

**Negotiating History, (Re-)imagining the Nation:
The Indian Historical Novel in English, 1900-2000**

by

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Thesis Summary

As the title of my project suggests, this thesis deals with Indian historical fiction in English. While the time frame in the title may lead one to expect that the present study will attempt a historical overview of the Indian historical novel written in English, that is not a primary concern. Rather, I pose two broad questions: the first asks, to what uses does Indian English fiction put the Indian past as it is remembered in both formal history and communal memory? The second question is perhaps a more important one so far as this project is concerned: why does the Indian English novel use the Indian past in the ways that it does? There is as a consequence an intention to move from the inner world of Indian historical fiction to the outer space of the socio-political reality from which the novel under consideration has been produced. In other words, I read the literary text in the light of the social text.

Like several other sub-genres of Indian fiction in English, the Indian historical novel emerged first during the colonial period. Both its formal and thematic concerns are thus to a large extent shaped in the pre-independence period by the long shadows of the British colonisation of India. The two types of historical fiction written under an oppressive colonial regime—revivalist and nationalist—are geared to regenerating and constructing cultural/national identity/self. That is to say, the pre-independence Indian historical novel uses Indian history/past to imagine the nation.

Many of the inequalities that the political birth of the Indian nation-state was expected to remove have remained. Even more than half a century after the British had

left India, minorities are still ill-treated; casteism is still rampant; discrimination against women is still commonplace. Post-independence Indian historical fiction engages with Indian history/past to retrieve the voices of these subalterns. In challenging the bourgeois-patriarchal hegemony of the nation, the historical novel of the post-independence period sets out to re-imagine the nation in two notable ways, generating in the process the two most remarkable varieties of post-independence historical fiction: feminist and interventionist. A third type is revisionist which focuses on the politics of colonial representation rather than the re-imagining of the nation.

From a contextual reading of seven historical novels in this study, I conclude that Indian historical fiction in English uses Indian history/past both to construct and deconstruct the Indian cultural/national self.

Acknowledgements

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An earlier version of chapter 5 appeared as an article titled ‘The Nation and One of Its Fragments in *Kanthapura*’ in *Transnational Literature* (vol. 4, no. 1, November 2011) and went on to win the Best Student Research Paper Award 2011 in the Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law at Flinders University, South Australia. I am deeply indebted to my principal supervisor, Rick Hosking, and the anonymous reviewers of the article whose astute comments and suggestions went a long way towards shaping the argument I have finally been able to construct in both the article and the chapter in which it appears.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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INTRODUCTION

Since the interpretation of history is itself historically situated, the historical reference of the historical novel is double: not only is the past seen through the prism of the present, it also serves present interests.

David Roberts¹

The academy, media and political arena have been all shaped in recent times by the ‘history wars.’² Although I believe I am a peace-loving person, though not exactly a Gandhian pacifist, my research requires I come to grips with this particular kind of war in some detail. I am doubly obliged to embark on such an undertaking because both my research location (an Australian public university) and research focus (representation of history in Indian English fiction) have been sites of some of the fiercest battles over the question of history and historiography. That it should be so comes as no surprise, for both history and historiography have always been contested terrains whose capture has been of

¹ David Roberts, ‘The Modern German Historical Novel: An Introduction,’ in *The Modern German Historical Novel: Paradigms, Problems, Perspectives*, eds. David Roberts and Philip Thomson (New York and Oxford: Berg, 1991) 3.

² The term ‘history wars’ was coined in the US and became popular on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary in 1995 of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For an overview of the ‘history wars’ in the US, see *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, eds. Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996).

crucial importance to totalitarianism in all its shades.³ At the same time, however, engaging history is no less empowering. If anti-colonial nationalisms all over the world had one common political agenda, it was the rewriting of the history produced by the colonial masters. At the turn of the nineteenth century, for example, the Bengali/Indian nationalist, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, was heard clamouring for a history of/for the Bengalis. Without history, according to Bankimchandra, there was no way out for the Bengalis from colonial subjugation. In wanting a historical discourse of, by, and for the Bengalis/Indians, as Vinay Lal has succinctly put it:

[. . .] Bankim was giving expression to the sentiments of many nationalists and modernizers who agonized over India's enslavement and the lack of a historical literature, and who saw in those twin deficiencies, which had to be overcome, an inescapable connection.⁴

And the centrality of revisionist history in feminist movements is too well known to bear repetition.⁵

³ In her memoir, Bryher, cited in Diana Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 2, notes the ban that Benito Mussolini imposed on the study of history by women at the universities in pre-war fascist Italy.

⁴ Vinay Lal, *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (2003; New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2007) 80. See also Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth-Century Agenda and Its Implications*, S.G. Deuskar Lectures on Indian History (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1988); Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1995).

⁵ See, for example, Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

History Wars in Australia

In most countries that have witnessed history wars, these wars have been fought along three shared fronts. First, a dominant and reassuring myth was challenged and gave way to a less savoury one, or just fell apart. In the Australian context, for instance, the heartening image of European settlement beginning in the late eighteenth century was cracked open to expose how it had meant the deprivation and displacement of the Indigenous population. In his six-volume *History of Australia*, Manning Clark demolished a whole set of what Graeme Turner calls ‘national fictions,’ so much so that a reviewer of the fifth volume of *History* published in 1981 went so far as to remark that it was a ‘bitter and cynical’ history produced by ‘a man who hates his own society.’⁶ The controversy reached its peak as the nation arrived at celebrating the Bicentenary of the white occupation of Australia in 1988. Virtually the whole nation was forced to choose between two competing interpretations of the Australian past and decide, accordingly, if the Bicentenary should be observed as an occasion for jubilation or mourning. Interestingly, the two versions have come to be associated with the names of two historians—Manning Clark, who is accused by the opposite camp of offering a ‘Black Armband’ view of Australian history, while his one-time

⁶ Cited in Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (2003; Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne UP, 2004) 61. Charles Manning Hope Clark, *History of Australia*, 6 vols (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne UP, 1962-87); Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986). The phrase ‘national fictions,’ as Turner uses it, has a double meaning: it means both the myths Australia likes to live by and the narratives where these myths are constructed in the first instance.

student, Geoffrey Blainey, became the champion of the earlier ‘Three Cheers’ view, a view that draws attention to past achievements rather than wrongs.⁷

But the history wars were not history wars *qua* history wars. More was at stake. They were intimately bound up with the question of Australian cultural/national identity, with ‘what kind of story about its past Australia ought to be telling itself,’ as Inga Clendinnen puts it in her engaging review of *The History Wars*.⁸ The largely unproblematic white Australian identity became increasingly contested by the challenges posed by Asian immigration, global capital, and multiculturalism. The two ways of looking back at the Australian past in the last decades of the twentieth century pointed to the two ways that the nation could be (re)-imagined at a time when ‘the nation-concept’ itself came to be discredited in some parts of the world (especially in the West), though its appeal had by no means weakened in some other parts.⁹

On the second front, the exchange of arguments pertained more to how history gets written than to what it professes to say. With postcolonialism, postmodernism and poststructuralism becoming hegemonic from the late 1970s onward, the discipline of historiography came under close scrutiny, as did a host of other disciplines such as anthropology, medicine, literature, and so on. Setting aside its claim to objectivity and truth, it was now claimed that historical narrative

⁷ According to Stuart Macintyre, ‘The Black Armband epithet had been minted [. . .] by the historian Geoffrey Blainey.’ Macintyre and Clark 3.

⁸ Inga Clendinnen, *Agamemnon’s Kiss: Selected Essays* (Melbourne, Victoria: Text Publishing, 2006) 149.

⁹ The term comes from Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2005) 4.

was just another discursive practice. The knowledge of the past that history is able to provide is, to borrow from Mariadele Boccardi, ‘always mediated and already encoded.’¹⁰ In short, historical knowledge of the past is ideological, shaped by any number of power relations and structures. With the inductive and positivist foundations of historiography under fire, proponents of the old school lamented ‘the killing of history,’ as a retired academic historian in Australia put it in the title of his abrasively polemical book.¹¹ Who were doing the killing? Keith Windschuttle, the warrior-historian, gave the answer in his sub-title. The murderers were the ‘literary critics and social theorists.’¹²

All was not quiet on the last front, though it has perhaps been quieter than the other two. Inga Clendinnen paints a delightful picture of the initially pleasant scene and its subsequent transformation into a volatile one:

Novelists writing on historical topics and historians writing history used to jog along their adjacent paths reasonably companionably. More recently, perhaps because the intra-disciplinary disarray of the history wars has awakened imperial ambitions, novelists have been doing their best to bump historians off the track. It seems that that [*sic*] they have decided it is for them to write the history of this country, and to admonish and nurture its soul.¹³

¹⁰ Mariadele Boccardi, *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 36.

¹¹ Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How a Discipline Is Being Murdered by Literary Critics and Social Theorists* (Paddington, NSW: Macleay Press, 1994).

¹² See note 11 above.

¹³ Inga Clendinnen, *The History Question: Who Owns the Past? Quarterly Essay 23* (Melbourne, Victoria: Black Inc., 2006) 16.

A close reading of her long essay reveals that Clendinnen does not actually resent the fact that novelists are ‘doing history.’¹⁴ What she cannot accept is the way they tend to do it.¹⁵ Although there are several offenders around, Clendinnen takes Kate Grenville, the author of the contentious novel *The Secret River* (2005), as her ‘example.’¹⁶ Disarming Grenville step by step by deploying her own arguments against her, Clendinnen comes to her main point: novelists employ empathy and imagination to engage with the past and are thus prone to distorting it; historians have nothing to do with either empathy or imagination, and they take no liberty with facts. As far as Clendinnen is concerned, empathy and imagination are not appropriate tools for historical research.

What are they then? It is only ‘with patience, attentiveness and sufficient testing of the ground,’ Clendinnen argues, that one can begin to hope ‘to penetrate a little distance.’¹⁷ But ‘patience,’ ‘attentiveness,’ and the capacity to test are human qualities whose worth can be judged only through application. Where do historians employ them? The answer is ‘extant documentation,’ as Clendinnen puts it.¹⁸ So historical novelists and historians may use the same archive/material, but they use it differently and aim at different outcomes. Doing history aims at the ‘replication’ of the past, whereas ‘doing fiction’ aims at its

¹⁴ Clendinnen, *The History Question* 20.

¹⁵ In the final analysis, Clendinnen does not even begrudge novelists of doing history the way they do it, as long as they acknowledge that they are doing fiction, not history. Since Margaret Atwood, Peter Carey, and Tom Keneally admit that they tailor reality to artistic needs, Clendinnen does not seem to have any quarrel with them. *The History Question* 31-32.

¹⁶ Clendinnen, *The History Question* 16. Kate Grenville, *The Secret River* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2005). Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁷ Clendinnen, *The History Question* 26.

¹⁸ Clendinnen, *The History Question* 30.

‘transformation.’¹⁹ If so, the conclusion is obvious: it is historians who write ‘more penetrating history’ than fiction writers.²⁰ Did Australian novelists nod an assent? Yes, Inga, you’re right. Thanks for enlightening us about what we have all been doing all these years. No, they did not; at least not all of them, for historical novelists are no less ‘puritans’ when it comes to using history in fiction.²¹ So the debate has continued for some time now, with each party claiming to be offering the most compelling way of engaging with Australian history.²²

To consider whether historical fiction or history offers a better way of knowing the past is to see them as being generated and formed in two mutually exclusive, independent, ‘different [discursive] régimes,’ without any kind of interaction between the two, which is never the case.²³ All discourses are socio-historical constructs; as such, they are best understood as emerging from as well

¹⁹ Clendinnen, *The History Question* 20, 32.

²⁰ Clendinnen, *The History Question* 16.

²¹ Clendinnen, *The History Question* 16.

²² Grenville has two rejoinders on her website: ‘Responding to Inga Clendinnen’ and ‘The History-Fiction Demarcation Dispute,’ <<http://kategrenville.com/>>, accessed 17 Feb. 2012. The debate has resurfaced with the publication of *Bring Up the Bodies* by Hilary Mantel. See Stuart Kelly, ‘Unpicking the past masters: what makes a ‘historical novel’? *Guardian* 2 May 2012, accessed 8 May 2012 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/may/02/what-makes-historical-novel>>. Margaret Atwood, ‘The downfall of Anne Boleyn,’ review of *Bring Up the Bodies* by Hilary Mantel, *Guardian* 4 May 2012, accessed 8 May 2012 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/may/04/bring-up-the-bodies-hilary-mantel-review?newsfeed=tru>>. James Wood, ‘Invitation to a Beheading: The Thomas Cromwell novels [sic] of Hilary Mantel,’ *New Yorker* 7 May 2012, accessed 8 May 2012 <http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2012/05/07/120507crbo_books_wood>.

²³ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1980) 113.

as constituting what Michel Foucault calls ‘discursive formations.’²⁴ To a large extent then, what they can articulate and what they cannot depends on extra-discursive, institutional factors. Both as individuals and writers, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, for example, are so dissimilar in so many respects that to find a point of similarity between the two seems next to impossible. Yet when it comes to imagining the (Indian) nation, both subscribe to exclusionary politics; Rao (in *Kanthapura*) is perhaps more parochial than Anand (in the Lalu trilogy).²⁵ More to the point, the two sources of inspiration for Anand and Rao are also as diverse as two sources can possibly be: the model for Anand is Jawaharlal Nehru, the secular socialist; for Rao it is M.K. Gandhi, the traditional pacifist. If Gandhi and Nehru represent two opposing kinds of politics, how can they, one may legitimately ask, exist in the same discursive field? Herein comes in play the question of hierarchy, or what Foucault describes as the ‘orders of knowledge,’ for in any given discursive formation discourses are differentially positioned in terms of authority and legitimacy.²⁶ That is to say, some are allocated more prestige/status than others. In the theatre of Indian politics in the pre-independence period, Nehru came to occupy a central position only after Gandhi

²⁴ See chapter 2 (Part II) in Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, rpt. (1969; London and New York: Routledge, 1989); also Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), and Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, rpt. (1988; London: Routledge, 1992).

²⁵ Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (New York: New Directions, 1963). The Lalu trilogy by Mulk Raj Anand comprises *The Village*, 2nd Indian ed. (1939; Bombay: Kutub-Popular, 1960); *Across the Black Waters*, 1st Indian ed. (1940; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955); *The Sword and the Sickle*, 1st Indian ed. (1942; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955). Subsequent references are to these editions.

²⁶ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 112.

had vacated that position first. It is therefore more important to take into account how the two interactive discourses of history and historical fiction are situated in a given discursive field than to set to decide which of them best engages with the past.

The present study thus does not privilege historical fiction over historiography or *vice versa*. It rather aims at examining how the Indian novel in English represents history and how those representations are mediated by such historical determinants as the anti-colonial national movement in the colonial period, for instance.

History Wars in Post-independence India

As I have just mentioned above, this study examines how history is represented in Indian English fiction and how those representations are shaped by politico-historical factors. The comprising chapters thus open with a contextualisation section in which I attempt to relate particular uses of history in the Indian English novel to the (more or less) specific historical circumstances in which they emerge. With these opening contextualising sections covering most of the major battles fought over history and historiography in India up until the turn of the

twentieth century, I have decided to be brief here in my discussion of the history wars in the Indian setting.

In a real sense, debates over history in post-independence India have a not-too-hard-to-detect template. The two opposing camps are those of communal-nationalists and secular-nationalists, to a certain extent Indian counterparts of advocates of white and multicultural Australia, respectively. The former tend to see the Indian past, as they did in the pre-independence period, as a basically Hindu past, while the latter, as a predominantly syncretic one. One brief illustration will suffice. According to communal-nationalist perspective, India is the homeland of the Aryans, the forefathers of the present-day Hindus (especially Brahmins). The Aryans did not come from outside, communal-nationalists argue, like the Muslims or the British, for instance. As such, India belongs to the Aryans/Hindus.²⁷ The other point of view holds that the Aryans are as much invaders as the latter-day ones. India belongs to all those, according to secular-nationalists, who choose to belong to her, just as multicultural Australia belongs to all those who have chosen her as their (home)land.

Although both approaches have always been there in Indian historical discourse, the one representing communal-nationalists spoke in a subdued voice as long as Jawaharlal Nehru held office as Prime Minister. The mood changed

²⁷ Here is a typical example: 'Although India is the true motherland only of those who belong to the Hindu jāti [nation/race] and although only they have been born from her womb, the Muslims are not unrelated to her any longer. She has held them at her breast and reared them. The Muslims are therefore her adopted children.' Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, cited in Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) 111.

dramatically in the wake of the Emergency of 1975-7, imposed by Indira Gandhi, daughter of Nehru. The most obvious fallout of the Emergency was the increasing visibility of communalism in Indian politics. From then on, communal-nationalists broke from cover and began to perform as confidently and openly in politics as in the discourse of history. The discipline of history in India has perhaps been more fortunate than the realm of politics, for though communal-nationalism almost drove away secular-nationalism from the arena of Indian politics, it could not do so in the case of historical scholarship. The courage and determination with which secular-nationalist historians have fought and continue to fight communal-nationalist historians is something about which Indian historiography ought to be proud.

The most spectacular enactment of the confrontation of the two views of Indian history took place in the years immediately preceding and following the demolition of the Babri Masjid, a mosque named after the founder of the Mughal Empire, Babur. In the words of Vinay Lal:

[. . .] the controversy over the now-demolished Babri Masjid marked the first occasion in the history of independent India that the historian was brought to the forefront of national politics, and that the discourse of history was seen as having a unique place in settling a dispute of national proportions; and perhaps it would not be too much to aver that blood was shed over competing versions of history.²⁸

²⁸ Lal 169.

According to Hindu militants, there had been a Hindu temple where the mosque now stood in the city of Ayodhya. To complicate matters further, the very spot on which the mosque stood was said to be sacred to the Hindus, being the birthground of Lord Rama, who the majority of Hindus worship as one of the major Hindu deities. On 6 December 1992, a massive crowd of militant Hindus tore the Babri Masjid down in the presence of a substantial police force. More than any other group of professionals, both communal and secular historians have been involved in the mosque-temple dispute right from the start.²⁹ Both groups marshalled historical evidence in support of the position they championed; each accused the other of misrepresenting history. But recourse to history was meant not just to arrive at an acceptable resolution of the dispute at hand. As was the case with the Bicentenary controversy surrounding the past of Australia, here too much more was at stake, as is clearly evident from the reactions of such well-known Indians as Tabish Khair, Gyanendra Pandey, and Shashi Tharoor.³⁰ They all see the Babri Masjid affair as not just a much publicised communal/religious conflict. Very much like the history wars in Australia, it is a question of the kind of cultural/national identity India has to choose for itself: there is, on the one hand, the communal-nationalist image of India as an essentially Hindu India and, on the other, that of secular-nationalists as a pre-eminently syncretic India. In

²⁹ For a comprehensive coverage of the debate, see Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhumi Issue* (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1991).

³⁰ Lal 143.

other words, the struggle over the historical past of India is nothing less than a struggle over her very soul.³¹

The first round of the history wars in post-independence India, briefly recounted above, revolved less around questions of history as a mode of engaging with the past than around questions of its ideological/political uses. In the early 1980s, a group of social historians, collectively known as the subaltern group, set themselves to ‘rectify[ing] the elitist bias characteristic of much research and academic work’ ‘in the field of South Asian studies.’³² Of particular interest to the subaltern historians was ‘[t]he historiography of Indian nationalism’ which ‘has for a long time been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism.’³³ From the naming of the adversaries, one is able to infer what the subaltern historian is up to: s/he aims at bringing to light ‘the contribution made by the people *on their own*, that is, *independently of the elite* to the making and development of [Indian] nationalism.’³⁴ A new historiography of Indian nationalism quite obviously necessitated adjustments of the methodological, if not epistemological, parameters of the traditional discourse of history. Under the influence of such diverse schools of thought as cultural studies, deconstruction, neo-Marxism, and postcolonial theory, the subaltern historians read colonial and national archives not so much for what they said as for what

³¹ Lal 143.

³² Ranajit Guha, preface, in *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1982) vii.

³³ Ranajit Guha, ‘On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India,’ in Guha, *Subaltern Studies I* 1.

³⁴ Guha, ‘On Some Aspects’ 3. Emphasis in original.

they did not. The exclusions and silences of the colonial/national master narratives were brought into focus, though the disturbing question: ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ remained.³⁵ The self-reflectivity that the question points to is perhaps the hallmark of subaltern historical practice.

Significantly, India has not to date witnessed the Clendinnen-Grenville version of the history wars. The reason is not hard to find. In the pre-independence period, the two kinds of work—writing history proper and writing historical fiction—were thought to be complementary components of the same endeavour: to bring the nation discursively into being. In an illuminating chapter on the historical novels of Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), Meenakshi Mukherjee cites Dutt to demonstrate the ideological/political interconnectedness of the ‘two enterprises.’³⁶ Dutt wrote historical fiction ‘in the hope that we [the Indians] can sit together to sing of our nation’s glory and remember the bravery of the past.’³⁷ And the reason that he gave for undertaking the project of writing history was that the most effective way for ‘forming a nation’s character’ was to engage in ‘a critical and careful study of its past history.’³⁸ That that tradition has not changed much in the post-independence period is amply borne out by the

³⁵ In her now classic essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 271-313, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, reflects on the (im)possibility of representing/representing the (female) subaltern through an extensive engagement with some of the leading gurus of poststructuralist thought such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Louis Althusser.

³⁶ Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Elusive Terrain: Culture and Literary Memory* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2008) 141.

³⁷ Romesh Chunder Dutt, cited in Mukherjee, *Elusive Terrain* 141. Dutt is one of the illustrious members of the famous Dutt family of Calcutta (now called Kolkata). For the contribution of Dutt family to Bengal/Indian cultural renaissance, see Rosinka Chaudhuri, ‘The Dutt Family Album: And Toru Dutt,’ in *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (New York: Columbia UP, 2003) 53-69.

³⁸ Dutt, cited in Mukherjee, *Elusive Terrain* 141.

simultaneous appearance of interventionist history fiction—the kind of fiction fathered by Salman Rushdie and wonderfully nurtured by other midnight’s children and grandchildren and an example of which I discuss in chapter 8—and subaltern history in the early 1980s. For example, Mukul Kesavan writes both history proper and historical fiction, and the same interventionist-revisionist agenda is at the heart of both endeavours.³⁹

*The (Indian) Historical Novel (in English)*⁴⁰

Turning to the genre of historical fiction, it can be safely said that it is no less a disputed territory than history or historiography. To adapt the metaphor of history wars, it is a rich mine field that can blow up an unwary (re)searcher. It is therefore advisable that necessary precautions are taken. Possibly the best way to begin is to become familiar with that field (in the manner of colonisers!). The historical novel, to state the obvious, is an impure genre, crisscrossed by a number of dialectics/tensions: artistic, ethical, formal, temporal, and

³⁹ Kesavan published his debut novel *Looking through Glass* (London: Chatto & Windus) in 1995. See, for example, ‘A New History of Indian Nationalism,’ in his *The Ugliness of the Indian Male and Other Propositions*, 1st paperback printing (2008; New Delhi: Black Kite, 2009) 195-220.

⁴⁰ From now onward, I shall be frequently using the term ‘Indian historical fiction/novel’ as a shortened form for ‘Indian historical fiction/novel in English.’ Historical fiction/novel written in Indian vernaculars will be explicitly designated as such.

ideological.⁴¹ More often than not, these dialectics revolve around such dichotomies as escapism/commitment, fact/fiction, realism/romance, the particular/the universal, past/present, and so on. A satisfactory definition of (the genre) of historical fiction is thus hard to come by. Able scholars have attempted to define it, interestingly, not in terms of what it *is* but rather in terms of the aspects by which it can be identified. Only one scholar, as far as I know, has attempted to define it in terms of the formal/structural uses it makes of history.⁴² The discussion invariably begins with Sir Walter Scott, the founding father of the ‘classical historical novel,’ according to Georg Lukács, just as the debates regularly crystallize around the issue of the past that a historical novel sets out to reconstruct.⁴³

At least one characteristic of historical fiction is taken for granted: the past it deals with should be an impersonal one. That is to say, it should not have been experienced by the author of an historical novel in his/her personal life. As Jerome de Groot puts it:

It might be a rule of thumb to define the historical novel as something which has an explanatory note from the writer describing their own

⁴¹ Peter Green, cited in Neil McEwan, *Perspective in British Historical Fiction Today* (Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: Longwood Academic, 1987) 10, goes even so far as to call it a “bastard genre”. In his classic essay *On the Historical Novel*, trans. Sandra Bermann (1850; Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), the Italian practitioner of the genre, Alessandro Manzoni notes some of its inherent contradictions. On Manzoni and his essay, see Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010) 29-32.

⁴² Harry E. Shaw, *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*, 2nd printing (1983; Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1985).

⁴³ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (1937; London: Merlin Press, 1962) 63.

engagement with the period in question, either through schooling or, more commonly, through their reading and research.⁴⁴

According to Walter Scott, the ideal temporal distance between the historical event and its fictional reconstruction should be ‘sixty years,’ so that time is allowed for views to settle, issues to be clarified, and boundaries to get fixed. The time gap enables both clarity and objectivity or what de Groot calls ‘the benefit of hindsight.’⁴⁵ Looked at from a (temporal) distance, the writer-observer can see what those who were involved could not see at the time when the events in question actually took place. The past is thus seen in perspective as well as dispassionately, for the present writer-observer is supposed to have no stakes in those past events s/he chooses to deal with—an assumption that has gone largely out of fashion with the advent of postmodernism and postcolonialism. The hypothesis that time neutralises (I would rather say, depoliticises) history is the idea on which the whole notion of ‘’tis sixty years since’ is predicated.

Lukács detects a compositional correspondence between the need for temporal distance and the choice of the “middle-of-the-road heroes” by Scott.⁴⁶ Just as the time gap helps to see a historical crisis in perspective as well as with a certain degree of detachment, so too does a typical Scott protagonist, ‘a more or

⁴⁴ de Groot 6-7.

⁴⁵ de Groot 22. According to Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1991) 161-94, another reason for Scott to recommend a sixty-year-gap between historical event and its fictional reconstruction is to achieve for the genre of historical fiction the same ‘authority’ as nineteenth-century historiography was entitled to, for the gap allowed for the past to be constructed as history rather than memory. 165.

⁴⁶ Lukács 37.

less mediocre, average English gentleman.’⁴⁷ The reason why Scott chooses to deal with a bygone age and to depict that age ‘by means of characters who, in their psychology and destiny, always represent social trends and historical forces’ is, according to Lukács, that he aims at ‘preserv[ing] in his portrayals the great historical objectivity of the true epic writer.’⁴⁸

Latter-day theorists of historical fiction have spent a great deal of energy on the question of how a historical novel can achieve historicity rather than historical objectivity, though the latter seems never to have disappeared from the critical scene for long in such critics as Margaret Atwood. What are the ways of injecting historical consciousness into a work of fiction based on history? What compositional markers are there to suggest the historical period that a certain historical novel has as its (temporal) setting? Of all the commentators, it is Avrom Fleishman who comes closest to offering an answer:

The historical novel is distinguished among novels by the presence of a specific link to history: not merely a real building or a real event but a real person among the fictitious ones.⁴⁹

It is important to note here that Fleishman says ‘a real person,’ not a historical one. But could it well be that he in fact means the latter, for how would it be possible to ascertain whether a person *really* existed or not if there were no (historical) records to prove it? In fact, it *is* the case, for Fleishman continues:

⁴⁷ Lukács 33.

⁴⁸ Lukács 34.

⁴⁹ Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971) 4.

‘When life is seen in the context of history, we have a novel; when the novel’s characters live in the same world with historical persons, we have a historical novel.’⁵⁰ What is happening here is a coming together of the question of historicity and that of historical veracity. It is the presence of a historical character in a novel that turns it into a historical novel and at the same time functions as a formal/textual gauge by which to determine its conformity to or deviation from historical fact. Interestingly, Fleishman considers the presence of a real historical figure, not a real historical event, in a novel as essential for it to be regarded as historical.

From Scott, Lukács, and Fleishman, one gets three basic principles of criticism insofar as historical fiction is concerned: first, a historical novel should be objective in its treatment of history; second, it must foreground its historicity in some way or other; third, it should remain faithful to historical data.⁵¹ There is however a fourth requirement and all three luminaries seem agreed on its fulfilment: although set in a particular spatio-temporal setting the broad detail of which is widely accepted, a work of fiction based on history must go beyond the historical moment it attempts to recreate in the first instance. To go back to Fleishman:

The heroes of historical fiction represent not only Renaissance man or Edwardian man but man in general, conceived as a historical being who is

⁵⁰ Fleishman 4.

⁵¹ Margaret Atwood maintains that a historical novelist can legitimately ‘invent’ only at those points in historical records where there are ‘parts left unexplained’ and ‘gaps left unfilled.’ In the case of ‘a solid fact,’ it should not be altered. ‘In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction,’ *The American Historical Review* 103. 5 (Dec. 1998): 1515.

subject to the forces of one historical age or another. The ultimate subject of the historical novel is, then, man in history, or human life conceived as historical life.⁵²

In other words, historical fiction must strive for transcendence/universality, going beyond its historical moorings: ‘The historical novelist writes trans-temporally,’ writes Fleishman.⁵³

If so, one will not be wrong to assume that historical experience can be translated across cultures, genders and histories, a proposition women, to take the case of just one subaltern group, will find difficult to accept if only because of the sexist language in which Fleishman couches his hypothesis. In fact, no historical experience can be fully universal (especially in transcultural/transnational terms), though it may have a point of connection to the present. Especially given the European origin of the concept of universality and the politics of the European Man who is no more than a middle-class white male, it is important to remain vigilant against claims of universality in both creative and critical practices. Hence before one sets out to judge Indian historical fiction in the light of the Eurocentric critical criteria laid down by Scott, Lukács, and Fleishman, one must pause to ask how pertinent they are to the fiction under consideration here, a fiction that emerges from a very different socio-historical context.⁵⁴ Can a variety

⁵² Fleishman 11.

⁵³ Fleishman 15.

⁵⁴ In contrast to the standard view that the novel translated easily and readily to the colonies, Meenakshi Mukherjee notes some of the major constraints with which the early Indian practitioners of the form found themselves confronted in attempting to attune it to the socio-cultural reality of India under British rule. See chapter 1 in *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1985).

of the postcolonial historical novel be adequately and properly analysed when the critical framework employed is one that was devised in Europe in general and is informed by all the major epistemological parameters of the European Enlightenment in particular, even though the historical novel itself originated in the West?

Postcolonial theory and criticism has made it abundantly clear that such a practice runs the risk of re-colonising postcolonial cultural productions.⁵⁵ It not only misses out what is special about a certain postcolonial culture but also devalues it for that very uniqueness. Instead of attracting appreciation, postcolonial difference invites unhealthy as well as unjustifiable criticism from those who use colonial literary-critical paradigms without first subjecting them to scrutiny. Let me give an example. In his analysis of *The Devil's Wind*, a historical novel based on the so-called Indian Mutiny of 1857 by Manohar Malgonkar, Ralph J. Crane finds the work inadequate in comparison to another Mutiny novel, namely, *The Siege of Krishnapur* by the British novelist, J.G. Farrell.⁵⁶ The critical yardstick Crane uses to evaluate the novels is 'universality,' one of the most dangerous legacies of the European Enlightenment so far as postcolonial

⁵⁵ See, for example, Stephen Slemon, 'Postcolonial Allegory and the Transformation of History,' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 23.1 (1988): 157-68; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (1989; London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin, *Decolonising Fictions* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1993); Stephen Slemon, 'Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse,' in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham and London: Duke UP 1995) 407-26; Paul Sharrad, *Postcolonial Literary History and Indian English Fiction* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2008). For a feminist critique of Fleishman, Lukács and Scott, see Wallace.

⁵⁶ Manohar Malgonkar, *The Devil's Wind* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1972); J.G. Farrell, *The Siege of Krishnapur*, rpt. (1973; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979). Subsequent references are to these editions.

socio-cultural practices are concerned. *The Siege of Krishnapur* is, according to Crane, ‘the best novel of the Mutiny to have yet been written,’ because it has succeeded in ‘achieving greater universality than *Nightrunners of Bengal* or *The Devil’s Wind* do.’⁵⁷ Of all the legacies of the European Enlightenment, no idea has proved so resilient and so detrimental to a true appreciation of the cultural productions of once colonised societies as that of universality.⁵⁸ That its application to a postcolonial text will work to its disadvantage is therefore a foregone conclusion.

For another equally important reason Indian historical fiction needs to be read from a critical perspective more sensitive to the historico-political circumstances of its emergence. And here the Marxist Lukács is perhaps more relevant than the other theorists of the historical novel. In the context of Europe, the crystallization of historical consciousness in both cultural and other domains itself is an historical phenomenon. Lukács identifies ‘the French Revolution, the revolutionary wars and the rise and fall of Napoleon’ as making ‘history a *mass*

⁵⁷ Ralph J. Crane, *Inventing India: A History of India in English-Language Fiction* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1992) 54. John Masters, *Nightrunners of Bengal*, rpt. (1951; London: Sphere, 1977). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁵⁸ The problem arises from the fact that the notion of universality does not seem to work in colonies where double standard has been the norm. The legal system introduced by the British in India, for example, worked differentially for ruler and ruled. Up until the introduction of the Ilbert Bill in February 1883, Indian district magistrates could exercise criminal jurisdiction over Indians, but not over Europeans, which they could, however, as presidency magistrates. No such discrimination applied to British/European magistrates. It is the failure of the Enlightenment ideal of universality to universalize itself in the colonies that prompts Dipesh Chakrabarty to propose that Europe be ‘provincialized’ as part of the decolonization programme. See *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2000). I have briefly discussed the role of the Ilbert Bill controversy in rousing nationalist feeling in India in chapter 2.

experience, and moreover on a European scale.’⁵⁹ It seems understandable that historical fiction should rise in the wake of such a strong and wide-ranging perception of the role of history in human affairs. *Waverley; or, 'tis Sixty Years Since*, as is well known, appeared in 1814.⁶⁰

During the nineteenth century, British-Indian relations shift from collusion to collision. This shift is largely due to the Sepoy Mutiny (the Great Rebellion from the Indian perspective) of 1857. Pre-Mutiny relationship is predominantly characterised by confidence, cooperation and mutual trust, with both coloniser and colonised believing in a better future for India. Post-Mutiny relationship is, to a large extent, the opposite of its pre-Mutiny counterpart. Mutual disillusionment and distrust is what defines post-Mutiny Indo-British relations. The British are now openly the rulers of India rather than her reformers. The earlier vision of transplanting whatever is best in Europe into the Indian soil has given way to a different vision: the main concern is to consolidate the Empire and lengthen British rule in India by any means, fair or foul. Even the liberal opinion in Britain could not entertain the prospect of the disintegration of the Empire, which they feared they would be accelerating by granting the non-white colonies self-rule. The Indians, on the other hand, want to get rid of an alien power that is both selfish and oppressive to the extreme, and thus has no moral right to rule. The fight begins first, as in most anti-colonial nationalist contexts, in the realm of

⁵⁹ Lukács 23. Emphasis in original. The confinement of history by Lukács to the male/public domain is powerfully contested by the Others of history such as the colonised, women, working classes, and so on.

