

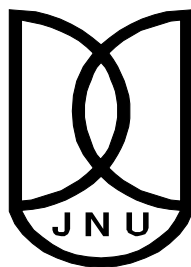
**Reading/Writing Indian Nationalism:
A Dialectical Study of Selected Texts**

Dissertation submitted to
Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Philosophy

by

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Date: 26 July 2017

CERTIFICATE

This dissertation titled “**Reading/Writing Indian Nationalism: A Dialectical Study of Selected Texts**” submitted by **Ms Sania Iqbal Hashmi**, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

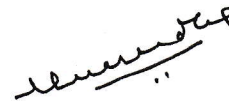
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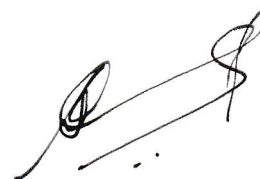
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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This dissertation titled “**Reading/Writing Indian Nationalism: A Dialectical Study of Selected Texts**” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.



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Like most others, and for good reason, I'd like to begin by thanking my parents. I owe to my mother the habit of working for the future and to my dad the custom of enjoying the present. Their fifty years of togetherness have been to me the greatest testimonial to a peaceful co-existence of contesting beliefs.

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Introduction

The forms that nationalism takes have been kaleidoscopic: religious, conservative, liberal, irredentist, diaspora, pan, etc. The fluidity and variety of national sentiments, national aspirations, and national cultural values create another obstacle to systematic research, as do the many different national identities ... The sheer variety of components of national identity and of possible causal factors has made it impossible for scholars of any discipline to study more than a few aspects and examples of the subject (Hutchinson and Smith 3).

One of the central deductions uniting the many theories and theorists of nationalism is the fact that there cannot be a single definition or explanation for the phenomenon of nationalism that continues to assume absolute power in modern democracies despite the glaring semantic lacuna at its heart. For instance, Ronald Beiner in his incisive compilation of theories of nationalism argues that there is an “amazing disproportion between nationalism’s political importance as one of the leading social phenomena of the modern world, and the virtual lack of intellectual endeavour at the highest level to vindicate or to rebut its normative claims” (Beiner 2). Benedict Anderson makes a similar deduction in *Imagined Communities* where he argues that “unlike most otherisms in the history of the world, nationalism does not have its own tradition of grand thinkers: no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes, or Webers” (B Anderson 5). How then does one account for this lack of interest on part of the thinkers towards one of the most potent forces of modern world history? Anderson opines that “Part of the difficulty is that one tends unconsciously to hypostasise the existence of Nationalism-with-a-big-N (rather as one might Age-with-a-capital-A) and then to classify ‘it’ as an ideology”, going on to offer the alternative of bracketing it “with ‘kinship’ and ‘religion’, rather than with ‘liberalism’ or ‘fascism’” (B Anderson 5). While Anderson offers a neat demarcation between the real and the abstract through the examples stated above, he does not provide us with a qualifying principle required for making these demarcations. While fascism is real, religion is abstract. By hypostasising nationalism, it is placed outside the realm of the abstract into the real. This becomes especially problematic in the case of India where one may witness a religious nationalism facilitating the establishment of totalitarian or fascist regimes of power. Where would one then place the phenomenon of Indian nationalism when its constitutive factors find their origins in both the real and the abstract? While religion is in the ambit of the

abstract, fascism finds itself situated in the real. Departing from Anderson's presentation of nationalism as abstract, one would therefore argue that nationalism is that which escapes this categorisation while effortlessly seeping into both.

If nationalism were to be placed solely in the realm of the abstract, it would quite simply mean one's love or dedication for one's country. How is it then different from patriotism? In his 1945 essay titled 'Notes on Nationalism', George Orwell makes a remarkable distinction between the two where he writes:

Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism. Both words are normally used in so vague a way that any definition is liable to be challenged, but one must draw a distinction between them, since two different or opposing ideas are involved. By "patriotism" I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people ... Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and prestige, *not* for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his individuality (Orwell 1).

It is in the appropriation of nationalism as a conduit for power that this research situates itself to observe the role it plays in the socio-political realities of India, and its relationship with the country's democratic ideals. This research argues that not only is there a dearth of analytical research on the phenomenon but also the fact that most theories are essentially Eurocentric and therefore incompatible with the demographic, racial, linguistic, and religious diversity of India. In that light, it restricts itself entirely to the phenomenon of Indian Nationalism.

In its scope and objective, this research is qualitatively different from both the existing bodies of work on Nationalism as a universal principle and Indian Nationalism as a socio-political phenomenon. In the first case, it is different from existing theories in that it places nationalism in a Lacanian framework to understand the relationship between fantasy and social construction, and the role played by nationalism as the master signifier in this process of absolute signification. The only other attempt at understanding a social phenomenon in a Lacanian framework has been undertaken by Slavoj Žižek in this pathbreaking analysis of anti-Semitism in *The Sublime Object*

of Ideology. This research is different from existing research on Indian nationalism on two counts: firstly, for the reasons mentioned above, and secondly in its handling of nationalism as a participant in social construction. The current scholarship on the subject can be broadly categorised into two: one dealing with the nationalist movement leading to the independence of India, as can be seen in the insightful oeuvre of Bipin Chandra, among others, and the other analysing religious or secular nationalism as separate entities isolated from the nationalism-at-large as in the case of Chetan Bhatt and Aditya Nigam respectively.

Attempts at understanding social realities in a psychoanalytical framework are often dismissed in the name of psychological reductionism. While on the one hand it is important to address this concern before one embarks on a psychoanalytical analysis, it is also important to recognise any semblance of merit in the reservation and tread with greater care in one's attempts. Both these concerns however can be addressed together in the concept of the Lacanian subject. As Feher-Gurewich points out:

Lacan's psychoanalytic approach is founded on premises that are in sharp contrast to the ones which have led to the failure of an alliance between psychoanalysis and social theory. Lacan provides social theory with a vision of the human subject that sheds new light on the relations between individual aspirations and social aims (Feher-Gurewich 154).

In his pathbreaking work *Lacan and the Political*, Yannis Stavrakakis has argued how Lacanian theory is not only applicable to social theory but is also uniquely so, for it resolves or lays bare those constitutive lacks that lie at the foundation of social construction. This is primarily because Lacan introduces a "novel conception of subjectivity, a 'socio-political' conception of subjectivity not reduced to individuality, a subjective opening a new road to the understanding of the 'objective'" (Stavrakakis 4). Lacanian theory therefore is not simply an application of the psychoanalytical to analyse the social, but is primarily a project of studying the inter-implications between the two. Aware of the larger tendency to dismiss analysis in the name of psychological reductionism, Lacan himself offered the following careful explanation of the relationship between the two:

It may be well that since its experience is limited to the individual, psychoanalysis cannot claim to grasp the totality of any sociological object, or even the entirety of causes currently operating in our society. Even so, in its treatment of the individual, psychoanalysis has discovered relational tensions that appear to play a fundamental role in all societies, as if the discontent in civilisation went so far as to reveal the very joint of nature to culture. If one makes the appropriate transformation, one can extend the formulas of psychoanalysis concerning this joint to certain human sciences that can utilise them (Lacan, *Theoretical Introduction* 14).

Apart from the radically different understanding of the subject that Lacanian theory offers, it is indispensable to any analysis of the social phenomena for the simple reason that it has redefined the object. Ernest Laclau has pointed out that the single most important contribution of Lacanian theory is in showing that ‘understanding social reality is not equivalent to understanding what society is, but what prevents it from being’ (Laclau 44). This is precisely the point that the current research moves towards. It shows what prevents the Indian democracy from being. As historian Romila Thapar argues, “A secular democracy, once it is established, makes no concession to caste or religion. We haven’t arrived there yet but we have to be clear about this as we strive to get there” (Thapar, *On Nationalism* 48). This research explores the role played by nationalism in preventing the democracy from becoming what it was meant and is supposed to be.

The first chapter entitled ‘The Birth of the Mother’ highlights the religious iconography of Indian nationalism by observing the manner in which religion becomes a definitive part of nationalism through its idolisation of the motherland as a Goddess who must be worshipped and freed from the torture of the foreign occupier. It examines the history of the independence movement and its handling of the song ‘*Vande Mataram*’ despite its religious and communal semiotics. It then follows a close textual reading of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s 1882 novel *Anandamath* to observe the connection between ‘*Vande Mataram*’ and its parent text and thereby understand the politics of secular cleansing which chooses to extract out from the communal that which is unproblematic and thereby ‘secular’. Consequently, the chapter argues that the secular is structured on the foundation of the communal and therefore conceptually intertwined with it.

The second chapter entitled 'The Master Signifier of Nationalism' first observes the omissions and commissions in the nationalist understanding of nation and nationalism. Through a comparative reading of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's *Hindutva* and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, it aims to understand the similarities and differences in their ideas of the Indian nation and its nationalism. The second part uses the Lacanian graphs of desire to understand the manner in which nationalism as the master signifier fixes the meaning of the entire field of floating signifiers. It then moves towards unravelling the manner in which the master signifier interpellates the subject into desiring and working towards the realisation of a socio-ideological fantasy that masks the constitutive lack in the symbolic order.

The third chapter entitled 'The Socio-Ideological Fantasy of India' unearths the manner in which fantasy works by upholding the beatific side as the ideal to work for while also identifying the internal threats who must be negated in order for the fantasy to be realised. It highlights the role played by history and historiography in the sustenance of the fantasy which posits an imagined past as a site of a lost pre-symbolic fullness that must be reproduced or replicated into the present. The chapter goes on to highlight the nature of the relationship between politics and the political. Arguing in favour of putting forth social multiplicities in the face of a homogenising force, it offers a reading of Qurratulain Hyder's 1958 novel *River of Fire* as a dialectical opposite to *Anandamath*, going on to conclude with an analysis of the relationship between nationalism and democracy and the ways through which one can deal with the symptom of the anti-national in order to truly traverse the socio-ideological fantasy of India.

Chapter 1

The Birth of the Mother

It is not till the Motherland reveals herself to the eye of the mind as something more than a stretch of earth or a mass of individuals, it is not till she takes shapes as a great Divine and Maternal Power in a form of beauty that can dominate the mind seize the heart that these petty fears and hopes vanish in the all absorbing passion for the Mother and her service, and the patriotism that works miracles and saves a doomed nation is born (Aurobindo, *Bankim* 10-11).

Contemporary debates surrounding nationalism in India have been reduced to a contest between two slogans—‘*Bharat Mata ki Jai*’ and ‘*Azaadi*’, where the two have somewhat unceremoniously—and in the case of *Azaadi* rather ironically—emerged as the rallying call for the nationalists and the anti-nationals respectively. The standard against which this difference was promulgated and is now being reproduced here is, as a matter of fact, essentially populist. It is only the nationalists who can identify who the anti-national is. On 16 March 2016, Waris Pathan, a member of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly was suspended from the House for refusing to chant ‘*Bharat Mata ki Jai*.’ In a rare display of solidarity, all the political parties in the House voted unanimously for his suspension on the complaint of a Bharatiya Janata Party member, Ram Kadam. That Pathan’s non-Hindu identity was the reason behind his selection as a candidate for the challenge, and which resulted in his suspension, did not receive any flak or revocation from the political or judicial processes of the country-at-large. Following the suspension, referring to the Muslims’ refusal to chant the slogan, the highly influential Yoga guru Baba Ramdev said at a public gathering that had it not been for the law of the land, “*hum toh lakhon ki gardan kaat sakte hain* (we would have decapitated lakhs)”, going on to add that “if any religion says that do not honour the motherland, such a religion is also not in the interest of this country” (*The Indian Express*, 4 April 2016).

The opposition of the non-Hindu community, primarily those from the monotheistic faiths, to the chanting of ‘*Bharat Mata ki Jai*’ or ‘*Vande Mataram*’ is primarily on the grounds of its idolatrous nature which sees India as a Goddess who must be worshipped in the same manner as any other God in the Hindu pantheon. The central contention in this imposition, however, is the manner in which the idolisation is presented as a prerequisite for a nationalism that is always

already absolute in its demand. Consequently, the subject who does not have the agency to reject nationalism in principle, is faced with the demand of participating in a religious practice that is not her own, as part of a process that she cannot choose to break away from. Nationalism, as the master signifier, therefore fixes the meaning and legitimacy of a particular religion. Sri Aurobindo, for instance, argues that the *Sanatan Dharm*, is the one religion that constitutes true nationalism. He writes:

I spoke once before with this force in me that nationalism is not politics but a religion, a creed, a faith. I say it again today, but I put it in another way. I say that it is the Sanatan Dharma which for us is nationalism. This Hindu nation was born with the Sanatan Dharma, with it it moves and with it it grows ... The Sanatan Dharma, that is nationalism (Aurobindo, *Karmayogin* 10).

In arguing thus, Aurobindo entwines religion and nationalism together in a such a manner that the very idea of the nation, its purpose, is negotiated in a theological framework that defines the qualifiability of a nationalist not on the basis of what she is but on what she is not. Savarkar, as we shall observe in Chapter 2, had a similar thesis on the genesis of the Indian nation which was born with the arrival of the Aryans and attained complete selfhood with the victory of the god-king Ram of Ayodhya. Every citizen must acknowledge this glorious past if she is to live and prosper in India. Nationalism, therefore, becomes a function of religion.

***Vande Mataram* and the Religious Iconography of Indian Nationalism**

The song *Vande Mataram* was originally composed in the early 1870s as a *vandana* or prayer to the motherland (as Goddess Durga) by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, and remained unpublished until 1881 when he included it as the central trope in his novel *Anandamath* (Bhattacharya xi). While in its inception, it was confined primarily to Bengal, it was subsequently appropriated in the nationalist movement as a slogan for the freedom of the enslaved mother. Its transformation into a political slogan happened first during the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal in 1905, wherein it gained wider public exposure and adoption. In the early 1920s, it was translated into various regional languages by Subrahmanya Bharati and others. It was in the 1930s that its status as a nationalist song came under scanner with the concerns raised by Mohammad Ali Jin-

nah and other Muslim League leaders who highlighted its essentially idolatrous nature which went against their own monotheistic faith, and hinted at the communalisation of the independence movement. Following a series of reviews, in 1937, the Indian National Congress adopted it as a national song after expurgating those sections which likened Mother India to Goddess Durga. On Dr Rajendra Prasad's insistence, the Constituent Assembly of India adopted the edited version of the poem as the national song of India in 1951 (Bhattacharya xii). The present section will look at the nature of the debates and contestations in the adoption of *Vande Mataram* as the national song of India as an instance of the nexus between religion and nationalism, while focusing on the politics of expurgation as secular cleansing which is structured on and around a communal core that always already permeates, and is allowed to permeate, into the secular.

The changing stance on the legitimacy of *Vande Mataram* as a slogan for nationalism on a plane of identification from where the secular looks worthy to herself can be best gauged from the two comments of Gandhi on the nature of the song, which were separated by thirty two years and covered the most tumultuous period of the independence movement. In 1915, when Gandhi was addressing a gathering in Madras which began with the singing of *Vande Mataram*—in its entirety—he commented on the nature of the song thus:

You have sung that beautiful national song, on hearing which all of us sprang to our feet. The poet has lavished all the adjectives we possibly could to describe Mother India ... It is for you and me to make good the claim that the poet has advanced on behalf of his Motherland (Gandhi, *CWMG XII* 64).

It is interesting to note how Gandhi refers to the poem as 'national song', way before it spread to the rest of the country, and decades before India actually became a nation. Thirty years later, when the controversy over its communal character had become a part of the public discourse, Gandhi was "distinctly defensive" (Bhattacharya 1) about the song and he said, "That was no religious cry. It was purely political cry ... It should never be a chant to insult or offend the Muslim" (Gandhi, *CWMG LXIX* 80). P K Datta argues that this shift in Gandhi's stance happened primarily because the song did indeed become a religious cry and was used by Hindu mobs in communal riots (Datta 256). This is further corroborated by Sumit Sarkar who writes:

The enormous overlap in personnel, assumptions, and symbols between mainstream Indian nationalism and Hindu communalism is too obvious to need much elaboration. One can think of the “Bande Mataram” hymn-cum-slogan, central to much anti-British patriotism and at the same time a Hindu rallying cry, at least in Bengal, during confrontations with Muslims. (I recall hearing it used in that way during a Calcutta riot in the winter of 1964-65) (S Sarkar 271).

