state in the colonial period, the continued use of this instrument in the dominant systems of education, administration and communication is an index of the profound almost genetic cultural link between the colonial and the post-colonial phases of the bourgeois state.¹²

Broadly three different worlds can be discerned in English August based on linguistic differences. The first one is the world of American English to which Renu and Bhatia ("just one more urban Indian bewitched by America's hard sell in the Third World" (75)) aspire.

Then there is the world of Delhi imitating the Englishness from abroad ("half our opinions come from there

(154)). This English is tempered by Indianism and thus distinct from the English spoken by the natives of that language as Srivastav observes "The English we speak is not the English we read in English books, and anyway those are two different things" (59).

Thus even though Sita is engaged to be married to Avery she and Agastya have more in common as both inhabit the world of Delhi which is different from both the world of Madna and the world of 'Time-Life'. Both of them

came from the same stock, megapolitan Indians, who ate hamburgers and knew who Artoo Detoo was. But Avery was different, almost another species. They had nothing in common, not even a language, leave alone the accent(205).

And when a denizen of Delhi, such as Agastya descends to the inner depths of Madna, he gets "hazaar fucked"(1), in the words of Dhruvo the Delhite, exemplifying their typical language whose hybridity and mongrelness is astounding as Agastya notes "amazing mix the English we speak. Hazaar Fucked. Urdu and American" (1).

The world of Delhi extends its tentacles to places as far as Madna, where the officialdom creates life in the image of Delhi:

The district life that he (Agastya) saw was the official life, common to all districts deadly dull.

This world comprised Collectors, District Development Officers, Superintendent of Police and their legionary subordinates many wielders of petty power sulking or resigned if posted away from home, and buying furniture cheap and biding time till transferred to a congenial place (21).

This extended world of Delhi is cut off from the world of Madna where the 'regional' language rule the roost and the national official has to "face the problem of language" in Madna as the people there "can't even speak Hindi properly" (15) let alone English. So great is the chasm between the two worlds that Agastya "saw very little of the real Madna, the lives of its traders in wool and forest produce, the coal miners, the workers at the paper mills, the shopkeepers, the shopkeeper..."(21). The megapolitan world seeks to put its imprint on places like Madna and Meerut, imposing its language and authority. Tonic for example questions the assumption of wisdom emanating from the centre when he queries:

why is some Jat teenager in Meerut reading Jane Austen? Why does a place like Meerut have a course in English at all? Only because the Prem Krishens of the country need a place where they can teach this rubbish?... Surely they can spend the money they waste on running the department usefully elsewhere (170).

According to the nationalist viewpoint, the world was a bipolar one, - the colonial world which was exploiting the national world. Chatterjee however deconstructs, dismantles, dissects the latter, the world is therefore tripolar for

him:

Madna, and within it Jompanna, Chipanthi, Gorapak, Mariagarh, like names out of magic, strong with an idiosyncratic tang, still reeking of the tribals that had once been their only inhabitants. And the megapolitan world of Delhi and Calcutta, the bewitching because elusive alternative... And stretching out to the infinitive was the Time-Life world from which John Avery had come, to which Dhrubo's Renu had gone only to feel dislocated (278).

English August shows that there is no smooth transition and commerce between these worlds and differences of culture result in dislocation and homesickness for those who venture out in defiance of their nature, nation and nativeplace. For years now the social sciences have been dominated by a phenomenon which may be called as 'economism or the ghost of Marx' which views economy as the sole motor of history the base on which the superstructure of society is erected. For the nationalists this stress on economy was imperative not only because it painted the colonialists as the villain of the piece, but also because it camouflaged the differences which plagued their project. According to Dipesh Chakravarty,

For a long time now, nationalist writing on Indian history has been dominated by kind of primacy given to the economic... An inexorable economic rationality was seen to be at work in all instances of popular unrest... Even where popular unrest had to do with religious demands, historians sought credit for discovering that the unrest was actually economic in content and religious only in form (13).