⁶⁰ Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley; or, 'tis Sixty Years Since* (1814; London: Penguin, 1980). Subsequent references are to this edition.

culture, before moving on into the political arena. Cultural discourses and practices begin participating in, to borrow from Benedict Anderson, ‘imagining’ the nation.⁶¹ Indian historical fiction in both English and other indigenous languages is a post-Mutiny phenomenon and is one of the most vigorous participants in the nationalist project of defining Indian cultural identity. For a real appreciation of the Indian historical novel of the pre-independence period, therefore, it should ideally be read against the backdrop of anti-colonial nationalism in India beginning at the turn of the nineteenth century, just as its post-independence counterpart is best appreciated against the background of the widespread disillusionment and dissatisfaction ensuing from the discriminations perpetrated by the postcolonial nation-state.

Given the bitter-sweet relationship between the British and the Indians over the course of the nineteenth century, it is advisable to keep in mind that even Lukács is not fully applicable to an (historical) explanation of the emergence of Indian historical fiction at the turn of the nineteenth century.⁶² To confront a paradox honestly, the historical project in India is both modernist and anti-modernist. Like nationalism, it looks backwards (to indigenous cultures and traditions) as well as forwards to newer forms of affiliation and community. That is to say, it has never been as straightforward a phenomenon in India as in

⁶¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1983). By characterising the nation as an ‘imagined community,’ Anderson puts emphasis on its cultural as opposed to political origination.

⁶² It is not for nothing that Frantz Fanon had warned: ‘[. . .] Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.’ *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, rpt. (1967; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) 31.

Europe.⁶³ To enter history, to imagine the nation, and to (re-)invent prose are all modern projects. The English-educated Indian elite who came to write the Indian historical novel in the last quarter of the nineteenth century stood in a paradoxical relationship to (European) modernity: as *enlightened* members of a subject nation, they aspired to embrace modernity but could not do so without reservations, for to do so would mean loss of cultural identity, which they felt they had already lost under the colonial regime and whose restoration was what they were all working for.⁶⁴ If history/historiography proper is an articulation of the Indian aspiration for modernity, Indian historical fiction is an expression of the reservations which the Indians felt about that particular aspiration. In other words, with its focus on economics, education, politics and other so-called male domains, history/historiography produced by Indians at the turn of the nineteenth century is the site where Indians sought British intervention (in the name of British fair play) so that differences and disparities between ruler and ruled could be removed, and as British citizens they would be granted the same rights and responsibilities as the British themselves, though it should be admitted that even all Britons did not enjoy the same rights and responsibilities *equally*.⁶⁵

On the other hand, the critical agenda of the pre-independence Indian historical novel is to accentuate *difference*, to make it more visible, not to eliminate it: to foreground how (spiritual) Indians are different from those who

⁶³ For the male, middle-class, white European, history has been largely unproblematic. See the introductory chapter in Christina Crosby, *The Ends of History: Victorians and "The Woman Question,"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991) 1-11.

⁶⁴ For a fuller discussion of the point, see chapters 1 and 2.

⁶⁵ It is only after World War I that British women won the right to vote.

rule them for the sake of material gain. The (historical) novel is one of the cultural sites where the Indian nation is to be imagined. Given its project of defining Indian cultural identity by emphasising the difference(s) between coloniser and colonised, perhaps the most fruitful way to engage with Indian historical fiction is to focus on its departures from rather than continuities with the classical historical novel, associated with Scott and his European followers. Unlike *Waverley*, for instance, the protagonist of the Indian historical novel moves from a state of political naivety to that of political consciousness. Instead of moving from extremes to a middle-of-the-road course, as *Waverley* does, s/he moves the other way round and thus ends up in partisanship.

If the Indian historical novel is geared to imagining the nation in the pre-independence period, it is put to the task of re-imagining the nation in the post-independence period. In other words, post-independence Indian historical fiction aims at deconstructing the (essentialist, homogenised) myths of the nation constructed during the independence struggle against the British colonial regime. Those identities that have been submerged under the dominant Indian identity—English-educated, Hindu, male, middle-class, urban, young—are now retrieved and restored. So the Indian historical novel of the post-independence period stands in the same antagonistic relationship to the official history of the nation as its pre-independence counterpart stood in relation to the history of India produced by the colonial masters, though it should also be conceded that the relationship of

Indian historical fiction with its non-literary (Indian) counterpart has been no less complex and fraught.

The Present Study: Agenda and Scope: Exclusions and Inclusions

This study deals with the representations of history in Indian fiction in English. (By the Indian English novel, I mean works produced by authors belonging to what is now India, though colonial India also took in Pakistan and Bangladesh.) It is broadly conceptualised around a pair of questions. The first is a *what* question, involving the complex uses of (Indian) history/past in Indian English fiction. That the historical novel can be used ‘in multiple contexts and for various reasons’ is now a critical commonplace.⁶⁶ Jerome de Groot gives a handy list of its manifold functions:

A historical novel might consider the articulation of nationhood via the past, highlight the subjectivism of narratives of History, underline the importance of the realist mode of writing to notions of authenticity, question writing itself, and attack historiographical convention.⁶⁷

While it is possible to undertake a study of Indian historical fiction in terms of any of the functions listed by de Groot, I intend to read it mainly in terms of its

⁶⁶ de Groot 41.

⁶⁷ de Groot 2.

‘articulation of [Indian] nationhood.’ As I hope to be able to show through an analysis of a total of seven Indian novels in English, some important pre-independence Indian novels served to imagine the Indian nation, while their post-independence counterparts have the task of re-imagining it.⁶⁸

The second question—a *why* question—is perhaps a more important one so far as the present study is concerned: why do certain Indian English fictions use Indian history primarily to construct and deconstruct Indian cultural/national identity? Focused on the sociology and politics of (literary) culture, the second question thus effects a movement away from the inner world of the Indian novel to an outer one of socio-political reality in which it has its being.

Ideally, a study so obsessed with the exclusions and inclusions in the mainstream discourse of the Indian nation should plainly state its own exclusions and inclusions at the very outset. Thus before I move on to analyse the socio-political dynamics informing the two broad uses of history in Indian English fiction—that is, imagining and re-imagining the Indian nation—it is important to spell out clearly what I intend to attempt and not to attempt in this study. First, I use the term ‘historical fiction’ much more expansively than many of the major theorists of the genre/form cited in this chapter. What I am primarily interested in is the representation of history/the past in Indian English fiction, especially in relation to its deployment in the project of imagining and re-imagining the nation. According to James Acheson and Robert L. Caserio, ‘Some novelists write about the present as a product of the past or as itself epochal’—an apt formulation that

⁶⁸ I treat the Lalu trilogy as one work of fiction.

can also be applied to writers who write about the past, with a little modification.⁶⁹ Some novelists write about the past with a view to understanding how the present evolved out of it. Others engage with the self-experienced past as itself epoch-making. To adhere to standard critical practice, only the works produced by the first kind of novelists who see the past as shaping the present, can be called historical novels. On the other hand, texts in which the self-experienced past itself is considered historic can be termed, in the absence of a more established generic term, history novels.

The age/past represented in a historical novel is usually a period well before the personal life experience of the author: ‘the world that existed before the author was born,’ as Harry B. Henderson puts it.⁷⁰ In *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* and *The Devil’s Wind*, for example, the Mughal periods in which the novels are set, are separated from the historical moments in which they are recreated by (more or less) three and one century, respectively.⁷¹ In that sense, that is, by the sixty-year criterion—Sir Walter Scott’s famous defining feature—only three of the texts I have chosen to analyse here—*Padmini: An Indian Romance*, *Nur Jahan* and *The Devil’s Wind*—are eligible to be called historical novels, or ‘historicals,’ as they are known in the publishing trade.⁷²

⁶⁹ James Acheson and Robert L. Caserio, ‘History in fiction,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel*, ed., Robert L. Caserio (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009) 176.

⁷⁰ Harry B. Henderson, III, *Versions of the Past: The Historical Imagination in American Fiction* (New York: Oxford UP, 1974) xvi.

⁷¹ Sirdar Jogendra Singh, *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (London: James Nisbet & Co., [sic] Limited, 1909). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁷² T. Ramakrishna [Pillai], *Padmini: An Indian Romance* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd., 1903). Subsequent references are to this edition.

On the other hand, the historical era reconstructed can be one lived through by the author. For instance, the 1930s in *Kanthapura* is a decade when its author Raja Rao (1908-2006) was a young man in his twenties and early thirties. The same is true of *Some Inner Fury* by Kamala Markandaya.⁷³ Consequently, the four other texts—*Kanthapura*, the Lalu trilogy, *Some Inner Fury*, and *The Shadow Lines*, because they represent a history/past personally experienced by the author concerned, would not normally be defined as historicals. I have chosen to call this second category of works *history novels*.⁷⁴

There are at least two compelling reasons for my decision to work with such a broad and expansive category/definition of the historical novel. To begin with, the use of the historical past (the usable past, as it is often described) is not an exclusive prerogative of historical fiction alone. More often than not, other kinds of fiction (such as family saga, history novel, memory fiction, political novel, war narrative, and so on) incorporate a strong sense of history or reflect the shaping influence of the past, especially fictions set anywhere in the last two centuries, when ‘history’ became a profoundly communal experience for all, in the age of world wars.⁷⁵ These various sub-categories, as Diana Wallace argues

⁷³ Kamala Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* (1955; New York: Signet Books, 1956). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁷⁴ For a very different way of classifying historical fiction based on the relationship of fiction and (recorded) history, see Joseph W. Turner, ‘The Kinds of Historical Fiction: An Essay in Definition and Methodology,’ *Genre* XII (Fall 1979): 333-55. Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, educational ed. (1988; Delhi: Oxford UP, 1995). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁷⁵ According to Boccardi, the ‘reach’ of the historical novel has ‘expanded’ to such an extent that it now includes ‘crime, romance and adventure.’ 1. Memory fiction is fiction in which the claims of individual/collective memory are prioritised over those of official discourses. A good example is *The Shadow Lines*, the 1988 novel by Amitav Ghosh. Family saga, memory fiction, and war

with particular reference to the family saga, should be regarded as legitimate ‘forms[s] of the historical novel.’⁷⁶ Along with the historical novel ‘proper,’ I consider these varieties (*The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh, for example, is both a family saga and a memory text), with a view to enabling a comprehensive picture of the uses that have been made of the historical past of India in Indian English fiction.

There is another, perhaps more forceful, reason why the so-called ‘improper’ kinds of historical fiction have to be included. As a significant number of Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial critics have pointed out, despite all its protestation of objectivity, it is frequently the case that official (whether colonial or national) history either marginalises or erases the radically different historical experiences of subaltern groups such as women, working classes, national minorities, and so on, who are no less (and perhaps even more) affected by history than its so-called makers.⁷⁷ Together with the ‘literary’ historical novel, these other types of (historical) fiction have effectively been utilised to accommodate the lives and struggles of the Others of history. Sometimes these other(ed) varieties of historical fiction also work to challenge the epistemological, formal, ideological and political priorities of the historical novel ‘proper.’ It is to distance himself from the privileged meanings, norms and values of both history proper and the classical historical novel that I. Allan Sealy, for example, chooses

narrative can be seen as some of the major Others of historical fiction in both colonial and (especially) postcolonial contexts.

⁷⁶ Wallace 55.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

to use the predominantly Persian form of *nama* (roughly ‘chronicle’ in English) to chart the fortunes of the Anglo-Indian Trotters in his 1988 novel *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle*.⁷⁸

In moving away from a consideration of the uses of history in the formal/structural context of historical fiction to an examination of the historical circumstances that give rise to those uses in the first instance, I part company with Harry E. Shaw who, in his impressive study of *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*, focuses on ‘the very different formal status that visions of history have in fact assumed in historical fiction.’⁷⁹ Contrary to Shaw, I read literary text in the light of social text, a methodology that brings my work closer to that by Mariadele Boccardi in *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire*. Boccardi reads post-World War II British historical fiction ‘both *contextually* and theoretically.’⁸⁰ If the contextual frame for Boccardi is the ‘steadily decreasing’ post-Empire politico-economic position of Britain on the world stage, her theoretical frame derives from Karl Marx via Lukács.⁸¹ Seeing a direct link between the contemporary identity crisis of ‘the recently ideologically deracinated [British] bourgeoisie’ and the disfavour into which the realist novel has fallen, Boccardi thinks that the increasing fascination of recent British historical fiction with the

⁷⁸ I. Allan Sealy, *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988; New Delhi: IndiaInk, 1999).

⁷⁹ Shaw 29.

⁸⁰ Boccardi 2. Emphasis added.

⁸¹ Boccardi 13.

mid-Victorian period has both a political and formal dimension to it.⁸² The Victorian age saw the nation at its most confident, a confidence reflected in ‘realist narrative practice, with its corollary aspiration to comprehensiveness.’⁸³ In the absence of ‘a unifying narrative form’ that can articulate its present-day anxieties and aspirations, the threatened middle class in Britain begins to turn in the last quarter of the twentieth century to ‘the Victorian fictional model’ and the world it represented in search of ‘origins and fault lines in historical continuity,’ clearly with a view to understanding the present in relation to the past.⁸⁴

In my case, the historico-political context is one that evolves over the course of the twentieth century. Up until the political birth of the Indian nation in 1947, it is the anti-colonial national struggle that forms the historical background of the Indian historical novel. The cultural agenda is to construct the identity of the ‘imagined community’ of Indians. In postcolonial times (especially in the wake of the Emergency of 1975-7), the nation-state miserably fails to live up to the high ideals of its chief architects such as Gandhi and Nehru. State-sponsored discriminations generate an atmosphere of angst and disillusionment, necessitating a reappraisal of the dominant narratives of the nation. The critical agenda of the post-independence history-based Indian fiction is to re-imagine the nation, bringing into focus exclusions along lines of age, caste, class, community, gender and language. In re-imagining the nation, the Indian English novel of the post-independence period also distances itself from the formal inheritance of its

⁸² Boccardi 12.

⁸³ Boccardi 13.

⁸⁴ Boccardi 12, 13.

pre-independence nationalist counterpart, social realism. Instead of using one single narrative form to narrate India, a plethora of forms are deployed to construct, to borrow from the title of a 2005 study, ‘alternative Indias.’⁸⁵

To turn to my second caveat: given the time frame in the title of this study, one may expect that it will attempt a broad historical survey of Indian historical fiction.⁸⁶ That is however not where my primary interest lies. The present study is rather meant to be a critical account of some of the ‘paradigmatic negotiations’ of Indian history/past so far achieved by the Indian English novel, with each negotiation explicated through textual analysis of a varying number of novels.⁸⁷ In addition, the mode of investigation is diachronic, covering a period of about hundred years. The temporal range is the whole of the twentieth century, a century marked by the twin processes of the ascendancy of anti-colonial nationalism and the decline of British supremacy the world over. Thirdly, the authors chosen for study here are all of Indian origin, whether resident in India or abroad.

The final caveat relates more to the choice of authors and texts than to the overall theoretical framework. In my choice of works and writers, I have consistently kept in view two considerations. One is purely methodological; the other, a combination of both methodological and personal. One of the research

⁸⁵ Peter Morey and Alex Tickell, eds., *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005).

⁸⁶ In *Realism and Reality*, Meenakshi Mukherjee has an impressive chapter on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indian historical fiction written in Indian languages. 38-67.

⁸⁷ Boehmer 22.

questions that the present project seeks to find an answer to is how twentieth-century Indian fiction in English represents history or past. Thus the temporal range of the project requires that it include texts produced over the course of the century in question. But all twentieth-century works of Indian English fiction cannot necessarily be considered here. In accordance with the focus of the study, only those Indian novels in English that overtly engage with Indian history/past in terms of the critical-cultural project of imaging and reimagining the nation, have been selected. Even then the texts I have finally chosen for close analysis are the ones that appear to reflect not only the socio-political ethos of the times through the ways they each represent history and nation but also a marked stage/trend in the Indian English historical novel itself.

The most obvious example of mixing methodological and personal considerations is to be found in chapter 8 on interventionist history fiction. My decision here not to engage with the texts by such major writers as Mukul Kesavan, Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie, Allan Sealy, Shashi Tharoor, and so on is likely to raise questions. There can be no doubt at all that they are all brilliant, powerful writers and that any one of them would be an immensely suitable subject for PhD analysis. While I admire them all and intend to translate my more-or-less uncritical liking for them into an informed critical appreciation by way of research and publication in the near future, I have chosen to work with Amitav Ghosh and his second novel, *The Shadow Lines*, basically for two reasons: the first one, entirely methodological; the other, a combination of

methodological and personal. First, there are two kinds of interventionist history novel; one type re-imagines the nation by way of reinstating (one or the other) national minority in the narrative of the nation—for example, the Indian Muslims in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Kesavan's *Looking through Glass*, the Anglo-Indians in *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* by Sealy, and the Parsis in Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*; the other variety attempts to bring to light those unsavoury episodes (such as communal violence) that would disturb (hence excised) the socio-cultural meaning(s) that the official story of the nation seeks to circulate and establish.⁸⁸ If I had chosen to analyse an example of the first kind of interventionist history fiction, I might ideally have studied any or all of the texts mentioned above. As my focus is on the second type of exclusions from national narratives, one of the most appropriate choices for me is Ghosh's second novel.

My second reason for choosing *The Shadow Lines* is as much methodological as personal. The kind of world that Ghosh creates in his novel and the cultural ethos in which the unnamed narrator-protagonist grows up are very similar to the ones in which I myself grew up. Consequently, it seems to me that as I know the socio-cultural dynamics informing the narrative in *The Shadow Lines* much more intimately than the one informing the same, say, in *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle*, I feel better prepared for teasing out the subtler nuances of the former.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981; London: Picador, 1982); Rohinton Mistry, *Such a Long Journey* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991). Subsequent references are to these editions.

⁸⁹ In an international conference held at Flinders University of South Australia in 2007, I met an Iranian PhD student who presented a paper on *The Shadow Lines*. In her discussion of the text,

As will be shown in detail in the next chapter, Indian historical fiction has largely been used as a discursive space for imagining and re-imagining the Indian nation before and after independence, respectively.⁹⁰ Each imagining of the nation has its distinct use of Indian history/past. Five such uses may be identified: two (revivalist and nationalist) from the pre-independence period and three (feminist, interventionist, and revisionist) from the post-independence period.⁹¹ Broadly, chapter 2 offers an overview of the socio-political context in which the Indian historical novel emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century. In chapters 3 and 4, I analyse two texts of revivalist historical fiction—*Padmini: An Indian Romance* (1903) by T. Ramakrishna Pillai and *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (1909) by Sirdar Jogendra Singh—respectively. Revivalist historical fiction has two strands: one, nostalgic; the other, critical. These two strands can also be found in uneasy alliance in one text. The nostalgic strand looks back at a heroic past, in order to contrast it with the humiliating present. The aim is to regenerate the spirit of the nation, instilling a sense of patriotism in its members. In contrast, the critical strand focuses on an (un)heroic past to

the student continually referred to Tridib and the unnamed narrator-protagonist as cousins, whereas they are actually (as represented in the novel) uncle and nephew. During a tea break, when I pointed out the error to her, she took part of the responsibility but put part of it on the kind of intricate relationships that obtain, according to her, in an extended Bengali/Indian family—the type of family that Ghosh represents in his novel.

⁹⁰ Given the colonial origin of Indian literature in English, the centrality of the national question to Indian historical fiction is not difficult to understand.

⁹¹ One may argue that the *different* uses of Indian history/past I propose to investigate here are, in fact, variations on the same use: (re-)imagining the nation. But the reason why I see them as distinct is that the ideological orientation of each use is distinctive, a distinctiveness a preliminary sense of which I think I have been able to convey through the terms (such as revivalist, nationalist, feminist, and so on) I use to name them. However, there is possibly no harm in seeing them as forming a continuum.

examine why it had come to pass. The lesson is not to allow history to repeat itself.

Nationalist history fiction, dealt with in chapters 5 and 6, updates the conflict between colonial and national forces, bringing it closer to the recent past. It celebrates the moment when the nation enters history. In chapter 5, I discuss *Kanthapura* (1938), one of the classic texts of Indian nationalism by Raja Rao, concentrating on its communal construction of the nation. Rao appropriates Gandhian ideology to envisage a nation which is unashamedly exclusionary not only in terms of class/caste and gender but also in terms of community. Indian Muslims are excluded from the projected nation in *Kanthapura*. The next chapter examines the Lala trilogy (1939-42) by Mulk Raj Anand. Although not as parochial as Rao, Anand hesitates, if not downright declines, to regard the Muslims of India as belonging to the imagined community of the nation in the trilogy.

The next two chapters (7 and 8), in which I analyse *Some Inner Fury* (1955) by Kamala Markandaya and *The Shadow Lines* (1986) by Amitav Ghosh, are best characterised as ‘re-visions’ of the nation in that they engage with the exclusions in the mainstream narratives of nationalism from two different perspectives, interrogating the nationalist versions of history in them. In re-imagining the nation, chapters 7 and 8 focus on the feminist and interventionist negotiations of nationalist history, respectively.⁹² The two ‘re-visions’ of the

⁹² The two terms are used just for the sake of convenience. They are both interventionist as well as revisionist.

nation—feminist and interventionist—tell the stories of what Partha Chatterjee calls the ‘fragments’ of the nation: the fragment brought (back) into focus in feminist history fiction is, to state the obvious, women.⁹³ The fragment reinstated in interventionist history fiction is a little different from its feminist counterpart. Here individual/personal memory is given a space to speak up so that those episodes (for example, communal violence in *The Shadow Lines*) that sound a jarring note and which the official records of nationalism try to suppress can be retrieved and restored alongside the heroic narrative of national arrival.

The penultimate chapter examines *The Devil’s Wind* (1972), the only Mutiny novel by an Indian author in English. Manohar Malgonkar revisits colonial history, with a view to re-telling the story of Nana Saheb from the perspective of his Indian protagonist. In the process, Nana, the so-called villain in the eyes of the colonial state, is duly restored to the dignity he deserves as a conscientious human being, if not as a national hero.

Each of the five uses of Indian history/past listed above is the product of the historico-political matrix out of which it emerges. Each use is characterised by a distinct mood as well as a distinct narrative mode/pattern. In addition, each has a defining set of thematic/ideological, formal/representational, and linguistic preoccupations, corresponding to how it addresses the national question, that is, how it imagines the national community. Although I shall pay some attention to

⁹³ The term ‘fragments’ has been taken from Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993).

some of these extra-national concerns in the following pages, the socio-political context will for obvious reasons take pride of place.

CHAPTER 1

Fiction, History and Nation in India

[. . .] historical reconstruction at both popular and academic levels is rather a dialogue between present and past generations, inevitably time-bound and selective [. . .].

Sumit Sarkar¹

Although readers are often attracted to historical novels because they believe they will learn about the past time recreated in the novel, any historical novel always has as much, or perhaps more, to say about the time in which it is written.

Diana Wallace²

Representation of history in literature is not a new phenomenon. Shakespeare and his contemporaries, for example, wrote plays based on historical events and figures. Even before Sir Walter Scott arrived on the scene, gothic fiction—one of the major precursors of the historical novel—was making regular forays into historical archive, to mix fact with fantasy. But a look back at the past in a postcolonial context such as India (especially with a political end in view) is a comparatively new development, both facilitated and necessitated by the colonial encounter. It is a well known fact that it was the work of men like Sir William

¹ Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973) 2.

² Diana Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 4.

Jones that gave the Indians (especially the English-educated, middle-class Hindus) a sense of a long-gone past when India was supposed to be at the height of her glory. The disintegration of that golden age began with the advent of Islam in the Indian subcontinent.³ The Indians are, however, lucky (so the colonial story went) because the British, by establishing law and order in society, have put India back on the right track. In the near future India will again be the glory that it once was. For a while Indians would believe what the British wanted them to believe. But disillusionment would soon follow, and under the open racial oppression by the alien masters the Indians would, ironically, turn to the same past as the one represented in colonial discourse as marking the peak of Indian magnificence. Infused with a burgeoning national consciousness, both cultural and political discourses at the turn of the nineteenth century would tirelessly invoke this very past as a strategy to bring about national regeneration.

Strictly speaking, there seems to be a hiatus in the engagement with the past during the years (from the 1920s onward) when nationalism became a formidable force in the lives of most Indians. As the struggle with the colonial regime gathered momentum, the past that came to be represented in Indian English fiction is the one self-experienced by the writers of the period such as Mulk Raj Anand in the *Lalu* trilogy, Raja Rao in *Kanthapura*, and *Tomorrow is Ours! A Novel of the India of Today* by K.A. Abbas.⁴ It is only after the intervention of *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie that history/past

³ See, for instance, James Mill, *The History of British India* (London: Baldwin, Craddock & Joy, 1820).

⁴ K.A. Abbas, *Tomorrow is Ours! A Novel of the India of Today* (Delhi: Rajkamal, 1946).

has once again become a major preoccupation of Indian writers in English. A somewhat parallel development can be seen in the critical literature on the Indian historical novel in English.

Overall, Indian English fiction dealing with history or past has not received any sustained attention from critics, whether Indian or foreign. In that respect, the present study would fill up a long-standing gap in the critical scholarship on the Indian English novel in general and the Indian English historical novel in particular. As in many other areas of Indian cultural studies, Meenakshi Mukherjee has an excellent chapter on Indian historical fiction too, in which she briefly discusses some of the key historical novels written in some of the major Indian languages at the turn of the nineteenth century, before moving on to examine in some detail the work of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.⁵ Although Mukherjee does not cover Indian historical fiction in English in her discussion, most of her conclusions regarding the appearance of the Indian historical novel in Indian languages, as I hope to be able to demonstrate below, seem equally applicable to its counterpart in English:

This newly-awakened interest in the past could not have been unrelated to a nascent nationalism among the reading public at large which the novelist could exploit.⁶

In India, in other words, historical fiction, whether in *bhasa* or English, emerged in the context of a burgeoning national consciousness in the late

⁵ See chapter 3 in Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1985).

⁶ Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality* 40.

nineteenth century. In that sense the present project complements what Mukherjee has so impressively done in her study of the historical novel in Indian languages.

In *Inventing India: A History of India in English-Language Fiction*, Ralph J. Crane reads ‘fiction as history,’ employing a comparative analytical framework.⁷ British and Indian reconstructions of a certain historical period (the so-called Indian Mutiny of 1857 in chapter 2, for example) are juxtaposed, with a view to getting ‘a full picture of the period.’⁸ In aiming to ‘look at various historical periods and show how those historical periods have been imagined in the novels of Britain and India,’ Crane seems to commit himself to analysing how fiction and history interact in the works he has chosen to work on.⁹ A related consequence of the focus on *how* is that little attention is paid to the question of *why* history is represented the way it is represented in English-language fiction by British and Indian writers. In my study, by contrast, I am as much concerned with the representation of history in Indian English fiction as with the socio-political dynamics (especially the question of imagining and reimagining the Indian nation) that shapes those representations in the first instance.

Possibly the best coverage of the treatment of history/past in what has come to be known as Rushdie-inspired Indian English fiction is the work by

⁷ Ralph J. Crane, *Inventing India: A History of India in English-Language Fiction* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1992) 1.

⁸ Crane 4.

⁹ Crane 4.

Neelam Srivastava.¹⁰ According to Srivastava, Indian English novels of the 1980s and 1990s emerge out of a sense of crisis engendered by the National Emergency of 1975-7, imposed by the first female Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi. The crisis of democracy and secularism—the twin ideals of politics associated with Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India—is further accentuated ‘by the rise to prominence of an alternative national ideology, Hindutva, based on the supremacy of Hindu religion and culture.’¹¹ Brought up in the culture of Nehruvian politics, the writers of these post-Emergency works feel threatened by the rise of authoritarianism and communalism in the Indian public sphere, and thus look back at the Nehruvian era sometimes nostalgically as in Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* (1993) and at other times critically as in Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* (1996). *Midnight’s Children*, the urtext of the post-Emergency period, remains suspended between despair and hope.

In two important respects, this study can be seen as both contributing to and advancing the argument constructed by Srivastava in her work. First, pre-independence Indian historical fiction displays a double tendency in its conceptualisation of the Indian nation: it is both parochial-religious as in T. Ramakrishna Pillai’s *Padmini: An Indian Romance* and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* and liberal-secular as in Sirdar Jogendra Singh’s *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen*, a tendency that clearly contradicts Srivastava when she claims that

¹⁰ Neelam Srivastava, *Secularism in the Postcolonial Indian Novel: National and Cosmopolitan Narratives in English* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹¹ Srivastava 2.

as a genre the novel is ‘dialogic and secular.’¹² While the novel can indeed be dialogic, it is not necessarily the case, at least in the Indian context, that it will inevitably narrate the story of the nation in pluralist and secular terms. This insight is a crucial one so far as (re-)imagining the nation in Indian English historical fiction is concerned.

Second, there can be no doubt that in reimagining the nation Rushdie and his many successors evince a clearer and stronger sense of engagement with history and the past than writers of the previous generation. Yet it cannot be said of the pre-Emergency generation of writers that they have been completely impervious to issues brought to the fore in the works of writers who began to publish after the Emergency. In both novels and short stories, Indian women writers in particular such as Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, and Nayantara Sahgal do address the question of (middle-class) Indian women in relation to the postcolonial nation(-state). Forgotten by history, ignored by the nation, and trapped by patriarchy, the search for self-identity begins anew for the Indian woman after the nation is born, politically. Importantly, the new identity is non-religious, if not exactly secular, stripping away the roles prescribed by custom and tradition. In that sense, post-independence Indian women writers deserve credit for initiating an interrogation of male-centred history, tradition-bound female identity, and patriarchy-oriented nation, a move that comes to assume a central position in the works of Rushdie and his generation. Interestingly, in her delineation of ‘a “secular” Indian canon in English,’ Srivastava does not include

¹² Srivastava 1.

even one single Indian woman writer whose work can be said to ‘engage with secularism as an ideology for the Indian nation-state.’¹³ My chapter on feminist history fiction in the present study in which I analyse *Some Inner Fury* by Kamala Markandaya to demonstrate how Markandaya enacts a number of interventions in the patriarchy-nation ideological nexus, with a view to creating a viable role model for the modern Indian woman, can thus be seen as constituting a significant addition to an otherwise commendable work by Srivastava.

Negotiating History, (Re-)imagining the Nation

Why is the national question so central to Indian historical fiction (in English)? One may counter-argue, ‘Why shouldn’t it be?’ Nations are, as Benedict Anderson so incisively suggests, ‘imagined communities,’ that is, ‘cultural artefacts.’¹⁴ For Anderson, the discursive reality of the nation precedes its political counterpart. That is to say, before the nation comes into being politically, it has to be imagined as such. Where might these imaginative constructions appear? One of the two sites Anderson identifies where such representations can be found is the (realist) novel, the other being the newspaper, both products of

¹³ Srivastava 1.

¹⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1983) 4.

what Anderson calls ‘print-capitalism’: ‘For these forms provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation.’¹⁵

An important question to ask is to what extent the Andersonian model of national formation is pertinent to an anti-colonial nation such as India. Partha Chatterjee, to cite the best-known case, has strong reservations when Anderson argues (as Chatterjee puts it)

that the historical experience of nationalism in Western Europe, in the Americas, and in Russia had supplied for all subsequent nationalisms a set of modular forms from which nationalist elites in Asia and Africa had chosen the ones they liked.¹⁶

For Chatterjee:

The most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on a *difference* with the ‘modular’ forms of the national society propagated by the modern West.¹⁷

Hence agreeing with Anderson amounts to, according to Chatterjee, ‘reducing the experience of anticolonial nationalism to a caricature of itself.’¹⁸ Yet Chatterjee concedes what one may term as one of the key arguments of Anderson: ‘Anderson is entirely correct in his suggestion that it is “print-capitalism” which

¹⁵ Anderson 25. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) 4-5. Chatterjee is by far the most incisive postcolonial critic of Anderson.

¹⁷ Chatterjee, *The Nation* 5. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸ Chatterjee, *The Nation* 5.

provides the new institutional space for the development of the modern “national” language.’¹⁹

One is, in effect, led back to where one started from: that is, to Anderson. However *differently* anti-colonial nationalism defines itself, in choosing both to locate and assert its very difference in the domain of culture rather than politics (politics being the domain where difference is to be challenged to be on par with the coloniser, as Chatterjee has shown to have been the case in the context of Indian nationalism), it makes the same use of (print) culture as its adversary, for the use of culture as a means to a political end is itself a bourgeois practice, first seen during the rise of the bourgeoisie in Europe.²⁰ Insofar as the leadership of Indian nationalism came from the new, English-educated, urban-based Indian bourgeoisie, ‘spawned and nurtured by colonialism itself,’ as Ranajit Guha puts it, culture *had* to be its site as well as articulation of difference.²¹ Being born coevally with Indian nationalism, Indian (historical) fiction was historically destined, it would seem, to imagine the Indian nation into existence. Its (thematic) fate does not seem to have changed much in the years after independence, as it continues to re-imagine not so much the nation as its ‘fragments,’ prompting in the process a reappraisal of both colonial and national history.²²

¹⁹ Chatterjee, *The Nation* 7.