The potentially communal essence of the slogan, then, was not in the realm of speculation. That it was not discarded, despite its religious semiotics, is of prime significance here. While the debate surrounding its nature was roaring, Gandhi made a rather interesting comment on its applicability in India which betrays a sense of hesitation that supports the accusations of scholars like Perry Anderson who identify him as “a dutiful son of his faith” (P Anderson 23). In a 1939 essay addressing the issue in *Harijan*, Gandhi writes that ‘as a lad’ he was enthralled by the song and that when he grew older, it was not his more nuanced understanding of the world that changed his stance, but the intolerance of the times he grew old in. He writes:

It never occurred to me that it was a Hindu song or meant only for Hindus. Unfortunately now we have fallen on evil days. All that was pure gold has become base metal today. In such times it is wisdom not to market pure gold and let it be sold as base metal. I would not risk a single quarrel over singing Vande Mataram at a mixed gathering. It will never suffer from disuse. It is enthroned in the hearts of millions (Bhattacharya 41).

Thus, while Gandhi aspires towards the secular, he does so with an acknowledgement of the richness, as is evident from his attribution of ‘gold’ to the hymn, that he is being made to relinquish as a result of the ‘evil days’ in which the communal intent of the subject is highlighted. An important aspect of this seeping over of the inherent religiosity in Gandhi onto the nationalist project is evinced from the recitations of prayers before all of his gatherings. In R K Narayan’s 1955 novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*, when Gandhiji visits Malgudi—which is an enormous event in itself—Sriram goes to the much-anticipated gathering addressed by Gandhi which begins with another Hindu hymn. Narayan writes:

Now a mighty choral chant began: *Raghupathi Raghava Raja Ram, Pathitha Pavana Seetha Ram*, to a simple tune, led by a girl at the microphone. It went on and on, and ceased when Mahatmaji began his speech ... Mahatma Gandhi said: ... 'We, the citizens of this country, are all soldiers of a non-violent army, but even such an army has to practice a few things daily in order to keep itself in proper condition: we do not have to bask in the sun and cry "Left" or "Right". But we have a system of our own to follow: that's Ram Dhun; spinning on the charka and the practice of absolute Truth and Non-violence' (Narayan 27-28).

The importance given to *Ram Dhun* in the the adoption of a way of life leading to independence leaves little for imagination as to the religious content of the ideals. Aditya Nigam makes an incisive observation about the religious symbolism in Gandhi's nationalism thus:

Gandhi was the lone leader whose nationalism sought to include, rather than exclude, other streams like the Muslims and the Dalits, if often in extremely misplaced ways ... The very vocabulary of Gandhi's political mobilisation, the very articulation of his moral world in the language of Hindu religious categories, endangered the project he strove to accomplish (Nigam 38).

It was common knowledge that was reflected in literature and elsewhere that most of Gandhi's public gatherings began with invocations that were essentially Hindu, which explains Gandhi's own bias towards the adoption of *Vande Mataram* across India, despite the fact that it is in Sankrit—a language few people understand in the country. Language, however, never became a barrier for Gandhi who chose to address the Malgudi crowd in *Waiting for the Mahatma* in Hindi. Narayan writes: "Natesh interpreted in Tamil what Gandhi said in Hindi. At the outset Mahatma Gandhi explained that he'd speak only in Hindi as a matter of principle. 'I will not address you in English. It's the language of our rulers. It has enslaved us. I very much wish I could speak to you in your own sweet language, Tamil; but alas, I am too hard-pressed for time to master it now ...'" (Narayan 27). Gandhi frequently argued that the 'Dravidians' should make an effort to learn Hindi in order to truly become a part of the Indian nation since they constituted a linguistic minority and it made sense for the minority to learn the language of the majority instead of the other

way around. In *Young India*, Gandhi appealed to those living in the southern parts of the country thus: “I have the greatest faith in the Dravidians some day taking up Hindi study seriously. If an eighth of the industry that they put in mastering English were to be devoted to learning Hindi, instead of the rest of India remaining a sealed book to them, they will be one with us as never before” (Gandhi, *Young India* 16 June 1920).

The point one is trying to make here is that the idea of ‘Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan’ was not confined completely to the Hindu Right, and this is best reflected in the debate surrounding the adoption or promulgation of *Vande Mataram*. While Gandhi did address the song’s potential to be appropriated or used in a communal context, many others from within the left and central organs of the Indian body politic chose to overlook this Othering by focusing instead on its revolutionary potential as argued by the Hindu Right to “spur thousands of young hearts to cheerfully ascend the gallows” (Golwalkar, *BOT* 78). The most peculiar aspect about this, however, is the fact that this ambiguity with respect to *Vande Mataram* on part of those who identify themselves as secular sustained even after the Independence and there has hardly been any progress in the nature of the debate ever since. In 1983, a member from the opposition in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly passed a resolution demanding efforts on part of the Left government to actively promote the novel *Anandamath* on a mass scale. The sitting government—a coalition of Left parties—chose not to vote against the motion while the Opposition victoriously shouted *Vande Mataram* in the House (Bhattacharya 5). About this ambivalence in the secular, especially Left ranks, Partha Chatterjee writes:

Why should there be such hesitation in ‘progressive’ circles about taking a clear position on *Anandamath* ... Its fame does not rest on its aesthetic merits. It rests almost entirely on the symbolic significance it has come to acquire within a particular tradition in Bengal. Why then should the Left find it so difficult to define its own position with respect to that political tradition? ... This time the Left has once more stepped into that familiar nationalist trap. Instead of addressing its historical right to criticise our own heritage, it has only connived at perpetuating a cultural attitude which sacralises every time of that heritage, transforms them into icons that must be worshipped from a distance, an attitude which treats criticism

as tantamount to desecration. This is scarcely consistent with ‘revolutionary’ cultural role of a ‘progressive’ political leadership (Chatterjee 16).

It is precisely this ambivalence that strengthens the notion that religion and nationalism are so deeply intertwined in India that one cannot choose between the two. Indian Nationalism mandates a certain form of religiosity that owing to majoritarian politics, is defined by the majoritarian faith and principles.

It was only within the two sides representing religious interests that the stand on *Vande Mataram* remained clear throughout the years leading to the Independence of India. It was only the communal which preached with an admirable degree of clarity on the issue—the Hindu right which embraced it, and the Muslim leaders who rejected it—while the secular remained non-committal and cautious. The consequence of this communalisation can be gauged from the following analysis by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya:

The emergence of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha among the contestants in the elections of 1926; major communal riots in different parts of India in 1924, 1925, and 1926; and the recurrence of lesser incidents of conflict, leading to bloodshed and police action between 1922 and 1927 (altogether 112 such incidents are reported by the government) created an ambience of tension in which the song increasingly became one of the many causes of Hindu-Muslim conflict. The Government of India Act of 1935, the reservation of seats on communal basis, and the 1937 elections leading to the formation of provincial governments exacerbated tensions. At this juncture we find Sir Henry Craik, then the head of the home department and member of the viceroy’s executive council, writing to Lord Baden-Powell that the song ‘actually originated as “hymn of hate” against Muslims’” (Bhattacharya 10).

Bhattacharya’s contention that the song was directly responsible for communal clashes lends a greater significance to the actual role played by the Congress at a time when it was the most organised and the most powerful political entity in the country. Battle lines were drawn within the Party in its handling of the issue. Subhash Chandra Bose, who was heavily perturbed by the at-

tack on the song, wrote to Rabindranath Tagore—who was one of the driving forces behind its popularity—to share his opinion on the same. Another person who sought Tagore’s advice on the issue was Jawaharlal Nehru who had recently read the novel and remarked on 20 October 1937, “I have managed to get an English translation of *Anandamath* and I am reading it at present to get the background of the song. It does seem that this background is likely to irritate the Muslims” (Bhattacharya 32). It is important to note that this is at a time when the Congress was fighting the Muslim League for the provincial government, and was seeking to consolidate the Muslim vote bank. In April of the same year, Nehru had written in a press statement referring to the Congress’ ‘Muslim Mass Contact’:

We talk of approaching the Muslim masses ... that is no new programme for us although the stress may be new ... It must be remembered that the Congress has always had a large number of Muslims in its fold ... Some of our most eminent national leaders have been and are Muslims. But it is true that the Muslim masses have been largely neglected by us in recent years. We want to correct that omission and carry the message of the Congress to them. Why do others object to this? ... The congress, being a political organisation, does not concern itself with religion or connected matters (*Hindustan Times*, 28 Apr. 1937).

Consequently, the Congress found itself in a quagmire of contested allegiances. While it had erstwhile maintained a careful ambiguity in its stance, it was now facing a test of who it really stood for. Conceding that he had difficulty understanding the obscure language of the poem, Nehru wrote to Tagore to seek his advice on what can be done. In his response, Tagore offered a solution that went on to define the fate of the song in India. Tagore wrote:

I freely concede that the whole of Bankim’s ‘Vande Mataram’ poem, read together with its context, is liable to be interpreted in ways that might wound Moslem susceptibilities, but a national song, though derived from it, which has spontaneously come to consist only of the first two stanzas of the original poem, need not remind us every time of the whole of it, much less of the story with which it was accidentally associated. It has acquired a separate individuality and an inspiring signifi-

cance of its own in which I see nothing to offend any sect or community
(Mukhopadhyay 110-111).

Consequently, the Congress Working Committee readily accepted the proposal and in October 1937 adopted the expurgated and ‘unproblematic’ version of the poem as the national song of India. However, there are two major thematic premises that Tagore draws upon that we are primarily concerned with here. The first is Tagore’s clear demarcation between the original poem and the expurgated song derived from it. In arguing thus, Tagore puts forward a method that disaffiliates the two as separate entities that can exist independently. The derived song thus, in his understanding, completely detaches itself from the parent text. In this line of reasoning, it would be safe to assume on part of the recipient that a fragment of the piece is self-sufficient in itself and does not depend on the context of the original for its meaning.

The second and perhaps an even more problematic premise upon which Tagore makes his suggestion is that he reduces the relationship between the poem and the novel to be an ‘accidental association.’ While doing so, he presents no rationale as to how the central trope of a novel can be accidental. Perhaps one would not be entirely misplaced in assuming that there is a certain bias in Tagore’s opinion of *Vande Mataram*, and the fact that he was the first to compose the song and sing it in the writer’s presence may have some role to play in it. Be that as it may, it is important to establish the contextual continuity of the novel into the song before one can truly dismiss Tagore’s assumption. For these and other reasons that shall be highlighted in due course, the following section shall analyse Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay’s *Anandamath* to investigate the possibility of a redemptive reading which can reduce the song to an ‘accidental association’.

***Anandamath* and the ‘Rishi’ of Indian Nationalism**

The significance of *Anandamath* and *Vande Mataram* in the development of India’s religious nationalism can be gauged from the wide support it received from those sections of the society that were working towards the formation of a majoritarian country, or believed the non-Hindus to be lesser players in a country that they did not belong to. In *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity*, Akbar Ahmed makes a forceful argument in declaring that “there is a direct relationship between *Anandamath*, written in 1882, and the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya in 1992” (Ahmed 220). The publication of the novel and the demolition of the mosque are separated

by 110 years and a distinct linguistic divide. How then could the two be related in the manner that Ahmed claims them to be, especially when Anandamath is popularly remembered as a proto-nationalist text? Aurobindo, for instance, hailed Bankim to be the ‘*rishi*’ of Indian nationalism who showed the way to the *santans* of *Bharat Mata* on how to achieve freedom. The following quotes from Aurobindo, written in 1907, hold special significance in the context of this discussion:

It was thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote his great song and few listened; but in a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions, the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and in a fated moment somebody sang Vande Mataram. The mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself ... Among the *Rishis* ... we must include the name of the man who gave us the reviving mantra which is creating a new India, the mantra Vande Mataram ... He, first of our great publicists, understood the hollowness and inutility of the method of political agitation which prevailed at that time ... The Mother of his vision held trenchant steel in her twice-seventy million hands and not the bowl of the mendicant. It was the gospel of fearless strength and force which he preached under a veil and in images in *Anandamath* ... (Aurobindo, *Bandemataram* 319).

Bhattacharya argues that although Bankim wasn’t the primary force behind the popularisation of the song, “he was the first to discern a peculiar significance in the religious semiotics of the song” (Bhattacharya 46). By the very anointment of his status to a ‘*rishi*’, Chattopadhyay becomes a part of a larger Hindu tradition that is representative of India—the India of the glorious Hindu past and the promise of the India that was yet to come. What is also important to note is that while the secular, as in the case of Tagore, strives to separate the song from its parent text and context, the communal/nationalist, as we see in the case of Aurobindo, labours to maintain the connection between the two. In order to truly understand the politics of this contested relationship, it is our imperative to truly understand the context of the novel that becomes the bone of contention in this regard, and has been largely hailed the proto-nationalist text of Indian literature.

Anandamath was serially published in the monthly journal *Bangadarshan*, which was also run by Chattopadhyay. The first excerpt appeared in the journal's twelfth issue in its seventh year of publication in 1881 while the last issue came out in 1882—two decades after the First War of Independence of 1857. The novel is set in Bengal at the time of the Great Bengal Famine of 1770 and covers the Fakir-Sanyasi (Muslim and Hindu ascetics respectively) rebellion against the East India Company. One of the first points at which the novel departs from the historical narrative is that it confines itself entirely to the Sanyasis while completely excluding the Fakirs, of whom there is no mention. Additionally, while the historical narrative claims that the rebellion was against the Company, the novel makes a radical detour in the identification of its enemy to be not the Company but the Muslim ruler and by extension the Muslim populace who must be annihilated in order for Mother India to be truly freed. About its historical discrepancies, Tanika Sarkar writes:

These ideological moves do not need proper historical authentication since they are posed in a fictional space; the pseudohistorical comments, however, carry an immense weight of conviction, nonetheless, particularly since Bankim was known for a highly historicist thrust in his discursive prose. They are, therefore, insidiously authenticated, and then they justify political rallying cries of extreme virulence: “Kill the low Muslims” (T Sarkar, *Imagining Hindurashtra* 180).

While the text is situated in the safe confines of fiction, it relies on the author's pre-established “historicist thrust” to not only validate the historical framework of the novel but also to absolve the author and the text of all historical discrepancies. Additionally, the pseudo-historicity works as a legitimising principle for identifying the Muslim Other as the enemy who must be killed. It is not the violence in the novel, however, that is the prime source of concern here. It is its adoption as a nationalist text that demands greater analysis. As Lipner concedes, “There can be no doubt that *Anandamath* has been received in the context of a wider nationalism, in which both the slogan *Vande Mataram* and the hymn from which it is drawn have played an important part” (Lipner 71). Why is it that the communalism of the novel was overlooked in favour of its nationalism? Is it because nationalism was a greater call or is it because there is no disparity between the domi-

nant understanding of nationalism and communalism? Is nationalism, therefore, essentially communal?

The novel begins with its portrayal of absolute desolation in Padacinha as a consequence of the famine. One of the wealthy men, Mahendra Simha, who had survived thus far, decides to leave with his wife and child for the city in the hope of finding food. When the two are estranged and Kalyani, his wife, is carried away by the cannibalistic robbers, she pleads to the gods: “Where are You, whom I worship and revere daily, and with whose help I’ve been able to enter even a forest like this! Where are You, Lord, Madhu’s slayer” (Chattopadhyay 136)? Promptly, she hears a “heavenly” voice chanting an invocation to “Vishnu O Hari, enemy of Mura, of Madhu and Kaitabha! O Gopal, Govinda, Mukunda, Krishna! O Hari, enemy of Mura, of Madhu and Kaitabha” (Chattopadhyay 136)! Right from the onset, the facticity of the Hindu tradition is established. It sets the tone for the narrative where the spiritual or divine seamlessly merges into the human world and becomes an active participant in it. The divine, therefore, becomes an incontestable reality in a historical framework that is structured around the event of the famine that is embedded in the popular imagination. The sweeping facticity of the famine and the *sanyasi* rebellion therefore works to legitimise the presence of the theological. About the famine, we are told:

In 1770 Bengal had not yet fallen under British sway. The British at the time were Bengal’s tax collectors. All they did was collect the revenue; they took no responsibility for overseeing the lives and property of Bengalis. Their task was to collect the money, while the responsibility for life and property belonged to the evil Mir Jafar, a vile, treacherous blot on the human race. He was unable to look after himself, so how could he look after Bengal? Mir Jafar took opium and slept, the British took in the money and issued receipts, and the Bengali wept and went to ruin (Chattopadhyay 136).