However it is increasingly being recognized that "economic forces and motives are not a unique and overriding determinant of the course of history"¹⁴ and the role of culture and tradition can make the plans of economic-oriented theory go away. Nationalists like Nehru sought to create 'one' world which was counterpoised to another world of imperialism. The common economic grievances of the farmers was enough to override any other local attachment that the "peasant, with his limited outlook"¹⁵ may have:

I told them of my journeying from the Khyber pass in the far north-west to Kanya-Kumari or Cape Comirin in the distant south, and how everywhere the peasants put me identical questions, for these troubles were the same - poverty, debt, vested interests... I tried to make them think of India as a whole.¹⁶

Here Nehru sees peasants as having only economic grievances, any communal or caste consciousness could only be a "peripheral nuisance created by British intrigue."¹⁷

As a reaction to this economic determinism, there has been an interest in culture and cultural studies. According to Sarah Joseph, this

compensates for the neglect of cultural factors in the understanding and strategies of the left and liberal forces in the country in the decades after independence. The Nehruvian belief in modernization as a dissolvent of primordial loyalties... The left, under the influence of reductionist interpretation of Marxism, down played the importance of culture.¹⁸

English August by its attention to cultural differences
withⁱⁿ the nation gives the lie to the nationalist rhetoric of
home and homogeneity.

END NOTES

1. Timothy Brennan, "The national longing for form" in Bhabha (ed.) Nation and Narration (London: Routledge 1990), p.63.
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3. Aiyar, Ibid.
4. Ramashray Roy "Self Vs the Nation" in The Hindustan Times, Delhi, Nov. 20, 1990.
5. Upamanyu Chatterjee, English August: An Indian Story (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p.4.
6. Ibid. p.3.
7. Quoted in Peter Worsley, The Three Worlds: Culture and World Development (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1984), p.104.
8. Irving Louis Horowitz, The Worlds of Development: (New York; Oxford University Press, 1972), p.319.
9. Quoted in Brennan in "The national longing for form" in Bhabha (ed.), p.45.
10. Chatterjee, p.77. 'Agastya's is a typically modern malaise, described by Christopher Lasch as a self that is "increasingly emptied of any kind of content and which has to find the goals of life in the narrowest possible terms... in terms of raw survival, daily survival, as if daily life were so problematic, as if I world were so threatening and uncertain that the best you could hope to do was to simply to get by. To live one day at a time", Bill Bourne, Udi Eichler, David Herman (ed.), Modernity and its Discontents (Nottingham Spokesman/Hobo 1987), p.43.
11. T.K. Oommen, "Problems of Identity: Native And Alien of one Country" in The Times of India, Delhi, April 30, 1993.
12. Aijaz Ahmed, "Third Worldism and Literature in Svati Joshi (ed.) Rethinking English, (New Delhi, Trianka: 1991), p.233.

13. Dipesh Chakravorty, "Invitation to a dialogue" in Ranajit Guha (ed.) Subaltern Studies IV (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1985), p.370.
14. Peter Worsley, p.37.
15. J. Nehru, The Discovery of India, (New Delhi, Oxford University, 1982 rpt), p.59.
16. Ibid., p.60.
17. Ranajit Guha "Discipline and Mobilize" in P.Chatterjee and Gyan Pandey (ed.) Subaltern Studies VII (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992), p.100.
18. Sarah Joseph "Identity, Culture and Community in Economic and Political Weekly, (Vol. XXVIII, No.17, April 24, 1993), p.807.

Chapter 5

IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

"I don't believe in this India-Shindia."

The Shadow Lines

The Shadow lines (1988) belongs to a group of Indian English novels which may be classified as 'Partition novels'. Many of these political novels are in fact a criticism of partition leading to the creation of Pakistan and India. Nations, in many of these novels are arbitrary creations, the result of the machination of politicians, which bring untold miseries to the common people, especially to the star-crossed lovers. Love which transcends boundaries, disdains differences is here used to interrogate nations and nationalism.