²⁰ In her study of *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), Nancy Armstrong has forcefully argued the point in a feminist context.

²¹ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997) 5.

²² The term ‘fragments’ comes from Chatterjee, *The Nation*. For an insightful discussion of the obsessive engagement of Indian English fiction with history, see Paul Sharrad, *Postcolonial Literary History and Indian English Fiction* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2008).

If Anderson and Chatterjee engage in a dialogue as to how the nation is imagined across a range of cultural and historical formations, Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad famously engage in another, regarding the figuration of the nation in the so-called third-world literature. As is well known, Jameson shook up the placid world of academic criticism by his essay ‘Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.’ Jameson postulates:

Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.*²³

Critics have identified numerous shortcomings of this ‘sweeping hypothesis,’ as Jameson himself characterises it.²⁴ They are too well known to bear repetition. As with Anderson, I shall limit myself to the most publicised critique of Jameson, that offered by Ahmad. Of the many examples of ‘positivist reductionism’ enumerated by Ahmad in his devastating riposte, the one most pertinent to the present discussion has to do with the homogenisation by Jameson of ‘nationalism itself’ as if it were ‘some unitary thing with some predetermined essence and value.’²⁵ ‘There are hundreds of nationalisms in Asia and Africa; some are

²³ Frederic Jameson, ‘Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,’ *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986): 69. Emphasis in original.

²⁴ Jameson 69.

²⁵ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London and New York: Verso, 1992) 97, 102.

progressive, others are not,' Ahmad reminds Jameson.²⁶ What Ahmad says can be developed further: not only are any two (third-world) nationalisms distinct from each other; each is a complex phenomenon on its own right, marked by tensions, contradictions, and ambivalences of its own.

Ironically, by downplaying its complexity, Jameson divests nationalism of its historical character at a time when it is being explored with far greater rigour and vigour than ever before.²⁷ The tensions informing 'the nation-concept' are precisely what constitute its appeal to contemporary theorists.²⁸ As Tom Nairn contends, '[. . .] it is an exact (not a rhetorical) statement about nationalism to say that it is by nature ambivalent.'²⁹

If the ambivalent figure of the nation is a problem of its transitional history, its conceptual indeterminacy, its wavering between vocabularies, then what effect does this have on narratives and discourses that signify a sense of 'nationness'?

asks Homi K. Bhabha.³⁰ The closest Bhabha comes to answering the question is to suggest that 'the constitutive contradictions of the national text are

²⁶ Ahmad 102.

²⁷ The knowledge that Jameson is a major Marxist cultural theorist gives the irony an extra edge.

²⁸ The term has been taken from Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2005) 4. In her book (*Stories*), Boehmer offers a forceful argument as to why nationalism is still relevant to the postcolonial world. The recent theoretical interest in nationalism derives its impetus from the general distrust of grand narratives in the West, manufacturer as well as sufferer of World War I and II, though the trend is fast gaining ground in other parts of the world as well. As such, the approach is rather critical/cynical than sympathetic, with the failures of nationalism given more attention than its achievements.

²⁹ Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London: Verso, 1981) 348.

³⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, Introduction, *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) 2.

discontinuous and “interruptive”.’³¹ To put it plainly, the ‘conceptual indeterminacy’ of nationalist ideology translates into narrative/discursive ambivalence, which is why narratives/discourses of the nation can never be free from (obvious) contradictions.

Of the many contradictions of Indian nationalism informing Indian historical fiction, the one I will be primarily concerned with is the disparity between an inclusive rhetoric and an exclusive praxis, which can be clearly seen in the way the nation is predominantly imagined in the pre-independence era. Chapters 3, 5 and 6 present three case studies of the communal construction of Indian national identity: the conflation of Indianness with Hinduism, originating from ‘a nationalist imagination dreaming up the nation-state of the future as a Hindu Samrajya or a Ramrajya.’³² The pre-independence Indian historical novel treats this ambivalence differentially as well as strategically, depending on the specific function that the historical narrative is meant to serve: it is either recognised with a sense of unease (as in revivalist historical fiction) or glossed over (as in nationalist history fiction). More or less, the post-independence Indian historical fiction tends to engage with the mainstream discourse of the nation, including its precursor, critically. As a consequence, the inherent ambivalence of nationalist discourse/ideology in the post-independence Indian historical novel is deliberately foregrounded (as in both feminist and interventionist history fictions). In relating to the national question revisionist historical fiction, though a

³¹ Bhabha, Introduction 5.

³² Guha 62.

post-independence phenomenon, aligns itself with one of the two kinds of pre-independence historical fiction (namely, the revivalist historical novel) rather than any of its fellow-travellers.

Revivalist Historical Fiction

It was Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of British India from 1828 to 1835, who officially introduced English as the language of schooling for administration in India to replace Persian which had long been the language of business and governance in the Mughal courts. Within a generation of its introduction, Indians (especially in Bengal) not only acquired English but also became so competent in the use of the language that they could express themselves creatively in it. In less than half a century from the moment of contact with English literature, modern Indian literature is born.³³ Whether written in English or Indian vernaculars, modern Indian literature is a product of the colonial encounter, whose imprint on both its thematic and formal concerns is too marked to be missed.³⁴ A few examples will suffice. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73), perhaps the most talented of the pioneers of modern Indian literature,

³³ Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality* 3.

³⁴ In her brilliant study, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989), Gauri Viswanathan examines the role of English literary education in the consolidation of British colonialism in India.

introduced quite a few European literary forms in Bengali such as farce and the sonnet. He is also the first to use blank verse in Bengali poetry. The impact of the colonial encounter is also evident in the way Madhusudan recreated the Indian epic *Ramayana* in *Meghanadavadha Kavya* (1861). Sajni Kripalani Mukherji writes: ‘The focus of the work [*Ramayana*] has shifted from Rama, the legendary hero, to Meghnad and Ravana in the rival camp,’ enacting in the process a subversion ‘of the hegemony of Rama.’³⁵ This colonial context more or less determines as well as accounts for the uses that have been made of Indian history/past in Indian English fiction of the pre-independence period.

Colonialism, in the words of Ania Loomba, ‘reshapes, often violently, physical territories, social terrains as well as human identities.’³⁶ That is to say, for the colonised the psychic violence of colonialism is no less devastating than its more visible political and economic counterparts. Crucially, under colonialism the self-identity of the colonised is systematically eroded.³⁷ It is the ‘native intellectuals,’ according to Frantz Fanon, who first begin to realize that they must ‘shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped.’³⁸ This realization drives them, ‘hot-headed and with anger in their hearts,’ towards ‘discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and

³⁵ Sajni Kripalani Mukherji, ‘The Hindu College: Henry Derozio and Michael Madhusudan Dutt,’ in *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (New York: Columbia UP, 2003) 51.

³⁶ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd ed. (1998; London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 155.

³⁷ See Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, 1st paperback ed. (1983; Delhi: Oxford UP, 1988).

³⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, rpt. (1967; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) 168.

abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates [them] both in regard to [themselves] and in regard to others.’³⁹

The Fanonian model of cultural revivalism has come to be seen as paradigmatic of the processes of self-recovery throughout the colonial world, more specifically in occupation colonies.⁴⁰ Considered thus, the first use of Indian history/past in Indian English fiction can properly be characterised as revivalist. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Indian novelists in English, oppressed by the colonial present, began to participate in cultural revivals, already initiated by their counterparts in the native languages (for example, Bengali, Marathi, and so on), other literary genres (especially drama), and other cultural domains (such as religion). They searched for a heroic past, as T. Ramakrishna Pillai does in *Padmini: An Indian Romance* (1903) with regard to Vijayanagara, whose fictive re-creations would, they hoped, help restore the self-esteem of the Indians ravaged under the harsh colonial regime.⁴¹ The project of recovering self-esteem through visiting past glory invariably produced a mood of nostalgia, which is one of the defining moods of the historical fiction of the revivalist phase, the mood of *Padmini*.

Nostalgia often tends to prompt a diagnosis of the causes of contemporary degeneration: if our ancestors were so great in the past, why is our condition so

³⁹ Fanon 169.

⁴⁰ In his foreword to Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986) vii-xxvi, Homi Bhabha shows why it is important ‘to return to Fanon,’ especially when ‘the human world’ is learning how to ‘live its difference.’

⁴¹ T. Ramakrishna [Pillai], *Padmini: An Indian Romance* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd., 1903). Subsequent references are to this edition.

miserable now? Who is to blame? What should we do about national regeneration? How is the (lost) paradise—the prototypical revivalist image for the father/motherland—to be regained? These were tormenting questions, but they had to be addressed; the sooner, the better. In the process, Indian (English) novelists, like other anti-colonial intellectuals both before and since, ‘investigated the part their own people had played in colonial occupation.’⁴² The discovery was both disconcerting and soothing: disconcerting, because it revealed how mutual rivalry, distrust, and disunity between and within communities had paved the way for colonial penetration; and soothing, because it suggested the course of action to be adopted for resisting colonial aggression. In *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (1909), Sirdar Jogendra Singh contrasts the two rules of Akbar and his son Jehangir, with a view to examining them critically.⁴³ While Akbar does all he can to unite the different communities living in India, Jehangir is a pleasure-seeker, given to wine and woman. By closing the novel with Jehangir on the Mughal throne, Singh suggests that the communal harmony that Akbar had worked so hard to achieve would disintegrate during the rule of his son, which, in its turn, would bring about the subjugation of India once more. In order not to provoke the ire of colonial administration, the author of *Nur Jahan* judiciously does not mention explicitly the agent of this subjugation.

⁴² Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd ed. (1995; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 188.

⁴³ Sirdar Jogendra Singh, *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (London: James Nisbet & Co., [sic] Limited, 1909). Subsequent references are to this edition.

There are thus two related but distinct uses of the Indian past in revivalist historical fiction: one is viewed through what Elleke Boehmer calls ‘the artifice of nostalgia,’ which is what Pillai employs in *Padmini*; while the other derives from critical engagement, the mode of engagement adopted by Singh in *Nur Jahan*.⁴⁴ They may, however, appear together in a single narrative. In different ways, both types of narrative expound the same message: in unity lies our salvation. With every possibility of being considered seditious in the eyes of the colonial masters, this call for solidarity could not be articulated openly for fear of reprisal. Revivalist historical fiction combined Romance with allegory and romance to resolve what in postcolonial studies is known as the problem of generating a counter-discourse to oppose and undo the ideological formations informing colonialist discourse.⁴⁵

The real challenge for the historical novelists of the revivalist phase was to decide which Indian past they should choose to revive. As (male) members of the upper-caste Hindu community, they rarely opted for the Muslim rule that preceded ‘the white man’s incursion’ as the golden age to be contrasted with the

⁴⁴ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* 114. The same double-faceted engagement with the Victorian past is seen in post-World War II British historical fiction. The age of empire is re-visited both nostalgically and critically. The first approach, which Salman Rushdie characterises as ‘the Raj revival,’ seeks to commemorate the ‘greatness’ that Britain had once been. The critical stance tries to understand why Britain lost its vast Empire. See Kate Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991) 90; Annie Greet, Syd Harrex, and Susan Hosking, eds., *Raj Nostalgia: Some Literary and Critical Implications* (Adelaide: CRNLE, 1992).

⁴⁵ For a perceptive discussion of the problems associated with the task of forging ‘counter-colonial representations,’ see Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994). In this study, I shall use ‘Romance’ as a generic term to designate a narrative with quest as its central motif and ‘romance’ in the popular sense of love interest in a given work. For a fuller discussion of Romance, see chapter 4 below.

disgraceful colonial present.⁴⁶ The Muslim rule, in fact, represented for some (if not all) of them a chapter in the history of India as dark as (if not darker than) the colonial occupation itself that they were fighting against.⁴⁷ This is exactly what is found in *Padmini*. In reviving a glorious Hindu past which was brought to an end by the Muslim penetration of southern India, Pillai is attempting two (antithetical?) things at the same time. He is rousing the Indians (in fact, the Hindus) to regain the glory they have lost. But the identification of the Muslims as villains works to alienate one community from the other, which is not very conducive to the project of national integration and is in fact self-defeating. That Pillai has yet to come to terms with the question of Hindu-Muslim amity in the context of national emancipation is clearly revealed in his choice of Francis Day, the only colonial-historical character in the novel, whom he uses as a formal device to unite the Hindu lovers and thus bring the text to a typical Romance closure, namely, ‘and they lived happily thereafter.’

Yet for the anti-colonial struggle to achieve its ultimate goal, it was crucial for the revivalist historical novelists to heal rather than aggravate the rift between the two communities. In choosing to revisit in *Nur Jahan* the reign of Akbar as an *Indian* past worth revival, Singh signals that his aim is to forge/figure a healthy Hindu-Muslim relationship, not to exacerbate but to alleviate tension between the two communities. In other words, unlike Pillai, the author of *Nur Jahan* is not

⁴⁶ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* 116.

⁴⁷ In fact, one can amass numerous cases to prove that some (if not most) of the Indian intellectuals of the time preferred British rule to the one it had replaced.

disposed to view India as the sole possession of the Hindus. What the two pasts of Pillai and Singh make abundantly clear is that these early ‘prophets of nationalism,’ to borrow from Ernest Gellner, tended to construct Indian cultural identity in varied ways.⁴⁸ There was room for diversity and dialogue. To imagine the nation exclusively on the basis of Hinduism is still a few decades away.

Nationalist History Fiction

The infamous Amritsar massacre (also called the Jallianwala Bagh massacre) of 13 April 1919 marks a decisive moment for the Indian nationalist politics. More than any other act of colonial brutality, it laid bare the coercive foundation of British dominance in India and thus ‘provoked a crisis’ among the national leadership who had so far ‘retained faith in the good intentions of British democracy and the efficacy of negotiating,’ despite mounting pressure from within to launch ‘active resistance against their masters.’⁴⁹ They were now faced with a great dilemma: given the tense political climate of the day, should they continue to pursue the old strategy of legitimate and peaceful means to achieve their goal or move towards a more radical course? The appointment of the all-

⁴⁸ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) 124.

⁴⁹ Purnima Bose, *Organizing Empire: Individualism, Collective Agency, and India* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003) 30; Benita Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination, 1880-1930*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1998) 21.

white Simon Commission in 1927, so called after the name of its chairman, to decide ‘whether India was ready for further constitutional progress and on which lines,’ provided them with a definitive answer.⁵⁰ They realised, *albeit* contrary to their expectation, what Fanon would come to realise several decades later: that the imperialist never gives anything away out of good will. Henceforth the nationalist movement decidedly became what it had only half-heartedly been before: it became, in the words of Edward W. Said, ‘more openly liberationist.’⁵¹ By the late 1920s the movement, which had begun with a moderate demand for Home Rule in the mid-1910s, had developed into ‘a great global wave of angry opposition to colonial rule’: its only goal had come to be, as Jawaharlal Nehru phrased it, *Purna Swaraj* (complete independence).⁵² The goal was finally achieved in 1947, with the birth of India as an independent nation-state.

Anti-British nationalist resistance is the defining Indian experience of the Gandhian era. ‘No Indian writer, writing in those decades or writing about them,’ writes Meenakshi Mukherjee, ‘could avoid reflecting this upsurge in his work.’⁵³ This national experience is the stuff the history novels of the period are made of. What is most remarkable about them is the change of focus. The scene has shifted from distant to near past, from ‘unexperienced’ to self-experienced past.⁵⁴ Gone are the days of nostalgia and self-criticism. Inertia, self-doubt, and despair are left

⁵⁰ Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, Sucheta Mahajan, and K.N. Pannikar, *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1988) 260.

⁵¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1993) 271.

⁵² Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* 173.

⁵³ Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Novel: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English* (New Delhi and London: Heinemann, 1971) 34.

⁵⁴ The term ‘unexperienced’ is from Joseph W. Turner, ‘The Kinds of Historical Fiction: An Essay in Definition and Methodology,’ *Genre* XII (Fall 1979): 340.

behind. Passivity has given way to action: ‘The existence of a new type of man is revealed to the public.’⁵⁵

Just as other nationalist narratives do, nationalist history fiction relates the story of the emergence of this ‘new type of man’ and, by extension (*à la* Jameson), of the nation itself. That is why most of the nationalist history novels are, formally, *bildungsromane*. The typical plot is a journey away from the small world of home (usually located in a rural or suburban setting) to the big bustling city, as is the case in both *Kanthapura* and the Lalu trilogy.⁵⁶ Initially, the (male) protagonist is a naïve, home-loving, young fellow, having nothing to do with the politics of nationalism, as in *Waiting for the Mahatma* by R.K. Narayan, for instance.⁵⁷ But the spirit of the times asserts itself before long and s/he (usually he) finds himself enmeshed in the national cause. It is a measure of *his* education that the farther he moves away from home, the stronger grows his commitment to the cause of the nation. The more he suffers colonial injustice, the more keenly he feels the plight of his land, which now stands for his mother in the form of Mother India. By the end of the narrative, he is sure of himself, knows his

⁵⁵ Fanon 194. Interestingly, M.K. Gandhi had made an almost identical statement: ‘The birth of such a man can bring about the salvation of India in no time.’ This ‘man’ is ‘a *satyagrahi*’ (as Gandhi called him) whom ‘[p]eople in general always follow’ because he possesses ‘virtues like self-control, fearlessness, etc.’ *Satyagrahi* literally means the truth fighter/seeker. See ‘Satyagraha—Not Passive Resistance,’ in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Electronic Book), vol. 16 (New Delhi: Publications Division Government of India, 1999) 9-15.

⁵⁶ Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (New York: New Directions, 1963). The Lalu trilogy by Mulk Raj Anand comprises *The Village*, 2nd Indian ed. (1939; Bombay: Kutub-Popular, 1960); *Across the Black Waters*, 1st Indian ed. (1940; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955); *The Sword and the Sickie*, 1st Indian ed. (1942; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955). Subsequent references are to these editions. By leaving home behind, the nationalist protagonist also leaves behind what in nationalist imagination stands for the female domain. (Male) politics is always in the world outside.

⁵⁷ R.K. Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* (N.p.: Michigan State UP, 1955). Subsequent references are to this edition.

mission of life, and is prepared to shoulder greater social/organisational responsibility than ever before. The defining mood of a narrative with such an ‘upbeat, idealistic, forward-looking’ ending cannot but be optimistic.⁵⁸ Both *Kanthapura* and the Lalu trilogy end pointing to a better future for India, though the assassination of Gandhi with which *Waiting for the Mahatma* closes, works to dilute the optimism that the union of the lovers/protagonists seems to promise.

The use of the recent/self-experienced past and the evocation of optimism are not the only distinguishing features of nationalist history fiction. Its narrative mode is also distinct. Whereas revivalist historical novelists had to resort to allegorical Romance so that they could safely put their *seditions* (patriotic from the other side of the colonial divide) message across, there was no such representational hurdle for their nationalist successors to surmount. In fact, ‘the documentary or realist mode of historical narration’ they chose for ‘giving conceptual shape to their history, culture, and society’ derived both its inspiration and strength from the highly charged political climate they were writing in.⁵⁹ In the case of Rao, it was the 1930s, a decade marked by a series of civil disobedience and non-cooperation programmes under the leadership of M.K. Gandhi, though it should be kept in mind that the writing of *Kanthapura* had actually begun in 1929; the last volume of the Lalu trilogy came out in 1942, the year when Indian nationalism had openly asked Britain to ‘quit India.’ With the nationalist fervour running so high, nationalist intellectuals could now be

⁵⁸ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* 99.

⁵⁹ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* 116.

‘unashamedly polemical.’⁶⁰ In fact, not to be so was very likely to be considered unpatriotic.

The more compelling difference between revivalist historical and nationalist history novels, however, has to do with the construction of national identity. As has been observed above, the former did not straightaway conflate Indianness with Hinduism. That is to say, national identity was not *invariably* subsumed within communal/religious identity. At least, some (for example, the author of *Nur Jahan*) did make sincere attempts to bridge the communal divide, especially between Hindus and Muslims.⁶¹ In contrast, the latter forms national identity predominantly on the basis of Hinduism. In this formulation, to be an Indian is to be, first of all, a Hindu. Significantly, there is not a single Muslim of any consequence in *Kanthapura* (excepting the villain Badè Khan, who does not belong to the village of the title), though the Indian Muslims comprised the second major population group at the time. The case of Anand of the trilogy is more unfortunate. In the last volume, *The Sword and the Sickle*, Anand allows the broad socialist agenda, geared to improving the condition of the Indian working classes, to be hijacked by a vaguely defined nationalist programme aimed at the dismantling of the imperial structure.

It is not the case that nationalist history fiction builds no bridges at all. It does, but, interestingly, they are meant to promote not inter-communal but intra-communal amity. In other words, the nationalist bridges aim at drawing not so

⁶⁰ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* 180.

⁶¹ It should be noted here that the author of *Nur Jahan* Sirdar Jogendra Singh was a Sikh whose ancestors originally belonged to Amritsar in the Punjab and later settled in the United Provinces.

much ‘the various Indian communities together,’ as Ralph J. Crane has suggested, as the different Hindu castes.⁶² Relatedly, the standard national subject is assumed (as if by definition) to be no other than an upper-caste, (upper-)middle-class young male Hindu: ‘a single, consistent, unambiguous voice’, as Partha Chatterjee so astutely puts it, ‘glossing over all earlier contradictions, divergences and differences.’⁶³ While the homogenisation of the national subject is certainly the case so far as Moorthy (in *Kanthapura*) is concerned, the Sikh Lalu (in the *Lalu* trilogy) is in no way any different. Although very touchy about his personal identity, Lalu does not murmur even the slightest protest when he is enlisted as a Hindu into the British Indian army. The multiple exclusions along lines of religion, gender, class, caste, and age from the figuration of national subject and, by extension, from both national imaginary and nationalist discourse, have been, and continue to be, vigorously contested not only in the (history) fiction but also in other literary genres of the post-independence period. Scholarly discourses have also questioned what Josna E. Rege phrases as ‘the success of the nationalist synthesis.’⁶⁴

⁶² Crane 99.

⁶³ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986) 51.

⁶⁴ Josna E. Rege, *Colonial Karma: Self, Action, and Nation in the Indian English Novel* (Hampshire and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 81.

Feminist History Fiction

Why could a critique of the dominant national narrative not emerge till after the Emergency of 1975-7? In the meantime, if there was any criticism at all, it was neither sustained nor loud enough to be taken cognizance of. As the new nation was consolidating itself, the order of the day, indeed, was for the individual citizen to identify his/her destiny with that of the nation. Nation was *the* text that pervaded all spheres of Indian life, leaving little space for different worldviews. Yet a few works of fiction based on national history appeared even before the Emergency that sought to draw attention to some of the 'foundational fictions' of the nation.⁶⁵ Both *Some Inner Fury* (1955) by Kamala Markandaya and *A Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Khushwant Singh, for example, aim at deconstructing the myth of nonviolence attached to the birth of the nation.⁶⁶

For the present, however, it is important to delineate the two broad tendencies informing Indian (English) literature in the post-independence, pre-Emergency period. Some of the writers, more prominently those who had begun writing in the heyday of anti-colonial struggle, continued to align themselves with the nationalist cause; others, most of whom belonged to the first generation of post-independence writers, attempted to disarticulate, if not resist, it. In the work

⁶⁵ Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, 1st paperback printing (1991; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993).

⁶⁶ Kamala Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* (1955; New York: Signet Books, 1956); Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, rpt. (1956; New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1988). Subsequent references are to these editions. In his essay, 'Inscribing a Sikh India: An Alternative Reading of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*,' in Peter Morey and Alex Tickell, eds. *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005) 181-96, Ralph J. Crane reads *Train to Pakistan* as constructing 'a distinctly Sikh-centred India' by way of investing its Sikh protagonist with 'virility.'

of the first group, there is, as should be expected, a preponderance of ‘nationalist stereotypes,’ while two related but distinct preoccupations characterise the work of the second group: introspection and (re)turn to nature in the form of primitive (tribal) culture.⁶⁷ Although both groups are as much products of, as responses to, the same historical moment, it is the sub-group associated with what has been called ‘the turn inward’ within the second larger group that has come to be regarded as representing the defining literary trend of the period.⁶⁸ As Josna Rege, in her 2004 study *Colonial Karma: Self, Action, and Nation in the Indian English Novel*, has observed, ‘Beginning in the 1950s and accelerating in the 1960s, the Indian English literary scene saw the emergence of a new literature of interiority.’⁶⁹ In distinct contrast to the literature of ‘public preoccupations’ of the earlier Gandhian era, the dominant concern of this ‘new’ literature is ‘with character development and psychological depth, often combined with a sense of the alienated individual, dissatisfied with modern life.’⁷⁰

The critical tendency has till relatively recently been to dismiss the alienation and dissatisfaction informing this ‘new literature of interiority’ as originating rather from ‘the corrupting influence of European existentialism’ than from the Indian ethos itself.⁷¹ To put it bluntly, its Indianness has been taken to be highly suspect. On related lines, this ‘cynical’/‘sceptical’ literature – in its

⁶⁷ Rege 85.

⁶⁸ Rege 85.

⁶⁹ Rege 85.

⁷⁰ Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Novel* 78; Shyamala A. Narayan and Jon Mee, ‘Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s,’ in *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (New York: Columbia UP, 2003) 219. One of the writers whose work best represents ‘the turn inward’ trend is Arun Joshi (1939-93).

⁷¹ Rege 88.

fictional form, in particular – has been ritually disregarded on the ground that, instead of locating and analysing the real causes of alienation and dissatisfaction (that is, the very source of its cynicism/scepticism) in a material context and being thus able to see/show a way out of the impasse, it merely confines itself to exploring ‘the somber traumas of the inner world,’ as if expecting to excavate some rare insight into the contemporary malaise (if there really was one) lying buried in the depth of individual human psyche.⁷² In plain terms, the practitioners of this introspective literature have been accused – novelists more savagely than others – of lacking social commitment. They were not builders of the nation.

Both these charges have largely been discredited. The critical school that spawned them has itself come to be regarded with a certain amount of ‘scepticism.’ The ‘literary turn inward’ is now seen ‘as arising chiefly from specifically Indian conditions.’⁷³ Rege argues:

In fact, Indian English novelists who turned inward during the doldrums of the 1960s and 1970s were not rejecting their social responsibilities, but struggling to find an authentic voice in which they could express themselves as modern Indians, attempting to come to grips with their own predicaments. The reasons that they could not do so lie in the ambivalence at the very roots of Indian nationalism, and thus, rather than merely being the irrelevant, existential posturing of a small, privileged class, their

⁷² Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, ‘The Twentieth Century: Women Writing the Nation,’ in *Women Writing in India*, eds. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, vol. 2 (New York: Feminist Press, 1993) 95.

⁷³ Rege 81, 88.

struggles for personal self-expression can also be seen to register a conceptual dissonance within the Indian nationalist discourse.⁷⁴

The Emergency of 1975-7, ‘the triumph of cynicism in Indian public life,’ as Salman Rushdie so memorably characterised it, changed it all.⁷⁵ Just as the Amritsar massacre had exposed the coercive foundation of British dominance in India and thus impelled the national leadership to adopt a more militant course of action against it, the Emergency, by shaking the very foundation of democracy in India, initiated ‘Indian intellectuals’ reassessment of the meaning of Indian democracy and the “achievements” of the postcolonial state,’ including a probing into the inclusive myths and rhetoric of Indian nationalism.⁷⁶ Consequently, what had hitherto been unspeakable or, at best, muted could now be heard loud and clear. The cracks and contradictions of the nationalist discourse so vigilantly kept from showing up began to burst open. Its erasures and exclusions could no longer be held back from exploding. Nehru had promised ‘to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell.’⁷⁷ With the eviction of the colonial regime, ‘the noble mansion of free India’ did in fact come into existence, but obviously not ‘all her children’ have been able to ‘dwell’ in it, at least not on equal terms. ‘The so-called secular, democratic, and universal nature of citizenship that the Indian state claimed to establish in 1947’ had, writes Jill Didur, sadly but surely, shrunk into ‘an elite, masculine, and ethnically

⁷⁴ Rege 88.

⁷⁵ Rushdie 52.

⁷⁶ Srivastava 4.

⁷⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology*, ed. Sarvepalli Gopal (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1980) 77.

homogeneous citizen-subject.’⁷⁸ Thus the ‘inclusive rhetoric’ of nationalist leaders like Nehru came to be perceived to have largely been ‘a mask for an exclusive reality.’⁷⁹ To a large extent, the history-based Indian English fiction of the post-independence period grew out of an acute sense of this disjuncture between ‘inclusive rhetoric’ and ‘exclusive reality,’ necessitating in the process a re-imagining of the nation.

Possibly the most impressive response/challenge to the discriminatory/exclusionary politics of the nationalist scheme has come from the first generation of women novelists who had before the Emergency been more or less engrossed in their ‘private universes,’ but now turned to writing ‘public fiction, shedding the reserve of [their] earlier work.’⁸⁰ The history fiction they have produced, especially since the late 1970s—*The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) by Kamala Markandaya, *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai (1980), *Rich Like Us* (1985) by Nayantara Sahgal, and so on—is clearly one of the finest embodiments of this ‘public fiction.’⁸¹ This fiction is feminist in that it is committed to ‘foregrounding women’s presence in history and claiming a moral and political validity for the parts they play.’⁸²

⁷⁸ Jill Didur, *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2006) 14.

⁷⁹ Jon Mee, ‘After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and 1990s,’ in Mehrotra 323.

⁸⁰ Rushdie 71. Rushdie makes these observations with particular reference to Anita Desai and one of her post-Emergency works *In Custody* (1984).

⁸¹ Kamala Markandaya, *The Golden Honeycomb* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977); Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Nayantara Sahgal, *Rich Like Us* (London: Heinemann, 1985). Subsequent references are to these editions.

⁸² Boehmer, *Stories* 35.

Some of the women novelists—for example, Kamala Markandaya in *Some Inner Fury*, Attia Hosain in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961)—were already engaged, long before the Emergency, in critiquing the patriarchy-derived prejudices of the nation.⁸³ In *Some Inner Fury*, the text I have chosen to analyse as an early example of feminist history fiction, Markandaya revisits the India of the Quit India Movement of 1942, one of the most celebrated moments in the (official) history of Indian national struggle. The purpose is not to spin a heroic tale of national significance, but to lay bare the collusion of nationalism with patriarchy in oppressing Indian women. Mira, the protagonist, loves an English man, named Richard Marlowe; but the lovers cannot be united because the two nations they belong to want them to part at the height of the nationalist agitation in India at the time of the Quit India Movement. Mira must defer her desire and dream for the sake of the nation, though her westernised brother Kitsamy is not required to do so.

‘It is difficult,’ argues Elleke Boehmer, ‘though not impossible, to conceive (of) the nation without the inscription of specific symbolic roles for male and female historical actors.’⁸⁴ That is to say, nationalism ascribes different(ial) roles to men and women based on gender. Men are the makers of the destiny of the nation (hence Nehru’s ‘tryst with destiny’), while women are ‘the *bearers* of national culture.’⁸⁵ This active-passive binary is then translated into, according to Partha Chatterjee, ‘the domain of culture’ as ‘the material and

⁸³ Attia Hosain, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961)

⁸⁴ Boehmer, *Stories* 5.

⁸⁵ Nehru 76; Boehmer, *Stories* 4. Emphasis in original.

the spiritual' and into 'the social space' as '*ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world': the active material world is 'typically the domain of the male' 'where the battle [is] waged for national independence,' whereas the passive spiritual home, 'far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state,' is the female domain – 'the inner core of the national culture.'⁸⁶

It is, therefore, predictable that the official national narrative (insofar as it is a male prerogative) will choose to tell the story of the outer domain of male action. The inner domain of female experience is, consequently, either erased or marginalised. In its attempt to tell 'the stories of women,' feminist history fiction is thus left with no other choice but to focus on the inner space of home. That it has made a virtue of necessity has to be admitted. From this perspective, it can be said of the feminist history novel that it is not so much concerned with using history as with, to borrow a term used by Linda Anderson, 're-visioning' and deconstructing its nationalist-patriarchal version.⁸⁷ Although it may seem so, in choosing to focus on the domestic world, feminist history fiction is, in effect, neither reproducing nor legitimising the masculinist discursive legacies of postcolonial nationalism. The approach is rather subversive. In authorised national accounts, the private sphere is invariably (and for obvious reasons) represented as static (and its 'normative' occupants as passive): as the locus of 'the traditional values beloved of the nation,' it must remain beyond the

⁸⁶ Chatterjee, *The Nation* 117-121.

⁸⁷ Linda Anderson, 'The Re-Imagining of History in Contemporary Women's Fiction,' in *Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction*, ed. Linda Anderson (London: Edward Arnold, 1990) 130.

pale/reach of modernity/history.⁸⁸ Feminist history fiction boldly refuses to condone this construction of the private sphere as unaffected by the processes of history (which it finds historically inaccurate), and re-configures the private-public binary as a dialectic: each sphere shapes and is shaped by the other.

This private-public dialectic (in)forms the narrative content of feminist history fiction. Three broad patterns may usefully be identified. The first kind of narrative looks back at a critical phase in national history (for instance, the Quit India Movement of 1942 in *Some Inner Fury*) but, crucially, not from the usual national perspective. Instead of focusing on the efforts and achievements of nationalist males, the important roles played by women are recounted. For example, it is the feminist Roshan Merchant, a young Parsi widow in *Some Inner Fury*, who more than anyone else enlists all her youthful energy into the service of the nation.

The second variety has a pattern almost identical with the one found in the first. Its hub of interest is, however, differently placed. It is much more interested in exploring how history affects (often tragically) the lives of women (though located far away from what Diana Wallace calls ‘the male domains of history – politics, warfare and adventure’) than in recuperating their contribution.⁸⁹ In both cases, the outcome is what Storm Jameson calls ‘accurate history,’ meaning a more inclusive version of ‘history.’⁹⁰ Anita Desai, one of the leading women novelists of the post-independence period, sets out in *Clear Light of Day* to show

⁸⁸ Boehmer, *Stories* 208.

⁸⁹ Wallace x.