Two significant points are made through this description. Firstly, it redeems the British who were only stationed to collect the taxes and were no in way responsible for the conditions of existence of the people. They are therefore not be blamed for any incompetence on their part. Secondly, the entire blame is put on the “evil” Mir Jafar. That the Company’s agriculture policies in favour of growing indigo instead of rice led to the food shortage is left unaddressed. It is interesting to note

how the two powers are described. It is not the coloniser who is the enemy, but the titular who is “a treacherous blot on the human race.” This is especially significant because history tells us that Jafar died in 1765, five years before the famine.¹ In 1770, Bengal saw three different Nawabs— lesser known Nawabs. By identifying Mir Jafar (who was known for his betrayal of Siraj-ud-Daula) as the sitting nawab, the text enhances its effectiveness in pointing out the real enemy by choosing a personality who is better known in the popular imagination in order to eventually make him representative of the callous rule of the Muslims. At one point during the battle, Bhabhananda tells the English captain, “Captain Sir, I shan’t kill you, the English are not our enemies. But why are you here to help the Muslims? Here, I spare your life, for the time being you are my prisoner. Victory to the English! We wish you well” (Chattopadhyay 207). Retrospectively, Bhabhananda’s words were far more significant than he realised, for the narrator tells us, “Of course, the *santans* didn’t know then that the English had come to rescue India. How could they? Even Captain Thomas’s English contemporaries didn’t know” (Chattopadhyay 191). The English presence, therefore, was a blessing in disguise for India for they freed India from the tyranny of the Muslim oppressor.

In that light, it is quite ironical when *Anandamath* is hailed as a novel against the British rule in India, or as a torch lighting the fire of freedom struggle in India. The English were never the enemy in the first place to be fought or defeated in the novel. Since the collapse of the Muslim rule, India was always already on the road to Independence helped by the guiding light of British colonisation. In clubbing the Muslims and the British together in direct contradistinction to the Bengalis, as can be seen from the above-mentioned quote, the novel establishes a clear dichotomy between the native Self and the foreign Other. The Muslim inhabitant of the land is as much an occupier as the British. The Mother therefore is not suffering from the presence of the British alone but primarily from the presence of the Muslim ruling class. When Mahendra is being recruited by Satyananda, he is taken to the temple devoted to the Mother where there are three idols representing her state in the three temporal phases of the past, present and future. As we will argue in the last chapter, it is these three representations that have become the definitive means of Indian history in the popular nationalist imagination. While the image of the past represents a state of harmony and fullness, the present depicts her as an incarnation of Kali who is in

¹Whether or not Bankim was aware of this inconsistency is a matter of speculation.

direct combat with her enemies, where as in the future she is depicted in all her glory with her power restored. It is towards the realisation of this future that the *santans* must work.

When Mahendra is rescued by Bhibananda, the latter by way of the song *Vande Mataram*, introduces the former to the order of the *santans*—Mother’s Children—who have renounced their own families in the service of the Mother. When Mahendra questions him on the ends of their violent means, Bhabhananda tells him, “If we don’t get rid of these bearded degenerates will anything be left of our Hindu identity?” and when Mahendra asks him, “How will you get rid of them?” Bhabhananda responds “By destroying them” (Chattopadhyay 147). The identification of the enemy is sealed with an admirable clarity. It is the “bearded degenerate” who must be destroyed by the Mother’s Children in order for her to be truly free. When Mahendra enquires as to how the destruction would happen, Bhabhananda replies by singing *Vande Mataram*. The point one is trying to make is that throughout the text—as will be highlighted subsequently—the enemy is consistently defined to be the Muslim rulers and not the Englishmen, who are even valorised for their courage. Bhabhananda tells Mahendra:

“Listen”, said Bhabananda, “an Englishman won’t flee even to save his life, whereas the Muslim will run off when he begins to sweat; he’ll slope off in search of a cool drink! Again, the English hang on, they’ll finish what they’ve begun. But the Muslim plays fast and loose. The sepoy risk their lives for money, even then they don’t get paid. And finally, it’s a question of courage. The cannonball can fall only in one place not in ten, so there’s no need for two hundred to run when they see a single cannonball. Yet when they see a single cannonball a whole tribe of Muslims will flee, whereas a tribe of cannonballs can’t make a single Englishman run” (Chattopadhyay 147-8)!

The Muslim, therefore, is an embodiment of all the vices possible that may not even concern the state of the mother as depicted in the temple. Far from being fit to rule the land, they do not even qualify to be a competing force against the courage and virility of the Mother’s *santans*. Consequently, if *Anandamath* continues to enjoy the status of a nationalist novel, one is compelled to question as to who this violent form of nationalism is directed against. As is clear from the text, the Englishman is a worthy opponent who, unlike the Muslim, lives his life by a code of honour

and courage. As Satyananda, the leader, says “We don’t aspire to temporal power. All we wish to do is uproot the Muslims completely because they are enemies of our Lord” (Chattopadhyay 180). Tanika Sarkar argues:

Since the old Hindu had suffered from the absence of a combination of physical prowess and desire for self-rule, the new Hindu will only have arrived when he proves himself in a final battle that will overwhelmingly establish his superiority over the Muslim, who had in the past always defeated the Hindu. (The agenda of the war with the Muslim occurs only in the novel.) Since the British have something to impart to the Hindu, Hindu empowerment, it seems, must unfold within an overarching colonial framework. It is the Muslim, the vanquisher of generations of past Hindus, who will be the great adversary of the new Hindu. This is the concluding note and message of *Anandamath* (T Sarkar, *Imagining Hindurashtra* 177).

So when Aurobindo argues that “the *mantra* had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism”, one is compelled to question the nature of this patriotism. Is the ‘religion of patriotism’ then to be understood in a completely literal sense as a religious patriotism? When news of Satyananda’s return reaches *Anandamath*, one *santan* asks another, “Brother, has the day come when we will be able to tear down the mosque and build a temple to Radha and Krishna in its place” (Chattopadhyay 203)? This is perhaps why Ahmed argued that *Anandamath* was directly responsible for the Babri Masjid demolition. The mosque becomes an extended symbol of the foreign occupier which must be destroyed in order to reclaim the land for the rightful owner—the *santan* of the Mother. Even when the *santans* join their ranks as planned by Satyananda, their actual tasks involve the burning of Muslim villages and the slaughtering of every Muslim they can find. We are told, “He would collect about twenty to twenty-five volunteers, and they would enter a Muslim village and set it on fire. Whilst the Muslims tried frantically to save their lives, the *santans* would loot their belongings and distribute them among the new devotees of Vishnu” (Chattopadhyay 189). There are numerous other instances in the text which lead to the same conclusion. It is the Muslim and the Muslim alone who is the enemy of Mother India and who must therefore be “uprooted.” By depriving them of any voice or

agency in the novel, the Muslims are further dehumanised and reduced to cardboard figures that become recipients of the *santans*' wrath. One would therefore disagree with Tanika Sarkar's argument that the novel is "ambiguous about whom the mother is fighting" (T Sarkar, *Imagining Hindurashtra* 173). One could even go as far as to say that there is an impeccable clarity as to who the enemy is. Lise McKean makes an incisive psychological reading of the novel and argues that:

The narrative of militant "matriotism" might be read as an oedipal drama of the patriarchal nation-state. The nation is figured as a loving Mother surrounded by her devoted children; the secular state and Muslims (as heirs of Muslim invaders) figure as the tyrannical Father. Whether celibate or supported by their devoted wives, Bharat Mata's sons are valiant protagonists whose struggle is a righteous patricide, a conquest that simultaneously liberates the nation—the Mother and her children—and enables her sons to enjoy the power and riches they have successfully wrested from the malevolent Father (McKean 252).

Every act of violence committed by the *santans* is in the name of the Mother who is invoked throughout the novel with the slogan of *Vande Mataram*, while all the Muslim can respond with is: "Allah Akbar! Is the holy Koran completely false after all! We pray five times a day, even then we can't conquer this Hindu lot with their smears of sandalpaste! The whole world's a sham" (Chattopadhyay 214). In the face of the empowered *santan*, not only does the Muslim occupier lose his power but he also realises the falsity of his faith which is completely overpowered by the righteous *santan*. The *santans*, having renounced all worldly pleasures, become invincible in the novel on their path of destruction in order to save the Mother. It is this figure of the Mother that sustained through more than a century and is still a symbolic representation of India. It is precisely this idolatrous nature that became the eye of the storm in the years leading to the independence of India. However, the expurgated form of the poem was still adopted as the national song of India, as was previously pointed out.

The Politics of Expurgation

There are currently three major temples in India that are dedicated to Bharat Mata. The first temple in Varanasi was inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi in 1936, on which occasion he is reported to have said, “I hope this temple, which will serve as a cosmopolitan platform for people of all religions, castes, and creeds including Harijans, will go a great way in promoting religious unity, peace, and love in the country” (Eck 100). The second temple was founded at Haridwar in 1983 and was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The third temple was founded in Kolkata in 2015 on the occasion of the completion of 140 years of *Vande Mataram*, and was inaugurated by the then Governor of West Bengal, Keshari Nath Tripathi. The temple at Haridwar is 180 feet tall and has eight storeys. McKean makes the following observation about the statue:

The inspiration for the Bharat Mata statue is attributed to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s poem “Bande Mataram”. The guidebook links Bharat Mata to the freedom struggle by explaining that Bankim visualised her during the movement for independence from British rule ... [A] large map of India is mounted on a raised platform located in the centre of this ground-floor shrine. On it are marked mountains and rivers, major centres of Hindu pilgrimage, and “all important centres of culture”. The map thus represents the political boundaries of the Indian state while inscribing its topographic features in terms of Hindu cosmography (McKean 269).

What then is the nature or limitation of the secular fabric of India? How does one explain the hesitation or denial on part of a secular democracy in rejecting *Vande Mataram* as its national song? How does expurgation truly work? The Congress subcommittee formed in October 1937 to resolve the issue of ‘Bande Mataram’ declared it to be “symbolic of national resistance to British imperialism.” In selecting only the first two paragraphs, the Committee presented the following rationale: “These two stanzas described in tender language the beauty of the motherland and the abundance of her gifts. There was nothing absolutely in them to which objection could be taken from the religious or any other point of view” (Lipner 80). However, this selection of the two stanzas did not obliterate from existence the rest of the poem as composed by Bankim. In fact, it

is still used by Hindutva forces as their national anthem. Tanika Sarkar reports that the song is still sung in its entirety everyday at the RSS *shakhas*. She writes:

For the Sangh Parivar, “Bande Mataram” is the authentic national anthem, not Rabindranath Tagore’s “Jana gana mana,” the official anthem for the Republic of India. The hymn is apparently sung in its entirety (including Bengali passages) daily at RSS training meetings (*shakhas*). Any change or abbreviation is strictly forbidden, since the song symbolises the undivided, inviolate body of the pre-partition motherland; hence, an abridgement amounts to a symbolic mutilation of the sacred body ... When the BJP came into power in Delhi during the 1993 state elections, it made singing “Bande Mataram” compulsory in Delhi state schools (T Sarkar, *Imagining Hindurashtra* 162-3).

When regimes of power change, especially those driven by a majoritarian ideology, changes like these are not only inevitable but also protected by the constitutional processes. However, is there really a ‘change’ in the discourse through these measure or is it simply an expression by a bolder government of the latent desires of the preceding regimes?

Through expurgation as a means for secular cleansing, what is unwittingly(?) enabled is the formation of the secular on the foundation of the sacred, or in this case, communal. The secular derives its meaning by pruning the contours of the communal to make it ‘unproblematic’—as was said for the national song. However, since it is the communal base upon which the secular superstructure is erected, the base will always already regulate and pervade the meaning of secular. One would therefore contest the demarcation in B R Purohit’s *Hindu Revivalism and Indian Nationalism* where he argues that Hindu Nationalism is distinct from Indian Nationalism and that “the two were fundamentally in opposition to each other with respect to their ideals. The former was exclusive, narrowly based, mixed with religion and partial ... The latter was broad based, pacifist, secular, democratic, and liberal in temperament” (Purohit 76). What is often glossed over in these teleological narratives of secular historians is the intersection between the communal and the secular which blurs the lines between an Indian and a Hindu nationalism which is primarily because of the nature of nationalism as an empty/pure signifier, which will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 2

The Master Signifier of Nationalism

Nationalist theory accords with the famous remark by Péguy: *Tout commence en mystique et finit en politique*. In the beginning is the nation, an unselfconscious cultural and linguistic nature waiting like Sleeping Beauty to be aroused by the kiss of politics (Minogue 74).

At the stroke of that celebrated midnight hour when the world slept and India awoke to light and freedom, Jawaharlal Nehru declared to the sleeping(?) world that the soul of a 'nation' which had been long suppressed, had finally found utterance. Like Sleeping Beauty, it woke up after hundreds of years to 'light and freedom.' Before one can begin to understand the circumstances of its awakening, one is also compelled to investigate the causes that led to this long slumber, and identify the hero(/es) to whom the awakening may be attributed. In other words, the idea of a 'return,' of a redemption begs the question of not just the origins of beginnings but also the forces foreclosing the redemptive potential of every moment or time period and the nature of the inadequacies of this 'weak messianic power' of the preceding generations. Additionally, if the nation was always already there, waiting to be awoken, is the founding of a nation essentially a retroactive exercise? If so, how far can one go in tracing the beginnings of the nation especially when in its regard 'the past does not remain static' (Thapar, *On Nationalism* 22). What role does nationalism have to play in defining these contours of a territorial or ethnic nationalism? Can the springs of nationalism be traced to the founding of the nation or does nationalism accelerate the need for a nation? Is the nature sutured together through an all-pervading kinship that validates the nation or does the nation make kins of its subjects? While famously arguing how all nations are essentially 'imagined communities', Benedict Anderson highlights this semantic lacuna thus:

Nation, nationality, nationalism — all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse. In contrast to the immense influence that nationalism has exerted on the modern world, plausible theory about it is conspicuously meagre. Hugh Seton-Watson, author of far the best and most comprehensive English-language text on nationalism, and heir to a vast tradition of liberal historiography and

social science, sadly observes: ‘Thus I am driven to the conclusion that no “scientific definition” of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists’ (B Anderson 3).

If the nation has existed and continues to exist without a definition or a meaning, how has it managed to emerge as one of the strongest powers assuming an unquestionable ‘emotional legitimacy’ (Anderson 4) in the socio-political economy of human existence? How does nationalism (sans meaning) or the nationalist ideology work to interpellate individuals into becoming its subjects? Consequently, what does nationalism demand its subjects to desire? Taking the particular case of India, this chapter will address these questions by placing Nationalism in the Lacanian framework using his four graphs of desire to argue how Nationalism is the *point de capiton*, the signifier without a signified, that ‘stops the otherwise endless movement (*glissement*) of signification’ (Lacan, *Ecrits* 231) by providing a socio-ideological fantasy that functions as ‘absolute signification’ and promises a vision of a society/nation that existed, *does* exist, and will exist.