For example in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan, the village of Mano Majra is shown to be oblivious of the intentions of the nationalist leaders. "What is all this about Pakistan and Hindustan?"¹ asks a villager of Mano Majra. "The Punjabi's code" of village with its emphasis on "being true to one's salt, to one's friend and fellow villagers"² is pitted against a modern meta-local concept of nation. Similarly the doomed love affair between the Sikh Juggut Singh and the Muslim Nooran criticizes and negates

the dividing line between the two nations. In Chaman Nahal's Azadi, the love affair between Arun and Nur gives the lie to nationalist politicians.

This complex weave of personal and political - of modernity and tradition, themes is also shown in The Shadow Lines. However this novel differs from the earlier partition novels in one respect. Most of the earlier novels hark back to the pre-partition period as a desirable epoch when social relations were smooth and unfractured. Though there is a criticism of the present through the past, the latter is seen from a nationalistic perspective. To many of these writers, the partition was an arbitrary, irrational event. But there is nothing arbitrary about the borders of India, which apparently have remain unchanged throughout the ages. In The Shadow Lines reality is more complex, and two antagonistic strands are yoked together. The view that nations are artifices coexist along with one which stresses natural ties and cultural continuity within a nation. While the former is expressed most forcefully by the cosmopolitan Tridib, the latter finds a champion in the narrator's traditional grandmother.

The novel contrasts the essentialist notion of nation which sees it as emerging from a timeless immemorial past and of which an individual is willy-nilly a part if he has

to remain true to his nature with the notion which views it as a construct based on a past which is selected and fabricated. According to this view, reality or "a place does not merely exist, it has to be invented in one's imagination"³ thus asserting the fictitiousness of all nations and frontiers while the former stand would emphasise the natural and primordial ties, which by definition cannot be altered.

The modern impulse is to master reality through knowledge, rationality and science. The modern scientific man, like Tennyson's Ulysses, "cannot rest from travel" and "desire(s)/To follow knowledge like a sinking star,/Beyond the utmost bound of human thought." This modernist urge is displayed in the text by the intellectual Tridib who held that

one could never know anything except through desire, real desire, which was not the same thing as greed or lust; a pure, primitive and painful desire, a longing for everything that was not in oneself, a torment of the flesh, that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror.⁴

Desire, for Tridib, can annihilate differences and distances which in fact are illusory, creations of mind, and not something 'out there'. Tridib is a part of the modernist endeavour which considers everything, including nations, as

a part of imagination and invention. The narrator remembers Tridib explaining that there is no way to get past inventions in order to apprehend 'reality':

Tridib... had said that we could not see without inventing what we saw, so at least we could try to do it properly. And then, because she (Ila) shrugged dismissively and said - Why? Why should we try, why not take the world as it is? - I told her how he had said that we had to try because the alternative wasn't blankness -- it only meant that if we didn't try ourselves, we would never be free of other people's inventions (31).

For Tridib history is but a story and truths, as for Nietzsche, mere "illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are":

Everyone lives in a story, he (Tridib) says, my grandmother, my father, his father, Lenin, Einstein, and lots of other names I hadn't heard of; they all lived in stories because stories are all there are to live in, it was just a question of which one you chose (182).

In the novel Tridib in fact belongs to a group of cosmopolitans whose ideal is a uniform borderless world peopled by individuals bereft of blood and soil connections. National, cultural and regional differences are old myths which ought to be debunked by modern scientific rationality, according to them. For the narrator for example, blood relationship is something "arbitrary and unimportant", (3) an attitude that is different from that of his mother for whom "relatives and family were the central points which

gave the world its shape and meaning; the foundations of moral order" (129).

Tridib writes in the pornographic letter he sends to May about the way he would like to meet her - as a total stranger indifferent to past and nationality. Similar to the meeting between the airman and the woman, which Tridib witnessed as a voyeur in a ruined cinema theatre, he wanted them to meet as

the completest of strangers -- strangers-across-the-seas - all the more strangers because they knew each other already. He wanted them to meet far from their friends and relatives - in a place without a past, without a history free, really free, two people coming together with the utter freedom of strangers (144).