⁹⁰ Storm Jameson, cited in Wallace 2.

how lives of women in the inner domain of home are as much affected by the course of history as those of men in the outer domain of the world. The freedom movement of the 1940s alters the life of Bim, the female protagonist of the novel, as decisively as that of her brother, Raja, who to pursue his non-communal dreams abandons the family when it needs him most. In addition, Desai posits memory as a corrective to the nightmare of history. Denied access to the theatre of history, the female characters in *Clear Light of Day* fall back upon ‘the ambivalent privilege’ of personal memory in times of crisis, and find whatever relief they can to keep going in a world in which (ideal) women are supposed to be those who neatly fit into the roles prescribed for them by the joint forces of nationalism and patriarchy.⁹¹

The third variety is the most radical. It tells the stories of those women who refuse to endorse the so-called inner-outer divide and dare, in the words of Malashri Lal, to

accept the challenge of a gender determined environment designed for the promotion and prosperity of men, and [. . .] contend with prejudices against [their] attempts to appropriate [their] own space in the name of dignity and social justice.⁹²

⁹¹ The phrase comes from C.L. Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 156. Memory is ambivalent in *Clear Light of Day* in that in some cases the same event/experience from the past is remembered in opposing ways, with one character looking back at it nostalgically, whereas another rather critically.

⁹² Malashri Lal, *The Law of the Threshold* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1995) 19.

Through its historical lens, the final variety allows one to see through the constructedness not only of ‘nationalist stereotypes’ but also of the pretence of the bourgeois-patriarchal nation to inclusiveness.

The subversive thrust of feminist history fiction is also evident, on the one hand, in its choice of certain narrative forms and, on the other, in its rejection and rupture of the structural preferences of some others. It is not for nothing that most of the history novels written by women are family sagas as in *Clear Light of Day* and *Rich Like Us*. In her impressive study of the historical novel by twentieth-century British women writers, Diana Wallace has compellingly demonstrated why the family saga ‘has been a very important historical form for [British] women writers’ at large and for those of the 1930s in particular.⁹³ Indian women novelists, who turned to history in order to map their (vexed) relationship to the postcolonial nation-state especially in the aftermath of the Emergency, seem to have similar reasons for using the family saga as their British counterparts. First, because of its focus on the domestic, the family saga allows women (writers as well as readers) to explore a whole range of female experiences which have consistently been excluded from traditional/national historical narratives. Second, the family saga conceptualises history ‘as a cyclical, rather than linear, progression.’⁹⁴ This model of history is a more accurate gauge of the ‘partial and fragile’ progress made by women than the one offered by the grand narratives of

⁹³ Wallace 13.

⁹⁴ Wallace 55.

(national) history.⁹⁵ In *Clear Light of Day*, Desai forces a comparison between the lives of the ‘modern’ Bim and her widowed aunt Mira. Despite her education and teaching job, Bim does not appear to be leading a much better life than the one lived by her ‘traditional’ aunt. Although belonging to two generations, both women remain victims of a male-dominated society, forced to give up personal aspirations to fulfil social obligations.

Interestingly, however, Indian women writers seem to have used the form of the family saga more radically than their British predecessors. Most of the family sagas produced by British women writers during the inter-war period typically end with the marriage of the female protagonist. This romantic and, more importantly, ideologically conformist ending rather deflects than augments the disruptive potential of the form by offering ‘the soothing balm of an ideology of stoical acceptance which naturalises the social and sexual status quo, and is ultimately dependent upon essentialist categories of femininity.’⁹⁶ In contrast, the protagonists of the Indian family sagas tend to be indifferent to marriage: Bim in *Clear Light of Day* is an exemplary case in point. They see marriage as rather frustrating than fulfilling the possibilities of self-realisation. To marry is to risk personal freedom, which they value more than the (doubtful) security of marriage. The painful experiences of women – (grand)mothers – from earlier generations have taught them the bitter lesson that it is always women who pay

⁹⁵ Wallace 57.

⁹⁶ Christine Bridgwood, ‘Family romances: the contemporary popular family saga,’ in *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction*, ed. Jean Radford (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986) 178.

the most to make marriage a success. The lost possibilities of the past serve them with a clear warning. They must not allow *history* to repeat itself. Hence to leave their stories open-ended is both an ideological and textual imperative.

Kamala Markandaya deploys a different strategy in *Some Inner Fury*. She uses the classic realist form of the novel to relate the *romance* of Mira and her English lover Richard Marlowe. Unlike the protagonists (both male and female) of the realist novel, however, Mira refuses to ‘grow’ by way of learning lessons from the past. In other words, Markandaya does not allow *Some Inner Fury* to become a *bildungsroman*, which the nationalist-realist novel invariably aspires to be. There is thus a disjunction between the novelistic form Markandaya chooses to tell the story of her female protagonist and the ideological-pedagogical end she makes it to serve. By not allowing her protagonist to grow, Markandaya undermines the very idea of progress(ion) (from ignorance to enlightenment) and, by extension, that of teleology, which forms the philosophical foundation of both realist fiction and narrative historiography. Negation of progression also works to invalidate the notion of change underlying all historical projects. For Markandaya and her protagonist(s), history does not liberate; rather, it victimises.

All these – the counter discourse it sets out to construct vis-à-vis the nation, the radical uses it makes of the family saga as a historical form and of the realist novel, and the tenacity with which the majority of its female protagonists

resists being moulded into ‘nationalist stereotypes’ – combine to make ‘cautious optimism’ the predominant mood of feminist history fiction.⁹⁷

Interventionist History Fiction

Feminist history fiction is not the only post-independence variety of Indian historical fiction that has made an issue of the exclusions in the authorised version of national narrative. Following the lead of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), a whole body of history-based fiction (mostly by male writers) has emerged whose central concern is to ‘re-imagine’ the nation.⁹⁸ The ideological premise of this re-imagining of the nation is exactly the opposite of what it proposes to dislodge. As I have suggested in my discussion of nationalist history fiction above, pre-independence Indian (English) writers as well as some of their post-independence successors had conceived of the national self in terms of cultural essentialism/homogeneity, eventually collapsing Indianness into Hinduism, whereas *midnight’s children* and *grandchildren* place the cultural diversity of India right at the centre of the national imaginary. ‘India,’ as Rushdie has remarked in an interview with David Brooks, ‘if it means anything, means

⁹⁷ Chidi Okonkwo, *Decolonization Agonistics in Postcolonial Fiction* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1999) 155.

⁹⁸ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children* (1981; London: Picador, 1982). Subsequent references are to this edition.

plurality.’⁹⁹ In constructing a more fluid and polyphonic national identity, this Rushdie-inspired fiction commits itself to ‘recuperating histories squeezed out of the state’s homogenising myth of the nation.’¹⁰⁰ The outcome is a history fiction that can reasonably be discussed as interventionist in view of its radical agenda.

Interventionist history fiction addresses the national question in two kinds of narrative. Of the two, this study will deal only with the second type.¹⁰¹ The first variety ‘looks at a community which is often erased from nationalist histories’ because its ‘presence troubles the imagining of the nation in terms of the expression of some homogeneous cultural authenticity.’¹⁰² That is to say, the first kind of interventionist history fiction renders the silenced voices of national minorities audible. Various models on *Midnight’s Children*, a number of both historical and history novels have been written in the post-independence period such as *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988) by I. Allan Sealy, Rohinton Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey* (1991), and *Looking through Glass* (1995) by Mukul Kesavan, in which a national minority (the Anglo-Indians in *The Trotter-Nama*, the Parsis in *Such a Long Journey* and the Indian Muslims in *Looking through Glass*) is given a space to tell its own story, framed by a pair of questions: how the community in question and the larger community of the nation

⁹⁹ Cited in Neil Ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2004) 149-50.

¹⁰⁰ Mee 327.

¹⁰¹ My reason for doing so is given in the previous chapter (see 39-41).

¹⁰² Mee 329, 327.

see themselves in relation to each other; and whether the ensuing relationship is an enabling or crippling one for one of them or for both.¹⁰³

The second variety of interventionist history fiction retrieves a different kind of ‘suppressed histories,’ histories (such as those relating to communal riots in *The Shadow Lines* [1988] by Amitav Ghosh) less glorious than the ones commonly celebrated in official records.¹⁰⁴ While the memory surrounding these ‘frequently forgotten or forbidden’ histories continues to haunt those affected by them, the postcolonial nation-state is ever so watchful to wipe them out from collective memory by refusing to grant them any narrative space in its self-congratulatory accounts.¹⁰⁵ With a view to redressing the balance, the second type of interventionist history fiction comes up with alternative histories – histories paradoxically lacking official signature but at the same time authenticated by the personal experiences of individuals who reconstruct them through an intense process of retrospection, putting the ‘shards of memory’ into a coherent pattern to make sense of the past (as well as present) and thus save it from getting lost for good.¹⁰⁶ In *The Shadow Lines*, the anonymous narrator-protagonist is shocked to find that the main(stream) sources of information such as the newspapers of the time have very little to say about the Hindu-Muslim riots of January 1964, in one of which his uncle-cum-mentor Tridib was killed. Even the family members do

¹⁰³ I. Allan Sealy, *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988; New Delhi: IndiaInk, 1999); Rohiton Mistry, *Such a Long Journey* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991); Mukul Kesavan, *Looking through Glass* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995). Subsequent references are to these editions.

¹⁰⁴ Mee 329. Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, educational ed. (1988; Delhi: Oxford UP, 1995). Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁰⁵ Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, practice, politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 111.

¹⁰⁶ *Shards of Memory* (1995) is the title of a novel by Ruth Praver Jhabvala.

not talk about how Tridib got killed. The only explanation given out is that he was killed in an accident in Dhaka. Consequently, it is from the personal memories of those who were present on the spot that the narrator-protagonist is finally able to know how his uncle-cum-mentor lost his life. The story thus retrieved works to heal him and all those who have so long been oppressed by the silence surrounding the death of Tridib in a communal riot.

Possibly the most outstanding feature of interventionist history fiction, a feature that sets it apart from all other varieties of historical fiction chosen for study here, is its formal diversity. With a remarkable artistry, interventionist history novelists have employed a wide variety of narrative forms, ranging from magic realism in *Midnight's Children* and *Looking through Glass* to such localised ones as the Persian *nama* in *The Trotter-Nama*, for example, to the Proustian mode of remembrance so deftly used by Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines*. This formal diversity is rather integral than incidental to the pluralist vision informing both the conceptualisation of the nation that one strand of this fiction is focused on, and the rewriting of the history of the nation that the other strand seeks to accomplish. At a metatextual level, it may well be taken to suggest that there are as many ways of imagining and narrating India as there are Indians. Matching its ideological/allegorical function – that is, to re-imagine the nation and thus rewrite its monochromatic discourse, interventionist history fiction has a defining mood, which is best characterised as ‘revisionary scepticism.’¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Mee 327.

Revisionist Historical Fiction

The historical fiction I am going to discuss now may look a little out of place in the heady world of Indian history fiction of the post-independence period. The focus of this fiction is the representational politics of colonial historiography. Broadly, there are two (interrelated) sides to the colonial representation of the native. In the history (or any other narrative/discourse, for that matter) of the colonial masters, the native (usually the commoner) is figured either as passive, sensual, and degenerate and, therefore, in need of reformation; or (in the case of the rebel) as a cunning, scheming, conspiring villain, who poses a real threat to the rule of law and order and must, therefore, be contained in the greater interest of the society. The brutal colonial treatment of this villain (who is most often dethroned, exiled, or executed) is justified in the name of peace and progress that the colonial rule claims to have established by replacing the chaos and anarchy of the pre-colonial period.

Revisionist historical fiction takes up the case of these villains of colonial history, with a view to ‘rehabilitat[ing them] in national memory,’ as Bhagwan S. Gidwani, author of one such novel (*The Sword of Tipu Sultan* [1976]), puts it in an Author’s Note.¹⁰⁸ In doing so, it creates a narrative space for the telling of their stories. This re-telling from a different perspective effects a radical ideological transformation: the monstrous Calibans become national heroes; the enlightened Prosperos turn out to be the real culprits.

¹⁰⁸ Bhagwan S. Gidwani, *The Sword of Tipu Sultan: (A historical novel about the life and legend of Tipu Sultan of India)*, rpt. (1976; New Delhi: Allied Publishers Limited, 1990) xvii.

Formally, revisionist historical fiction uses a range of narrative modes and viewpoints: they include the third-person omniscient perspective in the realist *The Last Mughal* by G.D. Khosla; the first-person limited point of view in the autobiographical *The Devil's Wind* (1972) by Manohar Malgonkar; and the mixed perspective in the largely biographical *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* by Gidwani.¹⁰⁹ All these forms and viewpoints have been used to the advantage of the revisionist agenda. The third-person omniscient narrator of a realist novel is a god-like figure, who knows more than all the characters around. If knowledge is power, unlimited knowledge is then unlimited power. By fusing focaliser and narrator together, the realist-revisionist historical novel works to empower its protagonist who is more often than not one of the blackguards of colonial historiography such as the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar II, who was and still is believed (by the British) to have masterminded the Indian Mutiny/Great Rebellion of 1857.¹¹⁰ According to Diana Wallace, the biographical mode 'use[s] third-person or impersonal narration, and the point of view often shifts to other characters to convey information not available to the central figure [. . .]. The implication here is that the "history" conveyed [. . .] is objective, hence the impersonal narrator.'¹¹¹ It is precisely the effect that Gidwani seeks to achieve in *The Sword of Tipu Sultan*.

¹⁰⁹ G.D. Khosla, *The Last Mughal*, Orient Paperbacks (Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1969); Manohar Malgonkar, *The Devil's Wind* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1972); Subsequent references are to these editions.

¹¹⁰ A compelling work on the Great Rebellion/Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and its aftermath in the context of the life and times of Bahadur Shah Zafar II is *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006) by William Dalrymple.

¹¹¹ Wallace 136.

In contrast, the autobiographical mode, which employs first-person narration, is highly subjective ‘because of the intimate proximity of subject and object.’¹¹² The autobiographical ‘I’ is a composite ‘I.’ It is both the narrator (the present self) telling the story and the actor (the past self) whose story is being told. Positivist theorists of historical fiction, for whom the personal is *never* historical, are hardly likely to approve of this convergence of narrative (representation) and narrator (source of experience) in a fiction claiming for itself the generic term ‘historical.’ Revisionist historical fiction chooses to employ the autobiographical mode because, by displacing the trace of the author from the narrative, it attempts to grant the protagonist full narrative autonomy. The suggestion is that it is time the Empire ‘wrote back,’ re(-)placing colonial lies with authentic national narratives.

Revisionist historical fiction is thus a double-edged counter-colonial discourse. On the one hand, the third-person or impersonal narration of the realist and biographical modes lays bare what Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin call ‘[t]he myth of historical objectivity’ by offering an alternative/nationalist version of history in both *The Last Mughal* and *The Sword of Tipu Sultan*.¹¹³

¹¹² James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972) 39. In fact, Olney is referring here to Arthur Melville Clark (*Autobiography: Its Genesis and Phases* [London: Oliver and Boyd, 1935] 12) who is in turn arguing against Samuel Johnson. According to Clark, Johnson is not correct in maintaining that writing autobiography is easy ‘because of the intimate proximity of subject and object.’

¹¹³ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 356.

On the other hand, by granting its protagonist both experiential and representational/textual agency, the first-person narration of the autobiographical *The Devil's Wind* deconstructs the colonial trope of the submissive and treacherous native and, by extension, that of the colonial conquest as a drama without conflict. As Edward Said has forcefully argued in *Culture and Imperialism*,

[n]ever was it the case that the imperial encounter pitted an active Western intruder against a supine or inert non-Western native; there was *always* some form of active resistance and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out.¹¹⁴

If 'there was *always* some form of active resistance,' needless to say, there must have been organisers of resistance too. The so-called villains of colonial history such as Nana Saheb in *The Devil's Wind* have in most cases been the spearheads of native resistance.

When *The Conquered* by the British novelist Naomi Mitchison appeared in 1923, it provoked significant critical attention.¹¹⁵ For one critic, it marked 'the beginning of the new era.'¹¹⁶ As the very title suggests, the novel tells the story of the Roman conquest of Gaul in the first century BC, not from the perspective of the conqueror (Julius Caesar) but from that of the conquered (Meromic, a Gaul enslaved by the Romans). From this perspective, what one is able to see is not so

¹¹⁴ Said xii. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁵ Naomi Mitchison, *The Conquered* (1923; London: Jonathan Cape, 1932). Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹¹⁶ Peter Green, cited in Wallace 44.

much the triumphant march of Roman history with Caesar at its head but ‘the terrible human cost of the conquest’ suffered by the Gauls.¹¹⁷ This is a telling exposure of the inhumanity perpetrated by the (Roman) imperialist project. As a ‘coded critique’ of the British colonial enterprise, the same critic went on to say, *The Conquered* came ‘like a slap in the face to complacent Caesar-nurtured imperialists’ as it ‘forced readers to perform a radical revaluation of the ethics drummed into them during their school days.’¹¹⁸ Given its devastating exposure of the politics of colonial representation, it may be ventured, then, that revisionist historical fiction does no less than effect ‘a radical revaluation’ of the whole ideology backing up both the project of British colonial expansion in the Indian subcontinent and its self-validating discourses.

Considering its anti-colonial, ‘writing-back’ stance, one might assume that revisionist historical fiction is no more than a post-independence version of nationalist history fiction. That is not the case; in fact, revisionist historical fiction is closer to its revivalist rather than nationalist counterpart as far as the construction of Indian cultural identity is concerned. Like revivalist historical fiction, it imagines the nation variously, which is clear from its choice of the historical figures and the pasts they are associated with: Tipu Sultan and Bahadur Shah Zafar II were Muslim rulers, whereas Nana Saheb was a Hindu one. Although the Indian national self is predominantly a Hindu one in *The Devil’s*

¹¹⁷ Wallace 44.

¹¹⁸ The term ‘coded critique’ has been taken from Wallace (who uses it in her discussion of Naomi Mitchison) 43; Green, quoted in Wallace 45.

Wind, the novel does contain Muslim characters who are drawn with empathy. Unlike the national canvas in *Kanthapura* by Rao, the one in *The Devil's Wind* is filled with men and women who are taken from a range of castes, classes and communities. The nation in the latter is thus far more inclusive than even the one in the Lalu trilogy by Anand.

In his now classic study of national formation, which I have already referred to at the beginning of this chapter, Anderson defines nations as 'imagined communities.' On this point, there can possibly be no ground for disagreement with Anderson: the narrative construction of the nation in the Indian context is amply substantiated by a whole range of works such as *Imagining India*, *Reinventing India*, *Writing India*, and so on.¹¹⁹ What Anderson does not adequately address is the very implication of his own formulation, that is, the question of re-imagining the nation; for if it is possible to imagine a nation, by the same logic, it should also be possible to re-imagine it, if need be. The same is true of many of the critical works dealing with the fictional representation of the Indian nation. As Vijay Mishra has argued,

[n]ations are not fixed entities, national cultures are not absolute cultures, they are not governed, like religion, by perennial, universal values. Nations

¹¹⁹ Richard Cronin, *Imagining India* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1989); Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Bart Moore-Gilbert, ed., *Writing India, 1757-1990: The Literature of British India* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1996).

and cultures are products of their multifaceted histories, and they grow and change with the times.¹²⁰

Imagining the nation is an on-going process. Where is this process best captured?

From the discussion above, one answer would be the historical fiction of the nation concerned.

¹²⁰ Vijay Mishra, *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007) 20.

CHAPTER 2

The Emergence of Indian Historical Fiction: The Colonial Context

Dominance provokes revulsion and hostility as well.

Tapan Raychaudhuri¹

It is, needless to say, a primary sign of the nationalist consciousness that it will not find its own voice in histories written by foreign rulers and that it will set out to write for itself the account of its own past.

Partha Chatterjee²

This chapter outlines the trajectory that British-Indian relations followed in the course of the nineteenth century, the most crucial century for both coloniser ('Britain's Imperial Century,' to borrow from the title of a study by Ronald Hyam) and colonised, though for quite different reasons.³ It is intended to provide a sense of the historical circumstances in which Indian historical fiction emerged. The context in question was prepared as much by local as by external forces, involving both rulers and ruled in the process. In delineating this context, I also attempt briefly to tell the story of India as told by its white masters in the

¹ Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1988) 5.

² Partha Chatterjee, 77.

³ Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976).

nineteenth century. One needs to be familiar with how India was narrated/represented first by the East India Company and then by the colonial state to be able to see what it is that the Indian historical novel (especially in the pre-independence era) takes issue with, sets out to challenge, and how it does these. The tale of the Indian nation as Indian historical fiction in English tells it is perhaps best appreciated after its colonial version has been duly attended to.

The nineteenth century is one of the most fascinating periods in the history of colonial India, not only because it is crowded with events with far-reaching impacts on Indian life, but also because it is marked by strategic shifts from one ideological position to another, on both sides of the colonial divide. These ideological shifts provide a window into the twists and turns of coloniser-colonised relations over the century: now colluding, now colliding. At no point in its history was British-Indian relationship a simple, straightforward phenomenon. There have always been tensions, contradictions, and ambivalences—sometimes pronounced, sometimes muted. It is only in recent times, especially after the advent of postcolonial cultural studies in the late 1970s, however, that students of the colonial encounter are paying these disruptive features of the encounter a good deal of attention, going beyond simple binaries. As Thomas R. Metcalf contends, ‘[. . .] there existed, as the British contemplated India, an enduring tension between two ideals, one of similarity and the other of difference, which in turn shaped differing strategies of governance for the Raj.’⁴ The Indian version of the story is very similar, if not identical. Tapan Raychaudhuri argues, with

⁴ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) x.

particular reference to the western-educated Bengalis of the nineteenth century, '[. . .] one notes an all-pervasive concern, almost obsessive, in their social and intellectual life – an anxiety to assess European culture in the widest sense of the term as something to be emulated or rejected.'⁵ These are, however, not the only areas of convergence between the two accounts of the colonial encounter. Interestingly, in both versions of the story, there is a porous middle ground. 'Sometimes, indeed,' Metcalf suggests, 'they [the British] simultaneously accommodated both views in their thinking, making it perilously difficult to discern any larger system at all.'⁶ On the Indian side, 'Sometimes a cautious and careful assessment is recommended as a basis for adopting selectively what might be acceptable in the Indian context.'⁷

In view of the structural correspondence between the two narratives, the colonial encounter is best understood as a dynamic process of negotiation between ruler and ruled. It is never, as is so commonly assumed, 'a simple dialectic of domination and resistance,' though the relationship of the parties concerned is no doubt differentially structured in terms of power.⁸ The encounter, in the 'contact zone,' as Mary Louise Pratt describes the site of interaction, facilitates rather than inhibits what Pratt, borrowing from the Cuban ethnologist Fernando de Ortiz, calls 'transculturation,' the ramifications of which outlast the

⁵ Raychaudhuri xi.

⁶ Metcalf, *Ideologies* x.

⁷ Raychaudhuri xi.

⁸ D.A. Washbrook, 'India, 1818-1860: The Two Faces of Colonialism,' in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter, vol. 3 (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 397.

formal closure of imperialism the world over.⁹ That is why the question of colonialism/imperialism is ‘still [so] relevant,’ even though ‘the imperial structure has been dismantled in political terms.’¹⁰ In the following sections, I attempt to construct a broad outline of the major shifts in British-Indian relations as they evolved during the course of the nineteenth century. My contention is that a careful perusal of what Gauri Viswanathan designates ‘the changing structure of relationships,’ which is so clearly in evidence in the shift from a relationship of collusion in the first half of the century to one of collision in the second half, is a vital key to understanding the emergence of Indian historical fiction in its appropriate historical context.¹¹

Relationship of Collusion

The Charter Act of 1813 may well be taken as inaugurating a new era in the history of British-Indian relations. The right of conquest, which had so far defined the British attitude to India, was now replaced by (or re-placed as?) a concern for

⁹ See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) and Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁰ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (1989; London and New York: Routledge, 2002) 6. The emergence of postcolonial cultural studies in the late 1970s is just one of the many proofs of the continuing relevance of the colonial question to contemporary socio-political reality.

¹¹ Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989) 4.

the wellbeing of the conquered. The contour of the new relationship is most effectively captured in the words of Charles Grant, who was undoubtedly one of the masterminds behind the Act:

The primary object of Great Britain, let it be acknowledged, was rather to discover what could be obtained from her Asiatic subjects, than how they could be benefited. In process of time it was found expedient to examine how they might be benefited in order that we might continue to hold the advantages which we at first derived from them. [. . .] [Their] happiness is committed to our care.¹²

Insofar as modern colonialism was driven by the force of ‘an expansionist capitalism, to which racial oppression was integral,’ one may justifiably doubt whether Britain was ever ‘committed’ to the ‘happiness’ of her colonial subjects.¹³ But there can be no doubt that by the turn of the eighteenth century both the new rulers and the new elite—decidedly the most conspicuous product of the colonial encounter—had come to see the colonial intervention as a blessing for India. Raja Rammohun Roy, ‘the man of the moment,’ as the historian Percival Spear has so astutely described him, unfailingly extolled the virtues of British rule in contrast to ‘the Mogul government.’¹⁴ After centuries of darkness,

¹² Charles Grant, cited in Viswanathan 26. From the British point of view, the new relationship can be defined as one of trusteeship.

¹³ Benita Parry, ‘The institutionalization of postcolonial studies,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006) 70; Grant, cited in Viswanathan 26.

¹⁴ Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of Modern India: 1740-1947* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1965) 207; Raja Rammohun Roy, quoted in Bruce Carlisle Robertson, ‘The English Writings of Raja Rammohan Ray,’ in *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (New York: Columbia UP, 2003) 29. No name is possibly so frequently misspelt as that of

despotism, and degradation, a new age had finally dawned ‘under the milder, more enlightened and more liberal policy of the British Government.’¹⁵ It is this shared conviction that I mean to convey through my use of the term ‘relationship of collusion’ that would, with small adjustments, endure up until the Indian Mutiny of 1857.¹⁶

It is not that there had not been any other attempts prior to the Charter Act of 1813 to (re-)define the nature of relationship supposed to obtain between conqueror and conquered. To be sure, there had been quite a few, beginning with William Pitt (Lord Chatham), who initiated ministerial intervention in East Indian affairs while briefly in power between 1766 and 1768.¹⁷ But they were, at best, half-hearted, vague, shrouded in confusion and hence largely ineffectual. After half a century of trial and error, the British were finally able to devise a legal apparatus in the form of the Charter Act of 1813 that set the pattern of the metro-colony relations in unequivocal terms. In addition, the Act clearly spelt out where the State stood with the East India Company on the Indian question. Both relations would, however, undergo a radical change following the momentous crisis of 1857.

Opposing theories/theses are in circulation as to how the British rose to (political) power in India. One extreme British view maintains that it was *not* a

Rammohun Roy. This chapter contains three samples (including the one I have employed here). I have, however, used the one Roy signed his letters with.

¹⁵ Roy, cited in Robertson 29.

¹⁶ From the Indian/nationalist perspective, the Indian/Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 is called the Great Rebellion/Uprising. I shall be using these terms interchangeably.

¹⁷ H.V. Bowen, ‘British India, 1765-1813: The Metropolitan Context,’ in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P.J. Marshall, vol. 2 (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 536.

deliberate act; it just happened, *absent-mindedly*.¹⁸ At the other extreme is the view that it was the outcome of a carefully planned expansionist venture, driven by capitalist/liberal economy. However, given the bloody rise of the British to (political) supremacy in India, the conciliatory note of the Charter Act may come as a pleasant surprise.¹⁹ During the first half of the eighteenth century, British interests in India had essentially been commercial, limited to, in the apt words of H.V. Bowen, 'trade for trade's sake.'²⁰ The British in India were then quiet traders, with hardly any ambitions other than commercial. The second half of the eighteenth century saw them fundamentally changing roles, moving from apparently peaceful trade to wars and conquests, despite repeated warnings from home to the contrary.²¹ A direct consequence of these new activities was that the British became 'a player in the complex diplomacy of post-Mughal India.'²² By 1765, they were engaged in such diverse activities as managing the civil administration of Bengal and the provinces affiliated with it, protecting the Wazir of Oudh by keeping garrisons in his dominions, serving regional rulers as bankers or military chiefs, and so on.²³ By no stretch of imagination can any of these doings be possibly characterised as philanthropic. They are, in effect, some of the

¹⁸ J.R. Seeley famously wrote: 'Our acquisition of India was made blindly. Nothing great that has ever been done by Englishmen was done so unintentionally, so accidentally, as the conquest of India. There has indeed been little enough of calculation or contrivance in our colonisation.' *The Expansion of England*, ed. John Gross (1881-82; Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971) 143.

¹⁹ I discuss in detail the two primary concerns of the Charter Act of 1813 – humanitarianism and reform – below.

²⁰ Bowen, 'British India' 532.

²¹ P.J. Marshall, 'The British in Asia: Trade to Dominion, 1700-1765,' in Marshall, *The Oxford History of the British Empire* 491.

²² Marshall, 'The British in Asia' 504.

²³ Marshall, 'The British in Asia' 487-507.

most visible instances of what Robert Travers, following the ‘drain theory’ of pre-independence nationalist elite, describes as ‘the systematic plunder of India by an alien power.’²⁴ Why did the colonial masters then become so concerned about the welfare of the Indians after the turn of the century when India was just a few wars away from almost fully becoming British India? How does one explain such a dramatic change of heart?

In his excellent study of *Ram Mohan Roy: Social, Political and Religious Reform in 19th Century India*, S. Cromwell Crawford explains the factors responsible for the formation of this new attitude of trusteeship:

First there was the public indignation against the ‘nabobs’ – the Company’s officials who plundered the Indian economy during the time of Clive and Hastings. These *nouveaux riches* flaunted their ill-gotten gains through lavish living back home. Parliamentary investigations in the 1780s revealed what was suspected: corruption and mismanagement on the part of the East India Company from the directors on down.²⁵

A second factor which moved the British to consider themselves guardians and trustees of Indian interests was the rise of humanitarian ideals in the eighteenth century, accompanied by an eagerness for administrative reform.²⁶

The humanitarians and administrative reformers were not the only interest groups at the back of the new outlook and, by extension, the Charter Act of 1813.

²⁴ Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 10.

²⁵ S. Cromwell Crawford *Ram Mohan Roy: Social, Political and Religious Reform in 19th Century India* (1984; New York: Paragon, 1987) 19.

²⁶ Crawford 20.

Other more powerful groups such as free traders, evangelists, utilitarians, and so on, were also at work. Together, they ‘created a distinctive ideology of imperial governance shaped by the ideals of liberalism,’ the political philosophy gaining ascendancy at the time.²⁷ The following brief review of the Act reveals how seamless an embodiment of the liberal spirit it is.

First, the East India Company has to be reformed, if it is to be entrusted with the responsibility of ruling its recent territorial possessions. With a view to achieving this end, the Act proclaimed indubitable sovereignty of the Crown of the United Kingdom over British India.²⁸ The proclamation was clearly intended to caution the servants of the East India Company that they were accountable for what they did in India, not only to the Court of Directors in London but also to the British public. The message was unambiguous: do not misuse the power and privileges you enjoy in India.

Secondly, the Act withdrew the monopoly of the Indian trade from the East India Company. The decision to curtail the Indian monopoly was taken under steady pressure from British merchants and manufacturers who were by then desperate to have free access to Indian markets, following, on the one hand, the loss of markets in the wake of war in Europe and North America, and, on the other, industrial revolution at home.²⁹ There is substantial evidence that the British merchants and manufacturers were not the only beneficiaries of the

²⁷ Metcalf, *Ideologies* 28.

²⁸ P.J. Marshall, *Problems of Empire: Britain and India 1757-1813*, ed. G. R. Elton (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968) 31.

²⁹ Marshall, *Problems of Empire* 100.

opportunities thus created. The Indian commercial communities were quick to react and exploit them to the full.³⁰ The Industrial Revolution and the setback it produced in the economic relation of India with Britain, writes Eric Stokes, resulted in a radical change in the rationale of political dominion.³¹ Stokes adds:

Instead of providing a flow of tribute – a conception which survived at least until the end of the eighteenth century – the British power in India came to be regarded after 1800 as no more than an accessory, an instrument for ensuring the necessary conditions of law and order by which the potentially vast Indian market could be conquered for British industry. This transformation of economic purpose carried with it a new, expansive, and aggressive attitude, which the French, who were its later masters, termed that of *la mission civilisatrice*.³²

Thirdly, measures have to be taken and provisions made to promote the general welfare of the many millions under the government of the East India Company. Hence the Act opened up the territories under direct control of the Company to a greater penetration of missionary activities. The long debate as to how to justify colonial conquest was thus brought to a decisive conclusion: India receives the wonderful gifts of (western) civilisation in return of her conquest by the British. The surest way for the civilising mission to work in India is not, as the earlier generation of Edmund Burke and his likes had tended to believe, to let the

³⁰ In *River of Smoke* (2011), the second volume of the *Ibis* trilogy, Amitav Ghosh has brilliantly captured the Indo-Chinese-European trade that flourished on the Indian Ocean at the time.

³¹ Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, rpt. (1959; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969) xiii.

³² Stokes xiii.

Indian society be as it had (supposedly) been for centuries, but to westernise it in the widest sense of the term.³³

Finally, as if to negate the possibility of its commitment to advancing the interests of the Indians being dismissed as merely rhetorical, the Act not only permitted missionary activities in British India but also obligated the Company to spend a substantial amount of money yearly on education: ‘The reformers hoped that the security and happiness of Indians were to be achieved not by leaving them to their traditional ways, as had long been Company practice, but by introducing them to the benefits of western civilisation.’³⁴

Perhaps it is not entirely correct to say that the westernisation of the Indian society began strictly after the British Parliament had passed the Charter Act of 1813.³⁵ The process had, in fact, started as early as the 1770s, when Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General, took initiatives to reform the administrative and judicial systems of Bengal along western lines. But eighteenth-century reforms on western lines were different from those of the next century in two important respects. First, westernisation in the eighteenth century was usually a local affair – ‘part of a wider pattern of crisis management,’ as Robert Travers

³³ It is this humanitarian (translated into anglicising/westernising) concern that sets the Act apart from earlier (legislative) attempts at reform. Its reformist agenda includes not only those who will rule British India but also those who will be ruled. Only a two-way reform will produce the desired result. The liberal attitude is neatly captured in the words of Stokes: ‘The missionaries of English civilization in India stood openly for a policy of “assimilation”. Britain was to stamp her image upon India. The physical and mental distance separating East and West was to be annihilated by the discoveries of science, by commercial intercourse, and by transplanting the genius of English laws and English education.’ xiii-xiv.