India: Nation and Nationalism

In *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background*, Hans Kohn, one of the leading theorists in the field, argues that nationalism is “first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness” (Kohn 13). If nationalism is indeed a state of mind, how is the individual interpellated into accepting it as the ‘ultimate source of cultural energy and economic well-being’ (Kohn 16)? How does the individual begin to identify with the nationalist discourse and become a part of this collective consciousness? More importantly, how does identification work in a country like India with multiple ethnicities, religions, and languages, and how does nationalism emerge as the primary plane of identification in this complex play of identities? As evinced from the following quote by the pioneer theorist of ethnosymbolic² nationalism, AD Smith, even this form of analysis which prioritises the role of myths and popular culture in the forming of a nation presumes a certain homogeneity which may be considered incompatible with the socio-political realities of a country like India. He writes:

² Ethnosymbolic nationalism, as a critique of the modern understanding of nationalism, is one which relies on myths, symbols, memories, values and traditions to legitimise the collective identity of a people over centuries to lend due significance to pre-existing ethnic communities.

By the term nation, I understand a named human population occupying a historic territory or homeland and sharing common myths and memories; a mass, public culture; a single economy; and common rights and duties for all members. By the term nationalism, I understand an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential “nation” (Smith 20).

This viewpoint derives its validation from presupposing a certain commonality that hegemonises the dominant myth, the dominant memory, and the dominant culture in a country that is as diverse as India where even the location of the origins of the ‘nation’ is steeped in the politics of the powerful. In fact, one can go as far as to argue that modern Indian politics is shaped by the many beliefs as to its origins, which also serves as a legitimising principle—the political—upon which is based the structure of ideological politics. Trying to arrive at a fixed point in this investigation is akin to traversing a mobius strip of nation-al signification, bringing one back to the question of what is a nation and what makes one a part of it? Steven Grosby records the etymological roots of the word ‘nation’ and argues:

The English word ‘nation’ is derived from the Latin noun *natio*, which, in turn, is from the Latin verb *nasci* that means ‘to be born from’ (and from which is also derived the Latin noun *nativus*, ‘native’). Thus, the Latin *natio* and *nativus*, as well as the above examples of the biblical Hebrew ‘*ezrach* (native) and the Arabic *watan*, refer to one’s origins; but there is an imprecision as to what is meant by those origins. This imprecision is a consequence of the fact that while familial descent, traced from either the mother or the father, is different from territorial descent, these two forms of kinship are neither mutually exclusive nor historically demarcated (Grosby 44).

If familial descent is the qualification for becoming a nation, it is also important to understand how deep the family tree is dug to ascertain the nativity of a national. In addition to this, the relationship between familial and territorial descent—if the two are different from one another—also gains paramount significance in determining the origins of the nation. For instance, depending on

the ideological filter determining qualifiability, what would be the hierarchical relationship between familial and territorial descent? In the case of India, with a rich history of settlements across millenia, how does one draw a line between pre- and post-nation formation, and what would be the status of the inevitable exclusions? Moreover, how would these qualifications be affected by the dominant ideologies of the time? How does one appropriate the premodern past to fit the fabric of modern neologisms and ideologies? Grosby points out:

Examinations of the nation in history often begin with England in the 16th and 17th centuries or the United States and France in the 18th century. The nation is, thus, judged to be relatively recent, to have taken shape as a consequence of democratic conceptions of political participation, the social mobility of industrial capitalism, and technological advancements in transportation and communication. There is much to recommend such a conclusion (Grosby 57).

In a historical framework, therefore, guided by principles of democracy and modern advancements, one can safely presume August 1947 to mark the birth of the nation. As B R Ambedkar points out, “It is true that the Hindus are getting together and the spirit moving them to become one united nation is working on them. But it must not be forgotten that they have not yet become a nation. They are in the process of becoming a nation and before the process is completed, there may be a setback which may destroy the work of a whole century” (Ambedkar 25). Written in the years leading to the Partition of India, there are two primary deductions one can make from Ambedkar’s statements: that India wasn’t already a nation and was in the process of becoming one, and that the Hindu community was working towards that goal while carrying with it a threat that could ‘destroy the work of a whole century.’ What could possibly have been an effort in the making of a nation that could also at the same time undo the entire struggle to attain it? Additionally, what was Ambedkar’s own position from which the said group was so radically different? One can therefore assume that within the shared kinship of an imagined community presumed to be already existing there were multiple ideas of the India that was and the India that was yet to come, and that these imaginaries were modelled on different understandings of a pre-existing, premodern, and pre-symbolic fullness that must now be either emulated or reproduced. These two antithetical imaginaries, especially with regard to an investigation of the (imagined) origins of the

nation, can be traced back to the writings of the two prominent figures who defined the two major ideologies of modern Indian politics: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

Savarkar traces the birth of the Indian nation to the coming of the Aryans who chose to cut off all their ties from their neighbours, ‘especially Persians’ (Savarkar 20), and settle across the length of the Sapta Sindhus which ‘welded them into a *nation*’ (Savarkar 21).³ Not only does he establish the Aryans as the forefathers of the contemporary inhabitants of India but he also distinguishes them from the aboriginal tribes who cannot be therefore retrospectively seen as being part of a ‘national’ identity before the arrival of the Aryans since the very foundation of the nation lay with their naming of themselves as Sindhus. He goes on to argue:

At last the great mission which the Sindhus had undertaken of founding a nation and a country, found and reached its geographical limit when the valorous Prince of Ayodhya made a triumphant entry in Ceylon and actually brought the whole land from the Himalayas to the Seas under one sovereign sway. The day when the Horse of Victory returned to Ayodhya unchallenged and unchallengeable, the great white Umbrella of Sovereignty was unfurled over that Imperial throne of Ramchandra the brave, Ramchandra the good and a loving allegiance to him was sworn, not only by the Princes of Aryan blood but Hanuman, Sugriva, Bibhishana from the South—that day was the real birth-day of our Hindu people. It was truly our national day: for Aryans and Anaryans knitting themselves into a people were born as a nation (Savarkar 26).

Through this mythopoeic exercise defining the birth of the nation, Savarkar manages to accomplish three things which work to define not just the nation that was and the nation that was to come but also determine ways to approach a certain kind of nationalism. Firstly, he makes it a point to use the word ‘nation’ repeatedly throughout the text, even when he may be referring to groups that were yet to expand or spread across the geographical length of what he refers to as India. Secondly, he fills this lacuna of the political with the theological by anointing Ram of Ayo-

³ Savarkar argues that these Aryans had ‘developed a nationality’ and started calling themselves Sindhus. The letter ‘S’, he argues, was often changed to ‘H’ in Prakrit languages, as a result of which one can trace the Hindu identity back to these Sindhus or Aryans, who constituted a nation unto themselves.

dhya as the torchbearer of this nationality. In doing so, not only does he conflate Indian with Hindu but also offers an ethnosymbolic nationalism by offering a rationale supported by myths and popular culture that also work to “set limits to elite understandings and strategies” (Özkirimli 143). Thirdly, he anoints Ram as the lord and saviour of not just the Aryans but also the indigenous population while establishing a clear hierarchy between the two where the aborigines must embrace the India that Ram had envisioned.

Gandhi’s understanding of the origins of the nation is both similar to and different from Savarkar’s. Ernest Gellner, one of the most renowned theorists of nationalism, argued in *Nation and Nationalism* that the springs of nationalism are directly involved with the processes of industrialisation. In *Hind Swaraj*, however, Gandhi provides a contrary belief. He writes:

Editor: It may be a debatable matter whether railways spread famines, but it is beyond dispute that they propagate evil.

Reader: Be that as it may, all the disadvantages of railways are more than counterbalanced by the fact that it is due to them that we see in India the new spirit of nationalism.

Editor: I hold this to be a mistake. The English have taught us that we were not one nation before and that it will require centuries before we become one nation. This is without foundation. We were one nation before they came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation that they were able to establish one kingdom. Subsequently they divided us (Gandhi 37).

Thus we see how Gandhi presents India as a monolith that was always one nation primarily because of its geographical continuity and that it was modern industrialisation that brought evil to a nationalist society. Unmindful of the overwhelming diversity of its people, Gandhi argues that the people travelled across the country by foot or bullock-carts and that there was no “aloofness between them.” He goes on to argue that since it was always perceived as one nation, the people “established holy places in various parts of India, and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world. And we Indians are one as no two Englishmen

are” (Gandhi 38). Gandhi is different from Savarkar in that he does not put forward hierarchies in a ‘nation’ that he presents as a homogenous geographical entity.

What is far more interesting however are the similarities between the two. Like Savarkar, Gandhi too believes in the existence of the Indian nation before it was officially born as a democracy in 1947. Like Savarkar, Gandhi too imbues that nation with religion as a cementing force. What is the biggest takeaway from this collision, however, is the idea of fullness that premodern India symbolised for both. It is this fullness that, according to both, must now be reproduced in decolonized India. The means that they wish to employ in arriving at these ends are different, however, and shall be dealt with in the subsequent chapters. What both ‘nationalists’ through their arguments aim to do is to (re-)kindle a desire for this lost nation. As Lacan points out, “it is desire (*Begierde*) that is given the responsibility for that minimum connexion with ancient knowledge (*connaissance*) that the subject must retain if truth is to be immanent in the realisation of knowledge (*savoir*)” (Lacan, *Écrits* 229). What one aims to understand, through the following sections, is the manner in which the ideological quilting of nationalism take place to interpellate subjects into becoming a part of the nationalist desire.

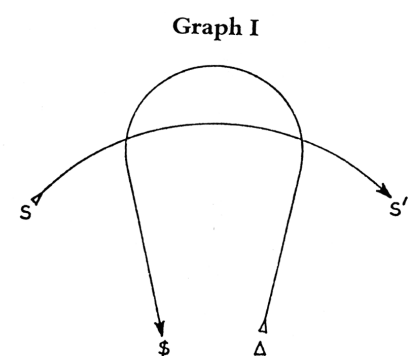
Che Vuoi?: Unveiling the Nationalist Desire

Lacan states that the purpose of his graphs of desire is to show “where desire, in relation to a subject defined in his articulation by the signifier, is situated” (Lacan, *Écrits* 231). This section will show the manner in which the nationalist desire situates itself in the socio-ideological fantasy of India where the subject becomes a function of the ‘master signifier’ of nationalism. In any analysis of ideology, one finds a series of floating signifiers which can in this case be those of ‘nation,’ ‘nationality,’ ‘nationalism,’ ‘religion,’ ‘freedom,’ ‘justice,’ etc which are essentially without a fixed meaning, without a fixed signified. Their metonymic sliding is halted by a signifier that emerges as the nodal point, the ‘designated signifier’ which accords meaning to all other signifiers. The present research will show how nationalism becomes that designated signifier, that *point de caption* which regulates this field of signification, and examine the consequences of that designation in the nation’s teleological narrative. Borrowing from the work of Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Slavoj Žižek highlights the role of this nodal signifier in the formation of identities thus:

What creates and sustains the *identity* of a given ideological field beyond all possible variations of its positive content? *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* delineates what is probably the definitive answer to this crucial question of the theory of ideology: the multitude of ‘floating signifiers’, of proto-ideological elements, is structured into a unified field through the intervention of a certain ‘nodal point’ (the Lacanian *point de capiton*) which ‘quilts’ them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning (Žižek 95).

What nationalism as the *point de capiton* does is to fix and totalise all other floating signifiers as contingent upon the *point de capiton* for their meaning, it is “rather the word which, *as a word*, on the level of the signifier itself, unifies a given field, constitutes its identity: it is, so to speak, the word to which ‘things’ themselves refer to recognise themselves in their unity” (Žižek 105). It is not that nationalism in itself provides the answer to the struggling nation, what it does is to give each floating signifier a quilt under which it defines itself. It is the point which, so to speak, lends meaning to every other point while also ‘totalizing the (ideological) field.’ Stavrakakis argues “Social construction is possible exactly because meaning and signification do not depend on some stable signified or transcendental signifier” (Stavrakakis 56-57). The following analysis with the Lacanian graphs of desire will unravel the manner in which this social construction of India takes place by means of a socio-ideological fantasy.⁴

The first graph, the ‘elementary cell’ (Lacan 231), shows the two vectors of the signifier’s chain (S.S’) and subjective intention (Δ .) as opposed to the Saussurean model where one would find parallel lines denoting the signifier and the signified. What we see from the first graph is the manner in which the pre-symbolic intention (Δ) quilts the signifier’s chain to emerge as the split subject—\$. Žižek observes, “This minimal articulation already attests to the fact that we are dealing with the process



⁴ The four graphs of desire shall be used sequentially and in full measure as used by Lacan in ‘Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire’ to systematically prove how nationalism works to interpellate the subjects.

of *interpellation of individuals* (this pre-symbolic, mythical entity—with Althusser, too, the ‘individual’ which is interpellated into subject is not conceptually defined, it is simply a hypothetical X which must be presupposed) *into subjects*” (Žižek 112). The point at which the two meet, where the ‘subject is sewn to the signifier’ is the *point de capiton*, the point which acts as the rigid designator to interpellate the subject and subjectivize the chain of the signifier. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this graphical representation, however, is to show how meaning is always retroactively produced since the point at which the vector of subjective intention leaves the signifier is preceded by the point at which it enters it. This meeting of the two vectors in sewing the meaning to the signifier also halts the sliding of all the other floating signifiers which were until then without signification.

In order to understand how ideological quilting happens through this *après coup*⁵, Žižek takes the particular case of Communism and writes:

In the ideological space float signifiers like ‘freedom’, ‘state’, ‘justice’, ‘peace’ . . . and then their chain is supplemented with some master-signifier (‘Communism’) which retroactively determines their (Communist) meaning: ‘freedom’ is effective only through surmounting bourgeois formal freedom, which is merely a form of slavery; the ‘state’ is the means by which the ruling class guarantees the conditions of its rule; market exchange cannot be ‘just and equitable’ because the very form of equivalent exchange between labour and capital implies exploitation; ‘war’ is inherent to class society as such; only the socialist revolution can bring about lasting ‘peace’, and so forth (Žižek 113).

Similarly, in the analysis of Indian nationalism as an ideology, one can see how the fulfilment of any other desire becomes a consequence of nationalist fulfilment. It is nationalism that founds and secures the nation, it is nationalism that one must embrace before anything else. As Kohn points out:

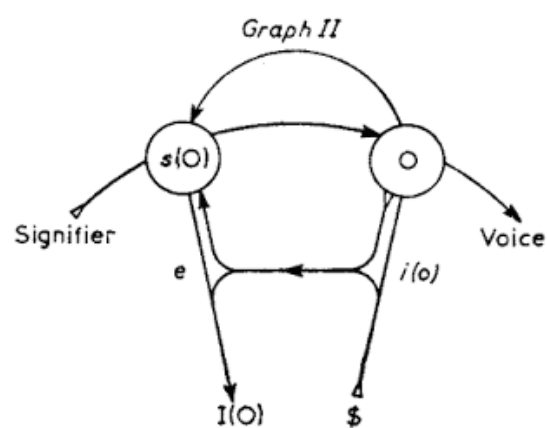
Although objective factors are of great importance for the formation of nationalities, the most essential element is a living and active corporate will. It is this will

⁵ Lacan’s extension of the Freudian ‘afterwardness’.

which we call nationalism, a state of mind inspiring the large majority of a people and claiming to inspire all its members. It asserts that the nation state is the ideal and the only legitimate form of political organisation and that the nationality is the source of all cultural creative energy and economic well-being (Kohn 10).

The nation becomes not just the source but also the target of all personal pleasure and prosperity. Nationalism as the *point de capiton* fixes the sliding of all other aspects of the subjective realities of the national. It defines the contours of freedom and the legitimacy of justice. In the 2016 blockbuster Hindi movie *Dangal* (based on a real life story), for instance, the only reason why the protagonist Mahavir Singh Phogat wants a son is so that he can vicariously fulfil his aborted dream of winning a gold medal for India in wrestling. The plot takes a much-acclaimed feminist turn when he realises that even a daughter can fulfil that dream. What remains at the kernel, however, is the goal of getting that medal—not for himself, not for the daughters, but for India. After a series of failures resulting from the adoption of an unsportsmanlike (read feminised) lifestyle, the prodigal daughter returns with short hair to finally win a gold medal at the 2010 Commonwealth Games to the tune of the Indian national anthem in the backdrop. As soon as the anthem ends, a child in the audience yells ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’. *Dangal* was soon made tax-free by the Governments of five states in India as it carried a social message, and went on to become one of the most successful movies of all time. It is a movie about a nationalist who trains his children to achieve laurels for the country, to put the country before themselves. The nation becomes both the ultimate repository and goal of not just glory but also fulfilment. Phogat’s nationalism is the *point de capiton* which fixes the meaning of every other sentiment or aspect in his, and by patriarchal extension, his children’s lives. The manner in which nationalism emerges as the plane of identification shall be highlighted by placing it as the *point de capiton* in the second graph.