Tridib is not daunted by the fact that May is an English girl but on the contrary his love thrives, indeed springs up because of the cultural divide and foreignness between the two. Indeed the paragon and role-model for him is the western mythical hero Tristan whose story is "in fact the best in the world" (182) and who is "a man without a country" (186).

The "wonderful, sad little story" (186) which Snipe tells Tridib is international or pre-national as

it happened everywhere, wherever you wish it. It was an old story, the best in Europe, Snipe said, told when Europe was a better place, a place without borders and countries - it was a German story in what we call

Germany, Nordic in the north, French in France, Welsh in Wales, Cornish in Cornwall; it was the story of a hero called Tristan, a very sad story, about a man without a country, who fell in love with a woman-across-the seas... (186).

Other parallels between the Tristan story and the Tridib story abound. The name Tristan signifies sadness and melancholy and Tridib (is it a co-incidence that the names are phonetically similar) is also described as "saturnine" (167), surrounded by "the sense of defeat" (175) and "rueful" (174). He describes May as "my love-across-the seas" (175) an allusion to Isolde.

Like Tridib, Ila too shares the fascination for the foreign because of the freedom it provides to escape the narrow and rooted world. Like Tridib she believes that home is where imagination is: "If we pretend it's a house, it'll be a house. We can choose to build a house wherever we like" (70). Her flings with numerous foreign boys and her marriage to Nick Price shows that she thought nothing of difference of nations, race and cultures. Ila who describes herself as "free woman and free spirit" (187), chooses to live in London because she wants to be free of the burden of culture and past:

Free of you, she shouted back. Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you (189).

It is because Ila shows all the "signs of cosmopolitanism" (97) that the traditional grandmother cannot endure her presence and calls her "English whore" and "memshaheb" whore (90).

Another cosmopolitan character and hence in the bad books of grandmother is her sister's husband, called derisively "Shaheb" by her because of his uppity anglicized way. Shaheb is in fact resembles a 'propah' English gentleman so much that the Irish Mike is constrained to question his nationality: "You don't look much of an Indian to me" (63), he observes. Shaheb's mother had in fact proudly declared that her "son was so Europeanised that his hat wouldn't come off his head" (34). For most of his working life Shaheb stays abroad or in Delhi and after his retirement from diplomatic service he chooses the cosmopolitan Calcutta rather than his native Raibajar as he "had no intention of leaving his clubs and going to live outside Calcutta" (180).

Similarly Ila's mother and Shaheb's daughter-in-law, "Queen Victoria", is always on the move, crossing borders as one crosses cities. She has nothing but contempt for the traditional notion of, for example Ram Dayal, her servant who held that crossing the sea was sinful and sacrilegious and laments: "Why did I come to Lanka? he wailed. I knew

Ravana would come to get me" (25).

For the narrator, as for Tridib nations are 'invented' and imagined by creating Others in the mind. He knows "nothing at all about England except as an invention" (105) and talks of his grandmother's plan of "rescuing her uncle from his enemies and bringing him back to where he belonged, to her invented country" (136-37).

The utter indifference towards national feelings which is displayed by the Tridib-Ila-Shaheb-narrator group also is the hallmark of the Alan-Dan-Mike-Francesca group in another generation which is pitched against the ultra-nationalist ambience of the world war. The internationalism of the thirties leftist groups was to counter a variant of nationalism unleashed by Hitler, Mussolini and Franco. Francesca's relationship with the group is unaffected by her German and Jewish background though after the death of Alan and Dan she is detained at the camp for "enemy aliens" on the Isle of Wight by the English government.