³⁴ H.V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756 – 1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006) 204.

³⁵ I am using ‘westernisation’ as an umbrella term here, to cover both ‘anglicisation’ and ‘evangelisation.’ But it is important not to conflate it always with ‘modernisation.’

sees it in the case of Hastings' reforms – undertaken by the Company officials in accordance with local expediency, often keeping the Court of Directors in London in the dark about what was actually going on in India.³⁶ In contrast, nineteenth-century westernisation was a conscious State policy, which the Company was under strict obligation both to adhere to and translate into practice. Secondly, although the main objective of both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attempts at westernisation was undeniably to safeguard British interests in India, the commitment of those of the nineteenth century to promoting the happiness and well-being of the Indians was sincere, if not altogether altruistic.

Being part of State policy, nineteenth-century westernisation was keen to penetrate the whole of Indian life. 'The whole of the Western mind had to be introduced into India.'³⁷ The (conservative) Burkean ideal that the British should not attempt 'shaking ancient Establishments' of India lost ground to the force of the new (liberal) reformist agenda, championed by such influential figures as the humanitarian William Wilberforce, a close friend of Pitt, and the evangelist Charles Grant, an influential stakeholder of the Company.³⁸ Both were also prominent members of the Clapham Sect, the wellspring of evangelicalism in Britain and its tireless promoter in the British colonies overseas. The Indian institution that came to be seen as needing urgent attention was the Hindu

³⁶ Travers 100.

³⁷ Stokes 33.

³⁸ Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke: India: 1774-1785*, ed. P.J. Marshall, vol. 5 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) 179; Stokes 28. For a brilliant deconstruction of the so-called 'conservative' and 'liberal' paradigms in the 'imperial' context of India, see Uday Sing Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

religion, supposed to be, in the words of Wilberforce, ‘one grand abomination.’³⁹ The ills of the Hindu religion could only be removed, in the opinion of the evangelical fathers, if an organised effort was made for the introduction and spread of Christianity in India. In other words, Indians (read Hindus), ‘long sunk in darkness, vice and misery,’ as Charles Grant had taken the moral condition of the Hindus to be in his 1792 treatise, had to be evangelised.⁴⁰ With the establishment of an Indian church in 1814, a most vital step was taken towards the realisation of the evangelist programme.⁴¹

During the next decade and a half, orientalist interests remained strong enough not to let the westernising programme have a smooth sailing. It was only during the Bentinck era (1828-35), unanimously applauded as the ‘Age of Reform’ in both colonial and national historiography, that the liberal spirit asserted itself to the full.

C.A. Bayly has usefully discussed the reforms of the Bentinck era under three headings: economical, social, and educational.⁴² As the economical reforms pertain more to British than to Indian interests, they are left out of the present discussion.⁴³ As regards his social reforms, William Cavendish Bentinck took a firm stance against a series of controversial practices prevalent among the Hindus such as the ritual murder and robbery associated with the wandering religious cult

³⁹ William Wilberforce, cited in Stokes 31.

⁴⁰ Grant, quoted in Stokes 34.

⁴¹ Stokes 28.

⁴² C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 121-122.

⁴³ In the manner of a Marxist historian, Bayly regards the other categories of reform as deriving from the economical ones.

of the Thugs, infanticide, human sacrifice, and so on.⁴⁴ Of these corrective measures, however, none has come to evoke the image of Bentinck the reformer so powerfully as the outlawing of *sati* (widow-burning) in 1829. This legislative measure is regarded by many as his most memorable achievement.

The image of Bentinck the westerniser is, however, most effectively captured in his educational policy, and it has proved to have been a far more forceful catalyst for the emergence of modern India than any of his other policies. With the unwavering support of such committed westernisers as Thomas B. Macaulay and Charles Trevelyan behind him, Bentinck could confidently declare:

His Lordship in Council is of the opinion that the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science amongst the natives of India and that *all* the funds appropriated for the purposes of education would be best employed on English education alone.⁴⁵

Almost a year before his educational policy was finally formalised and made public, Bentinck had written to Mancy, ‘general education is my panacea for the regeneration of India.’⁴⁶ In the light of the resolution (quoted above) stating his educational policy, it is possible to see what Bentinck had meant by ‘general education.’ ‘English education alone’ was deemed a sound investment.

⁴⁴ For a wonderful ‘writing back’ to the colonial discourse on the Thugs, especially *The Deceivers* (1952) by John Masters, see Tabish Khair, *The Thing about Thugs* (New Delhi: Fourth Estate, 2010).

⁴⁵ William Cavendish Bentinck, Resolution on Education, 7 March 1835, cited in David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773-1835* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969) 248. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁶ Bentinck to Mancy, 1 June 1834, quoted in Spear 145.

As if all this effort were not adequate to ensure its success, Bentinck gave the modernisation movement one extra push by replacing Persian with English as the language to be used in the higher courts and government dealing.⁴⁷

The next two decades were virtually an ‘extension of the Bentinck régime.’⁴⁸ Except for a few minor modifications, his successors followed the ideal of westernisation in educational as well as other policies. Yet a subtle change in British attitude can be detected from the 1840s onward. The spirit of benevolence that had initially accompanied the modernising impulse was steadily developing into an inflated sense of cultural and racial superiority. The horizon was darkening. Unwittingly, the stage was being prepared for the enactment of the catastrophe of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. In the following extract, Percival Spear has neatly captured the attitudinal change of the British (indicative of an ideological shift) taking place during the period:

A certain hardening was perceptible in the whole tone of the British government, indeed in the attitude of Europeans generally to India. The advocates of ‘westernism’ became more strident and aggressive, the conviction grew that nothing good was to be found in the Indian past, and that all reform must be *western* reform. The earlier faith of men of high position in a quick and favourable response to the ideas of the West, along with the patience and willingness to wait, faded into indifference and scepticism. India had little to contribute to the future from her own past it

⁴⁷ Spear 145.

⁴⁸ Spear 146.

was more and more widely believed, and no serious intention of abandoning it in favour of the western present. [. . .] In the eyes of the governing class both in England and India, India ceased to be the scene of an impending cultural transformation, to become a conquered territory peopled by communities wedded obstinately to obscure and archaic cultures, strange in their habits, mysterious in their thoughts and hostile to all change. The myth of spontaneous reform was giving place to the counter-myth of the unchanging East.⁴⁹

As can be inferred from the passage above, British-Indian relations would have a very different configuration after the Great Rebellion of 1857. I deal with the new configuration in a later section. For the present, I will briefly discuss a classic Victorian text in terms of its depiction of the relationship of collusion.

Representation of the Relationship of Collusion in Jane Eyre

Jane Eyre (1847), one of the classics of Victorian fiction by Charlotte Brontë, has attracted a good deal of attention from both postcolonial creative writers and critics.⁵⁰ The re-writing of the novel by Jean Rhys from a postcolonial-feminist

⁴⁹ Spear 149-50.

⁵⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Richard J. Dunn, 2nd ed. (1971; New York and London: Norton, 1987). Subsequent references are to this edition.

perspective is perhaps the most known case in point.⁵¹ The text is also rich in significance as far as Indo-British relationship in the pre-Uprising period is concerned.

Near the end of *Jane Eyre*, Brontë introduces a male character called St. John Rivers, who is bent on going, and eventually goes, to India to win the benighted Indians over to the path of light and virtue through the teachings of Christianity.⁵² St. John asks Jane to accompany him to India as his wife so that the two can implement ‘with effect—with power—the mission of [the] great Master.’⁵³ Jane declines the offer. By her refusal to join him in his ‘missionary labours,’ Jane (as well as her creator) makes it abundantly clear that she does not approve not so much of what St. John wants to do in India as of the way he wants to do it.⁵⁴ Jane rejects St. John for the very thing that he considers his best qualification as a missionary, his ‘inexorable as death’ belief in and dedication to his ‘vocation,’ which is to dispel ignorance with knowledge, war with peace, bondage with freedom, and superstition with religion.⁵⁵ In other words, St. John has not the slightest doubt that Christianity does have the moral and spiritual potency to mould the character of the Indians (read Hindus). It is this belief in the

⁵¹ For an overview of twentieth- and twenty-first-century critical responses to *Jane Eyre*, see chapter 1 in Cora Kaplan, *Victoriana – Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 2007).

⁵² Is there a touch of irony in the name of St. John Rivers, for the surname is quite easily changeable with ‘reverse,’ with the implication that here is a character who reverses the ideals of Saint John the Apostle who serves as a patron saint of friendship?

⁵³ Brontë 357.

⁵⁴ Brontë 354.

⁵⁵ Brontë 321, 329. For a fuller discussion of the point, see chapter 2 in Francis G. Hutchins, *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1967).

malleability of the Indian character that formed the cornerstone of the relationship of collusion that obtained between the British and the Indians in the pre-Mutiny period.

Indian Response to Modernisation

Before I chart what I have called the relationship of collision, it is important to raise the question of how Indians saw the massive modernisation programme of the first half (or, more precisely, of the second quarter) of the nineteenth century. Just as the British opinion was divided (orientalist versus anglicist) as to what constituted the best means for the modernisation of India, the Indian response to the phenomenon was likewise varied. Before entering into a discussion of the issue, it is important to take note of the following caveat.

The immediate geographical setting of the modernist agenda was colonial Bengal, then locus of British power in India. Accordingly, the colonial policy had its greatest impact on the Bengali society, though it could not possibly have affected all different social classes and groups to the same extent. With the old feudal aristocracy on the verge of extinction, the most sustained response to the scheme of Indian modernisation came from the quarter from which it was most likely to come – the emerging middle class of western-educated (Hindu)

Bengalis. The Indian response is thus a (selective) response of the largely Calcutta-based Bengali (Hindu) intelligentsia, the most conspicuous product of the colonial rule: its most loyal collaborator as well as its most ruthless critic.⁵⁶ In accepting the Bengali experience of modernisation as emblematic of the Indian one, I am following, I should add, the path taken by many scholars in a number of allied fields, though none has perhaps offered a more cogent justification for the view than Ashis Nandy in his inquiry into the psychology of colonialism:

The examples I shall use will be mainly from Bengal, not merely because the Bengali culture best illustrated—and dramatized—the colonial predicament in India’s political, cultural and creative life, but also because it was in Bengal that the Western intrusion was the deepest and the colonial presence the longest.⁵⁷

The Indian response to the westernisation project is usually taken to have three mutually exclusive strands within it: conservative, liberal, and radical. From an analytical perspective, such a categorisation is more convenient than accurate. While the radical position (represented by the Young Bengal – a small group of ardent westernisers based in the Hindu College, Calcutta) had always been

⁵⁶ Calcutta is now called Kolkata.

⁵⁷ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, 1st paperback ed. (1983; Delhi: Oxford UP, 1988) 18n27. Examples of work using the Bengali experience of modernisation as a representative one for India include: Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986); *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1993); Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1995); Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1997). Works by Tapan Raychaudhuri, S. Cromwell Crawford, and David Kopf cited above also belong to the same tradition.

distinct, though short-lived and limited in influence, the other two were not so conclusively so, especially in relation to each other.⁵⁸ They shared much more than differed. The increasing polarisation of the two can largely be attributed to the aggressive westernising mission of the Bentinck era itself. In all fairness to the (so-called) conservative position, it was opposed not so much to the idea of modernisation as to the ‘intrusive forms of Westernization.’⁵⁹

I have initially characterised the British-Indian relationship in the first half of the nineteenth century as one of collusion. From a broad historical perspective, it is still a valid characterisation. The complexity, if not diversity, of Indian response to the modernisation policies of the period does, however, require it be fine-tuned, so that its finer nuances do not lose out to the general pattern. More importantly, given the representational politics of colonial historiography famous for its stereotyping of the native, there is much sense in preferring a detailed picture to a simple overview of the time. For example, the Indian response to the westernisation programme is consistently depicted in colonial history as one of total acceptance, with Raja Rammohun Roy, one of the first Indian reformers, represented as the representative Indian figure.⁶⁰

The westernisers were not the only troupe on the Indian stage to act out the script of Indian modernity. Long before Bentinck and his epigones appeared on the scene, the orientalist had already devised and been practising a formula for

⁵⁸ The Hindu College was established in 1817, renamed the Presidency College in 1855, and then made into a public university, called the Presidency University, in 2010.

⁵⁹ Kopf 271.

⁶⁰ See note 66 below.

the modernisation of the Indian society, which the emerging intelligentsia found agreeable both in terms of social reform and psychological needs. Although ‘split’ between the ‘classical group’ who supported ‘an elitist, Sanskritic high-culture program’ and the ‘vernacularists’ who chose ‘a scheme that would reach the masses chiefly through the indigenous languages,’ the orientalist espoused what David Kopf has called ‘the engrafting theory’ of westernisation, as opposed to the westernisers who took it for granted that the modernisation process involved nothing less than thorough assimilation to the western (British, to be precise) way of life.⁶¹ The orientalist believed ‘that modernization could be achieved by pouring the new wine of modern functions into the old bottles of Indian cultural traditions.’⁶² Given the fact that ‘Indian traditions had continually changed to meet one challenge after another,’ they concluded, ‘it was hardly necessary to substitute alien traditions for those of the Hindus.’⁶³ Hence they set out to modernise India through ‘syncretic schemes.’⁶⁴

Perception of modernity, it can be argued, was an integral part of the colonial experience. The new intelligentsia was no doubt the product of the new colonial order: urban, middle-class, western-educated. It was also the main beneficiary of colonial opportunities. Yet the majority of its members did not (in fact, did not want to) totally abandon traditional norms and practices. They were ready to accept as well as effect modernisation but to a certain tolerable extent.

⁶¹ Kopf 149, 151.

⁶² Kopf 205.

⁶³ Kopf 205.

⁶⁴ Kopf 246.

To be completely cut off from one's own cultural roots was just unthinkable. They took to the orientalist brand of modernisation positively because it did not entail a complete break with tradition. Rather it provided them with, to borrow from Ashis Nandy, 'categories, concepts and, even, defences of mind with which to turn the West into a reasonably manageable vector within the traditional world views still outside the span of modern ideas of universalism.'⁶⁵ In other words, the native intelligentsia found in the orientalist model an ideal solution as to how to reconcile the rival claims of an alien modernity and an indigenous tradition.

Colonial historiography, as I have briefly argued above, tends to present the Indian response to the westernising policies of the Bentinck regime as one of general acceptance.⁶⁶ This was certainly not the case. Apart from a small minority of intellectuals who saw their entire cultural inheritance as unwholesome, the local intelligentsia had always been syncretist vis-à-vis the modernisation of India. They were, to borrow a (paradoxical) term which the Indian historian Amal Tripathi has used with regard to the mid-century Bengali social reformer and educationist Iswarchandra Vidyasagar (1820–89), 'traditional modernisers.'⁶⁷ As such, they could hardly appreciate what Bentinck was bent on doing to the Hindu socio-religious institutions. A series of legislations were passed to purge the Hindu religion of the superstitions and corruptions it had (supposedly)

⁶⁵ Nandy xiii.

⁶⁶ A classic example is Spear 208-209. A change is discernible in recent scholarship such as Bayly 163.

⁶⁷ Amal Tripathi, cited in Bharati Ray, 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929,' in *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, ed. Bharati Ray, Oxford India Paperbacks (1995; Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997) 180n10.

accumulated over centuries. The crisis came to a head in 1829, when the practice of *sati* was legally proscribed. More than any other corrective measure of the Bentinck era, the *sati* Regulation roused, as had been anticipated, a deep distrust among a vast majority of the intelligentsia of the rationale of the modernist crusade. They wondered: what are the English doing? Are they really trying to do us good or harm? Is it reform or something else in the name of reform? Social discourse could no longer be free from such disturbing questions. The initial distrust produced what it was expected to produce:

While the English were contending for power, they deemed it politic to allow universal toleration, and to respect our religion, but having obtained the supremacy their first act is a violation of their professions, and the next will be, like the Mahommedan conquerors, to force upon us their own Religion.⁶⁸

The English were now attempting what the Muslim conquerors had previously done to the Hindu tradition. The white penetration had to be resisted, the concerned intelligentsia decided. The result was the formation of the *Dharma Sabha* (Religious Society) in 1830, the earliest organised Indian response to the growing British hegemony.⁶⁹

In terms of concrete achievement, the *Sabha* was obviously a failure. At a deeper level, that is, at the level of socio-cultural dynamics, it was not. Its very formation tells a story which colonial historiography finds it difficult to come to

⁶⁸ Bentinck, cited in Crawford 111.

⁶⁹ Bayly characterises the association of Dharma Sabha as ‘neo-orthodox.’ In my opinion, it is a historically more accurate description than the one suggested by the term ‘conservative.’ 74.

terms with. It is a story of tensions, contradictions, and ambivalences, which British-Indian relations had never been free of, neither in the first half of the nineteenth century when the relationship was predominantly one of collusion nor in the second half when it increasingly became one of conflict.

Relationship of Collision

In his important study *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India*, Francis G. Hutchins charts the changing roles of the British in India over a period of a century and a half, noting three such roles. The first two – those in the pre-Mutiny period – have as their central idea post-Enlightenment universalism (in both its conservative and liberal configurations), which assumes that human nature is the same both across cultures and times, while the third one – the one in the post-Rebellion period – can be characterised as informed by the (presumed) racial superiority of the British. The shift is thus from a cultural view of humanity to one based on racial hierarchies. Cultures are mutable; racial attributes are permanent. ‘India was conquered for England,’ writes Hutchins, ‘by merchant adventurers such as Robert Clive and Warren Hastings, and gentlemen warriors such as Lord Wellesley and Sir Charles Napier, who thought of England’s

position in India in terms of profit and national advantage.’⁷⁰ These were men who ‘conquered India but did not despise it.’⁷¹ They were followed by a group of liberal reformers who came from a British culture strongly infused with evangelistic and utilitarian doctrines, and were thus fired by ‘optimistic hopes for the rapid transformation of Indian society.’⁷² It is this reforming group, according to Hutchins, that ‘laid the groundwork for the justification for Britain’s permanent control of India.’⁷³ Significantly, conquest and reform were roles of the pre-Uprising period. India had not yet become what it would eventually become – in the now famous words of Benjamin Disraeli, ‘the jewel in the crown of England.’⁷⁴ A distinctly different role emerged after the Mutiny of 1857:

Once the target of reformers, India had now become the hope of reactionaries. The man who now came to India was likely to be a man excited by the desire to rule rather than reform, concerned with British might, not Indian hopes; a man to whom the permanent subjection of India to the British yoke was not a repugnant thought.⁷⁵

It cannot be denied that the events of 1857 did contribute to the formation of the changed British role in India. Indeed, there was disillusionment on both sides. The British were shocked to see the Indians so frenetically engaged in driving out those who had, they thought, for decades now been labouring to

⁷⁰ Hutchins 3.

⁷¹ Hutchins 3.

⁷² Hutchins 10.

⁷³ Hutchins 16.

⁷⁴ *The Jewel in the Crown* (1988) is also the title of the first of the four novels by Paul Scott collectively called the *Raj Quartet*.

⁷⁵ Hutchins xi.

provide Indian society with all the liberal gifts of modern civilisation: rule of law, order, progress and, above all, modernity itself. How could the Indians be so irrational, so stupid, and so ungrateful a people? On the other hand, the Indians were convinced that the alien rulers were in fact determined to convert all Indians into Christians. What could be the meaning of greased cartridges other than a secret design to ruin the religious faith of Hindus and Muslims alike?⁷⁶ Had not we suspected such a heinous scheme right from the beginning? That such an atmosphere of mutual distrust would prove immensely conducive to the growth of racial antagonism is no surprise at all.

Nevertheless it will be naïve to assume that the change of British role from reformer to ruler (which was, in effect, a change of attitude to Indians) in the second half of the nineteenth century was absolute and brought about by the Mutiny alone. Neither was the case. The British did continue to devise and implement a series of reforms after the Rebellion. But it was ‘carried through in an entirely different spirit from the age of reform of the thirties’⁷⁷:

In the Bentinck period the movement of modernization had been regarded as a co-operative effort between the British and a corresponding Indian middle class who were to be ‘interpreters between us and the millions

⁷⁶ It is commonly believed both by British and Indian scholars that it was the greased cartridge that set the Mutiny of 1857 in motion. For a fuller discussion of the point, see my penultimate chapter on *The Devil’s Wind* below.

⁷⁷ Stokes 269.

whom we govern'. [. . .] Now reform was to be carried in the spirit of racial conquest that succeeded the Mutiny [. . .].⁷⁸

While the Uprising did to a considerable extent contribute to the genesis of the new spirit and, by extension, to the formation of the new relationship of collision between coloniser and colonised, it was, to be sure, part of a larger dynamic. To begin with, mid-Victorian England was not the England of the early years of the century. Its intellectual as well as political climate was changing, moving away from innovation toward conformity. The culture of debate was being replaced by one of compliance. One obvious example of this change from the domain of culture is the banishment of all controversial issues from the stage: 'Domestic political and class conflict, depictions of the royal family and politicians, references to the Irish problem or biblical subjects and religious controversies were all banned.'⁷⁹ Instead, imperial (exotic) themes came to dominate the stage. The most visible sign of the emerging trend is, however, to be located in the steady attenuation of liberalism. Progressively, liberalism could neither retain its conceptual coherence nor have so strong a hold on English life and thought as it had had before. As Thomas Metcalf has written:

By 1860 it was no longer the heady, intoxicating brew it had been during the 1830's [*sic*], when a group of earnest young men, brash, self-confident, and aggressive, had set out to remodel England according to the principles

⁷⁸ Stokes 269.

⁷⁹ John M. Mackenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures,' in Porter, *The Oxford History of British Empire* 276.

of Bentham and Ricardo. The prosperous, complacent England of mid-century aroused little reforming enthusiasm.⁸⁰

The abatement of reformist impulse in the context of English prosperity and complacency points to some other, more deep-rooted, anxieties. Three of them are worth taking into consideration. First, England was, at this juncture of her history, moving towards political democracy. Measures were being taken to enfranchise the working classes. The Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884 gave the vote to urban and rural working class, respectively. But the political empowerment of the uneducated mass appeared to a number of prominent liberals to be a violation rather than an endorsement of the true spirit of liberalism. They could plainly see the ‘dangers’ of political democracy:

Because I am a Liberal and know that by pure and clear intelligence alone can the cause of true progress be promoted, I regard as one of the greatest dangers with which this country can be threatened a proposal to subvert the existing order of things, and to transfer power from the hands of property and intelligence to the hands of men whose whole life is necessarily occupied in daily struggles for existence.⁸¹

Is Robert Lowe, the author of the now famous text, contradicting himself? The question is readily answered, if one looks a little closely at what liberalism proposes to realise. Political emancipation is not a liberal agenda. Nor is the

⁸⁰ Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1964) viii.

⁸¹ Robert Lowe, cited in Metcalf, *Ideologies* 56. See also John Roach, ‘Liberalism and the Victorian Intelligentsia,’ *Cambridge Historical Journal* 13 (1957): 58-81.

sharing of political power a liberal practice. If there is any scope for democracy or egalitarianism in liberalism, it is to be expected in socio-economic rather than political arena. In its most authentic incarnation, then, liberalism is enlightened despotism. If such is the real political orientation of liberalism in the metropolitan centre, how *(il)liberal* its colonial counterpart will be, can easily be imagined. It was not John Stuart Mill but Rowe and his likes who were true to the liberal tradition. With an extensive first-hand colonial experience to fall back on, these liberals could pick up on ‘the authoritarian strand within liberalism.’⁸²

A second, but related, source of anxiety was the question of colonial self-government.⁸³ In the early decades of the nineteenth century, colonial rule was justified on the ground (one among many) that it was preparing the natives for self-government, just as parents take care of children till they are able to take care of themselves. As Thomas Macaulay had put it in his memorable speech (1833) on the government of India:

It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not. But

⁸² Metcalf, *Ideologies* 56.

⁸³ I am well aware of the fact that Britain treated her imperial possessions *differentially*. See note 85 below.

never will I attempt to avert or to retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history.⁸⁴

It may not be possible to establish what Macaulay himself would have done if he had had the opportunity to decide the fraught question of colonial self-determination. But some of his leading successors (politicians and intellectuals alike) did ‘avert’ and even tried to ‘retard’ it. They did not consider it ‘the proudest day in English history,’ when, for example, Charles Stewart Parnell, leader of Irish Home Rulers, whom W.B. Yeats would immortalise in two of his poems ‘Parnell’s Funeral’ and ‘Parnell,’ demanded (partial) home rule for Ireland.⁸⁵ The idea seemed so outrageous to them that they did not even hesitate to forsake their leader, William Gladstone, and join the opposition to form an alliance with a view to defeating the cause of Irish self-rule. Evidently, they had a very different conception of English pride than the one envisioned by Macaulay. It resided in maintaining, not disintegrating the British Empire, which is to say, not in granting but refusing the colonies political independence. On its way to becoming ‘the White Man’s burden,’ the Empire had at this stage of its development become a symbol of national pride. In his Crystal Palace speech of 24 June 1872, Benjamin Disraeli, then leader of the Conservative opposition,

⁸⁴ Thomas B. Macaulay, *Macaulay: Prose and Poetry*, comp. G.M. Young (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1952) 718.

⁸⁵ Certainly, Britain did not have a uniform attitude to her diverse imperial possessions. The Australian colonies, for example, were given limited self-rule in the early 1850s, whereas the idea appears to have outraged even the liberals when it came to the question of Irish self-rule. W.B. Yeats, ‘Parnell’s Funeral,’ ‘Parnell,’ in *Poems of W. B. Yeats: A New Selection*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares, 2nd ed. (1984; Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1988) 156-8, 305.

gave a powerful expression to this shift in the British perception of Empire.

Disraeli urged his audience:

When you return to your homes, when you return to your counties and to your cities, you must tell to all those whom you can influence that the time is at hand, that, at least, it cannot be far distant, when England will have to decide between national and cosmopolitan principles. The issue is not a mean one. It is whether you will be content to be a comfortable England, modelled and moulded upon Continental principles and meeting in due course an inevitable fate, or whether you will be a great country,—an Imperial country—a country where your sons, when they rise, rise to paramount positions, and obtain not merely the esteem of their countrymen, but command the respect of the world.⁸⁶

The Empire formed a most vital component of the new British national consciousness. It seems to have been inevitable, given the emergence from the mid-1870s onward of France, Germany, Russia, and the United States as contenders for global supremacy. Interestingly, the resurgence of metropolitan nationalism coincided with its colonial counterpart: the two would have difficulty to come to terms with each other.

The third source of anxiety was the Empire itself. As the nineteenth century wore on, it came to exercise an ever-increasing hold on the life of English people both at home and abroad. English pop culture fell within its orbit of

⁸⁶ Benjamin Disraeli, *Selected Speeches of the Late Right Honourable the Earl of Beaconsfield*, ed. T.E. Kebbel, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882) 534.

influence no less effectively than English politics. Indeed, as Edward Said has argued, ‘scarcely a corner of life was untouched by the facts of empire.’⁸⁷

From what has been presented above, two simple conclusions can reasonably be drawn: first, the interplay of metropolitan and colonial interests was a complex phenomenon; second, Britain needed her Empire as much for its symbolic as for its material value. How could she legitimately claim that the British (or the English?) were the greatest not only of all the nations (here the emphasis was on the West) but also of all the races (here on both the West and the East) in the world without the possession of a vast Empire (on which the sun never set)? By the 1870s the British Empire had become the site where nation and race were intriguingly welded together.

Thus the transformation of the British from reformers to rulers of India was not so straightforward a phenomenon as has often been assumed. It is, therefore, more accurate to say that the change was brought about by a wide variety of forces, the Mutiny of 1857 being one of them. The changed role of the British must have affected British-Indian relations in the latter half of the nineteenth century. How did the colonial master and his Indian subject come to view each other now? Did they come together or fall apart? Did the rupture heal or worsen?

After the Rebellion, Indo-British relationship came to be defined more and more in racial terms. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, that is, during the Age of Reform, the Indians were seen as degenerate but not incapable

⁸⁷ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993) 7.

of regeneration. All that was needed for the regeneration of Indian society was to reform it on a British model. There was not the least doubt that English education would ultimately free the Indians from the age-old tyranny of ‘monstrous superstitions.’⁸⁸ The British were in India, it was argued, to see to its realisation:

To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own. The sceptre may pass away from us. Unforeseen accidents may derange our most profound schemes of policy. Victory may be inconstant to our arms. But there are triumphs which are followed by no reverse. There is an empire exempt from all natural causes of decay. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism; that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and laws.⁸⁹

It was even possible to be ‘Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.’⁹⁰ In view of the resultant hybridity or ‘transculturation,’ as Mary Louise Pratt might have put it, the racial boundaries seem to have been porous enough to permit crossing.⁹¹ At no level could there be any such crossing conceivable, not to say permissible, after the disconcerting events of 1857. However hard they may try to be friends, Fielding and Aziz (in

⁸⁸ Macaulay 728. On the role, success and failure of English *literary* education in the so-called civilising mission in the context of India, see Viswanathan.

⁸⁹ Macaulay 718.

⁹⁰ Macaulay 729.

⁹¹ See note 9 above.

E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*) must eventually part.⁹² The British and the Indian had nothing in common, so the new argument went. They were *now* two races, each distinct from the other in all respects, from physical appearance to mental capacity. Even Christianity became a *white* religion, a marker of cultural difference. The twin ideals – the universality of human nature (one of the Enlightenment legacies) and ‘the limitless malleability of human character’ (its liberal/Romantic corollary) – came to be regarded as fallacious.⁹³ In a radical departure from the earlier liberal stance, the presence of the British in India was now justified on an explicit assertion of racial superiority: ‘Away, then, with the assumption of equality; and let us accept our true position of a dominant race.’⁹⁴ The exhortation did not, apparently, go unheeded. Others (including liberals) joined in, incited by an even greater degree of illiberal impatience and racial arrogance. The lone voice (if it indeed were so) grew into a loud chorus, ultimately drowning the old, enfeebled *liberal* voice.

The question whether the rupture between the colonial master and the native subject healed or worsened is a rather tricky one in that the British assertion of racial superiority was more pronounced in the case of the classes shaped by English education than in the case of the traditional upper classes of Indian society such as the feudal aristocracy and the landed gentry. One of the notable developments of post-Mutiny British administrative policy was to make allies of Indian princes and nobles. ‘To secure completely, and efficiently utilise,

⁹² E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, rpt. (1924; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

⁹³ Metcalf, *Ideologies* 33.

⁹⁴ Brigadier-General John Jacob, cited in Hutchins 26.

the Indian aristocracy is [. . .] the most important problem now before us,' wrote Lord Edward Lytton, Viceroy of India (1876-80), to Salisbury in 1876.⁹⁵

So the rupture with the Indian aristocracy was made to heal. They had so far been seen as an impediment to the progress and prosperity of India, which would come about, it was sincerely believed, only when India was thoroughly modernised. For all this to happen, India must follow the course taken by the more advanced European nations, Britain being the foremost among them. In no way, Indian princes and nobles were (deemed) fit to guide India to the bright future awaiting her. They were relics of the past.⁹⁶ For a modern India, a modern leadership was required. The new leadership would come from the now thriving western-educated professional intelligentsia based in the three oldest presidencies of British India.⁹⁷ This was the vision whose fulfilment had dictated pre-Rebellion British policy as far as India was concerned.

The British rapport with the landed classes meant rupture with the new elite who had been so impeccably loyal to the foreign regime during the Uprising as to merit special treatment. Instead, they came to be ignored. A nuisance of sorts, they were now held in ridicule. They were the trouble-makers. It had been imprudent of the British 'to [have] pamper[ed] the conceit and the vanity of half-educated natives, to the serious detriment of commonsense, and of the wholesome

⁹⁵ Lytton to Salisbury, 11 May 1876, cited in Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1968) 134.

⁹⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru holds an identical attitude to the old Indian aristocracy in *An Autobiography* (1936; Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1962) 58.

⁹⁷ They were Calcutta (now Kolkata), Bombay (now Mumbai) and Madras (now Chennai).

recognition of realities,' complained Lord Lytton.⁹⁸ As a consequence, the half-educated natives—'a deadly legacy from Metcalfe and Macaulay'—were now less inclined to be collaborators than to be treated as equals of the British.⁹⁹ 'It is one thing,' Lytton maintained, 'to admit the public into your park, and quite another thing to admit it into your drawing room.'¹⁰⁰ During his viceroyalty, Lytton did try by all means at his disposal to keep the educated Indians from entering his drawing room. The native branch of the civil service (the Statutory Civil Service of 1879) he created was an instrument not so much to promote the admission of qualified Indians to official service as to bar them from competing for entry into its more prestigious as well as more lucrative counterpart, that is, the Covenanted Civil Service. It was thus a subtle stratagem to 'separate the black and white sheep into two distinct flocks.'¹⁰¹

Did Lytton then leave the park open to the Indians? The Vernacular Press Act of 1878, which was passed with 'unusual haste,' is sufficient proof that he was not so disposed.¹⁰² For 'the Baboos, whom we have educated to write semi-seditious articles in the Native Press, and who really represent nothing but the social anomaly of their own position,' Lytton had nothing but contempt.¹⁰³ Hence he could stoop neither to admitting them into his drawing room for dialogue nor to allowing them to agitate in the park or, for that matter, in the press. Its impact

⁹⁸ Lytton to Col. Sir A. Clarke, 26 April 1878, cited in Seal 140.

⁹⁹ Salisbury to Lytton, 9 June 1876, quoted in Seal 133.

¹⁰⁰ Lytton to Col. Sir A. Clarke, 26 April 1878, cited in Seal 140.

¹⁰¹ S. Gopal, *The Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon 1880-1884* (London: Oxford UP, 1953) 117.