One of the first differences one can notice between the first and the second graphs is the source of the vector of subjective intention. Instead of the mythical (Δ), what we have is the split subject ($\$$). This is primarily, as Lacan



explains, a consequence of the ‘effect of retroversion’ as a result of which at every stage of the project, the subject becomes what it always already was. The O marked at the intersection of the two vectors, at the *point de capiton*, represents the Big Other whose signified is retroactively fixed at $s(O)$ as a result of which it assumes what Lacan calls the ‘Master position.’ He writes, “The Other as previous site of the pure subject of the signifier holds the master position, even before coming into existence, to use Hegel’s term against him, as absolute Master” (Lacan 232). It is located at the *point de capiton*—which fixes the meaning of all preceding signifiers in compliance with its code—precisely because it (in this case Nationalism) represents the big Other, “the synchronous code in the diachronous signifier’s chain” (Žižek 114). At $s(O)$, “the punctuation in which the signification is constituted as finished product” (Lacan 232), is the point where the signified is fixed as a function of the big Other. This meaning, as we can see, is produced retroactively as a consequence of the ideological quilting of the Symbolic Other, not only for the *point de capiton* but for the entire field of the floating signifiers. Nationalism establishes itself as the master signifier which defines the relation between all the floating signifiers of nationality, nation, freedom, justice, etc. The end product of the signifier’s vector, Voice, must be understood in a strictly Lacanian sense where it is not the bearer of meaning or plenitude but a representation of what remains of the signifier after the ideological quilting has retroactively taken place. As Žižek elaborates, “the voice is what is left over after we subtract from the signifier the retroactive operation of ‘quilting’ which produces meaning ... as the objectival leftover of the signifying operation” (Žižek 115).

As a consequence of the quilting, we see the subject’s vector culminating at $I(O)$ which is the plane of Symbolic identification, I being that trait or signifying feature in the Symbolic order which, according to Lacan, “represents the subject for another signifier” (Lacan pp). It is here that the subject “assumes concrete recognizable shape in name or a mandate that the subject takes upon himself and/or that is bestowed on him” (Žižek 116). It is the symbolic order of Nationalism that is bestowed upon the subject from where she identifies herself. This identification is what Jacques-Alain Miller calls “constitutive” as opposed to the imaginary “constituted” identification which is represented by $i(o)$, o being the imaginary other in the identification with which the ego (e) is constituted. The subject must put herself outside her identity in the image of the imaginary other in order to constitute self-identity which is why this form of identification is constituted in contradistinction to the Symbolic identification which is constitutive.

The most significant aspect of these identifications, however, is the fact that “the imaginary identification is always subordinated to Symbolic identification” (Žižek 120). While imaginary identification may result in an imitation of the other, Symbolic identification is the attempt at imitation of that which cannot be imitated, thereby making the process an unending one where the subject identifies with the very place from where the observation of herself originates, from the position where the subject appears worthy. The imaginary Ideal Ego will therefore always be dispensable in comparison to the Ego Ideal of the Symbolic. As Žižek highlights, “The ‘effect of retroversion’ is based precisely upon this imaginary level—it is supported by the illusion of the self as the autonomous agent which is present from the very beginning as the origin of its acts: this imaginary self-experience is for the subject the way to misrecognize his radical dependence on the big Other, on the symbolic order as his decentred cause” (Žižek 116). Imaginary identification will therefore be the image in which we see ourselves where symbolic identification will be the gaze, the place from which we are being observed and from where we must appear worthy. It is this movement between imaginary and symbolic identification where the former is subordinated to the latter, that the process of social integration or interpellation takes place. As Jacques Alain Miller argues:

Lacan knew how to extract from Freud’s text the difference between ideal ego, marked by him *i*, and ego-ideal, I. On the level of I, you can without difficulties introduce the social. The I of the ideal can be in a superior or legitimate way constructed as a social and ideological function. It was moreover Lacan himself who did this in his *Écrits*: he situates a certain politics in the very foundations of psychology, so that the thesis that all psychology is social can be treated as Lacanian. If not on the level at which we are examining *i*, then at least on the level at which we fix I (Miller 21).

It is this plane of symbolic identification that we are primarily concerned with in our understanding of (Indian) nationalism as a social ideology and national or anti-national as an identity resulting therefrom.

The difference between imaginary and symbolic identification in the ideological framework of nationalism can be aptly portrayed through a reading of Raja Rao’s 1938 novel *Kantha-*

pura to focus on the manner in which Moorthy's relationship with Gandhi is resolved. Since his attendance of the Mahatma's lecture in the city, Moorthy becomes a true disciple of the latter and decides to dedicate his life to Gandhi's Satyagraha and the Independence movement. After facing numerous attacks from both inside and outside his community and spending months in prison, Moorthy is himself anointed to the position of a Mahatma by his own community. It is only after this anointment, when he becomes the Mahatma, that Moorthy renounces Gandhi's spiritual idealism in favour of Nehru's social idealism. In his letter to Ratna, he writes, "Since I am out of prison, I met this Satyagrahi and that, and we discussed many a problem, and they all say the Mahatma is a noble person, a saint, but the English will know how to cheat him, and he will let himself be cheated" (Rao 182). As long as Moorthy is a disciple following in the footsteps of the Mahatma, he needs him as a model whose work in the country he emulates in his village. He needs the Mahatma as the ideal ego whose teachings guide him to attain the larger goal of freedom. However, when he himself becomes the Mahatma for his own village, he no longer needs Gandhi to be his ideal. While Mahatma Gandhi will allow himself to be cheated, Mahatma Moorthy will not. It is only when he becomes a Mahatma that he truly identifies with Gandhi, he becomes a Mahatma through his identification with Gandhi. The identification therefore is no longer imaginary. He does not need to emulate the Mahatma anymore and has now become enchanted with the social idealism of Nehru. By being bestowed with the mandate of the Mahatma, the identification is now Symbolic since he now occupies a place in the "intersubjective symbolic network" (Žižek 122). It is this symbolic identification that dismantles the imaginary identification which is now reduced to an acceptance of Gandhi's impracticality.

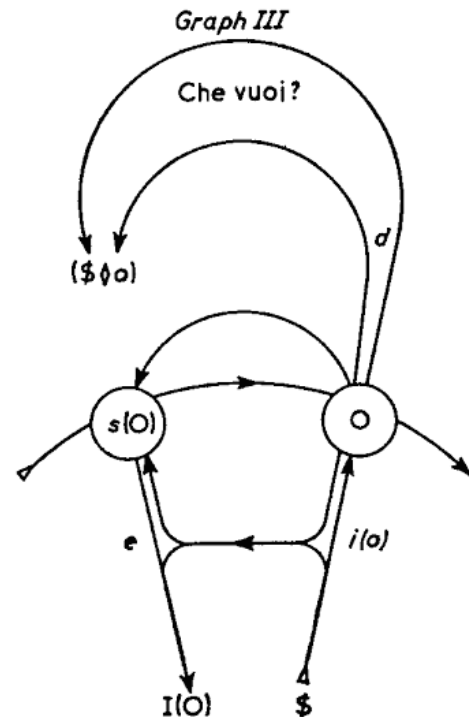
Another aspect of this play between symbolic and imaginary identification is that despite/ because of the ideological quilting, there is always a remnant, a little something that remains.

Žižek elaborates the nature of this remnant thus:

The only problem is that this 'square of the circle' of interpellation, this circular movement between symbolic and imaginary identification, never comes out without a certain leftover. After every 'quilting' of the signifier's chain which retroactively fixes its meaning, there always remains a certain gap, an opening which is rendered in the third form of the graph by the famous 'Che vuoi?'—'You're telling me that, but what do you want with it, what are you aiming at' (Žižek 123)?

As Moorthy writes in the letter, “And yet, what is the goal? Independence? Swaraj” (Rao 182)? It is with ‘*Che vuoi?*’ that one moves beyond the level of utterance to the level of enunciation which will be analysed with the aid of Lacan’s third graph of desire.

As can be seen from the third graph, at the same point of the emergence of *Che vuoi?* is also located the origin of desire, d . This desire is a consequence of the mandate bestowed upon the subject who is now compelled to wonder what it is that is desired of her. This desire, in Lacan, is to be understood in direct contradistinction with demand. In demanding a particular thing from the subject, what is it that the symbolic order desires? Hence the question “*Che vuoi?*”: “What do you want?” It is interesting to note that both vectors of desire and *Che vuoi?* culminate in a single matheme: $\$ \diamond O$, which in the Lacanian typology, is the formula for fantasy. Žižek highlights the importance of the place accorded to fantasy in the larger schema thus:



Fantasy appears, then, as an answer to ‘*Che vuoi?*’, to the unbearable enigma of the desire of the Other, of the lack in the Other, but it is at the same time fantasy itself which, so to speak, provides the co-ordinates of our desire—which constructs the frame enabling us to desire something. The usual definition of fantasy (‘an imagined scenario representing the realization of desire’) is therefore somewhat misleading, or at least ambiguous: in the fantasy-scene the desire is not fulfilled, ‘satisfied’, but constituted (given its objects, and so on)—*through fantasy, we learn ‘how to desire.’* In this intermediate position lies the paradox of fantasy: it is the frame coordinating our desire, but at the same time a defence against *Che vuoi?*, a screen concealing the gap, the abyss of the desire of the Other. Sharpening the paradox to its utmost—to tautology—we could say that *desire itself is a de-*

quence of this enmeshing, as highlighted in the graph, is castration. On entering the signifier's field, the body is deprived of *jouissance*, or as Žižek argues “the body survives as dismembered, mortified. In other words, the order of the signifier (the big Other) and that of enjoyment (the Thing as its embodiment) are radically heterogeneous, inconsistent; any accordance between them is structurally impossible” (Žižek 137). This is precisely why the point of intersection of the vectors of *jouissance* and the signifier are marked as $S(\emptyset)$ which designates the lack in the big Other. *Jouissance*, originating from the real, is that which cannot be symbolized, and which therefore exposes this lacuna in the big Other. Conversely, it is only through this lacuna that *jouissance* can be signified which is why its only possible signifier ($S(\emptyset)$) is one which designates this discrepancy in the Other.

What *jouissance*, and *jouissance* alone, can potentially do therefore is to expose this inconsistency, this lack, in the Other which exposes the central constitutive impossibility of the symbolic order. In the absence of any lack, the Other is a closed system that assumes an unapproachable/unquestionable position vis-à-vis the subject. In the exposition of the lack, however, the Other is for the first time in a position where it may be assumed to not have the answers, thereby enabling a de-alienation—what Lacan calls *separation*—where the Other is not the repository of the object anymore. However, this expository potential of *jouissance* is again contained by fantasy as we see in the graph. This process can be best understood if one were to focus on the left half of the completed graph, starting from $S(\emptyset)$ and moving downwards to $s(O)$. First, we have *jouissance*— $S(\emptyset)$, which denotes the lack in the Other and thereby the desire of the Other. However, it is sheathed, so to speak, by fantasy ($\$ \diamond O$) which masks this lack in the Other, leading to, in the end, $s(O)$, the corollary of signification which is always already under the dominion of fantasy. This is how, as Lacan points out, fantasy works as ‘absolute signification’ (Lacan 239). An additional change one can notice in the completed graph is the introduction of Drive in the upper half, represented by the formula ($\$ \diamond D$), where D stands for the symbolic demand. Jacques Alain Miller and Žižek explain that drive is the remnant in the subject after it has been evacuated of *jouissance* by the signifier. However, the Demand that this drive is founded upon is defined by the symbolic law. It is the Demand that finds its roots in the signifier. Highlighting the role of castration in this process, Lacan elaborates: “Castration means that *jouissance* must be refused, so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder (*l'échelle renversée*) of the Law of desire” (Lacan 247). Consequently, the subject is driven to aspire for that which is demanded by the symbolic

order and defined in the fantasy. What the upper half of the completed graph does therefore is to project that which lies 'beyond interpellation'. Žižek argues that the central lacuna in the erst-while understanding of ideology is the fact that it only concerned itself with the lower half, aiming to investigate the manner in which interpellation takes place. What is ignored, however, is the drive that lies beyond interpellation, that promise of the pre-ideological *jouissance* that holds the ideological discourse together.

The Absolute Signification of Fantasy

If one were to first focus on the lower half of Lacan's completed graph, one would embark on what Žižek calls a 'symptomal reading' of the ideological discourse. This reading would expose how the individual becomes a subject through the fixation of the metonymic sliding of signifiers around a *point de capiton* that becomes the master signifier and accords meaning to all other signifiers. As pointed out earlier, the narrative of socio-political realities in postcolonial India is centred around the master signifier of Nationalism. Nationalism not just guarantees the subject freedom in every aspect of life, but also sets the contours of those freedoms. In *Pakistan Or The Partition of India*, Ambedkar records the contemporary discourse on the idea of India as a nation and the contestations therein. He writes that while the Anglo-Indian would argue that there was no India that could be reinstated, the Hindu went out of his way to establish its existence, and that the Hindu reformers who knew that this was a 'dangerous delusion' could not openly say anything on the contrary for fear of being called an 'enemy of the country'. We see how even before the nation is established, the law of nationalism dictates what can and cannot be said. Unmindful of how certain acts, sentiments, or 'dangerous delusions' may be detrimental to the process of nation-building itself, the reformers chose not to say anything for the fear of being called 'enemy of the country' which is in common and legal parlance called 'anti-national'. Perhaps it can even be argued that the nationalism of the few was cowed down by the (dangerously delusional) nationalism of the many which aimed to present a certain idea of India that always already was. Ambedkar goes on to argue:

What is a nation? Nationality is a social feeling. It is a feeling of a corporate sentiment of oneness which makes those who are charged with it feel that they are

kith and kin. This national feeling is a double-edged feeling. It is at once a feeling of fellowship for one's own kith and kin and an anti-fellowship feeling for those who are not one's own kith and kin. It is a feeling of "consciousness of kind" which on the one hand binds together those who have it, so strongly that it overrides all differences arising out of economic conflicts or social gradations and, on the other, severs them from those who are not of their kind. It is a longing not to belong to any other group. This is the essence of what is called a nationality and national feeling (Ambedkar 44-45).

This 'double-edged feeling' that Ambedkar talks about is precisely the manner in which nationalism as a master signifier and fantasy as absolute signification work. What this ideological quilting does in order to cover for the traumatic social antagonism that lies at its heart is to posit the antagonism as a consequence of a force from within the system who is working to undermine it. The fear referred to earlier by Ambedkar in the Hindu reformers which prevented them from voicing their reservations is in reality the fear of being identified as this internal enemy withholding from us our *jouissance* and preventing our nation from becoming what it always already was in the pre-symbolic real. In a section titled 'Internal Threats' in *Bunch of Thoughts*, MS Golwalkar argues that there are only three grave internal threats to India—Muslims, Christians, and Communists—in that order. He argues that these are people who cannot possibly be initiated into the nationalist order and it would be complete folly to try otherwise. There are two important things to notice in this assertion. Firstly, the three categories of people mentioned are all non-Hindus. Secondly, in positing them as threats to the country what is presupposed is a certain organic homogeneity that is firmly in place. This is precisely the manner in which ideological quilting brings about social construction—the fantasy of a prosperous country and the fantasy of internal threats conspiring to destroy it. The role this fantasy plays in the construction of a utopia shall be highlighted in Chapter 3.

In short, what the socio-ideological fantasy does by means of the master signifier of nationalism is to manufacture a vision of the nation that *does* exist as one whole organic body with a "consciousness of kind." Žižek argues that "the corporatist vision of Society as an organic Whole, a social Body in which the different classes are like extremities, members each contributing to the Whole according to their function—we may say that 'Society as a corporate Body' is

the fundamental ideological fantasy” (Žižek 142). In Indian nationalist sensibilities, it is the figure of the Bharat Mata, whose iconography represents a most tangible religious hue and who is often described as having been raped by invaders from a different faith.