Both the groups show a fascination for foreign lands and for movements and flights to alien territories. They are thus removed and detached from the home and the hum-drum reality which values communal feelings. For example in the deracinated intellectual Tridib, there is "something detached about his manner" (9) and he is happiest in

"neutral, impersonal places" (9) where he is unlikely to meet his neighbours. His room is described as "monastic" (174) and he is

something of a recluse; even as child... he was happiest in that book-lined room of his, right at the top of their old family house (18).

The kind of fellow-feeling and camaraderie displayed by hanger-ons at addas earns Tridib's disapproval, he is often "maliciously dismissive of those people (hanger-ons); marine mammals, he would say of them, creatures who sink to the bottom of the sea of heartbreak when they lose sight of the herd" (18).

Tridib's criticism of nations involves pluralism and imagination, by which the dominant view of looking at things is challenged by positing an alternate view. It is a part of the structuralis-modernist project to assault the dominant and monolithic doxa. According to John Sturrock for example:

Structuralism invites us to delight in the plurality of meanings to reject the authoritarian or unequivocal interpretation of sign. Meanings may and should co-exist, there is no call for one to be exalted at the expense of the other. The more meaning there is in our world the better.⁵

In addition to Tridib's challenge to nations through a modernist, rational and leftist perspective, the text shows another facet of this challenge, this time by traditional,

local and conservative angle. The example of this view is the narrator's grandmother.

The grandmother articulates the position that nationality is the result of a long process of cultural and religious assimilation and so cannot be acquired or changed overnight. The past demands allegiance from the individual, denial of which is a betrayal of one's blood. Her reaction to Ila's attachment to England is therefore vitriolic: "She has no right to be there. She doesn't belong there... What's she doing in that country"? (77). Ila's repudiation of her own culture and past is not only an act of high treason but also smacks of greed and usurption.

It took those people a long time to build that country hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood (77-78).

Grandmother's notion of nationhood is very similar to Ernest Renan's who in his essay "What is a nation" emphasised the "possession of a rich legacy of memories"⁶ in addition to "consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one had received" for a nation. According to Renan

Of all the cults, that of ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more - these are essential conditions for being a people.⁷

Renan's emphasis on sacrifice, solidarily and suffering ("suffering in common unites more than joy does") reverbrates also in the words of the grandmother in Shadow lines.

Hasn't Maya told you how regimental flags hang in all their cathedrals and how all their churches are lined with memorials to men who died in wars, all around the world? War is their religion. That's what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood. That's what you have to achieve for India (78).

For her a baptism of blood is required for the birth of a nation in addition to the Other. She herself is fascinated by men who are fighting against the British. In the early twenties, she would dream of helping the nationalists in their struggle. When someone from her class in the college is arrested as a terrorist, she remembers him fondly. She would "lie in bed and conjure up his face, complete with that stringy beard of his" (38).

In her patriotic zeal she is even ready to kill for her freedom: "I would have killed him. It was for our freedom: I

would have done anything to be free" (39). She wants to "do something for the terrorists, work for them in a small way, steal a bit of their glory for herself" (39).

If Tridib's is a view from the top, the grandmother's is worm's eye vision with close connections to the soil. If Tridib is the monarch of all he surveys and imagines, the latter remains attached to her own roots and regards the rest as alien territory. All that she remembers in her long 12-year stay in Burma are "hospitals and railway stations and Bengalee Societies: to her nothing else in that enchanted pagoda-land had seen real enough to remember" (124). Whereas people like Tridib could "experience the world... concretely in their imagination" (30) grandmother is blind to all but her narrow world. If for Tridib national boundaries are as the result of past and prejudice, the grandmother inhabits the world of past: "The past is what we talk about" (127). According to her the distinction between peoples and nations are real and not imaginary as she believes the border to be "a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other" (151).

The anti-intellectual traditionalism of grandmother is at odds with the modern temper ("I don't know what you expect Ma", her son exclaims, "This is the modern world" (151).) and she has an uneasy relationship with Tridib, whom

she "didn't approve of" (3) and even "feared him" (7).