¹⁰² Lytton to Stephen, 26 May 1878, quoted in Seal 145.

¹⁰³ Lytton to Salisbury, 11 May 1876, cited in Seal 134.

could not but be profound on British-Indian relations: it veered away from collusion toward collision. One last effort was made during the viceroyalty of Lord Ripon (1880-84) to improve Indo-British relationship in a really meaningful way. Yet the bridge that Ripon was finally able to build between the two races was as rickety as its literary counterpart in *A Passage to India*.¹⁰⁴

No contrast can be sharper than the one between Ripon and his predecessor, Lytton. Lytton was a thorough conservative, Ripon an uncompromising liberal. To the former, the *natural* leaders of the Indian people were the Indian aristocracy; to the latter, they were the English-educated professional intelligentsia. While Lytton was committed to safeguarding the interests of the British in India; Ripon was to those of the Indians. One was hostile but the other sympathetic to the idea of Indian self-government. In short, as far as (educated) Indians were concerned, Lytton's was a repressive regime; Ripon's, a 'frankly liberal' one.¹⁰⁵ Despite all his liberal efforts, Ripon was, however, only partially successful in repairing British- Indian relations, though it should be admitted that the failure was not entirely his alone. In both England and her Empire, the imperial ideology was fast gaining ground at the time. The cornerstone of this ideology was the self-perception of the British that they were the greatest of all the nations/races in the world: 'Most British felt that they possessed the virtues necessary to dominate the world, and history seemed to bear

¹⁰⁴ See note 92 above.

¹⁰⁵ Ripon to W.E. Baxter, 6 December 1882, quoted in Gopal 121.

them out.’¹⁰⁶ The fact that the most expansive Empire belonged to them was taken as conclusive proof of this greatness. If a viceroy decided not to conform to the prevailing mood, he was sure not only to antagonise the small white community in India but also to earn the displeasure of London (of the India Council, in particular). Ripon did both, the former more than the latter.

The occasion was the introduction of the famous Ilbert Bill of 1883. The story is worth recounting at some length. Despite its protestation to the contrary, imperialism can never be free from racial discrimination, which, in the final analysis, forms its very foundation. Through Marlow, Joseph Conrad has given the unsavoury truth an unforgettable expression in his great turn-of-the-century novella *Heart of Darkness*:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.¹⁰⁷

Some forms of racial discrimination are perhaps more invidious and, consequently, less ‘pretty’ than others. The elimination of one such discrimination was what the Ilbert Bill was meant (but failed) to achieve.

Over time it had become customary for the members of the European community in India to be treated with special consideration in all respects, from trade to travel. So pervasive was the bias that even the systems of law and

¹⁰⁶ Allen J. Greenberger, *The British Image of India: A Study in the Literature of Imperialism 1880-1960* (London: Oxford UP, 1969) 11.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Kinbrough, 3rd ed. (New York and London: Norton, 1988) 10.

jurisdiction could not be free from it. The Code of Criminal Procedure of 1861, for example, exempted the European British subjects from the criminal jurisdiction of the magistrates officiating as Justices of the Peace in the district towns. Only a high court could try criminal charges against them. But each of the three high courts was located in a presidency town, more often than not thousands of miles away from the scene where the crime had actually been committed. Such a system of criminal jurisdiction was not only time-consuming but also expensive. In addition, for the usually poor Indian plaintiffs living in remote villages, going to a city like Calcutta to sue a white sahib was no less intimidating than going to the city of London was for a character like Joe Gargery in *Great Expectations*.¹⁰⁸ With a view to ridding it of these drawbacks, the Code was revised in 1872, bringing Europeans under the criminal jurisdiction of the district courts. But the provision of old that a judicial officer must himself be a European British subject to have jurisdiction over another European British subject was left unaffected. In terms of administrative efficiency, then, the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1872 was definitely an improvement on its earlier version. On the other hand, however, it did not contribute at all to abolishing race distinctions in jurisdiction, which was, to a certain extent, achieved by an Act half a decade later.

All presidency magistrates were empowered by Act IV of 1877 to exercise jurisdiction over Europeans and Indians alike within the limits of the presidency towns. The physical limits of this jurisdiction came to pose a serious, if

¹⁰⁸ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1860-61; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

unforeseen, problem, which was soon detected in the case of Behari Lal Gupta, whose promotion to a senior position was due in 1882. (Gupta was then Presidency Magistrate of North Calcutta.) Promoted, Gupta would now be transferred to a district town, where he could exercise criminal jurisdiction over Indians but not over Europeans, which he had previously done as Presidency Magistrate. ‘The anomaly,’ as Anil Seal has remarked, ‘was palpable.’¹⁰⁹ So promotion in the case of Gupta would be more a bane than a boon. To save himself from the looming disgrace, Gupta wrote a note to the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir Ashley Eden, in January 1882, pointing out the anomalous position he was in. The note did not produce the desired effect so far as Gupta was concerned. It was too late to save him from his plight. But the (political) effect it did produce went far beyond all expectations.

With the introduction of the Ilbert Bill in February 1883, the European community in India raised a storm which took more than a year to subside. The community felt its *rights* to be so much at stake, its interests so threatened, and its privileges so much in jeopardy that it pledged itself not to rest until the Government of India revoked the Bill, and revoked it unconditionally. Every means of mobilisation (along racial lines) and agitation was tried: formation of associations and sub-associations, public meetings, submission of memorials, polemics in English newspapers in both England and India, and so on. To add force to what they were fighting for, the non-official members of the white community decided not to cooperate with the Riponite administration. In every

¹⁰⁹ Seal 163.

attempt at agitation, they received full sympathy from most of the officials. With a handful of real supporters in India to fight for the cause and with the Home Government more interested in Ireland and Egypt than in India, Ripon was left with no other decent choice but to compromise. After a series of negotiations resulting in its modifications, the Bill was enacted in January 1884, almost a year after it was made public. 'There seems little in common between the original draft and the ultimate enactment,' observes S. Gopal.¹¹⁰ In its final version, the Ilbert Bill had to retain what it had so expressly sought to undermine. A European British subject was entitled to claim trial by jury with Europeans or Americans composing at least half its membership.

Was the Ilbert Bill then a complete failure? The answer is both yes and no. It was no doubt a failure so far as the removal of racial discrimination from the administration of criminal justice was concerned. In terms of the emergence of Indian nationalism, however, it was to prove one of the key factors. As noted above, the repressive measures of Lytton had already soured the relations between the two races. It was not that Lytton was more despotic than some of his predecessors. What was remarkable about his regime was that it smacked of racism to an extent unmatched before. Thus it was that during the viceroyalty of Lytton the educated Indians began to sense the ideological operation of racial feeling in imperial dynamics. Like Gupta, many of them had personally suffered discriminations of some kind or other. Instances of humiliation based on racism were on the rise. The list of (personal as well as collective) grievances was daily

¹¹⁰ Gopal 161.

becoming longer. With the arrival of Ripon, the situation seemed to improve for a while, though his strong liberal policy was a source of irritation for the majority of colonial officials from the outset. It was, however, the storm of the Ilbert Bill that upset the little that Ripon had so far been able to achieve in terms of race relations, which had, one should not forget, never been completely free from strains of some sort or other, especially since the Rebellion of 1857. Ripon left India in 1884. With his departure, the era of collusion came to a decisive end. Henceforth Indo-British relationship would increasingly become one of collision, with brief periods of tense quiet woven into the dominant pattern.

According to formalist critics, the function of language in poetry is to make stone feel stony. In other words, poetic language sharpens perception of reality. Every articulation of racism (whether linguistic or otherwise) can be said to have a similar, though perhaps unintended, function. By forcing the reality of racism into consciousness, it makes the victims of racism feel all the more intensely what they *racially* are. In a colonial context, this accentuation of racial consciousness produces a deep sense of identity crisis for the colonised, which can only be resolved through the subversion of colonial hierarchies, involving, first, the inversion of the values of the colonial power and, then, of the colonial structure itself, a common pattern of anti-colonial national struggles across the globe:

Anti-colonial struggles had to create new and powerful identities for colonised peoples and to challenge colonialism not only at a political or

intellectual level, but also on an emotional plane. In widely divergent contexts, the idea of the nation was a powerful vehicle for harnessing anti-colonial energies at all these levels.¹¹¹

A naked display of ‘the depth of British racial feeling,’ as Metcalf puts it, the Ilbert Bill agitation was apparently the moment when the educated Indians showed the first signs of an identity crisis whose resolution they sought to find in terms of national politics in general and national culture in particular.¹¹² An eye opener, the Ilbert Bill campaign not only taught the native intelligentsia the technical skills of political organisation but can be said to have provided them with the ideological base for such organisation as well: the ideal of colonial difference had to be countered with the ideal of national difference. Against the forces of colonialism were to be mobilised the forces of nationalism. Colonial interests were to give way to national interests:

The Ilbert Bill controversy helped to intensify the growing feeling of unity among the Indian people. The Anglo-Indian community had formed their Defence Association with its branches in different parts of the country. They had raised over a lakh [one hundred] and fifty thousand rupees to protect what they conceived to be their interests, and to assert their special privileges. Their organization and their resources had secured success to their cause. The educated community all over India watched the struggle with interest. There was the Ilbert Bill agitation with all its developments

¹¹¹ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd ed. (1998; London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 185-6.

¹¹² Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt* 309.

taking place before their eyes. They could not remain insensible to the lesson it taught, of combination and organization; a lesson which in this case was enforced amid conditions that left a rankling sense of humiliation in the mind of educated India. It was, however, fruitful of results. It strengthened the forces that were speeding up the birth of the Congress movement [. . .].¹¹³

If the birth of the Indian National Congress was the explicit political expression of the emerging Indian nationalism, one of its most important cultural counterparts was the urge to rewrite Indian history from an Indian perspective. In the words of Ranajit Guha:

Historiography was one of the two principal instruments – the other being literature – which would henceforth be put to increasingly vigorous use for such reclamation. In other words, historiography would proceed from now on to construct the Indian past as a national past that had been violated and appropriated by colonialist discourse. The indigenous historian’s mission to recover that past was therefore to acquire the urgency and vigor of a struggle for expropriating the expropriators.¹¹⁴

What Guha says of ‘an Indian historiography of India’ is equally applicable to modern Indian literature, whether written in indigenous languages or in English, which had, by the time of the appearance of nationalism in India, become something of a lingua franca. Needless to say, the socio-political

¹¹³ Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in Making* (Bombay: Oxford UP, 1963) 79-80.

¹¹⁴ Guha 98-99.

dynamics that led to the formation of the Indian National Congress and the rewriting of Indian history also paved the way for the emergence of Indian historical fiction, first in indigenous languages and then in English. Its agenda was the same: to deploy Indian history/past in imagining the nation. That such has indeed been the case is amply borne out in the next two chapters in which I analyse two examples of what I have called revivalist historical fiction, paying attention to the shifting historico-political circumstances in which they appeared.

CHAPTER 3

Revivalist Historical Fiction 1: *Padmini: An Indian Romance* (1903)

[. . .] it is the reawakening of past national greatness which gives strength to hopes of national rebirth. It is a requirement of the struggle for this national greatness that the historical causes for the decline, the disintegration [. . .] should be explored and artistically portrayed.

Georg Lukács¹

History is to a nation what memory is to an individual.

S.A. Rahman²

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that Indian historical fiction emerged at a time when India was under British colonial rule, for it is this context of colonialism that makes this fiction what it is, both formally and thematically. In other words, if the reality of colonialism dictates its thematic as well as formal concerns in the pre-independence period, it is the legacy of colonialism that determines those very concerns in the post-independence period. This line of continuity can also be seen from a nationalist perspective. It is as a cultural site or discursive space for imagining and re-imagining the Indian nation that the Indian historical novel has in the main been used both before and after independence.

¹ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (1937; London: Merlin Press, 1962) 22.

² S.A. Rahman, foreword, *Muslim Separatism in India: A Brief Survey: 1858-1947*, by Abdul Hamid (N.p.: Oxford UP, 1967) v.

The different representations and uses of history one comes across in this fiction are thus (ideological) projections of the different ways that the nation has so far been imagined.

In this chapter I examine one of the two examples of what I have called the revivalist variety of Indian historical fiction. I briefly explained in the introductory chapter why I describe them as revivalist; they are revivalist not simply because they tend to revive one Indian past or another for its own sake (if such a thing were at all possible), for invocation of a certain past is precisely what all historical novels do, or at least profess to do. Sir Walter Scott, who is usually credited with fathering the genre of historical fiction, brilliantly captured the pastness of the past in the title of his *Waverley; or, 'tis Sixty Years Since*.³ But the socio-psychological dynamics from which revivalist historical fiction derives its 'generative impulse' is much more complex.⁴ In *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*, Meenakshi Mukherjee offers a graphic description of 'the life of the nineteenth-century Indian' which was 'politically servile, economically deprived and socially circumscribed.'⁵ It is perhaps more accurate to say that it was the English-educated, urban-based members of the emerging professional middle class in the latter half of the nineteenth century who came to see life as Mukherjee presents it. However, when the present is so barren, life so devoid of

³ Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley; or, 'tis Sixty Years Since* (1814; London: Penguin, 1980). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁴ The phrase comes from Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997) x.

⁵ Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1985) 7.

dignity, and the future so bleak, to resort to the past seems to be a viable, if not inevitable, course of action.⁶ Indeed, it is to escape as well as break free from the claustrophobia of the colonial regime that the western-educated Indian elite set out to revive some pre-colonial past or other whose heroic splendour would, it was hoped, help repair the sense of dignity Indians had apparently lost under the white rule. The irony is that the glorious India of the past chosen for revival was largely the creation/discovery of the European Indologists/orientalists. When the first impulse (that is, to escape from the vicissitudes of colonialism) was stronger, the past was resorted to in a mood of nostalgia. This use of the past was thus meant to fulfil what Amanda Collins defines in her essay on ‘Jane Austen, Film, and the Pitfalls of Postmodern Nostalgia,’ as the ‘societal need for nostalgia.’⁷

The (other) impulse to break free from the shackles of colonial subjugation led to a critical assessment of the past. What went wrong in the past that makes the present so miserable and shameful was the persistent question. Instead of remaining blind to the follies of the past, such follies had to be recognised to prevent them from being repeated in the present. In its engagement with the past—whether nostalgic or critical (and the two often came together)—what revivalist historical fiction aimed at achieving was national regeneration, the first

⁶ The following extract from the introduction to a Marathi novel titled *Manjughosha* (1868) by Naro Sadashiv Risbud sheds light on how drab life was at the time: ‘If we write about the things we experience daily, there would be nothing enthralling about them, so that if we set out to write an interesting book we are forced to take up with the marvellous [. . .]. Cited in Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality* 7. Hence to be able to write, Risbud opted out of the realist mode altogether.

⁷ Amanda Collins, ‘Jane Austen, Film, and the Pitfalls of Postmodern Nostalgia,’ in *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, eds. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, 2nd ed. (Lexington, Kentucky: The UP of Kentucky, 2001) 81. On the British need for Raj nostalgia, see ‘Outside the Whale’ and ‘Attenborough’s Gandhi,’ in Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991) 87-101 and 102-06.

necessary condition for a new nation to emerge. Needless to say, this paradigm is pertinent more to anti-colonial than to other national formations.⁸

Several historical novels were produced at the turn of the nineteenth century, including *Padmini: An Indian Romance* (1903) by T. Ramakrishna Pillai (b. 1854) discussed in this chapter, and *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (1909) by Sirdar Jogendra Singh (1877-1946) examined in the following one.⁹ As the subtitles suggest, both are historical Romances, with Romance having an upper hand in both. However, it must be emphasised that both works are Romances, not in the sense that they are structured around the quintessential Romance motif/theme: that is, the motif/theme of quest. They are rather so, in terms of the kind of world they create and the kind of people who inhabit that world. The world of a Romance is governed much more decisively by ethical considerations than historical ones; its characters are either completely good or entirely evil.¹⁰ The reason why both Pillai and Singh shape historical material to Romance ends rather than those of historical realism is that they were writing at a time when the political voice of Indian nationalism itself was far from assertive

⁸ See Tamara Sivanandan, 'Anticolonialism, national liberation, and postcolonial national formation,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006) 41-65. For an impressive mapping of the wide variety of forms that resistance to European domination took from the turning of the eighteenth century onward, see Alan Thomas *et al.*, *Third World Atlas*, 2nd ed. (Buckingham: Open UP, 1997).

⁹ T. Ramakrishna [Pillai], *Padmini: An Indian Romance* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd., 1903); Sirdar Jogendra Singh, *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (London: James Nisbet & Co., [sic] Limited, 1909). Subsequent references are to these editions. The period also saw an increasing interest in historical drama. One of the finest practitioners of the genre in Bengali was D.L. Roy (1863-1913) who wrote a number of plays using the Indian past. Two of them *Nurjahan* (1906) and *Sajahan* (1908), as the titles suggest, were based on Mughal history/past.

¹⁰ I discuss at some length some of the key compositional coordinates of Romance in the final section of the next chapter.

and unambiguous, though the conventions of popular literature could also have something to do with it.¹¹ It followed a rather guarded course of action. As in the political arena, the cultural manifestation of Indian nationalism was also a cautious and hence tongue-in-cheek phenomenon. The struggle begins in earnest a decade later in the 1920s.

Unlike the moral status of characters in a realist novel, for example, that of a Romance character is never in doubt. S/he is either all virtue or all vice. It is in these two respects—in constructing an ethically governed world and populating it with morally polarised characters—that *Padmini* and *Nur Jahan* are Romances with a capital ‘R.’ They are also romances with a small ‘r,’ because they both tell a love story. In my discussion of these two examples of revivalist historical fiction, I shall be using Romance and romance in the senses outlined here. The irony is that the heavy dose of Romance, if not romance, which had once made these works popular, is apparently responsible for the critical neglect they have now fallen into.¹² The critical consensus seems to be that they are better forgotten than remembered.¹³ I have chosen to discuss them at some length here not so

¹¹ The argument applies, it should be pointed out here, more to the author of *Nur Jahan* than to that of *Padmini*, who appears to have been more pro-colonial than pro-national.

¹² In *Realism and Reality*, Meenakshi Mukherjee has an illuminating chapter (3) on Indian historical fiction written in Indian vernaculars. The chapter sheds light on the popularity of the genre at the time of its emergence. The majority of these texts are hailed as the first serious attempts at prose narrative in the languages concerned. In comparison, the critical reception of the early Indian historical novels in English is far from appreciative. Mukherjee herself dismisses them rather perfunctorily in one brief paragraph in her otherwise brilliant study of the Indian English novel in *The Twice Born Novel: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English* (New Delhi and London: Heinemann, 1971) 20-21.

¹³ In his *Apology for Heroism: A Brief Autobiography Of [sic] Ideas*, 2nd ed. (1946; Bombay: Kutub-Popular, 1957) 85, Mulk Raj Anand writes, ‘And, of course, there were always the vast bulk of those others, the low pressure artists, the whores of literature, who wrote to provide escape and relaxation to the tired ladies and gentlemen of our suburban civilization.’ With a little

much to prove these critics wrong as to draw attention to an important point about Indian historical fiction: What prompted the early Indian authors of the historical novel to tilt in favour of Romance rather than history? Deriving from the context of the freedom movement that gathered momentum from the 1920s onward, the explanation will, it is hoped, help understand the departure of Indian historical fiction from Romance to realism.

There is a second reason why Indian historical fiction written at the turn of the nineteenth century needs to be critically engaged with. With Benedict Anderson highlighting the role of the realist novel in imagining the nation, the early Indian (historical) novel is now receiving more and more attention from both foreign and Indian critics.¹⁴ While the increased critical attention accorded to the early examples of Indian historical fiction is a tendency deserving applause from students of Indian writing in English, the uncritical haste with which they are lumped together as projecting a Hindu-communal Indian identity is rather unfortunate. In his otherwise impressive essay on ‘Hindu nationalism and early Indian fiction in English,’ Alex Tickell questions ‘the automatic critical equation of the Indian-English novel with a secular or pluralist national imagining.’¹⁵ From his reading of basically three popular (historical) Romances—Sarath Kumar Ghosh’s *The Prince of Destiny* (1909), *Hindupore* (1909) by S.M. Mitra, and

softening, what Anand says here can possibly be taken as representing the standard critical attitude to the Indian historical novel until quite recently.

¹⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1983).

¹⁵ See Alex Tickell, ‘The Discovery of Aryavarta: Hindu Nationalism and Early Indian Fiction in English,’ in *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism*, eds. Peter Morey and Alex Tickell (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005) 25-52.

K.K. Sinha's *Sanjogita* (1903)—written at about the same time as *Padmini* and *Nur Jahan*, Tickell argues that these early works of Indian (historical) fiction resort to 'primordial Hinduism' in the form of 'Vedic Aryanism,' to construct a communal-Hindu cultural identity from which latter-day nationalists such as Jawaharlal Nehru sought to distance themselves but could not do so completely. The conclusion is absolutely valid as far as the four (including *Padmini*) 'proto-national' texts are concerned; but it cannot be extended to the whole body of the Indian English novel written in the early decades of twentieth century.¹⁶ *Nur Jahan*, which was written in the same year as *The Prince of Destiny* and *Hindupore* and which I analyse in the next chapter, clearly imagines the national community in pluralist, if not secular, terms.

T. Ramakrishna Pillai, a South Indian writer from Madras (now called Chennai), has a number of works to his credit, from a variety of genres: social realist fiction (*Life in an Indian Village*, 1891), narrative poetry (*Tales of Ind*, 1896), historical Romance (*Padmini*, 1903 and *The Dive for Death*, 1911), memoir (*Early Reminiscences*, 1907), and travelogue *My Visit to the West* (1915). Considering the fact that Indian writing in English was just emerging at the time when these works were produced, the generic range is impressive, though one cannot be confident about placing each on any scale of literary excellence. In other words, they fare poorly in terms of artistic/literary merit. So far as the two Romances are concerned, they will certainly be found inadequate, if one is looking for the kind of historical realism Georg Lukács found in the *Waverley*

¹⁶ Tickell 32.

novels of Walter Scott (more so in *Padmini* than in *Nur Jahan*). In view of the historical circumstances in which these Romances came to be written, the absence of historical realism should not ideally be seen as a lacking. It is to break free from the oppressive history/reality of British colonialism that both Pillai and Singh look back at two different pasts existing well beyond the colonial era. The need is no less psychological than political.

The subtitle, *An Indian Romance*, is an apt tag, providing the reader with a sense of direction as to what s/he is about to experience: a world full of melodrama. It is as if to reinforce the initial expectation that Ramakrishna opens the narrative with a prophecy, one of the stock devices of Romance.¹⁷ Significantly, the novel ends too with a prophecy. But the two prophecies are executed differently. The first comes to pass in a world of Romance, with history barely having any role to play in it. The second is projected into future, a future whose driving force is the operation of European imperialism in India, represented by the only historical figure in the novel called Francis Day.¹⁸

Padmini opens with the lawful ruler of Chandragiri, Venkataroya, recently dethroned by his chief minister, the 'able and unscrupulous' Saluva.¹⁹ In order not to provoke 'the ire of the nobles and the petty chiefs, who each had armies of their own, and would raise a conflagration throughout the country, which it would

¹⁷ The opening invites comparison with that of *Macbeth*. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Stephen Orgel, Pelican Shakespeare (New York: Penguin Books, 2000). Subsequent references are to this edition. It should be pointed out here that the great Indian epic *Mahabharata* also opens with a prophecy.

¹⁸ Francis Day (1605-73) was an East India Company official. He shares the credit of being the founder of Madras (now called Chennai) with Andrew Cogan.

¹⁹ Pillai 4.

be hard to quench,' the usurper shrewdly decides not to kill his master but to keep him locked up.²⁰ One day a youthful minstrel of twenty, 'burning with rage,' visits Saluva and pleads that the rightful king of Chandragiri be set free and restored to power.²¹ Saluva, 'for a minute at least,' oscillates between conscience and outrage.²² But when the youth comes to sing the following segment of his song:

'Tis thy accursed body sitting on the throne;

It is a tyrant's scheming head that wears the crown;

And in these palaces and these halls a savage roams,

And trembling maidens strive through fear to please a fiend,

'the enraged ruler' strikes him with 'his javelin.'²³ The dying minstrel prophesies:

Thy dart hath pierced my heart, but hearken to the darts,

From this my bleeding tongue, that shall consume thy race,

Of whom none shall this throne of high renown defile,

None to point, where thy body crumbled to the dust.²⁴

Needless to say, *Padmini* tells the story of how this ominous prophecy comes to pass. No student of English literature can possibly fail to see how lavishly Ramakrishna has borrowed from Shakespeare, though James Bryce, who wrote an introduction to the Romance, seems blissfully ignorant of any such intertextual transactions. In the manner of Macbeth, after the witches have

²⁰ Pillai 6.

²¹ Pillai 8.

²² Pillai 10.

²³ Pillai 12.

²⁴ Pillai 12.

warned him to beware of Banquo, Saluva decides: ‘The only impediment to his ambition should be removed. The deposed monarch and every one of his progeny should become extinct.’²⁵ As in *Macbeth*, one of the sons of Venkataroya, Srirangaroya (who will later appear as Chennapa), inevitably escapes the cruel end—another Romance device deployed by Ramakrishna.

Padmini, the female protagonist, makes her first entry in the next chapter: ‘Like the diamond, whose lustre is hidden in a dark mine, this beauty of the village grew in an obscure, thinly populated, and scarcely visited village.’²⁶ When Saluva comes to know of ‘the thousand and one charms of the country girl’ from one of his Brahmin agents, he ‘resolve[s] to win her, but by means only fair and honourable.’²⁷ Predictably, the girl resists his advances. There is hardly any narrative progression in the next two chapters whose main burden is to enlighten the reader on a number of topical issues such as the Hindu ideal of womanhood, polygamy, and so on. These two digressive chapters are important in a different sense. Focusing on issues of national interests, they are meant to educate the reader so that s/he can become worthy citizen-subject of the civil society in the making in India under the beneficial rule of the British. Had Ramakrishna been a little more adventurous, he could have crossed the threshold and turned the projected civil society into a national community held together by Hinduism. Why he fails to do so is explained below.

²⁵ Pillai 18.

²⁶ Pillai 32.

²⁷ Pillai 32, 36.

When the story resumes, Ramakrishna goes on to borrow even more from Shakespeare. But it is not the Shakespeare of the great tragedies, nor of histories, but of the romantic comedies. The dark, sombre world of *Macbeth* is left behind. Instead, the bright, sunny arcadia of *As You Like It* moves in.²⁸ *Padmini* must remain true to the spirit of its subtitle. This structural shift from *Macbeth* to *As You Like It* can be seen as representing a departure from a gothic past, engendered by the Muslim conquest of India, to a Romantic one (in retrospect), brought about by the benevolent British presence in India.²⁹

Going back to the story, the protagonist, Srirangaroya/Chennapa, is now a young man of eighteen, serving as ‘Saluva’s trusted personal attendant.’³⁰ So far Saluva has not been successful in his attempts to win Padmini over. Soon an opportunity arises for Saluva to impress Padmini and for Chennapa to exhibit all the typical virtues of a Romance hero. A large diamond is found in one of the mining villages of Chandragiri. Saluva sends his men to bring him the diamond which he plans to present Padmini as a gift. On its way to Chandragiri, the diamond is intercepted by Echama Naick, a bold chieftain, who seems ever ready to harass Saluva. ‘Is there no one to curb his [Echama’s] pride?’ asks Saluva, ‘in the spirit of utter helplessness, and perhaps of desperation too.’³¹ Chennapa comes forward:

²⁸ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Juliet Dusinberre, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006). Subsequent references are to this edition.

²⁹ The term ‘Romantic,’ as used here, should be read as deriving from Romance, not from the literary/poetic movement known as Romanticism.

³⁰ Pillai 101.

³¹ Pillai 97.

My royal master! I will instantly go. I want not men nor money to subdue the rebel chief, but give me ten of thy faithful men and ten of thy best steeds. In three days I will come back with the diamond.³²

True to his word, Chennapa recovers the diamond ‘within the allotted time.’³³ This daring act earns him ‘the position of a courtier.’³⁴ He is now ‘not only the most favoured of the nobles of the court, but also the most popular hero of the people.’³⁵ ‘This remarkable feat of heroism, cool courage, and self-denial’ is surpassed by a second in which Chennapa—like Orlando in *As You Like It*—defeats ‘the champion wrestler of all India.’³⁶ Joining others to congratulate the victor, Padmini throws him a pearl necklace, the very one Saluva has presented her. Saluva resolves to avenge himself ‘against the woman who thus dared to slight him, and the man who had become now the object of her attachment.’³⁷ Apprehensive of danger, both Chennapa and Padmini leave Chandragiri to save themselves ‘from the wrath of the cruel tyrant.’³⁸

In the course of his wandering, Chennapa comes to Chingleput where he is chosen as ‘the new chief’ by ‘its leading inhabitants.’³⁹ He is happy, but the thought of Padmini is ever present in his mind. How will he find her out? The sage of Chingleput advises Chennapa to go to Chandragiri in search of Padmini

³² Pillai 98.

³³ Pillai 105.

³⁴ Pillai 105.

³⁵ Pillai 105.

³⁶ Pillai 105, 125.

³⁷ Pillai 125.

³⁸ Pillai 126.

³⁹ Pillai 129.

‘in the garb of a holy man.’⁴⁰ The fourth visit brings the lovers together. The real identity of Chennapa is revealed; Saluva, the usurper, flees from Chandragiri and perishes on a sacred hill, ‘thus fulfilling the prophecy of the young minstrel who died at his hands.’⁴¹ Chennapa/Srirangaroya gets back what is rightfully his: the throne of Chandragiri.

I have given an outline of the story of *Padmini* in order to make two important points. First, the world Ramakrishna depicts in *Padmini* is conspicuously free from the operation of historical forces. Whatever it may be, its operative logic is by no means Hegelian (dialectic). The whole career of Saluva, like King Oedipus’ or Macbeth’s, is predestined (hence the prophecy with which the story opens). History dare not intervene here. The lovers, Chennapa and Padmini, fall in love, are separated from one another, and then re-united at the end in a world where history does not have the ghost of a chance to function. If so, where is history then in the story/text? My answer is in the margins.

Second, if history is thin in *Padmini*, romance is no less so. Most critics discuss *Padmini* as a romance with a small ‘r.’ As suggested above, a romance (in modern usage) is a love story, while a Romance is a generic text which, while it may represent a love interest, is also an adventure narrative with stereotypical characters and a quest at the heart of its narrative interest. Even Uma Parameswaran, the only critic who has, so far as I know, given *Padmini* more than a cursory glance, writes, ‘*Padmini* is the story of a tyrant-king’s love for

⁴⁰ Pillai 166.

⁴¹ Pillai 212.

Padmini and her steadfast rejection of him in favour of the impoverished but noble Chennappa [*sic*].⁴² I find it difficult to reconcile myself with such an account of *Padmini*, because it exaggerates the love interest of the story to an extent not warranted by the story/text itself.⁴³ If *Padmini* is predominantly a love story, why does Ramakrishna bring the lovers together for a brief first encounter (if it can be so termed) after more than half of the story has already been told? A possible explanation can be that Ramakrishna is drawing here on indigenous literary traditions, especially those associated with Radha and Krishna. A regular trope in the stories relating the fraught love affair of these legendary lovers is the intense suffering the two undergo as a consequence of long spells of separation. The pathos of separation is given free vent.⁴⁴ However, *Padmini* is better considered a moral fable in the guise of a romance; in writing such a book, what moral lesson does Ramakrishna seek to convey to his readers? As will be shown below, one such lesson is to induce them to be grateful and loyal to British rule, for the salvation of the Hindus (not Indians) lies in the hands of the white masters.

In his analysis of *The Boyne Water* (1826), a historical novel by the Irish novelist John Banim, James M. Cahalan notes an interesting similarity between the ways that Scott and his Irish successor Banim both use history: ‘as in Scott, entrance to history [in *The Boyne Water*] is gained through the doors of

⁴² Uma Parameswaran, *A Study of Representative Indo-English Novelists* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1976) 17.

⁴³ One might feel like reading the synopsis of a commercial Bollywood film.

⁴⁴ A pioneering work in this tradition is the twelfth-century poet Jayadeva’s *Gita-govinda* (*Song of the Divine Cowherd*). The cowherd of the title is Krishna. For a brief discussion of Jayadeva’s great work, see Herbert H. Gowen, *A History of Indian Literature: From Vedic Times to the Present Day*, 1st Indian ed. (Delhi: Seema Publications, 1975) 416-22.

Gothicism.’⁴⁵ Exactly the opposite is true in the case of *Padmini*. One enters (as well as exits) the Romantic world of *Padmini* through the doors of history. In the following sections, I want to take a close look at the doors of history in *Padmini*, in order to engage not so much with the world they shut in as with the one they shut out. The point of entry is solidly historical – a historicity whose sharpness will soon be blunted:

On the 23rd of January 1565, on the plains of Talikota, that great battle was fought between the Hindus and the Muhammadans, which inflicted a crushing blow on the powerful Vijianagar kingdom, and the closing years of the sixteenth century witnessed the gradual disruption of that great Hindu Empire, whose sway extended as far south as Ceylon, that is, over nearly a third of the continent of India.⁴⁶

Given the accuracy of history it refers to, the tone of neutrality it seems to be able to maintain, and the economy of language it commands, one may feel like reading an extract from a history text. But these prized virtues of classical western historiography begin to disappear as soon as nostalgia sets in and history is re(-) placed by tradition:

The Lord of this Empire, *tradition* tells, had once enchained, though for a short time, the Emperor of Delhi, and the gradual effacement of its power paved the way more easily for the planting in India of British rule. During

⁴⁵ James M. Cahalan, *Great Hatred, Little Room: The Irish Historical Novel* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983) 50.