In the movie *Dangal* we referred to earlier, the lifelong struggles of Phogat find a climactic culmination when the National Anthem plays at the close of the presentation ceremony. As pointed out earlier, at the end of the anthem, a little girl shouts ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’. That girl was the daughter of the butcher—the only Muslim character in the movie—who sold chicken to Phogat at a 75% discount and whose daughters insisted on travelling to Delhi to watch the match and cheer Geeta on. For a movie based on a true story, this is one of the side stories that are fictitious and the script writer’s own additions. Of all the spectators present in the vast indoor stadium, it is the little Muslim girl who must travel all the way from a remote village in Haryana to Delhi to raise the controversial slogan of ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’ at the end of the anthem. There are many ways in which one can read this inclusion by exclusion. Is it supposed to prove that ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’ is a secular nationalist slogan that includes every citizen of India or does it imply that children are beyond the petty controversies churned out by adults? Or is it simply meant to enhance the diligently constructed pathos of the moment by proposing that the fulfilment was so overpowering that even a little Muslim girl was interpellated into embracing the slogan? While one can only speculate as to the reason behind the scene, the only thing one can be absolutely sure of is that it is a special moment one way or the other, and it is special precisely because a Muslim girl becomes a participant in a moment seeped in nationalist pride. The importance of the girl’s identity in the socio-historical fantasy of India will be highlighted in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

The Socio-Ideological Fantasy of India

Society is always traversed by an antagonistic split which cannot be integrated into symbolic order. And the stake of socio-ideological fantasy is to construct a vision of society which *does* exist, a society which is not split by an antagonistic division, a society in which the relation between its parts is organic, complementary ... How then do we take account of the distance between this corporatist vision and the factual society split by antagonistic struggle? The answer is, of course, the Jew: an external element, a foreign body introducing corruption into the sound social fabric (Žižek 142).

In his analysis of anti-Semitism, Žižek works in a Lacanian framework to highlight the manner in which the figure of the Jew becomes constitutive of the society which is both sustained and threatened by his existence. In Chapter 2, we saw the working of the process through which nationalism, as the *point de capiton*, hegemonizes the entire field of floating signifiers and accords meaning to them. In this construction of social reality, which is made possible only through the absence of a stable signifier, the lack in the symbolic order is masked by the promise of fantasy which also works to define the nature of desire in the social subject. In Lacanian theory, this lack in the symbolic is essentially “a lack of *jouissance*, the lack of a pre-symbolic, real enjoyment which is always posited as something lost, as a lost fullness, the part of ourselves that is sacrificed/castrated when we enter the symbolic system of language and social relations” (Stavrakakis 42). As soon as the subject is interpellated into the symbolic, the prohibited *jouissance* develops in the subject the desire to obtain it. The lost fullness is not manifested in its empirical occurrence but produced retroactively. Consequently, it is the symbolic lack that establishes the idea of fullness and not the other way around. About this act of retroactively assigning a fullness, Stavrakakis points out:

It means that it is an act of power, an act of exclusion, that retroactively produces the fullness we attribute to what was excluded, to that unknown impossibility. No doubt, it is common sense to think something was there before exclusion, other-

wise exclusion would make no sense at all, the only problem is that we can't really know what it was. To think that it was a state of fullness is a retroactively produced fiction (Stavrakakis 44).

As an act of power, what the symbolic order therefore does through its designing of an ideological fantasy in its social construction is to interpellate the subject into acknowledging the factified existence of a fictitious past. A nationalism which is inherently religious therefore presents to the subject a picture of a past that symbolised a fullness which has been taken away from him through the designs of a foreign invader—whole stole from her her *jouissance* and castrated the country at large. It is this invader who is now responsible for all the prevailing ills in the society which is prevented from becoming its symbolically promised spiritual self. Through the negation of the foreign element, nationalism promises to him the fantasy of reinstating that lost goodness. Fantasy, Žižek argues, “is a means for an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance” (Žižek 142). The mythological past therefore becomes the reservoir of all greatness that was and that which is yet to come, and failure in the social structure of the present is to be expected because the promise for attaining that prohibited *jouissance* has not been realised. Aurobindo, for instance, argues that the nation is an embodiment of the Goddess Shakti and is:

composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation, just as Bhawani Mahisha-Mardini sprang into being from the Shaktis of all the millions of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred millions of people; but she is inactive, imprisoned in the magic circle of *tamas*, the self-indulgent inertia and ignorance of her sons. To get rid of *tamas* we have but to wake the Brahma within (Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram* 83).

The Mother, as a Goddess, is therefore a Mother to only the Hindu native who claims a greater and more legitimate right on her and is thus endowed with the task of reclaiming the land from the foreign occupier and restoring to the Mother her lost glory.

One of the most remarkable ways in which this pre-symbolic fullness was presented—which is also the source of the nationalist imagination—was Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's

Anandamath. When Satyanand takes Mahendra to the temple of the *santans*, he is shown three different statues representing the three temporal phases of Bharat Mata. The Mother-that-was is represented as the victor who had subdued the wildest of beasts. She is described as, “She who subdued the wild beasts such as the elephant and lion underfoot and set up her lotus throne in their dwelling place. She was happy and beautiful, adorned with every ornament, radiant as the risen sun and full of majesty. Prostrate yourself before her” (Chattopadhyay 150). After they prostrate before the “nurturing mother”, Satyanand leads him to a dark passage at the end of which Mahendra finds himself facing the statue of Goddess Kali, the Mother-as-she-is, about whom we are told “Blackened and shrouded in darkness. She has been robbed of everything; that is why she is naked. And because the whole land is a burning-ground, she is garlanded with skulls. And she’s crushing her own gracious Lord underfoot. Alas, dear Mother” (Chattopadhyay 150)! On seeing her, we are told that tears streamed down Satyanand’s face resulting from a realisation of his own helplessness at having not been able to rescue her yet. Mahendra is then led to the third statue of the Goddess who was glistening and smiling under the glowing light of the sun. About her, the Mother-that-will-be, Satyanand says:

Her ten arms reach out in ten directions, adorned with various powers in the form of the different weapons she holds, the enemy crushed at her feet, while the mighty lion who has taken refuge there is engaged in destroying the foe. Behold her whose arms are the directions (here Satyananda’s voice broke down and he began to weep) whose arms are the directions, who holds various weapons and crushes the enemy and roams on the lordly lion’s back, who has Lakshmi personifying good fortune on her right, and the goddess of speech who bestows wisdom and learning on her left, with Kartikeya signifying strength and Ganesh good success, in attendance (Chattopadhyay 150)!

This is the very method through which Satyanand, with his socio-ideological fantasy of restoring the power into the hands of the Mother, interpellates Mahendra into renouncing his family and possessions in order to strive for the realisation of the fantasy. His personal happiness becomes subservient to the larger goal of securing the Mother’s happiness. It is the promise of the restoration of the lost harmony that works to bring Mahendra into the fold of ‘matriotism’. The episode

reaches its climactic brilliance when Mahendra asks the monk, “When will we be able to see the Mother in this form?” to which the monk replies “When all Mother’s children recognise her as the Mother, she will be gracious to us” (Chattopadhyay 151). It is therefore the responsibility of the *santan* to not just ensure his own subservience but also the interpellation into the symbolic order of every other subject.

***Akhand Bharat* and the promise of a lost fullness**

From millenarianism to the *Communist Manifesto* and up to Green ideology, we know that every political promise is supported by a reference to a lost state of harmony, unity and fullness, a reference to a pre-symbolic real which most political projects aspire to bring back. Once again, the constant presence of this idea of a lost past is not revealing anything about the true nature of such a state; it is a retroactive projection conditioned by the intervention of the symbolic lack. If social reality is lacking, if enjoyment is only partial, then the pre-symbolic state we long for has to be a state of fullness, a state without limits (Stavrakakis 52).

Every political promise, as Stavrakakis has argued, is sustained by a reference to a “lost state of harmony”. In the context of Indian/Hindu nationalism, it is the loss of the mythic Hindu past of *Akhand Bharat* that represents the mythical time when Hinduism was at the zenith of its political and spiritual power. As a result, Indian history is neatly categorised into the three broad categories of ancient, medieval, and modern India where ancient represents the golden age, medieval as the dark ages, and modern as the redemptive age which shall restore the power back into the hands of the Brahmin of the golden ages. The dark medieval ages are historically demarcated by the 600 years of Muslim rule in India. Their status as Indians is largely a contested area, where many believe them to be occupiers who unleashed tyranny on *Bharat Mata*. Consequently, all Muslims—often pejoratively referred to as ‘Sons of Babur’—occupy this ambiguity in the nationalist imaginary with respect to their status as the Other Indians. Historian Romila Thapar argues:

The creation of an internal ‘Other’ is tied to a presumed collective memory. The ‘memory’, in turn, is created by kneading the past into new forms, claiming these

as legitimate memory. Such claims created to endorse the attitudes of the present are then used to restructure the past and justify the present. This is a circular process. The current hostility to the Muslims among many in the Indian middle class is frequently explained as due to a collective memory of the tyranny over the Hindus and their oppression, by Muslim rulers in the medieval past. That the articulation of this 'collective memory' can largely only be traced back to the colonial period is because such constructed memories keep changing with every major historical change. Since memory is part of a living society it is not permanent and can be formulated in any way (Thapar, *ISATS* 140).

The most peculiar feature of this enterprise however is the manner in which historical time is either conflated with or subservient to mythological time which regulates any and all investigation into the past of the present. This conflation of the theological with the political can be seen in the writings of Aurobindo who writes, "Our ideal therefore is an Indian Nationalism, largely Hindu in its spirits and traditions, because the Hindu made the land and the people and persists, by the greatness of its past, his civilisation and his culture and his invincible virility" (Aurobindo, *On Nationalism* 484). Despite the inherent masculinity that becomes definitive of the ancient Hindu, it is important to note the givenness with which the past is made entirely religious. It is this greatness of the pre-symbolic real, of the mythological past, that must now be recovered. "History, therefore, is viewed as the right of the Hindu to be the inheritor of the land, excluding the non-Hindu in the process" (Thapar, *ISATS* 138). In this project of redemption, Aurobindo for instance, chooses the *Kshatriya* caste specifically to rise in arms and embrace the duty ordained unto them. He writes:

Politics is the work of the Kshatriya and it is the virtues of the Kshatriya we must develop if we are to be morally fit for freedom. But the first virtue of the Kshatriya is not to bow his neck to an unjust yoke but to protect his weak and suffering countrymen against the oppressor and welcome death in a just and righteous battle (Aurobindo, *BM* 235).

It is only through the Kashtriya—the Hindu—then, that redemption is possible because it is to the Hindu that the past belongs. The conflation of mythological and historical time is such that the second millennium is conveniently glossed over as an age of occupation and that all events therein succeed the India that was, and precede the India that was to come. As Romila Thapar points out, “Civilisation no longer signifies the humanist concept of the eighteenth century. It has now incorporated the aggressive confidence of nineteenth century imperialism and continues to define territories by religious labels. Such a stance, combined with nationalism, often reiterates the ideologies of religious nationalism” (Thapar, *ISATS* 132).

When Murli Manohar Joshi became the Human Resource Development Minister in 1998—the first time India got a right-wing government—he condemned the “intellectual terrorism of left historians” which in his words was “worse than cross border terrorism” (Chandavarkar 191). Consequently, amendments were made in the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks to highlight the real heroes of India—Hindu heroes of India. A recent addition was made to the RSS’ list of heroes alongside Shivaji and Maharana Pratap, with Hemu, who was defeated by Akbar’s armies in the Second Battle of Panipat. The *Akhil Bharatiya Itihaas Sankalan Yojana* (ABISY), the history wing of the RSS, hailed him as “Maharaja Hemachandra Vikramaditya”, the “Great Warrior of India”, and “the last Hindu Emperor of Delhi”.

Hobsbawm famously compared the relationship between history and nationalism to that between poppy and the heroin addict (Thapar, *On Nationalism* 11). At this juncture in time, when History has risen to such prominence in the national discourse and is assumed to be up for grabs such that the process of addition (or subtraction) of *historical* facts can be/is being made possible and accessible to right-wing historians for the simple advantage of majoritarian power such that the rise and rise of Hindu nationalism emerges both as a consequence and an offshoot of the colonial project by combining, as Dawa Norbu argues, Marx’s idea of ‘class consciousness’ with Weber’s idea of ‘social action’, to the effect that the identification of nationalist heroes is confined entirely to those Hindu rulers who fought against Muslim kings. In his speech on ‘Why I Assassinated Mahatma Gandhi’, Nathuram Godse justified his actions by saying:

It is my firm belief that in dubbing Rama, Krishna and Arjuna as guilty of violence, the Mahatma betrayed a total ignorance of the springs of human action. It was the heroic fight put up by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj that first checked and

eventually destroyed the Muslim tyranny in India. In condemning history's towering warriors like Shivaji, Rana Pratap and Guru Gobind Singh as misguided patriots, Gandhiji has merely exposed his self-conceit. He was, paradoxical as it may appear, a violent pacifist who brought untold calamities on the country in the name of truth and non-violence, while Rana Pratap, Shivaji and the Guru will remain enshrined in the hearts of their countrymen for ever for the freedom they brought to them (Godse 50-51).

After Aurangzeb Road in New Delhi was renamed to APJ Abdul Kalam Road, demands were made by many in the government to rename Akbar Road to Maharana Pratap road. General VK Singh claimed that this must be done because Maharana Pratap "has not been given his due" despite being "truly secular and a man of masses" (*The Indian Express*, 18 May 2016). In positing Akbar as communal and Maharana Pratap as secular, there is no reliance on historical veracity. The only determining factor is that Maharana Pratap as a Hindu is an Indian, and therefore has the support of the masses. B M Pande, organising secretary of ABISY, told the *Hindustan Times* "Our children have been reading history, which makes them feel humiliated of their past. We want a history which makes them feel proud as Indians." In the Introduction to his edited volume on *Religion and Indian History*, Prof Irfan Habib writes:

But Akbar was probably not satisfied with *mahzar* (declaration) of 1579 making him, as a 'just king', the interpreter of Muslim law—he may have come to think of the position as too limited or sectarian. During the last 25 years of his rule, he freely expressed his scepticism both of the notion of Prophethood and human incarnation of God, and asserted the supremacy of reason ('aql). He extended his critique to social matters, condemning alike the Hindu practice of widow-burning (*sati*) and the smaller share in inheritance given to daughters in Muslim law (Habib xxx).

If secularism is the criterion for retrospective heroism as Singh claimed, Akbar would not be any different from Pratap—both of whose armies had both Hindu and Muslim generals and soldiers. However, it is only Pratap who would be recognised as an Indian king while Akbar is condemned

to being a Muslim king who ruled over 'India'. Since its inception in 1984, the history wing of the RSS has published more than 350 books which apart from Golwalkar's theory on the shifting of the Arctic Circle, also claim that Dalits were 'created' by Muslim invaders in India during the medieval period. 'Castes such as Valmiki and Sudarshan resulted from atrocities meted out to Brahmins and Kshatriyas by the Muslims' (*Hindustan Times*, 8 Dec 2004). It is this valorisation of the Hindu king over the Muslim that lies at the heart of this enterprise which aims to conflate India with Hindu. As South Asian historian Audrey Truschke argues, "The British attempt to demonise the Mughals carries on today in the efforts of Hindu nationalists, who have gobbled up this colonial argument. Today two major impacts are the ongoing suspicion of Indian Muslims and the persistence of the troublesome notion that somehow Hindu and Indian are collapsible into a single identity."

The role played by religion in the writing of history was best encapsulated by German philosopher Walter Benjamin who had the following argument in his first thesis on the philosophy of history:

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called 'historical materialism' is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the service of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight (Benjamin 253).