If Tridib uses his imagination, to see distant places "quite clearly, as though he were there" (138), grandmother uses her's to create "an upside down house" (125), an inverted mirror image of her house in Dacca. She welcomes war with China hoping that this would "teach them a lesson" (220). In the war with Pakistan, she wants 'them' killed for 'our' freedom: "We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out" (237).

Grandmother betrays acute sensitivity to the feelings of blood and soil though she had "never pretended to have much family feeling" (129). Though apparently, she "had always founded her morality, schoolmistresslike, in larger and more abstract entities" (129) yet after twenty years of enmity and separation she acknowledges her link with her kin in Dacca; as they are "the same flesh, the same blood, the same bone" (129). Tridib for example does not show family-feeling but compounds his sin by not getting along with his father, according to grandmother (6).

Among the younger generation only Robi shows a consideration for blood and relations. It is family pride for example which force Robi to stop Ila from dancing in the nightclub and a chance remark by a waiter about Bangladesh sets his "hand shaking like a leaf, fifteen years later,

thousands of miles away" (247) where his brother Tridib was killed by the mob. Grandmother herself notes that Robi takes after her and not Mayadebi: "he's like me, not like Maya" (36).

Grandmother's nativism, blood and soil politics and autarkic philosophic runs counter to the nationalizing and homogenizing imperatives of the modern state for which "the individual is no longer definable as the locus of a complex of multiple loyalties, but overwhelmingly in terms of a single one, his nationality"⁸ according to Eric Hobsbawm. According to the narrator,

prior independent relationship is the natural enemy of government, for it is the logic of states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relationship between peoples (230).

Though this monopoly of state over individuals is accepted in many modern western nations, in others extra-territorial, regional and primordial loyalties compete with the state for this monopoly which complicates the scenario as the narrator notes when he draws circles in his Bartholomew's Atlas.

In the second circle drawn with Milan as its centre, the narrator can think of no event which might occur in a city near the perimeter of the circle which would bring the people of Milan pouring into the streets, except a war which

by definition is waged by states. This is because, he concludes that "within this circle there were only states and citizens; there were no people at all" (233).

In the first circle with Khulna as its centre and Srinagar at its periphery, however the theft of a sacred relic in Srinagar triggered off a series of riots in Khulna, Dacca Calcutta and elsewhere, "prior, independent" to the government.

This narrow, extra-or intra-national bonding elucidated by Jethamoshai and grandmother runs counter to "the most characteristic of western political ideas, namely that the state is the aggregation of individual",⁹ as the narrator discovers in the second circle he draws. Grandmother makes a critical point at the vagaries of nation formation when she cannot understand how "her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality" (152). Her confusion about the words 'coming-going' with regard to Dacca shows that she still considers Dacca her home.

Jethamoshai though he severs all connections with his blood, is in close connection with the soil of his birth. In a trenchant broadside at movement, change and 'India-Shindia' he declares:

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 are 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? No one will have you anywhere (215).

Similarly Khalil's father refuses to leave his native place for a grand, modern concept of Pakistan: "I couldn't get my father to leave/Motihari to come to Pakistan with us" (211), Khalil says.

Because of their sensitivities to micro, local and racial reality, grandmother and Jethamoshai effect a critique of the nationalist project which deemphasizes difference and otherness within the nation.

It is appropriate therefore that it should be Robi, the protege of grandmother who should discover that the various regional movements are merely the mirror image of the national movement and are propelled by the human urge for freedom:

Free, he said laughing. You know, if you look at the pictures on the front pages of the newspapers at home now, all those pictures of dead people - in Assam, Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura - people shot by terrorist and separatists and the army and the police, who'll find somewhere behind it all, that single word; everyone's doing it to be free (246).

According to Robi the logic of "our unity and freedom" is mirror image of the logic of "their freedom" and both are equally credible or frail according to the perspective:

I would have to go out and make speeches to my policemen saying: You have to be firm, you have to do your duty. You have to kill whole villages if necessary - we have nothing against the people, it's the terrorists we want to get, but we have to be willing to pay a price for our unity and freedom. And when I went back home, I would find an anonymous note waiting for me saying: We're going to get you, nothing personal, we have to kill for our freedom. It would be like reading my own speech transcribed in the mirror (246-7).