⁴⁶ Pillai 1. Mark the (nationalist) exaggeration in ‘the continent of India,’ instead of the usual ‘the Indian subcontinent.’

this memorable period of its history, Southern India witnessed many a deed of valour in the cause of truth and justice; and in the actions of the brave and the chivalrous was seen exemplified humanity in its higher and diviner forms, but alas! poets there were none to immortalise those deeds in enduring verse, and to make those spots, where the noblest of those human achievements were enacted, hallowed ground.⁴⁷

Two points should be noted here. First, Ramakrishna has chosen to invoke and represent (a) Hindu history/past in *Padmini*: the disintegration of the Vijayanagara Empire, a sixteenth-century Hindu empire in Southern India. Second, Ramakrishna does not appear to regret ‘the planting in India of British rule.’ Consequently, although the outburst of nostalgia is followed by a brief poetic moment of intense reflection on the colonial present, its subversive potential is deliberately checked from developing into a full-blown critique of the colonial regime:

Unhappy the nation that hath no history; and happy the nation that can hear the ballads, commemorating the adventures of her warriors, sung with fervour; and happy the country that can point with pride on the pages of history to patriots who wept for their country’s wrongs, boldly stood against the oppressor and the tyrant, and shed their blood for their

⁴⁷ Pillai 1-2. Emphasis added.

countrymen. But such is not our lot, and our heroes passed away with their deeds unsung and unrecorded.⁴⁸

Rather than bemoaning ‘our lot,’ Ramakrishna should have set himself to excavating those ‘deeds unsung and unrecorded.’ What is offered instead is a ghastly picture depicting the chaos of the very time of which he was so proud a little while ago:

At the same time, during those unhappy days, wholesale plunderings of villages and burning of cultivated fields were of everyday occurrence; innocent children were torn from their mothers, and the honour of women in large towns, unable to withstand even small marauding parties, was sacrificed to the uncontrolled passions of the merciless hordes, [*sic*] that continually overran and harassed the country.⁴⁹

Is Ramakrishna preparing to undertake a critical evaluation of the past to understand how the present came to be as it is? That is, however, what a historical novel proper is supposed to perform. Is it a sign that the narrative is going to move away from the nostalgic to the critical mode? Is it merely the case that the overflow of nostalgia is being tempered by the antidote of criticism, enabling a more balanced view of the past to emerge? Or, finally, is Ramakrishna simply confused? If Ramakrishna were to answer any of these questions, he would, I assume, possibly shout out an emphatic no. In order to appreciate what

⁴⁸ Pillai 2. The extract forcefully captures the national longing for a home-made Indian historical discourse. The use of editorial ‘our’ points to the process of ‘imagining’ the nation, as suggested by Anderson in *Imagined Communities*.

⁴⁹ Pillai 2-3. Although Ramakrishna does not specifically mention the identity of these ‘hordes,’ it is not difficult to guess who he means.

Ramakrishna is trying to achieve by following up the nostalgic-glorious portrayal of the past with a critical-gory one, one has to take several points into account. First, the textual location of the unpleasant passage is significant; second, the ending of the story—specifically the device used to round it off with a happy closure—needs to be described at some length.

The passage in question is part of a long section whose concluding portion marks the point at which history ceases to function and the world of Romance takes over in *Padmini*:

There were then more murders, more outrages on the purity of women, and more acts of injustice on helpless men perpetrated, than during any other period; but history, unfortunately, records them not for public execration by future generations. Reader! read and find if a ghastlier story could be found in the whole literature of the world.⁵⁰

So the story of *Padmini* is not to be found in *historical* records. The only site where one is likely to find a comparable (but less ghastly) story is the *literary* archive of the world. The moment of transition is clearly signposted. The reader is about to leave the world of history behind. It is important for Ramakrishna to ensure that the last glimpse of an historical past with which the reader leaves is most awful. Only when history is a nightmare, will s/he be glad to have been

⁵⁰ Pillai 3-4.

relieved of it: the darker the parting view of history, the greater the relief to have left it behind.⁵¹

As I have suggested above, *Padmini* has the typical happy-ever-after ending of a Romance. The villain, Saluva, is finally routed; the hero, Chennapa, regains what his father had lost. The other component of the happy ending—in fact, the one without which no tale has the right to call itself a Romance—is the re-union of the lovers, Chennapa and Padmini, which is facilitated, if not exactly brought about, by a colonial agent. Francis Day, the only character in *Padmini* taken from history, rescues the disguised Padmini, when the small band of saintly men she is travelling with is attacked by ‘a body of pursuers.’⁵² Day takes the group to ‘St Thomé, then a flourishing Portuguese settlement,’ from where Padmini goes to Chandragiri to be re-united with her beloved Chennapa.⁵³ In recognition of his ‘noble service,’ Day is granted a piece of land on which Fort St George would ultimately be built.⁵⁴ The initial moment of the colonial encounter is precisely recorded: ‘The plot of land for building Fort St George was granted to Mr Day on the 1st of March 1639.’⁵⁵ History is back home in the form of British presence/settlement in India.

By introducing the character of Day into the plot of *Padmini*, Ramakrishna is able not only to re-unite the lovers but also to bring history back into focus. But

⁵¹ Incidentally, Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* (1922), one of the urtexts of modernist fiction by James Joyce, considers ‘history’ ‘a nightmare from which [he is] trying to awake,’ ed. Danis Rose, rev. ed. (London and Basingstoke: Picador, 1997) 35.

⁵² Pillai 190.

⁵³ Pillai 192.

⁵⁴ Pillai 212-213.

⁵⁵ Pillai 212.

his treatment of history at the point of exit shares little with its counterpart at the point of entry, where the past is first visited nostalgically and then critically. In my view, the sequencing is deliberate. Coming in a sequence, the critical view attenuates the nostalgic one. Consequently, the Romantic world in *Padmini* stands out in sharp relief against the dark(ened) chapter of history at the beginning. On the other hand, at the point of exit, history is a welcome presence, which works to re-unite the lovers, and thus provides the story with a happy ending. The world of Romance slips into the world of history. What has been possible only in imagination/Romance is now history/reality. Fantasy becomes fact. With the arrival of the British/English, a new chapter in the history of India begins. From now on, Romance need not stand aside before history. In fact, they merge, one becoming the other. The prophecy with which *Padmini* ends projects an image of colonial India which far surpasses its own created world of Romance:

I see a cloud, now looming yonder there,
 No bigger than the hand of man, that shall
 Expand and rain and water to purge all
 The land of th' innocent blood shed on it,
 For mother India's cup of woe is full,
 And but three decades more,—there will come from
 The far-off ends of this vast globe of ours,—
 A little island planted in the sea,—
 A handful of a noble race to trade,

And shall from thee ask for a plot of land,
And they shall prosper for their valour and
Shall be exalted for their righteousness.
They shall befriend the helpless and the poor,
And like the streams that seek the ocean broad,
The chickens that run to their mother's wings,
The maidens helpless and forlorn, that court
The succour of the chivalrous and the brave,
The orphans poor, the bounty of the kind,
All men of Ind, all races and all creeds
Shall to their banner flock, to live in peace
And amity; the tiger and the lamb
Their thirst shall quench both from the self-same brook.
The giant brute before the weakly sage
Shall bow, and men shall fear to even gaze
Upon the maidens that go forth alone,
Adorned with naught but chastity, and from
All lands the wisest shall revere our faith.
He that desires our homes to plunder and
Sully the honour of our women, him
Punishment terrible shall sure await.
Three hundred years more and the little plot

Of land thou gavest shall grow and expand
 Into an empire huge, unwritten yet
 On hist'ry's page [. . .].⁵⁶

One wonders if Rudyard Kipling, the self-appointed apologist of 'the white man's burden,' could have produced a more flattering image of the colonial encounter!⁵⁷

Yet there are moments in *Padmini* when its author shows genuine appreciation of the age-old customs and traditions of India. The fullest-blown of them is where Ramakrishna rhapsodizes over the Hindu ideal of womanhood:

The Hindu ideal of womanhood is at once graceful and elevating. Conceived thousands of years ago by the sages of old, on the banks of rivers and in mountain caves, it is the one thing that has been handed down to us pure and unsullied. Its charm and beauty lies in its stern severity, and time or the altered circumstances of the country have in no wise modified it. While many nations of the earth have swept over India leaving naught behind but desolation, like those strange and sudden visitations of nature that change even courses of rivers and bury cities under ground [*sic*] and provinces under seas; while their laws and customs have affected our own; while dynasties and creeds have passed over her like meteors in the sky; while all else have died away and left a perfect change: her daughters are the same now as they were thousands of years ago [. . .].⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Pillai 213-14.

⁵⁷ Rudyard Kipling, 'The White Man's Burden,' in *A Choice of Kipling's Verse Made by T.S. Eliot*, comp. T.S. Eliot, 11th impression (1941; London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1967) 136-37.

⁵⁸ Pillai 43.

Before moving on to discuss the key characteristics of ‘this stern ideal,’ Ramakrishna pauses to pay homage to those sages ‘from whom emanated this noble conception of womanhood, whose immutability is strange, and its imperviousness to time and influences of the highest kind astonishing.’⁵⁹ The two main female characters in *Padmini*, the protagonist Padmini and, curiously, her adversary Ambiga, are both embodiments of ‘this noble conception of womanhood.’ From the extraordinary regard for the Hindu ideal of womanhood that Ramakrishna evinces in the passage above, it is possible to guess the character/kind of cultural identity he would construct, were he disposed to do so in the first instance. In all probability, it would have been imagined along communal lines. That is to say, the faint glimpses of the nation that one occasionally catches through the crevices of the predominantly pro-colonial text of *Padmini* suggest it to be a nation of Hindus, not of Indians, as is the case in *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao.⁶⁰

If the resilience of native traditions is one source of pride for Ramakrishna, another is its cultures—the Tamil language and literature. The effusion has all the romanticism a language is characteristically invested with when it has become or is on its way to becoming one of the (cultural) markers of self-identity:

That language [Tamil] has a music and rhythm which no other language is said to possess, and a poetic literature as rich and grand as any other in the

⁵⁹ Pillai 46.

⁶⁰ Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (New York: New Directions, 1963). Subsequent references are to this edition.

world. The glory of Tamil literature consists [. . .] in its grand ethical precepts, put in forms that Sappho might envy [. . .].⁶¹

Why do these potentially subversive moments of cultural pride in the case of Ramakrishna fail to crystallize into a defiant anti-colonial stance? Why does Ramakrishna stop just short of crossing the threshold of compliance and compromise? The questions are readily answered. For Ramakrishna, as for many of his enlightened contemporaries, the history of India can be divided into three contrasting chapters. The first is a happy tale, recounting the glorious achievements of Hindu heroes and the noble sacrifices of Hindu heroines. The second is a gory account of nightmares, projecting a past beyond redemption. The worst of them, according to Ramakrishna, is the fall of the great Vijayanagara Empire under the attack of the joint Muslim forces of Bijapur, Golconda, and Ahmadnagar in 1565.⁶² The third is an on-going narrative, recording the peace and prosperity India has been able to enjoy first under the East India Company and then under Queen Victoria. In other words, the golden age of the Hindus comes to an end with the Muslim conquest of India. On the other hand, the dark rule of the Muslims gives way to the fair one by the British. If so, then what need there is for Ramakrishna to want to drive away the British from India? In asking

⁶¹ Pillai 156. About half a century before Ramakrishna, Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73) wrote a sonnet called 'Bangobhasha' (1866) to sing the beauty and richness of the Bengali language. The title has two parts, 'bango' and 'bhasha' which mean Bengali and language, respectively.

⁶² For a brief introduction to the rise and fall of the Vijayanagara Empire, see chapter 2 in George Michell, *Architecture and Art of Southern India: Vijayanagara and the Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995).

the *mai-bap* of Indians to ‘quit India,’ as M.K. Gandhi would eventually do in 1942, will he not be contradicting himself?⁶³

Padmini, to borrow from Alex Tickell, is a ‘proto-national’ text, a text divided in allegiance: colonial vs. national.⁶⁴ Of the three stages in the development of postcolonial literatures, it belongs to the middle one when ‘the potential for subversion in their themes,’ Bill Ashcroft *et al.* argue, ‘cannot be fully realized,’ the reason being that ‘texts of this kind come into being’ in historical circumstances overdetermined by the asymmetry in coloniser-colonised power relations.⁶⁵ There is much truth in what Ashcroft *et al.* say as to why texts like *Padmini* cannot encode a clear nationalist message or programme. But it is also equally true that the incipient nation that often peeps through its pages is imagined along communal/ethnic lines, with the Hindus regarded as the original inhabitants of India, which is of course far from true. The Hindu past that the author of *Padmini* chooses to revive speaks volumes about the kind of nation he can afford to imagine into being. In *Nur Jahan*, which I am going to analyse in the next chapter, Singh chooses a different past (the reign of the great Mughal Emperor Akbar), a past justly celebrated for harmony and tolerance among the various Indian communities. No wonder, Singh is able to imagine an India in plural-secular terms.

⁶³ *Mai-bap* is a Hindi expression which literally means mother-father. Its associated meanings are benefactor, guardian, protector, and so on. In the context of colonial India, it referred to British paternalism, one of the stock colonising attitudes towards the colonised.

⁶⁴ Tickell 32.

⁶⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (1989; London and New York: Routledge, 2002) 6.

CHAPTER 4

Revivalist Historical Fiction 2: *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (1909)

For me the only question for immediate solution before the country is the Hindu-Mussalman question [. . .] I see no way of achieving anything in this afflicted country without a lasting heart unity between Hindus and Mussalmans of India.

M.K. Gandhi¹

Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen by Sirdar Jogendra Singh is my second example of revivalist historical fiction.² It appeared six years after *Padmini: An Indian Romance*, that is, in 1909.³ Though published in the same decade, the two novels construct Indian cultural identity differently, in fact so differently that one must pause to tease out why it should be so. In contrast to the nation in *Padmini*, *Nur Jahan* envisages an inclusive, plural, and secular nation, and thus declines to collapse Indian nationalism into Hindu nationalism, which is what happens in the earlier work. In the second section of the present chapter, I delineate the historical background against which the latter work should ideally be placed to appreciate the boldness of its author in envisioning a national

¹ M.K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Electronic Book), vol. 28 (New Delhi: Publications Division Government of India, 1999) 61.

² Sirdar Jogendra Singh, *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (London: James Nisbet & Co., [sic] Limited, 1909). Subsequent references are to this edition.

³ T. Ramakrishna [Pillai], *Padmini: An Indian Romance* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd., 1903). Subsequent references are to this edition.

identity that goes beyond such insular considerations as caste, class, and creed, though the issue of gender remains problematic.

Nur Jahan and Its Critics

The critical fate of *Nur Jahan* has not fared any better than that of *Padmini*. Most commentators have followed the footsteps of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, who dismisses the novel with the comment that ‘Ramesh Chander Dutt’s *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909) and Sir Jogendra Singh’s *Nur Jahan* (1909) are also historical romances.’⁴ There are, however, a few exceptions, including Gobinda Prasad Sarma. From the title of his book, *Nationalism In [sic] Indo-Anglian Fiction*, one can work out what Sarma is looking for: it is, to state the obvious, the representation of the emergence, growth, and consolidation of Indian national consciousness in the Indian English novel. Like any other nationalism, Indian nationalism is too complex a phenomenon, and ‘Indo-Anglian fiction’ too diverse a corpus, to be done justice to in one single study. Accordingly and also prudently, Sarma splits ‘*the aspect of Indian nationalism*’ into ‘*various aspects of this nationalism*,’ so that he can get a grip on his actual subject.⁵ He then sets

⁴ K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, 4th ed. (1962; New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1984) 323.

⁵ Gobinda Prasad Sarma, *Nationalism In [sic] Indo-Anglian Fiction* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1978) xii, xiii. Emphasis added.

himself ‘to find[ing] out and discuss[ing] all the Indo-Anglian novels and short stories till date’:

My choice for the study of Indian nationalism is based mainly on two reasons. There have been many studies of Indo-Anglian fiction in its various aspects [. . .]. But the aspect of nationalism in Indo-Anglian fiction has not yet been studied *exhaustively* and systematically by any [. . .]. The first reason behind my choice of this aspect is to fill up this gap in the study of Indo-Anglian fiction. *The second is that once I can show that Indo-Anglian fiction is nationalistic in spirit, all doubts about its not being Indian in spirit would be dispelled, and all prejudices against it will vanish.* And once this happens in case of fiction – the biggest branch of Indo-Anglian literature – the readers should be able to study other branches of this literature with an open mind.⁶

What stands out clearly from the extract above is the anxiety deriving from the critical dismissal of Indian writing in English as illegitimate—illegitimate because written in the language of the alien masters. The writing is also held in contempt because a long-standing critical assumption holds that (Indian) literature written in a language other than the mother tongue of the writer concerned cannot be an authentic one. Evidently, Sarma is trying to rescue Indian fiction in English from these twin *nationalist* allegations against it. While the aim is a commendable one, the method(ology) is perhaps not: instead of challenging the worth of nationalist critical orthodoxies informing discussions of Indian

⁶ Sarma xvii, xii. Emphasis added.

English writing in general and Indian English fiction in particular, Sarma is rather endorsing nationalist literary-critical practice in attempting to demonstrate ‘that Indo-Anglian fiction is nationalistic in spirit.’ Sarma has thus more to say about *Nur Jahan* than Iyengar:

From T. Ramakrishna’s *Padmini* to Sirdar Jogendra Singh’s *Nur Jahan* (1909), which has also been called a romance, there seems to be no distinct improvement in the growth of Indo-Anglian historical fiction.⁷

By what gauge is the ‘improvement’/‘growth’ of Indian historical fiction to be measured? In other words, what criteria are to be used for ascertaining/assessing whether or not a certain historical novel marks a ‘distinct improvement’ on its precursors? What does it consist of: depth of historical vision? aesthetically satisfying treatment of history? authentic reconstruction of the historical period concerned? close imitation of the Master of Abbotsford? Sarma does not answer any of these questions. He is rather preoccupied with discovering ‘the spirit of nationalism’ in *Nur Jahan* the lack of which leads him to conclude: ‘The story being without any tinge of nationalism, it need not be retold here.’⁸ So *Nur Jahan* is not, to borrow from Graeme Turner, a ‘national fiction.’⁹

⁷ Sarma 64.

⁸ Sarma xiii, 64.

⁹ Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

In contrast to Sarma, K.S. Ramamurti seems to appreciate *Nur Jahan* if only because it is ‘true to history almost in every detail.’¹⁰ In order to substantiate his claim, Ramamurti cites a lengthy passage from *An Advanced History of India* by the eminent Indian historian R.C. Majumdar. I quote a small portion of the cited passage to determine how accurate Ramamurti is in his claim:

In May 1611, Jahangir married Nur Jehan, originally known as Mihr-ul-Nissa, who considerably influenced his career and reign [. . .]. Sher-afghan (Ali Kuli Beg [Mihr-ul-Nissa’s husband]) was in his turn hacked to pieces by the followers of Qutb-ud-din at Burdwan [in Bengal] and Mihr-ul-Nissa was taken to the court with her young daughter. After four years, Mihr-ul-Nissa’s charming ‘appearance caught the king’s far-seeing eye and so captivated him’ that he married her, and made her his chief queen.¹¹

If properly sifted, the literary text can be shown to have departed at a number of points from the historical account above. The author of *Nur Jahan* is true to history as far as the murder of Ali Kuli Beg and the marriage of Jahangir and the widowed Mihr-ul-Nissa are concerned.¹² But whereas the historical Mihr-ul-Nissa was the mother of a ‘young daughter’ named Ladilah Begum at the time of

¹⁰ K.S. Ramamurti, *Rise of the Indian Novel in English* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1987) 252.

¹¹ Ramamurti 253. Ramamurti is even not so careful as to give the title of the novel correctly. The title is *Nur Jahan*, not *Nur Jehan*, as Ramamurti spells it.

¹² The two names—Jahangir and Mihr-ul-Nissa—are spelt Jehangir and Mihar-ul-Nissa in *Nur Jahan*. I have used the ones given in *Nur Jahan*.

her second marriage, her literary counterpart is childless, if not a virgin, which is a clear divergence from historical record.¹³

So, according to Iyengar, *Nur Jahan* is an historical Romance (in Iyengar, however, it is romance with a small ‘r’); according to Sarma, it is completely devoid of nationalism; and according to Ramamurti, it is faithful to history. All these critical judgments are true, but only partially. The truth (and I must hasten to add, not the final truth) is that *Nur Jahan* is a Romance and an anti-Romance at the same time; that it is no less *nationalist* in execution than in intent; and that it is faithful to as well as divergent from history. Of the three (counter) truths (if I may venture to put it so), it is worth noting, only the second one is not a paradox, nor even a contradiction. That it should be so is perhaps no wonder. For it is not only the progenitor but also the resolution of the other two. That is, if the second truth is a function of what one may call ideology, the first and third ones are its formal and substantive manifestations, respectively. To put it in plain terms, *Nur Jahan* is torn between Romance and anti-Romance, between history and fiction, not because its author intends to craft a new narrative discourse or devise a novel discursive apparatus but because he wants to reach out to his readers with a clear *nationalist* message: united we stand, divided we fall. The only way *Nur Jahan* can articulate this call for national solidarity is by disarticulating (one may as well say ‘by exploiting’) some of the taken-for-granted modalities of historical Romance, itself a mongrel. *Nur Jahan* must negotiate, in other words, the generic

¹³ See, for example, the partial genealogy of Mughal royalty given in Waldemar Hansen, *The Peacock Throne: The Drama of Mogul India*, 1st Indian rpt. (1972; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981).

stipulations of Romance on the one hand, and the mimetic codes of the historical novel on the other, to accommodate ‘any tinge of nationalism.’ To appreciate the significance of this double negotiation, the work has to be set in the particular historical moment of its appearance. So what follows is first the story of Indian nationalism at the turn of the nineteenth century, followed by the story of one of its fictional reconstructions in *Nur Jahan*.

The Historical Context of Nur Jahan

Nur Jahan was published in 1909, that is, six years after the publication of *Padmini*. Usually, six years are too brief a period in the life of a nation to be of any consequence. But these six years were some of the most eventful years in the national life of colonial India. They were to prove crucial to its political life in particular. Never before was colonial India so full of political activity as it was in the first decade of the twentieth century. Newer and newer trends were emerging, sometimes modifying the older ones, at other times rejecting them altogether. In my view, it is important to read *Nur Jahan* in the more specific context of these new developments in the arena of Indian politics. Only then one is able to appreciate the radical nature of its conceptualisation of Indian nationalism, by virtue of which it sets itself apart from the majority of contemporary works (in

English as well as in Indian languages), dealing with the same issue. Unlike *Padmini*, for example, *Nur Jahan* refuses to equate Indian nationalism with Hindu nationalism. Its ‘imagined community’ is imagined along secular, not communal/religious, lines.¹⁴ To begin to sense how challenging it was to conceive of Indianness in such terms as *Nur Jahan* does, it is necessary to take a closer look at the contours of Indian politics at the time of its production.

Some of the noteworthy developments in the arena of Indian politics in the first decade of the twentieth century are: first, the partition of Bengal in 1905 and the *Swadeshi* Movement (1905-8) it gave birth to (incidentally, *Swadeshi* was the first openly militant anti-British nationalist movement of the twentieth century); secondly, the birth of the All-India Muslim League in 1906; thirdly, the *Swadeshi* riots of 1906-7; fourthly, the split of the Indian National Congress in 1907 into moderates and extremists; and finally, the Indian Councils Act of 1909, which gave the Muslims of British India a separate electorate. So the overall picture of the period can be summarised as one of conflicts and tensions, of disintegration, of ‘things fall[ing] apart.’

In chapter 2, I traced how British-Indian relations changed over the nineteenth century. While the pre-1857 relationship was largely one of collusion, the post-1857 relationship was in the main one of collision. The latter remains the defining trend of the period under consideration here. The causes of Indo-British conflict are not difficult to identify. Foremost among them was the factor of

¹⁴ The now classic term comes from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1983).

mounting political dissatisfaction on the part of the English-educated (Hindu) intelligentsia who had come to dominate the Indian political scene of the day under the banner of the Indian National Congress which had come into being in 1885. In the following two decades, the Congress had been working to ensure that Indians were given more and more openings in public institutions and offices. But the achievement was far from satisfactory.

And now things were getting worse instead of better, with a viceroy determined to treat the Congress as an ‘unclean thing’ and rejecting all overtures made by its leaders ‘with the same polite but frigid indifference’—a viceroy whose achievements in six years included reduction of the elected element in the Calcutta Corporation, a Universities Act which most people felt was essentially an attempt to tighten official control over education, an Official Secrets Act curbing press freedom, and a convocation speech claiming ‘that the highest ideal of truth is to a large extent a Western conception.’¹⁵

The realm of politics was but a small domain of tension between rulers and ruled.¹⁶ More pervasive as well as more vicious was the overall Anglo-Indian attitude to Indians in general and ‘the noisy Bengalee Baboo’ in particular.¹⁷ The

¹⁵ Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-1908* (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1973) 24.

¹⁶ It was indeed a small domain because the Indian masses were yet to develop a political consciousness. One of the reasons why *Swadeshi*—‘at least [a] potentially mass movement,’ according to Sarkar—could not reap full harvest was the failure of its leaders to retain the support of common people which they had initially been able to mobilise. 4. With the advent of M.K. Gandhi, Indian national politics would ultimately expand both horizontally and vertically.

¹⁷ Lord Cross to Lord Dufferin, 14 April 1887, cited in Sarkar 406.

Anglo-Indian treatment of Indians was nothing short of a naked display of white racism. Sumit Sarkar writes:

Political disappointment affected directly only a limited circle; more important probably was the cumulative effect of racial discrimination and arrogance (of which the convocation address of February 1905 was such a glaring instance). Cases of assault, seldom punished by the courts; white arrogance on trains and steamers and in offices and factories; unfair treatment in matters of pay and promotion—none of these things were new, of course, but still we get the impression of worsening race-relations, as the jingoism of the new imperialist age percolated through innumerable channels into the minds and behaviour of Anglo- India.¹⁸

Last but not the least, the myth of a prosperous and peaceful India under British rule was fast eroding. ‘Faith in the “providential” British connection was difficult to maintain in face of the repeated famines and epidemics of the 1890s.’¹⁹ Signs of economic downturn were too palpable to be covered up by any amount of rhetoric.²⁰ The educated Indian had good reason to be disillusioned:

Western education made the intelligentsia intensely aware of the contrast between the prosperous industrialised West and poverty-stricken, famine-ravaged India. From Naoroji, Ranade, Digby, and above all Romesh

¹⁸ Sarkar 24.

¹⁹ Sarkar 25.

²⁰ The ideological and repressive apparatuses of the colonial state appear to be inversely related. When the one is fully at work, the other tends to recede into the background. For an insightful discussion of the coercion-persuasion dialectics at play in the dynamics of colonial formation in the Indian context, see Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1997).

Chandra Dutt's two monumental volumes (published in 1901 and 1903), it learnt that this tragic contrast was no decree of blind fate, but the result of deliberate British policy. The foreign rulers had used the 'arm of political injustice' to destroy the traditional handicrafts of India, thus creating the 'present helpless dependence on agriculture'; the latter in its turn had been ruined by an excessive land tax; and to all this had been added a crippling 'drain of wealth' in the form of first 'investment' and later home charges, which India was meeting only through a harmful and deceptive export-surplus.²¹

In short, the alien masters who were once looked upon as saviours now came to be seen as heartless exploiters. The situation was ripe for an explosion of anti-British energies.

Given the steady corrosion of British-Indian relations at the time, one may expect to see a greater cohesion among different Indian communities, especially between Hindus and Muslims. Contrary to expectation, an unprecedented hostility developed between Hindus and Muslims, despite some genuine attempts at bringing the two communities closer together.²² Needless to say, the frequency of communal riots at the turn of the century is its clearest proof. To be fair, both sides were to blame, if not to the same degree. Mutual distrust grew because one had begun to pursue a revivalist agenda for some time now, while the other turned more and more towards a separatist politics, both more or less communal

²¹ Sarkar 95-96.

²² Insofar as it is committed to projecting an inclusive India, I read *Nur Jahan* as one of these few remarkable efforts.

in character. The paths of the two communities had begun to diverge.²³ The action of the one provided an excuse for the (re)action of the other. To borrow from Salman Rushdie, the obnoxious politics of blame had been born.²⁴ ‘It became customary for both Hindu and Muslim newspapers,’ writes Abdul Hamid, ‘not only to accuse individuals but also to cast aspersions on the other community. The signs of approaching strife were unmistakable.’²⁵ The enlightened white *sahibs* knew all too well how to exploit these dark situations best.

British India, one may safely argue, had never been free from the phenomenon of revivalism. (Nor is present-day India or, for that matter, contemporary Pakistan. The case of Bangladesh is perhaps only slightly better.) It had been there all along in one form or another. If one period was marked by Hindu revivalism, another was marked by its counterpart, if I may put it so, Muslim revivalism. Sometimes both were at work at the same time, which was when communal tensions mounted. The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw two distinct tendencies growing up simultaneously. First, after many decades of hostility and indifference towards western education and culture, Muslims took to

²³ In the process, Indian nationalism would eventually grow into Hindu nationalism, and Muslim separatism into Muslim nationalism. Intimations of the partition of India already seem to be in the air. On the narrowing of Indian nationalism into Hindu nationalism and the subsequent demand for the (second) partition of Bengal by the Hindu intelligentsia on the eve of the political birth of India in 1947, see Joya Chatterji, *Bengal divided: Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

²⁴ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991) 57.

²⁵ Abdul Hamid, *Muslim Separatism in India: A Brief Survey: 1858-1947* (N.p.: Oxford UP, 1967) 48. Given the Pakistan bias of Hamid, one may ask with no use of irony whether he himself has learnt anything from the history of Hindu-Muslim ‘strife’ he is talking about.

reformism in the same spirit as the Hindus had done half a century ago.²⁶ Secondly, the Hindus turned away from social reformism to religious revivalism. As the century wore on, Hindu revivalism gathered momentum, engulfing the whole of India. More specifically, Bengal (the power base of the British at the time), Bombay (then the Presidency of Bombay, now the Province of Maharashtra with Mumbai as its capital), and the Punjab became major centres of Hindu revivalism.

A whole range of activities were undertaken to highlight the superiority of Indian (read Hindu) civilisation over all the other civilisations of the world—both past and present. The *materialist* West was deliberately contrasted with the *spiritualist* East. To highlight the spiritual heritage of India, the sacred texts of Hinduism such as the Vedas and the *Gita* were elaborately commented upon.²⁷ In the heat of the argument, some even went on to claim for Hinduism the status of the ‘only true and universal faith.’²⁸ As part of a larger programme to invest Hinduism with historicity, a number of biographies of Sri Krishna appeared in Indian languages, implanting him as the ‘ideal hero’ in Indian (Hindu)

²⁶ The Muslim apathy to westernisation has come to be questioned. Scholars now hold that Muslim response to western education was far from homogeneous. Hence to claim that a North Indian Muslim was as averse to the benefits of British culture as a Bengal Muslim is no more than an oversimplification. See Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972). Paraphrasing Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the pioneer of English education in Muslim India, Hamid enumerates the factors why the Muslims could not accept western education. Possibly the most compelling reason had to do with the widespread belief that ‘the study of English was forbidden to the faithful.’ 11-16.

²⁷ In one sense, the uses of these texts were also secular for they were to serve the national movement. For a discussion of the nationalist appropriation(s) of Hindu sacred texts (especially the *Gita*), see Josna E. Rege, *Colonial Karma: Self, Action, and Nation in the Indian English Novel* (Hampshire and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 1-21.

²⁸ Dayananda Saraswati, cited in Crispin Bates, *Subalterns and Raj: South Asia since 1600* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007) 96. Dayananda founded the *Arya Samaj* in 1875.

consciousness.²⁹ The Aryan ancestry of the Hindus was emphasised in order to infuse them with a sense of racial pride. As if to consolidate it further, heroes from the historical past, especially those who had successfully resisted the waves of Muslim invasion, were reinstated in public memory, with the (sometimes oblique, sometimes obvious) message to re-enact those heroic deeds of the past to rid India of her present-day subjugation. The Bengalis revived the memories of Pratapaditya and Sitaram, Maharashtrians of Shivaji, and the Punjabis of Ranjit Singh.³⁰

In each of these centres of Hindu revivalism, in short, there flourished a number of pro-Hindu organisations (whose pseudo-religious activities often led to communal riots), an array of Hindu *utsavas* (festivals) and *melas* (fairs), a spate of new journals, and a body of literary works based on history, whose revivalist gospel charged Hindu India with new life, but threatened Muslim India with doom.³¹ The revivalist clamour of the day was loud enough to drown the old voices of harmony, moderation, reformism, and tolerance for a while. Even Rabindranath Tagore was tricked into doing it service. Tagore would eventually distance himself from the contemporary revivalist frenzy, and become one of the

²⁹ See Amal Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge: India between 1890 and 1910* (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1967) 1-2.

³⁰ Tripathi 73-74.

³¹ The Muslim intelligentsia invariably saw Hindu revivalism as a threat to the existence of Muslim community.

earliest Indian critics of (Indian) nationalism for whom ‘nationalism itself became gradually illegitimate.’³²

How did the Muslims react to the Hindu revivalist craze of the day? The standard answer is the way any (threatened) minority might. The problem with such an answer is that it derives its justification neither from a deep perception of the nature of the crisis in question nor from a thorough grasp of the historical context of its genesis and resolution—both short- and long-term. In other words, it is deplorably simplistic—too broad a generalization to be of much use. The anxieties and aspirations of *all* minorities do not neatly fit into a common pattern.

The story of the Muslims of British India begins with the Great Rebellion of 1857. Rightly or wrongly, it was the Muslims who were held responsible for what the British tend(ed) to call the Indian/Sepoy Mutiny. ‘In the British view,’ writes Thomas R. Metcalf, ‘it was Muslim intrigue and Muslim leadership that converted a sepoy mutiny into a political conspiracy, aimed at the extinction of the British Raj.’³³

For most of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, therefore, the Muslim community was in murky waters, held in contempt and distrust by the colonial masters. Many of the age-old stereotypes of the Muslims were given a new lease of life. Peter Hardy has fittingly described the contours of Anglo-Muslim relations of the time:

³² Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self*, Oxford India Paperbacks (1994; Delhi: Oxford UP, 1996) 2. This slim book is a brilliant discussion of Tagore vis-à-vis the question of (Indian) nationalism.