Through this allegory, Benjamin argues how the hermeneutics of history will always already function in the realm of the theological. While the field of interaction may carry with it the illusion of transparency, it is actually in complete control of the hunchback of theology who needs the puppet as much as the puppet, devoid of even a semblance of selfhood, needs the hunchback. What theology does then is to appropriate the past to serve its own interests, and thereby present

a version of history that anoints it as the dominant narrative of the historical past. This attempt to “articulate the past historically”, as Benjamin argues in Thesis XVI, “does not mean to recognise it “the way it really was”” (Benjamin 255). Benjamin’s allegory of the puppet and the hunchback can also be used to understand the relationship between nationalism and religion. Just as the puppet has a counter to every move on the chessboard, nationalism too—as the master signifier—fixes the metonymic sliding of the entire field of signifiers in order to make social construction possible without itself in possession of a signified. Just as the mirror sustains the illusion of transparency on the table, nationalism by virtue of being the *point de capiton* in the construction of the symbolic order, interpellates the subject into striving for the restoration of the pre-symbolic fullness. Additionally, just as the hunchback “guided the puppet’s hands by means of strings”, religion becomes the defining force in deciding the course of nationalism.

The Politics of Religious Nationalism in a Secular Democracy

There is a structural lack in the symbolic, which means that certain points of the real can’t be symbolised in a definite manner ... The unmitigated real provokes anxiety, and this in turn gives rise to never-ending, defensive, imaginary constructs ... All human productions [Society itself, culture, religion, science] ... can be understood in the light of that structural failure of the symbolic in relationship to the real (Verhaeghe 60-61).

Through our analysis of the expurgation of the national song *Vange Mataram* in Chapter 1, we had argued how the secular is essentially structured on the foundation of the communal. The secular character of India is our political reality. However, what do we truly understand by political reality which is restricted in our political imagination to elections, citizenship, electoral parties, etc? As Nehru had argued in defence of the Congress’ stand on the issue of the national song, “The Congress, being a political organisation, does not concern itself with religion or connected matters”, one is compelled to investigate the obvious demarcation between the political and social that Nehru had so confidently assumed. Politics is therefore presented as an entity unto itself that remains over and above the many realities of the social, and people from within that system only expect to encounter it within the ‘arenas prescribed for it in the hegemonic discourse of liberal democracies’, which must be performed accordingly by the designated guests

(Beck 98). While the boundaries of politics is now expanding to unexplored realms, it still remains a system unto itself. In addition to this, “politics is identical to political reality and political reality, as all reality, is, first, constituted at the symbolic level, and, second, supported by fantasy” (Stavrakakis 71). He goes on to argue that if reality is defined in its relation to the real, what would be the defining principle for political reality? “If reality cannot exhaust the real it must also be the case that politics cannot exhaust the political” (Stavrakakis 71). In arguing thus, Stavrakakis highlights the connection between the political and the real, where the former emerges as a particular modality of the latter. The political therefore becomes one of the modes through which one experiences or ‘encounters’ the real. Political reality, then, is the means through which the political, as a modality of the real, is symbolised while covering over its constitutive lack with fantasy. It is this lack that Verhaeghe opines is responsible for the inevitable anxiety that leads to imaginary fears in the construction of social (and political) realities. Stavrakakis argues:

It is the moment of this failure, the moment of our encounter with the real, that is revealed as the moment of the political *par excellence* ... It is the constitutivity of this moment in Lacanian psychoanalysis that proves our fantastic conception of the socio-political institution of society as a harmonious totality to be no more than a *mirage*. It is this traumatic moment of the political *qua* encounter with the real that initiates again and again a process of symbolisation, and initiates the ever-present hegemonic play between different symbolisations of this real. This play leads to the emergence of politics, to the political institution of a new social fantasy (or of many antagonistic fantasies engaged in a struggle for hegemony) in the place of the dislocated one, and so on and so forth (Stavrakakis 74).

Through this exposition of the structural causality of the political, we can understand how the foundation of political reality always already represses the political which is manifested ‘*par excellence*’ at the moment when one makes the impossible encounter with the real. Additionally, it also shows the institution of any new political order can happen only as a consequence of the dislocation of the preceding order. India can establish itself as a democracy only after the preceding locations of power are dismantled. In attempting to restore the pre-symbolic fullness of the glori-

ous past, all depositories of power—the colonial, and the foreign rulers before that—are dislocated in every sphere of the political reality. In South Africa, for instance, apartheid can be traced back to “the dislocations that conditioned the emergence of the Afrikaner nationalist discourse” (Stavrakakis 74). Political reality then is structured on the repressed political. Institution of a new socio-political order is constructed on the foundation of a dislocation. As with all forms of reality, political reality is also constructed in accordance with the symbolic order and defined by a set of nodal points or *points de capiton*. In the understanding of political reality, the manner in which these nodal points work can best be understood by Freud’s own analysis in *Group Psychology* where he argues that what can work as a cementing force in uniting millions of people is a leader in whom they find a common point of reference. A leader who claims himself to be a Hindu nationalist, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi often does, therefore becomes that nodal point who united millions who would otherwise fall apart. An analysis of the politics of modern India would reveal how it is only now after seven decades of Independence that the secular fabric of the country is truly under threat. This is where the figure of the leader assumes paramount significance in any analysis of majoritarian politics.

Thus, in the ideological discourse of nationalism as the *point de capiton*, all forms of social and political reality are defined by the master signifier. All signifiers in the field assume their meaning as defined by the master signifier. The true realisation of democracy is therefore contingent on the fulfilment of the nationalist desire. The same rule applies to the entire field of signifiers that assume political significance. It is for this reason, as Laclau highlights, that “the Lacanian concept of the *point de capiton*, the nodal point that fixes meaning, is profoundly relevant for a theory of hegemony” (Laclau 255). As Stavrakakis elaborates:

The *point de capiton*, on the one hand, can function as a point of reference only if posited as an incarnation of the universality of a certain group or collectivity, as a representative of the pure being or the systematicity of the system. In the *point de capiton* a particular signifier is called to incarnate a function beyond its concreteness, it is ‘emptied’ from its particular signification in order to represent fullness in general and be able to articulate a large number of heterogenous signifiers. The signifier of exclusion, on the other hand, is also an empty signifier, but one that

represents the opposite of the *point de capiton*: pure negativity; what has to be negated and excluded in order for reality to signify its limits (Stavrakakis 81).

When the form of nationalism is essentially religious, it assumes a greater level of legitimacy in anointing itself as a representative of the larger population of the country. The signifier of inclusion, a function of the *point de capiton* is one which is emptied in order to represent fullness in general. Nicolas Demertzis in *The Discourse of Nationalism* argues that the ‘nation’ is this empty signifier that works to unite the entire community. What is far more interesting, especially in the light of current debates in India, is the other signifier—the signifier of exclusion. This research has argued how ‘anti-national’ is this signifier of exclusion that “represents the opposite of the *point de capiton*”, that is the opposite of the nationalist and stands for pure evil. It is this evil that must be uprooted from its roots in order for the nationalist fulfilment to truly take place. In 2016, New Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University—which holds the highest score on the NAAC accreditation list—was declared anti-national by the nationalist right wing government of India. Subsequently, it was argued by many in the ruling party that the University should be shut down. The anti-national, who is seen as an internal threat, must be negated in order to secure the socio-ideological fantasy of India. One is then reminded of the list compiled by MS Golwalkar where listed Muslims, Christians, and Communists as the top three internal threats to India. It is not co-incidental that they are all non-Hindu, or atheists, as in the case of Communists. About the Muslims, for instance, Golwalkar writes:

Have those who remained here changed at least after that? Has their old hostility and murderous mood, which resulted in widespread riots, looting, arson, raping and all sorts of orgies on an unprecedented scale in 1946-47, come to a halt at least now? It would be suicidal to delude ourselves into believing that they have turned patriots overnight after the creation of Pakistan. On the contrary, the Muslim menace has increased a hundred fold by the creation of Pakistan which has become a springboard for all their future aggressive designs on our country (Golwalkar, *BOT* 145-146).

These internal threats, by virtue of their faith, are always already anti-national and who must therefore be negated in order for India to be truly secure. While negation may not be the official policy adopted by the government of independent India, there lingered a certain distrust of the Muslim population which resulted in their exclusion from the great mission of nation-building. This coterie in the Congress was led by the ‘Iron Man of India’—Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Home Minister of India. In *India After Gandhi*, Ramachandra Guha records a speech given by Patel in Lucknow in January 1948 where he reminded the audience that it was in Lucknow that the two-nation-theory was born as it was the intellectual class of the United Provinces who had argued that “Muslims were a separate nation.” As for those who had not chosen to leave for Pakistan, Patel said that “mere declarations of loyalty to the Indian Union” wasn’t enough and that they “must give *practical proof* of their declarations” (Guha 365). It is not simply by pledging themselves to India that Muslims can prove their loyalty, they need to provide “practical proof” that they are truly children of Mother India. Patel presents an interesting conundrum to the Muslim population who must somehow find practical means to display their love for the country while at the same time being excluded from its working. Guha presents the briefing of the secretary of Patel’s Home Ministry which sent the following order to the secretaries of all other ministries under the Government of India. The order read:

There is growing evidence that a section of Muslims in India is out of sympathy with the Government of India, particularly because of its policy regarding Kashmir and Hyderabad, and is actively sympathetic to Pakistan. Such Government servants are likely to be useful channels of information and would be particularly susceptible to the influence of their relatives. It is obvious that they constitute a dangerous element in the fabric of administration; and it is essential that they should not be entrusted with any confidential or secret work or allowed to hold key posts (Guha 365).

This is perhaps an instance of how the Muslim—an anti-national—was systematically excluded from the nation-building that was aspiring for a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic, as enshrined in the Preamble to the Constitution of India. Guha records various cases in different organs of the Government where the Muslims were subsequently disempowered for fear that they

may compromise the internal security of the modern nation. This is precisely the nature of utopian politics which needs a threat in order to constitute itself towards becoming a nation. Every fantasy is sustained by its obverse. As Žižek argues in his analysis of anti-Semitism, the Jew is a significant presence in order for Nazi fantasy to consolidate itself. “The beatific side of fantasy”, Stavrakakis argues, “is coupled in utopian constructions with a horrific side, a paranoid need for a stigmatised scapegoat. The naivety—and also the danger—of utopian structures is revealed when the realisation of this fantasy is attempted. It is then that we are brought close to the frightening kernel of the real: stigmatisation is followed by extermination” (Stavrakakis 100).

This fear of the internal threat is not an exceptional case but the very building blocks of the structure of fantasy which always has two sides—the fantasy of a utopian society is sustained by the fantasy of internal threats who are conspiring to undermine the processes. This structuring of fantasy in socio-political realities is aided by representation of history. Norman Cohn argues that ‘the roots of both demonisation and utopian thinking can be traced back to the shift from a cyclical to a unilinear representation of history’ (Cohn 227). All social fantasies will therefore rely on the Symbolic representation of history to identify its internal threats. In the case of anti-Semitism in Germany, for instance, the Jew represents all that is wrong in the society as a cumulative effect of its history of exploiting Germany to serve his own interests. It is for this reason that the Jew must be negated in order for the German society to fulfil its dream. The Jews “were seen as deserving death (and resented for that reason) because they stood between this one imperfect and tension-ridden reality and the hoped-for world of tranquil happiness ... the disappearance of the Jews was instrumental in bringing about the world of perfection” (Bauman 76). One can therefore argue that for the good to happen, the evil has to be negated. It is the evil therefore that defines the good. For the nation to achieve its promised glory, it is the anti-national that must be cleansed out of the nation. Conversely, it is the anti-national upon whom the nation finds its meaning. As Jerold Post has argued, “We need enemies to keep our treasured—and idealised—selves intact” (Post 28-9). Analysing the politics of Hindutva, Prof Tanika Sarkar makes a similar argument where she writes:

V D Savarkar, the powerful ideologue of Hindutva, defined the nation in admirably clear terms. Perpetual antagonism against an ‘Other’, in his view, is the basis of the nation: the Other, presumably, is always to be defined by the self-ap-

pointed guardians of the nation. Antagonism, he said, creates and consolidates national identity and nothing unites a nation more than the presence of a common enemy. The nation, therefore, actually needs an enemy. The presence of the anti-national, in fact, is the first and also the supreme condition for the existence of the nation (T Sarkar, *Gandhi's Nation* 84).

An important distinction one needs to make here is to highlight that the Muslim need not be the permanent anti-national threatening the nation. By its very nature as an empty signifier, anti-national does not have a stable signified. At every point in the fantasy of the nation, there will be anti-national threatening to dismantle it. In the structure of a nationalism that is essentially religious, the empty signifier of anti-national assumes the meaning of non-Hindu or Muslims in the case of India.

Towards Subaltern Nationalism(s)

As we have established so far, the construction of social reality is possible precisely because the *point de capiton* is not a stable signifier. The Symbolic order—centre on this Master signifier—masks its constitutive lack through a socio-ideological fantasy that works as absolute signification. The fantasy builds the promise of resorting order in the subject's social life by restoring a fullness lost in the pre-symbolic real. Fantasy works in a two-pronged fashion. While on the one hand it promises a utopic society through its beatific side, on the other hand, it finds the source of its survival in its horrific side which identifies internal threats who are conspiring to dismantle the utopia. In this enterprise, history—defined by the Symbolic Law—works as the source that feeds the illusion of conspiracies in the figure of the Other who is stealing and has been stealing from us our *jouissance*. In the case of Indian/Hindu nationalism, we have seen how the anti-national becomes that internal threat which must be negated in order for the nation to truly attain its promised fulfilment which derives its legitimacy from a mythical past that was lost due of the designs of a foreign invader. In this scenario, how does one counter the mirage of fantastical fulfilment especially when one is part of democratic promise that is incompatible with the nationalist promise? How does one uphold the principle of democracy that essentially promises

an equality that resists Othering? In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe present an alternative. They write:

Between the logic of complete identity and that of pure difference, the experience of democracy should consist of the recognition of the multiplicity of social logics along with the necessity of their articulation. But this articulation should be constantly re-created and renegotiated, and there is no final point at which a balance will be definitely achieved (Laclau and Mouffe 188).

In the system of democracy, Laclau and Mouffe prescribe a ‘multiplicity of social logic’ in order to counter the terrorising potential of utopic politics, like nationalism, as we have established, has the potential of becoming. Extending their argument, this research argues that one of the ways in which one can undercut the master signification of nationalism is by attacking that from which it seeks its legitimacy—history. What one can offer therefore is a multiplicity of histories which resists and forbids hegemonisation of one dominant history. What we must do, therefore, is to dislocate a majoritarian nationalism while moving towards a subaltern nationalism(s) that is characterised by its inherent plurality and is loyally in keeping with the principles of democracy. In order to gain a better understanding of the manner in which this can take place, this research will present an analysis of what can be a dialectical opposite of the narrative that was discussed in the analysis of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay’s novel *Anandamath*. An example of the other view of the nation’s past can be found in Qurratulain Hyder’s 1958 novel *River of Fire*. In the totalising narrative of nationalist historiography where Indian history is often broadly categorised into the three essentialised periods of glorious ancient India, the dark medieval India, and modern independent India, Qurratulain Hyder presents to us a *dastan* of Hindustan where the narrative traces the 2500 years long trajectory of India from the fourth century Mauryan Empire till after its independence from the British rule in 1947. The true significance of Hyder’s novel lies in the fact that in building a diachronic reading of India’s history, she relies not on what is already a part of the popular imagination, but on that which has been excluded.

Transcreated in 1998 from the 1959 original *Aag Ka Dariya* by the author herself, *River of Fire* defies the boundaries of linear temporality. It is a unilinear representation of history, as we pointed out earlier, that sustains the machinations of the utopic and demonising nature of fantasy.