In Shadow Lines as we have seen two sets of characters are contrasted. Mobile, autonomous and 'flighty' characters (Tridib is described by grandmother as "lightweight" (6) and lacking "core of gravity)" (6) are contrasted with stationary, rooted and bound characters who defy the logic of borders of the modern states by being involved in relations which are denied by it. In the narrow circumscribed and rooted world of grandmother and Jethamoshai the concept of a wide embracing nation may itself be an Other.

Like other partition novels, Shadow Lines is also critical of partition, but it recognises powerful forces behind it which is peculiar to the sub-continent with its:

fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one,

the steet that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent - not language, not food, not music - it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror (204).

Good or bad, nationalism is a potent force, the book argues and not a mere handiwork of remote politicians as other partition novels suggest. Pitted against the Other it calls for uniformity and homogeniety and "want everyone to be alike" (76) as May points out about the children. It is a feeling similar to that shown by the narrator when a child he disowns his Muslim friend Montu at the time fo riots: "...I lied. I haven't met Montu for months" (200).

In The Shadow Lines, if there are 'aerial' characters like Tridib and Ila for whom borders of nations do not matter, there are others governed by fear of the Other who disregard the borders with the result that instead of "separation" places such as Dhaka and Calcutta are "more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines" (233). In both the cases, boundaries and disregarded and treated as shadow lines.

END NOTES

1. Khushwant Singh, Train to Pakistan (New Delhi, Ravi Dayal; 1988) p.61.
2. Ibid, p.54.
3. Amitav Ghosh, The Shadow Lines, (New Delhi, Ravi Dayal: 1982), p.21. All page references from this edition.
4. Ibid, p.29.
5. John Sturrocks (ed.), Structuralism and Since.
6. Ernest Renan, "What is a nation" (trans) Martin Thom in Bhabha (ed.) Nation and Narration (London: Routledge, 1990), p.19.
7. Ibid, p.19.
8. Quoted in Worsley, The Three Worlds, (London, 1984), p.
9. Ainslie Embree, Imagining India, (New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), p.

CONCLUSION

In our study of these four novels we saw that they seek to dismantle the western epistemological category of nation which emphasises homogeneity and unity by highlighting "the difference and contradictions of class, caste, gender, region and religion"¹ that such a unitary nationalism endeavours to elide over. In these texts the western donee, the nation - is demystified from the coordinates of localism and little traditions. As a genre they differ from the earlier post-colonial writings for which the only differences that matter are those between the west and the essentialized non-west.

The four texts studied problematize the 'commonsensical' definition of nation and are a part of recent literature in which, according to Meenakshi Mukherjee "unitary national identity... is restructured and at times subverted by localised narratives, rich in their plurality and specificity, multivalent in their competing claims of voices that are historically free from the need to construct the homogenized community."²

Most of the novels presented here have been conditioned by the post-modernist impulse with its interest in the local and distrust for grand schemes. Along with this is a climate in which the subject of culture and ethnicity has come to

occupy the centre stage which had been occupied by economy till now.

These novels give a lie to the modernist imaginings which believed that the age-old traditions and world-views would wither away in a smooth transition to a uniform world. Also the myth which associated masses with 'progressive' ideas and the elites with staticism and tradition is problematized if not inverted. Tradition in fact becomes a trusted tool for the subaltern to combat the elite who in his quest for modernity has either jettisoned it or rendered it ineffectual.

END NOTES

1. Svati Joshi "Rethinking English: An Introduction" in Svati Joshi (ed). Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History, (New Delhi, Trianka, 1991), p.4
2. Meenakshi Mukherjee, "Narrating a Nation" in Indian Literature, 150 (July-August 1992), p.141.

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