With its four stories estranged from each other by time and united by experience, the novel indulges in a fictionalised historical odyssey of the Gautams and the Champas of this civilisation whose lives apart from divulging to us the aesthetic sensibilities of their times, also give us an insight into the dynamically static relationship between the personal and the political. The narrative takes place over four periods that are themselves times of conflict, transition, and flux: the fourth century BCE and the rise of Chandragupta Maurya, the story of Muslim immigrants in the sixteenth century, the consolidation of East India Company rule in the nineteenth century and the decades surrounding the Partition of India. However, within these three broad periods spanning 2500 years, what stands out is the fact that the stories she narrates record the experiences of the historically marginalised who did not or could not be co-opted into the totalising narrative of nationalist historiography. And it is through the highlighting of this exclusion that one understands the politics of historiography that Hyder provides an equally legitimate counter to. In addition to this, one of the most prominent observations one can draw from the novel is the politics of space and place as revealed in the locations that the writer chooses to situate her narrative in.

Hyder begins her *dastan* with the journey of Gautam Nilambar, a Brahmin scholar of the Forest University of Shravasti. The intent of narrating what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls ‘subaltern pasts’ is conveyed in the choice of her spatio-temporal setting. While choosing to begin with the much romanticised ancient/golden Indian age, she situates her story not in the then powerful kingdom of Chandragupta Maurya’s Pataliputra, but in Shravasti. The India, if we may retrospectively use the term, is not a Hindu *akhand bharata*, but a plural society with Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains, which is also plagued by the horrors of the caste system. When Prince Hari Shankar disguises himself as Harius Sincarius, a Greek traveller, Gautam is apprehensive of touching him—a *mlechha*—for fearing of losing his caste. Additionally, while describing the social fabric of Shravasti, we are told:

Low-born cart-wrights, potters and basket-weavers lived in shanties outside the suburbs. The Chandals were the lowest of the low, inferior even to the Shudras. They were the fifth caste, destined to be pall-bearers. They could only wear clothes taken off dead bodies because their karma had not decreed otherwise. The Buddha had arrived in Shravasti nearly a hundred fifty years earlier from Magadh, and set up his Vihar in nearby Jetvan. A lot of untouchables followed him and be-

came touchables. He was greatly resented by the powerful Brahmin priests of Shravasti (Hyder 17).

This alternate incontestable reality of ancient India is in direct conflict with the Hindutva narrative which seeks its legitimacy in an idyllic past of a peaceful and homogenous Hindu society. The Shravasti community is decimated not at the hands of a foreign invader but by the armies of Chandragupta Maurya who has been taught the ‘Law of the Fish’ by Acharya Vishnu Sharma, according to whom, “big fish eat smaller ones. What we needed, he maintained, was an empire—the days of small kingdoms are over.” Consequently, thousands of residents of Shravasti are killed and their homes destroyed for the greater good of a Mauryan Empire. Thus, while a nationalist historiographical account would focus on the glory and retrospective nationalism of the Mauryan Empire, Hyder chooses to focus on the margins instead to relate the tales of those that were co-opted into the Empire and the political philosophy therein. More than anything else, this works to undercut the modern religious binary of Self/Other that is used to misappropriate the past. In this world of Hyder’s Shravasti, for a nationalist, would the Shravasti victims be the Self to the invading Chandragupta Other or would Chandragupta be the nationalist Self to the Shravasti Other? With multiple myths offering contesting solidarities, how does one appropriate the past?

“Appeals to the past”, writes Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*, “are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past is really past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps. This problem animates all sorts of discussions—about influence, about blame and judgment, about present actualities and future priorities” (Said 3). Is the past then really past and how does it extend into the present? When the narrative takes a leap to land in 1476 AD India with Abul Mansur Kamaluddin of Nishapur crossing the same river Saryu that many centuries ago Gautam Nilambar had drowned in, one of his main concerns is the fact that he was not “a native Muslim” of Hindustan. Having come to write his book, *The Marvels and Strange Tales of Hindustan*, Kamal goes not to Delhi but to Jaunpur, the Sultanate-i-Sharq or the Eastern Kingdom of Sultan Hussain Shah Sharqi, a great patron of art, who gives him the task of learning Sanskrit

so that he could translate texts of Hindu mythology. Kamal records his interaction with the locals, about one of which we are told by him:

Al-Hind is rife with myths, legends, folklore and old wives' tales. In Ayodhya the other day, I came across an inordinately long grave situated under a leafy tree. A local Muslim told me in Oudhi dialect, and in a matter-of-fact tone, that it was the last resting place of Prophet Sheth, son of Prophet Nooh. How on earth did Sheth come to be buried in Ayodhya?

"Well," said the local Muslim, "There was this Big Flood—say yes."

"Yes. But it happened in Iraq, etc.,—those areas ..."

"Only in Iraq? The whole world drowned in it—say yes."

"Yes."

"And Noah's Ark stopped at Mount Judi, didn't it? Well that was, in fact, Ayodhya" (Hyder 75).

The transcreated River of Fire was published in 1998, six years after the demolition of Babri Masjid by Hindutva forces, which permanently damaged the social fabric of India. What Hyder does here, then, is to contest a mythical past with another mythical one, as groundless and as incontestable as any other. How does one dismiss one myth by subscribing to another, and vice versa? What is highlighted, eventually, through each and every story is the composite cultural ethos of India which is incessantly disrupted by politicisation of randomly sketched identity markers. What Hyder accomplishes then is to show how these identity markers are historically rootless because she offers a series of other alternate histories that testify to the contrary.

By choosing to situate her narrative in Jaunpur, we are introduced (as we never find it in mainstream history books) to a society which has colleges and mosques for women, where translation is one of the chief activities supervised personally by the king, and where the king is a famed musician. However, it doesn't last because the Eastern Kingdom is destroyed by the expanding Lodi armies. At an old age, Kamal dies at the hands of the Mughals because his son was suspected to be supporting the Afghans. However, the biggest transformation that happens during his lifetime is his acceptance of India as his country, his homeland. During the fall of Jaunpur, when Kamal contemplates his future plans, he thinks to himself:

Go away? Where to? Nishapur? That name sounded a bit odd, now that he had started thinking of himself as a Hindustani. He was no longer a *Vilayati*. How could he be if he was chewing *paan* like a he-goat and the loyal Rajputs were picking betel leaves with him as an oath that they would die fighting for Hussain Shah? This custom was called '*beera uthaana*' (Hyder 87).

What is the nature of solidarity in a pluralistic society then? Who is the native nationalist and who is the foreigner? The only binary in terms of identity that does exist in the novel however is between the Indian Self and the colonising Other. The switch from '*beera uthaana*' to lifting the white man's burden is carried out in the figure of Cyril Ashley of Sidney College Sussex, Cambridge, to whom the merchant Peter Jackson points out the poetic justice in losing America and gaining India almost simultaneously and where England is described as a "demi-paradise that had never enjoyed such prosperity before. Palaces were being built, wealth was pouring in from Canada and Bengal and South America. The poor had become rich; the rich were richer." It is this prospect of a luxurious life in India that convinces Cyril to leave England for India and become an Occidental scholar with access to Dara Shukoh's translation of the Upanishads. However, despite struggling with the language and the text for his whole life, he dies a rich man with as little understanding of the text as when he had first received them. What the portrayal of Cyril as an incompetent officer accomplishes is to reduce him, and by extension the colonial project, to a meaningless speck on the vast canvas of India. Liyanage Amarakeerthi notes that the character Cyril, who is an embodiment of the colonial project, becomes insignificant when seen against the entire history of the Indian subcontinent, disempowering him as an "agent of history" and presenting him as just another "victim." What this also does is to draw a clearer boundary between the Indian Self and the foreign Other. As far as the identity of Muslims vis-a-vis the British is concerned, Hyder presents an alternate take on the matter pointing something that out that nobody wants to acknowledge. This alternate take is presented to us through Cyril's interaction with a local Hindu subject, Radhey Sharan. Following is an excerpt from that conversation:

“How could you be so loyal to rulers who called you *Kafirs*?” asked Cyril Ashley. “How are people like the Raja Saheb here so faithful to you, Sir, who call us heathens and treat us as inferior human beings? They didn’t. We were their equals, they shared our culture. Aliwardy Khan and his court officially played Holi for seven days running. Two hundred tanks in Murshidabad were filled with coloured water. They didn’t send the country’s wealth out to some foreign land. We ran their administration and held the highest ranks” (Hyder 120-21).

What follows is a long debate on the alleged foreignness of Muslim kings which “Cyril began to enjoy, for he and Peter were the winners and had the final word.” What this seeks to undermine is the British dishonesty/bias which defined the rules of historiography as it picked pace in nineteenth and twentieth century India under British historians. Again, it is the omissions that are highlighted and presented alongside the dominant ideology that work to showcase how the British dealt with the pluralism that was the Indian society.

For a novel that strives to establish the composite cultural ethos of India through these historiographical commissions and omissions, it is only fitting that the novel ends with the handling of this pluralism in the decades preceding and succeeding the Partition of India. About the discourse leading to the Partition, we are told:

There was yet another aspect of the new nationalist movement that was making its presence felt—some people had openly begun talking of Ancient Hindu Culture and the Glory that was Islam. How was Indian culture to be defined? Could ‘real’ Indians only be Hindus? Were Muslims unholy intruders who should be treated as such? Nobody had ever asked Mirzapur’s Qamrun Nissa and Ram Daiya their opinion on these matters (Hyder 202-03).

The true predicament of the Partition on the fate of Indian Muslims is encapsulated in the figure of Kamal Reyaz—a revolutionary fighting for the abolishment of the Zamindari system—who is compelled to move to Pakistan when his family is dispossessed of everything they ever owned because one of their relatives moved to Pakistan and they were declared to be ‘intending evacuees.’ Kamal could never grasp the ‘idea of India’. For him, anything and everything he ever

had a connection with was India. His house was India. The only time he started questioning if he would ever be considered Indian again was after his encounter with a British poet on his way back to India from England.

The British poet said, “Forster wrote his novel in 1924, at which time he created Dr Aziz as a representative Indian. Dr Aziz is no longer Indian—Muslims are now identified only with Pakistan.” He glanced at Kamal and added, “Now, our Kamal Reza is not the typical Indian, only our Pandit Gaur is” (Hyder 368).

Eventually it is this one question that changes Kamal’s worldview, that lies at the heart of this novel, and that haunts our socio-political discourse even today. Who is a representative Indian? And if India was a nation before 1947, who were the representative Indians then? Who is the representative of Ancient India? Additionally, since most/many would give Chandragupta Maurya as their answer, Qurratulain Hyder’s *River of Fire* is a Revelation that proves that there is no one right answer, that there will always be “six equally valid answers to every question”, if not more, and it is this pluralism that will always be the cornerstone of our society.

While narrating a story to her other diasporic friends in London, Talat lays down the central questions on narration that find resonance with Hyder’s own *dastangoi*, and the larger conundrum in nationalist historiography. She says:

There are many ways of telling a *dastan*. How shall I begin? I don’t know which characters are more important. Where did this story start? What was the climax? Who was the heroine? How should she have ended up? And who was the hero? Who is the listener of this story and who is the narrator? My older brother, Kamal, used to say that one day he will sit down and decide about all this. But he hasn’t even been able to decide about himself (Hyder 184).

It is not Kamal but Talat who will recite the *dastan*. And similarly, since he quite clearly hasn’t even been able to decide about himself, it is Hyder who must be the *dastango* for the *dastan* of Hindustan, and she does answer all of these questions. She begins at the perceived beginning. She ends the novel where it began, with 2500 years of exclusion in between. And there are no histori-

cal characters more or less important than anyone else. By providing the vast historical canvas of two and a half millennia, Hyder reduces every dominant historical event to a minor speck, especially in contrast to the multiple and equally legitimate histories that she chooses to focus on. Hyder's diachronic reading, in connecting the dots from different centuries and millennia, breaks the continuum of History to make opportunities for alternate experiences and histories. With its multiple marginalised histories, *River of Fire* therefore transcends the totalising narrative of nationalist historiography. It is a historical *dastan* that transcends History.

Conclusion

I will speak then about the good, and perhaps what I have to say will be bad in the sense that I don't have all the goodness required to speak well of it (Lacan, *VII* 218).

How does one begin to conclude an analysis of a phenomenon that escapes definition and yet remains the most powerful force in the constitution of a social/national identity? How does one offer a concluding remark on the nature of nationalism in India when by its very nature a dissenting voice is delegitimised from speaking on the same? Borrowing from Lacan and moving towards Lacan, we will speak then about the good knowing that what we will say will be construed to be bad for the simple reason that we do not bear the seal of goodness that is required to be even a part of the discussion. As Aditya Nigam argues, "It is the moment of crisis that forces re-examination and opens out possibilities for the re-emergence of the marginalised voices, if in entirely new forms. A moment of crisis then is also a moment of immense possibilities" (Nigam 37).

Through this conclusion, we will therefore aim to seize the moment of immense possibilities and move towards a radical restructuring of the discourse surrounding nationalism in a democratic country like India to highlight the incompatibility of the two principles and the need to situate the democratic over and above the nationalist. This section will therefore argue that if nationalism by its very nature tends to move towards a totalitarian structuring of the nation, a de-democratisation of the nation, there needs to be a radical shift in the understanding of nationalism and the place it assumes in the national imaginary. As we have shown in the preceding chapters, any attempt to create a homogeneity or hegemony in the name of nationalism is incompatible with the principle of democracy which is structured on the bedrock of difference.

The establishment of any new order is made possible by the dislocation of the preceding regime. In India, for instance, the establishment of democracy was preceded by decolonisation. Highlighting how the very nature and history of dislocations show that there cannot be a "unity founded on an *a priori* positive point of reference", Stavrakakis argues:

Any discussion on democracy cannot proceed from identifying a privileged essentialist point of reference (an ideal that would guarantee unity) to erecting it in the

heart of society in order to resolve its ambiguity. Following from this, democracy should not be viewed as a form of institutional arrangements that are applied in a given society to meet its essential needs. Modern democracies are constructed when it is realised that there are no essential needs and no unity founded on an *a priori* positive point of reference. The great innovation democracy is that it recognises this fact and attempts to build a new sense of unity on this recognition (Stavrakakis 124).

If nationalism becomes the privileged master signifier in the construction of the Indian nation, it goes against the very principle of democracy for the simple reason that nationalism works as a homogenising principle when democracy upholds the very principle of difference. In this thesis on 'Democracy', Alain Touraine argues that there are two main threats to democracy—the first is from above by totalitarian power, and the second is from below, 'through chaos, violence and civil war' (Touraine 2). By understanding the nature of the threats, one can also achieve a better understanding of the principle of democracy which therefore prospers in the absence of a totalitarian power and the violence of what Nigam calls the 'mass man'. Under totalitarian politics or nationalist totalitarian politics that plague contemporary times, a particular political party takes upon itself the function of realising the socio-ideological fantasy and as Claude LeFort points out it possesses "a legitimacy that places it above the law" (LeFort 13). The task of democracy is therefore to negotiate between speaking for the general while also defending the right of the particular. As we have established in the preceding chapters, the threat of majoritarian or religious nationalism is that it strives to legitimise the big Other, to establish the symbolic order of social construction as a single unified entity which is structured on and around a single principle of nationalism as the *point de capiton* fixing the meaning of the entire field of floating signifiers. This project based on a fantasy is fundamentally incompatible with the principle of democracy and can only work to establish or reinforce totalitarian tendencies.

In following a Lacanian ethics, the focus is not on replacing the proffered goodness with another but to dislocate the notion of goodness assumed by the totalitarian regimes of power. The idea therefore is to embrace the symptom. In the socio-political realities of India, the socio-ideological fantasy of nationalism offers the anti-national as the symptom—the internal threat to the nation in whose absence the nation would embark on the path of greatness that is promised by the

fantasy. In *Looking Awry*, Slavoj Žižek argues that the means to counter anti-Semitism or totalitarian regimes, for instance, is by declaring that “We are all Jews!”, “We all live in Chernobyl”, or “We are all boat people!” (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 140). In doing so, the stigmatised symptom is elevated into the fold of the universal tending towards the plane of identification which was erstwhile predicated upon the exclusion of the symptom. In the Indian context of a parochial nationalism, the only means to counter the draconian means of a nationalist government is by declaring that ‘We are all anti-nationals!’ It is only when one identifies with the symptom that one truly traverses the fantasy to observe the constitutive lack at the heart of the symbolic order. It is only then that we can truly give to ourselves a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic.

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