³³ Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1964) 298.

In the embittered and distrustful atmosphere which now prevailed, the British were constantly on the watch for ‘rustles in the Muhammadan community’, for an outbreak of that fanaticism and bigotry ‘characteristic of the race’.³⁴

On the other hand, the Muslim perception was one of disillusionment:

The savage British suppression of the Mutiny and Rising, with its destruction of Delhi as a centre of Muslim culture, and the dispersion of the descendents of Akbar and Aurangzib by execution and exile, at last forced educated Muslims to realise not only that the British were in India to stay, but also that they intended to stay on their own terms. The last illusions that they were the mayors of the Mughal palace were dissipated; the last illusions that an education in Persian and Urdu and in the Muslim religious sciences would serve both a Muslim’s eternal and his worldly welfare were torn away.³⁵

Hence the most vital task before the leaders of the Muslim community after 1857 was to repair Anglo-Muslim relations, to bring about, in the words of Hardy, ‘rapprochement between Islam and the nineteenth-century Western-dominated world.’³⁶ They decided on a two-part programme: to establish in the eyes of the white rulers of India that they were allies not enemies of white rule and, for the first part of the programme to bear fruit, to reconcile themselves and the community they represented to western education and culture, which in turn

³⁴ Hardy 82.

³⁵ Hardy 61.

³⁶ Hardy 104.

entailed dispelling the strong anti-British sentiments of the community. After the memories of 1857 had grown a little dimmer, the British policy was also geared to promoting the new secular ambitions of the Muslims. At the turn of the century, the British were so openly committed to safeguarding Muslim rights and interests as to invite charges of partiality from the Hindus.

So Hindus and Muslims were not the only actors on the Indian political scene at the time under discussion here. Right at the centre were the British, desperately looking for a new ally to meet the extremist challenge of the *Swadeshi* years.³⁷ From its earlier moderate position, the movement had shifted towards an extremist one, exposing the limits of liberal politics in the process. The extremist position is best captured in the words of Aurobindo Ghosh, the extremist guru of Bengal: ‘The new movement is not primarily a protest against bad government—it is a protest against the continuance of British control; whether that control is used well or ill, justly or unjustly, is a minor and unessential consideration.’³⁸ The well-meaning benefactor of the moderates had become an unwelcome outsider.³⁹ ‘I want to have the key of my house, and not merely one stranger turned out of it,’ thundered Bal Gangadhar Tilak—‘the

³⁷ When the Congress split in 1907, the *Swadeshi* Movement had already moved into its extremist phase. It was to enter the terrorist phase soon.

³⁸ Aurobindo Ghosh, cited in Sarkar 65.

³⁹ The moderates were what Thomas B. Macaulay had wanted them to be: admirers of British culture, champions of British morality, and defenders of British rule in India. They did not seem to have the slightest doubt that the British were waiting for the auspicious day when Indians would be fit to take care of themselves. They would then leave India, saying good-bye in the politest way. The Indians would get back the house the visitors had occupied for a while. Is it civil to drive out someone who has ostensibly come to do you good? But the extremists had a very different notion of the role the British were playing in India. They were, in fact, indifferent to whether British rule was a boon or a ban for India. They wanted the British to leave India—the sooner, the better.

Hercules and Prometheus of Modern India’—to borrow from the title of a study on the extremist guru of Bombay (now called Mumbai).⁴⁰

The British knew how to appease the moderates because they understood the rules of moderate politics well. A different set of rules governed the politics of extremism with which they were now confronted. It was impossible to grant the extremists what they were asking for. But the crisis had to be overcome in some way or other. Would coercion do as before? But how would they justify the use of force? Was there no better alternative? There was: the most satisfactory response to the extremist challenge would be to prove it *not* to be representative in character. Though cornered, a part of the Congress (that is, the moderates) was already in favour. So were the Muslims. The problem with the Muslims was that they did not yet have a political organisation at the all-India level. But the problem could be solved. The Muslims were already apprehensive of what the Congress was up to. Let us grant them a favour, one they would loathe to part with, the colonial administrators deliberated over.

Soon an opportunity offered itself. Towards the end of 1906, when (Hindu) India was still simmering with resentment over the partition of Bengal, Lord Minto, the first twentieth-century liberal Viceroy of India, received a thirty-five-member Muslim delegation. In his reply to the address presented by the delegation, he submitted that he was as ‘firmly convinced’ as they ‘that any electoral representation in India would be doomed to mischievous failure which

⁴⁰ Bal Gangadhar Tilak, quoted in Sarkar 65; S.L. Karandikar, *Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak: The Hercules & Prometheus of Modern India* (Poona: n.p., 1957).

aimed at granting a personal enfranchisement regardless of the beliefs and traditions of the communities composing the population of this continent.’⁴¹ The ‘political rights and interests of [the Muslims] as a community will be safeguarded,’ he assured them, ‘by any administrative re-organization with which I am concerned.’⁴² The members of the Simla delegation were intelligent enough to make out what the Viceroy meant. Nor was there any confusion at all as to what they were expected to do in return. In the space of barely a quarter of a year, the All-India Muslim League was founded. The objectives of the League were what they were supposed to be:

- (1) to promote loyalty to the British government,
- (2) to protect and advance the political rights and interests of Mussalmans of India and respectfully represent their needs and aspirations to Government, and
- (3) to prevent the rise among Mussalmans of any feelings of hostility towards other communities *without prejudice to the other objects of the League.*⁴³

True to its objectives, the League ‘in its second conference at Aligarh (1908) adopted a resolution welcoming the partition of Bengal and condemning the Swaraj and the Swadeshi Movements.’⁴⁴

⁴¹ Lord Minto, cited in Hardy 155.

⁴² Lord Minto, quoted in Tripathi 163. The Muslims of British India were finally awarded a separate electorate by the Indian Councils Act of 1909.

⁴³ Cited in Tripathi 165. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁴ Tripathi 167.

So during the years between 1903 and 1909, that is, between the publication of *Padmini* and that of *Nur Jahan*, Indian politics had become a site of conflicting interests, and Indian nationalism a constellation of parochial nationalisms. Instead of two (that is, rulers and ruled), there were now three players on the Indian political scene: the British, the Hindus, and the Muslims, each group jealously guarding its own interests. Understandably, the interests of the British were bound to be different from those of the Indians. But the Indians were by no means pursuing a set of common goals. For example, the Hindus resented the partition of Bengal, whereas the Muslims welcomed it. The Congress had split into extremists and moderates, with the political objectives of one faction at odds with those of the other. When interests diverge, the groups who work to protect and promote those interests cannot be supposed to be living together in perfect harmony. As British-Indian relations soured, anti-British sentiment grew both in passion and in reach, giving the Indian national movement valuable momentum in the process. Indeed, it would not be long when Indians would become so thoroughly convinced of the evil of British rule that all its altruistic platitudes would not be able to trick them (back) into being its accomplices. At the same time, however, infested with mutual distrust and hostility, Hindu-Muslim relations began to worsen and the paths of the two communities began to diverge. In the hullabaloo of Hindu revivalism and Muslim separatism, Indian nationalism could no longer remain Indian nationalism, pure and simple. With the two main communities looking askance at each other, it

could only be either Hindu or Muslim nationalism, one informed by revivalist and the other by separatist ideology.

Yet here and there a lone voice, albeit subdued, could be heard, urging moderation, sanity, and tolerance; projecting an Indian identity free from considerations of caste, class, or creed; and thus inviting fellow Indians to accept the cultural plurality of India. If Rabindranath Tagore is one such voice in an Indian language, the author of *Nur Jahan* is no doubt another in English.

The Nation in Nur Jahan

In addition to being torn between Romance and anti-Romance, *Nur Jahan* is also a romance with a small 'r,' that is, a (simple) love story told simply. Prince Salim, son of the great Mughal Emperor Akbar, falls in love with Mihar-ul-Nissa at first sight. In her (im)modest way, Mihar-ul-Nissa returns his love. Complications arise when it comes to be known that Ghias Beg, father of Mihar-ul-Nissa and also a top-ranking official at the Mughal court, has already decided to marry his daughter to Ali Kuli Beg, a young Persian officer in the imperial army. Seeing no way out, Mihar-ul-Nissa implores the Empress Jodha Bai to save the lovers from the impending doom of separation.⁴⁵ The Empress asks her husband to press the parents of Mihar-ul-Nissa to break off the engagement so that the lovers can be

⁴⁵ Singh 68.

united and thus be happy. But the Emperor plainly declines to do so. On his part, Salim sends one of his foster brothers, Mirza Ibrahim Koka, to Ghias and Ali Kuli Beg to ask them to call off the agreement. The mission fails, for neither agrees to soil his 'honour' to please the Prince.⁴⁶ In desperation, Salim writes his father a moving letter, begging him to intervene. Akbar remains unmoved. Instead of granting the plea of his son, he rather orders him in his reply to crush the rebellion of the Rana of Odeypore.⁴⁷ Salim 'could see that his father wanted him out of the way.'⁴⁸

The Prince returns from his expedition victorious but only to find himself a loser: while he was away, his beloved has been married to Ali Kuli Beg. After the death of his father, Prince Salim becomes the Emperor of India, assuming the title of Jehangir ('conqueror of the world').⁴⁹ His old love revives. With no one to hold him back, he is now determined to get Mihar-ul-Nissa back at any cost. With his attempt to persuade Ali Kuli Beg to divorce his wife having failed, he resorts to devious means to get him removed from his way to happiness. Ali Kuli Beg succeeds in foiling several attempts on his life, but is finally killed. Mihar-ul-Nissa mourns the death of her husband for a decent period of time. In due course, however, she softens to accept Jehangir and consents to marry him. The lovers

⁴⁶ Singh 91, 93.

⁴⁷ Singh 109.

⁴⁸ Singh 111.

⁴⁹ Singh 197.

are thus (re-)united. Jehangir gives his beloved the name she has come to be known to posterity—Nur Jahan, meaning ‘the Light of the World.’⁵⁰

From the bare skeleton of the story given above, one may begin to see where to look for the tension between Romance and anti-Romance in *Nur Jahan*. It is to be found mainly in its characterisation, especially of the male characters, though its traces are visible in its plot construction as well.⁵¹ A productive source of tension in the novel, a quality it shares with most of the works belonging to the genre of historical fiction and which I shall address first, is the question of the nature of relationship between historical fact and novelistic fiction: a question that has dominated critical discussions of the genre right from the time of its emergence at the turn of the eighteenth century. That is why the historical novel is often described euphemistically as a ‘hybrid’ form and bluntly as a ‘bastard genre.’⁵²

One of the many forms that the history-fiction question takes is: how much liberty can historical novelists take with historical sources they base their work upon? Should they be absolutely true to facts of history or bend them so as to serve a fictional design? Margaret Atwood, a contemporary practitioner of the genre, is quite explicit about the issue: a historical novelist can resort to invention

⁵⁰ Singh 258.

⁵¹ I am well aware of the dangers inherent in isolating one particular aspect of a work for discussion of the kind I am attempting here. In ‘The Art of Fiction,’ Henry James discusses some of the hazards involved in such a critical practice. My only justification is that it places my critical focus aright. *The Art of Fiction and Other Essays by Henry James*, comp. Morris Roberts (New York: Oxford UP, 1948).

⁵² Diana Wallace, *The Woman’s Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 3; Peter Green, cited in Neil McEwan, *Perspective in British Historical Fiction Today* (Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: Longwood Academic, 1987) 10.

only when there are gaps in historical record. Otherwise no liberty should be taken with historical detail.⁵³ The history-fiction question can be ‘tackled,’ according to David Roberts, from two sides: either ‘from the side of history, as with [Georg] Lukács,’ or ‘from the side of fiction, as with [Hans Vilmar] Geppert.’⁵⁴ In what follows, I look at the question primarily from the side of history, that is, from the perspective enabled by the history of (anti-)colonial India, though it will be impossible, I am certain, to ignore the insights of the other perspective altogether, for the two cannot be so neatly kept apart as they may entice one to suppose.

While refuting the claim made by Ramamurti that *Nur Jahan* is ‘true to history almost in every detail,’ I demonstrated one of the many instances where the novel departs from historical fact. These departures can be classified in a number of different ways, but I would group them according to whether they contribute to the romantic/Romantic bent of the work in question or strengthen its anti-Romantic bias. In organising historical details, such departures serve either the national or romantic/Romantic interests of *Nur Jahan*. I shall designate (for the sake of clarity and convenience) those departures as structural, designed to move forwards the romantic/Romantic interests of the plot and, those as ideological, designed to help it achieve its secular vision of a plural India. As can be gathered from my use of the terms ‘ideological’ and ‘structural,’ these two

⁵³ See Margaret Atwood, ‘In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction,’ *The American Historical Review* 103. 5 (Dec. 1998): 1503-16.

⁵⁴ David Roberts, ‘The Modern German Historical Novel: An Introduction,’ in *The Modern German Historical Novel: Paradigms, Problems, Perspectives*, eds. David Roberts and Philip Thomson (New York and Oxford: Berg, 1991) 2.

kinds of departures in effect correspond to the two sides from which, according to Roberts, the history-fiction interface can be approached, with the ideological departures converging on ‘the side of history,’ while the structural ones on ‘the side of fiction.’

There is also a third category of (innocent?) departures which do not seem to have much, if anything at all, to do with either the structural or ideological scheme of the work. A clear example of such departures is making Mihar-ul-Nissa the only child of her parents; there were in fact three more children: two sons and a second daughter. One of the sons would later become the father-in-law of the fifth Mughal Emperor, the famous Shah Jahan, who would immortalise his love for his wife Mumtaz Mahal and build one of the architectural wonders of the world, the Taj Mahal, to memorialise her passing.

A general consensus among scholars of Mughal India is that the romantic story of pre-marital love between Jehangir and Nur Jahan is indeed a *story*, a fiction. None of its constituent details is historically verifiable—from a youthful Prince Salim falling in love at first sight with a pubescent Mihar-ul-Nissa to Emperor Jehangir commissioning the murder of her first husband so that he can get her back. While the story is, in plain terms, a fabrication from start to finish, nevertheless it has circulated for centuries because as a story it is a fascinating one. In her thorough study of *Nur Jahan: Empress of India*, Ellison Banks Findly is unambiguous in her conclusion:

We must be persuaded, then, that all stories depicting any aspect of an earlier romance [between Jehangir and Nur Jahan] foiled by Akbar or by other circumstance were apocryphal and have their base not in historical fact but in courtly rumor or bazaar gossip.⁵⁵

If the entire edifice of the romantic story about Prince Salim/Emperor Jehangir and Mihar-ul-Nissa/Nur Jahan is an artefact, is there any profit in attempting to discover the ‘romantic liberties’ the author of *Nur Jahan* has taken with the facts of history to (re)construct it?⁵⁶ Although my answer is no, still I will briefly discuss one particular instance of what I have proposed to call structural departures, to point to another creative source of tension in *Nur Jahan*, namely, its divided/double allegiance, one of the many inherent ambivalences of (anti-colonial) nationalist discourse.⁵⁷ The specific example I have chosen to focus on also illustrates the tension the two types of departure (that is, ideological and structural) generate in a given text.

All the structural departures in *Nur Jahan* are meant to serve the romantic/Romantic interests of its plot. But some of them function in more ways than one, though they are not to be confused for this simple reason with what I have decided to call ideological departures. Structurally, a romance/Romance tends to have as its protagonist an eligible bachelor.⁵⁸ This structural constraint

⁵⁵ Ellison Banks Findly, *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 294n45.

⁵⁶ The term has been taken from Jim Anderson, review of *Is History Fiction?* by Ann Curthoys and John Docker, *The Flinders Journal of History and Politics* 23 (2006): 140.

⁵⁷ See the first section in chapter 1.

⁵⁸ In the world of fiction, the eligibility of the (male) protagonist has more to do with his moral than social standing, though the latter is by no means negligible.

must have presented itself as a serious difficulty for the author of *Nur Jahan*, in that Prince Salim/Emperor Jehangir of history was polygamous, as were most of the other Mughals both before and after him. Nur Jahan was his nineteenth—if also his last—wife. To use the historical figure of Prince Salim/Emperor Jehangir *as he was* meant jeopardising the romantic/Romantic interests of the work. The author of *Nur Jahan* could easily have decided to overcome the difficulty by making Prince Salim/Emperor Jehangir an eligible bachelor, paying no attention to history. Instead, he chose to make Prince Salim/Emperor Jehangir bigamous.⁵⁹ He was thus able to strike a balance between historical fact and generic demands.

There is another (possibly more pressing) reason behind making the polygamous Prince Salim/Emperor Jehangir of history into the bigamous Prince Salim/Emperor Jahangir of *Nur Jahan*. The readership of the work would have been mixed, composed of English-educated Indians, Anglo-Indians and the English back home. As readers, the English-educated Indians could not probably have any strong moral objection to a polygamous protagonist, for polygamy had been a long-established Indian custom in both Hindu and Muslim cultures, though they might have objected to such a protagonist on aesthetic grounds.⁶⁰ But the cases of Anglo-Indians and the English back home were very different. Both aesthetically and morally, polygamy was distasteful to them. It is as if to

⁵⁹ *Nur Jahan* is all but silent about the number of wives of Prince Salim/Emperor Jehangir. There is only a pair of far-flung references in the whole body of the work to the effect that Prince Salim is already married.

⁶⁰ Singh seems to imply that an age-old institution/practice like polygamy does not disappear overnight. It must be allowed time to die a slow death. Is the author of *Nur Jahan* criticising here the heedless reformist programmes of the colonial state meant to improve the quality of life of the natives but which more often than not lead to bizarre consequences?

dramatise the opposing reactions of his Indian and Anglo-Indian/English readership that Singh chooses to present a brief discussion about polygamy in the fifth chapter of his novel. It takes place between the European wife of Akbar, Mary and the Empress Jodha Bai. Mary articulates what one may safely take as the position of the Anglo-Indian and English readers of the work:

‘According to our [English] law,’ said Mary, ‘a man is not allowed to have more than one wife; if he does so, he is sent to prison; even a king cannot transgress the law.’⁶¹

In contrast, the Indian position is more tolerant. Jhoda Bai admits that polygamy should go, but adds, in defence of her husband, that ‘the people [of India] as a whole are not prepared for a radical change.’⁶² So part of the reason why Singh chose to transform the polygamous historical figure into a bigamous fictional character had to do with the aesthetic as well as moral taste of its Anglo-Indian and English readers. The author of *Nur Jahan* endeavours to please both his fellow sufferers and alien tormentors.⁶³

The ideological departures of *Nur Jahan* do exactly the opposite of what its structural departures are meant to do. They all tend to accentuate its anti-Romantic bias. The way they function is best exemplified in the portrayal of the male characters in the novel. Prince Salim/Emperor Jehangir is *not* what a Romance protagonist is expected to be. The qualities that go into the making of

⁶¹ Singh 59-60.

⁶² Singh 60.

⁶³ Significantly, *Nur Jahan* first appeared serially in *East and West*, a journal run by the noted Parsi journalist and philanthropist, Behramji M. Malabari. Later Singh took over the journal from Malabari.

such a protagonist are rather found in other male characters, notably in Akbar whom *Nur Jahan* offers as *the* model figure of Indian nationalism: secular, tolerant, just, impartial, caring and, above all, pluralistic.

Another important point to note about the ideological departures in *Nur Jahan* is the fact that while its author tries to strike a balance between historical fact and fictional need in most of the examples of structural departures, one can find no such effort at balance marks the departures meant to achieve its ideological (that is, national) purpose. The two characters – Akbar and Jehangir – with whom I am dealing – are idealised and demonised, respectively. And the irony is that such polarisation which helps the novel enact its vision of a secular national community is a prominent *structural* feature of the world of Romance. In a sense, then, the ideological departures of *Nur Jahan* are also structural departures and *vice versa*.

The characters of a Romance are, as a rule, types and at the same time one-dimensional: either good or evil, either black or white.⁶⁴ With a remarkable perceptiveness as well as precision, Gillian Beer captures the defining features of the world one enters in a Romance. As a critical judgement of the people who inhabit that world, the observation is no less apt:

The world of a romance is ample and inclusive, sustained by its own inherent, often obsessive laws. It is not an entire world; it intensifies and exaggerates certain traits in human behaviour and recreates human figures

⁶⁴ A Romance character is *not* supposed to surprise the reader by his/her change of *character*. Or to use a term given popular currency in literary-critical discourse by E.M. Forster, a Romance character must not be a ‘round’ character.

out of this exaggeration. It excludes some reaches of experience in order to concentrate intently upon certain themes until they take fire and seem to be the flame of life itself.⁶⁵

Hence the neat division in the characterisation of virtue and vice in a Romance.⁶⁶

It is the protagonist of a Romance whose prerogative it is to be cast as a paragon of virtues. By the same logic, the villain has to be an embodiment of vices. Rarely does a Romance (of whatever denomination) contain a character who partakes of both or, in other words, whose moral character/commitment is indeterminate.⁶⁷

Put another way, it is *not* possible for a Romance to be a *bildungsroman* whose plot is so structured as to map the moral growth of its chief protagonist (usually male, for Romance has been a pre-eminently masculine genre, as is the historical novel).⁶⁸ In addition, the Romance protagonist regulates all his action (from the beginning to the end) according to a strict ethical code of conduct, the slightest departure from which is unthinkable.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1970) 3.

⁶⁶ According to Arnold Kettle, Romance owes its 'tendency to the over-simplification of ethical questions' to its Christian take-over. In a Romance, writes Kettle, '[l]ife becomes a battle between Good and Evil. Characters, instead of being realistic, that is to say human, that is to say neither wholly good nor wholly bad, tend to become entirely black or white.' *An Introduction to the English Novel*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (1951; London: Hutchinson, 1967) 32.

⁶⁷ I think there is much truth in Michael L. Hays' argument that 'any differences among kinds of romances are directional, not structural. Except for their orientation, romances are alike in most of their materials.' *Shakespearean Tragedy as Chivalric Romance: Rethinking Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003) 69n4.

⁶⁸ As a rule, the Romance hero is required to prove his moral worth in a variety of ways. But to prove what one already possesses and to achieve what one previously lacked are not the same thing. For this plain reason, I cannot accept Hays' contentious claim that '*King Horn* [a chivalric romance] is our first *Bildungsroman*.' 71.

⁶⁹ Waverley, the classic creation of Sir Walter Scott, does 'waver.' But does he really depart radically from the values and virtues he leads his life by? His is what George Dekker so astutely terms 'a temporary aberration.' *The American Historical Romance*, 1st paperback ed. (1987; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 174.

If one goes by this formula of Romance characterisation, Prince Salim/Emperor Jehangir would in no way qualify as the protagonist of *Nur Jahan*. He is all that a Romance protagonist must not be. From the very moment of his entry into the story, it is made abundantly clear that he is *not*, to adapt Shakespeare, such stuff as Romance protagonists are made of:

Though the Prince was very young, he was already addicted to pleasure and loved excitement. Polite and engaging in conversation, courteous and obliging in manner, he was nevertheless intensely selfish, and he often sat drinking for days and nights together. He was simply dressed, but everything about him bespoke refined taste and love of ease.⁷⁰

If youthfulness, social graces, and cultural refinement speak in favour of Salim, his excessive self-absorption presents him in not so favourable a light. One may overlook his other limitations, but it is impossible to reconcile oneself with an ‘intensely selfish’ protagonist, for a protagonist (and especially a Romance protagonist) is a protagonist only insofar as he is ready to sacrifice his own interests for the sake of others around him. Rescuing people from danger, especially the female protagonist, is one of the defining structural features of Romance.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Singh 34. There is a suggestion of one of the great themes of world literature here: the theme of appearance and reality, though the author has not cared to develop it as such. The reason may be that he does not want his work to be treated as a moral fable, which has a tendency to be absolutely free from questions of historical causality, a tendency more prominent in a moral fable than in a Romance.

⁷¹ Anglo-Indian fiction based on the so-called Indian/Sepoy Mutiny is full of such rescues.

Like most classical/traditional historical novels, *Nur Jahan* is narrated from a third-person omniscient point of view, the narrative technique favoured by Sir Walter Scott. The narrator has therefore intimate knowledge of the strengths as well as of the weaknesses of all the characters. Interestingly, however, the drawbacks of Prince Salim are common knowledge. Most of the other major characters see him in the same light as the narrator. For example, when Mihar-ul-Nissa's mother suggests that if Malak Masud's prediction that Mihar-ul-Nissa 'will live to be an Empress' were to come true, Mihar-ul-Nissa would marry Prince Salim (who, to her chagrin, is already married), Mihar-ul-Nissa's father, Ghias Beg, bursts out⁷²:

'Prince Salim,' interrupted Ghias Beg, the warm blood of indignation mounting into his cheeks, 'is a man of pleasure, a drunkard, and a rake. I would sooner perish than see my daughter married to calumny and dishonour. I would rather be the same homeless wanderer as before than sacrifice the happiness of my daughter to his unholy passion.'⁷³

Even his own parents do not seem to differ much from others in this regard, though they tend to seek solace in the thought that the Prince will ultimately outgrow his delinquencies. Akbar is rather quite explicit to his wife about what he thinks of his son:

'Salim is so wayward, his love [for Mihar-ul-Nissa] may be a mere fancy which may pass away in time, so do not trouble yourself about it. What

⁷² Singh 12.

⁷³ Singh 42.

pains me is to find the Prince associates with low people. The wellbeing of the whole nation depends on his character, and it ill becomes him to waste his youth when he ought to be preparing himself for the work which at no distant date must devolve upon him.’⁷⁴

Salim does not, however, live up to the rather pat expectations of his parents, neither in their lifetime nor thereafter. After the abortive rebellion against his father, he is left with no other option but to accept his offer of reconciliation. Fearing that Abul Fazal, the most trusted adviser and friend of Akbar, will work to embitter the Emperor against him and thus render the prospect of reconciliation difficult to materialise, the Prince entrusts one of his retainers Bir Singh Deo with the ‘noble enterprise’ of getting his supposed adversary removed from his way to reconciliation with the father. Bir Singh executes his job to perfection. The Emperor does not live long enough ‘to avenge the murder of his best beloved friend.’⁷⁵

After his ascension to the throne, Salim/Jehangir seems to betray signs of positive change for some time, rousing hope in the hearts of some of the senior courtiers such as Man Singh that ‘he may change for the better and prove himself a worthy son of our beloved Akbar.’⁷⁶ Others, however, remain sceptical, even apprehensive. Khan Azim, another veteran courtier, for example, cannot be so optimistic as his old colleague Man Singh. He is rather certain that ‘he [Jehangir]

⁷⁴ Singh 79.

⁷⁵ Singh 181.

⁷⁶ Singh 201.

will give way soon. The moment he touches a drop of liquor, he will fall back into his old ways again.’⁷⁷

Fall back he does. No sooner has his love for Mihar-ul-Nissa revived than he resolves to get her back by any means—fair or foul, much in the manner of Macbeth in his bid for kingship. He is ‘prepared to stake everything for her, [his] name, honour, and reputation.’⁷⁸ The price Mihar-ul-Nissa’s dauntless husband Ali Kuli Beg pays for stubbornly refusing to do the new Emperor’s bidding is death. Jehangir does not fulfil the noble dreams of his parents. He seems rather bent on proving his father correct who had prophesied ‘that Salim as an Emperor would not be very different from Salim as a Prince.’⁷⁹

As I see it, the prophecy made by Akbar is a neat articulation of what I have called the tension between Romance and anti-Romance in *Nur Jahan*. To conform to the formula of Romance characterisation, Emperor Jehangir must not *morally* be ‘very different’ from Prince Salim. That is, an immoral Salim must not (eventually) grow into an upright Jehangir, as he would in all probability do in a (realist) novel. This lack of growth along moral lines or, to put it the other way round, moral stagnation is precisely what qualifies Salim/Jehangir as a character in *Nur Jahan* in the first instance and, at the same, disqualifies him as its protagonist. An added merit of the prophecy is that it suggests the unworthiness of Salim/Jehangir as a successor to the Mughal throne: another significant disqualification, for a Romance protagonist is generally one whose

⁷⁷ Singh 201.

⁷⁸ Singh 218.

⁷⁹ Singh 183.

moral beauty operates at a higher level of perfection than does that of his predecessor. Indeed the optimism a Romance is able to generate at its close is basically the function of this sense of moral advancement.⁸⁰ In failing to be a worthy son of his worthy father, Salim/Jehangir fails to be the protagonist of *Nur Jahan*, which is why the novel ends on an obvious note of melancholy, if not of total disillusionment. The suggestion is that with Akbar gone, hopes of a better India are also gone. But the mood is consistent with the one prevalent among a small section of thoughtful Indians who saw in the turn of Indian nationalism to Hindu nationalism in the late 1900s an ominous sign of impending disaster.

In sharp contrast to the Machiavellian Salim/Jehangir, the other major male characters in *Nur Jahan* are portrayed as upright figures. All of them put a high premium on the question of moral integrity. Temptations of material gain fail to divert them away from the cherished ideals they regulate their lives by. Nor do threats of death. Mihar-ul-Nissa's father Ghias Beg defies 'the future Emperor of India' by his refusal to annul his daughter's engagement with Ali Kuli Beg.⁸¹ He 'would rather die than have it [his face] blackened by dishonour and infamy.'⁸² 'It shall never be said of Mirza Ghias Beg,' he asserts boldly to the envoy sent by the Prince, 'that he went back from his word for earthly honour and wealth.'⁸³ Himself a man of strict morality, Ghias Beg selects a bridegroom for

⁸⁰ Here I must stress the point that this moral development is generational rather than individual. So the moral degeneration of Salim/Jehangir should be seen from a generational and not from an individual perspective.

⁸¹ Singh 90-91.

⁸² Singh 91.

⁸³ Singh 91.

his daughter who is morally no less upright than himself. The same high principles animate the character of Ali Kuli Beg. In the typical manner of a Romance protagonist, he prefers incurring the displeasure of the heir apparent to ‘desert[ing] the maid who has been named [his] wife.’⁸⁴ He is gallant enough to ask the envoy to tell Salim/Jehangir, ‘I have sold my head, not my honour; my body, not my soul.’⁸⁵ And he remains true to his word to the end. The extraordinary physical prowess he exhibits in foiling the several attempts on his life is a glowing testimony of the inner strength of his character which has its source in his moral soundness. It is only by getting him killed that Jehangir is able to acquire Mihar-ul-Nissa, ‘the priceless pearl of life.’⁸⁶

It is, however, in the portrayal of Akbar that the idealising tendency of Romance characterisation finds its fullest expression. If *Nur Jahan* is a romance/Romance, it is, I would contend, less because it tells the love story of Salim/Jehangir and Mihar-ul-Nissa/Nur Jahan than because it has such a *larger-than-life* character as Akbar right at its centre of moral gravity, against whose moral/spiritual stature all other characters, even the upright ones, seem to pale into insignificance.⁸⁷ The lesser moral beauties of Ghias and Ali Kuli Beg in effect function to highlight by way of contrast the greater moral beauty of Akbar.

⁸⁴ Singh 93.

⁸⁵ Singh 93.

⁸⁶ Singh 258.

⁸⁷ In fact, the love story itself departs in a number of important respects from Romance conventions. To cite one obvious example: a Romance female protagonist must be a virgin (in both senses of the term) at the time of (re)union with her lover, but Mihar-ul-Nissa is married. (In other words, the female protagonist in a Romance must be none other than a Pamela). Even if one employs the term ‘r/Romance’ in its modern sense of a love story, its applicability to *Nur Jahan* will still remain problematic. It would then require Salim/Jehangir to be read as an anti-

The keynote of the portrayal of Akbar in *Nur Jahan* is its mythic simplicity and down-to-earth ordinariness.⁸⁸ The Akbar of *Nur Jahan* is not, as S.M. Burke puts it, ‘Akbar: The Greatest Mogul,’ of history books: a hunting enthusiast, a bold campaigner, an outstanding administrator, a brilliant strategist, a power maniac, an insatiable imperialist, and so on.⁸⁹ There is definitely a touch of greatness about Akbar in *Nur Jahan*, but its source is suggested to be neither his imperial majesty (which is rather lavishly recreated to produce the feel of the historical time represented) nor his military might (which is, curiously enough, never put on display) but rather his ‘gentleness,’ ‘divine dignity,’ and ‘catholic love,’ issuing from his ‘sweetly smiling lips,’ ‘broad, open forehead,’ and ‘large penetrating eyes,’ respectively.⁹⁰ Other characters hold the same view as the narrator. Half way through the second chapter, the narrator likens Akbar to the figure of a father: Akbar displays a ‘gentleness’ as ‘winning as that of a father.’⁹¹ At the end of the same chapter, one of the male characters (Malak Masud) invokes the Emperor in similar terms, describing Akbar as ‘a kind master, a sincere friend, and as forgiving as a loving father.’⁹² The image recurs throughout

hero (in the manner of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*), whereas the author of *Nur Jahan* seems to do all he can to make him into a villain. To choose a character from British history/literature, it is Richard III who comes closest to the Jehangir of *Nur Jahan*.

⁸⁸ There is no suggestion of the dichotomy of appearance and reality in the character(isation) of Akbar as there is in the case of his son. The simplicity of the former is repeatedly unscored.

⁸⁹ Most historians see the greatness of Akbar as lying in the consolidation of the Mughal Empire during his reign, which happened because he could combine in himself, they hold, all those qualities I have just enumerated. S.M. Burke, *Akbar: The Greatest Mogul* (New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1989).

⁹⁰ Singh 21. Is Akbar being feminised here, to make him more compatible with the Gandhian/Hindu ideal of heroism/masculinity, as one sees in Lord Rama in the *Ramayana*?

⁹¹ Singh 21.

⁹² Singh 28.

the narrative, and can be found with an added emotive force immediately before and after the death of the greatest Mughal.

Just as a father does everything for the well-being of his children, Akbar is tireless in his efforts to promote and protect the interests of his subjects, irrespective of caste, class, and creed.⁹³ In an intimate discussion with his wife, Ghias Beg sheds much light on how the Emperor sees his royal vocation:

The outer world knows nothing about his struggles and endeavours for the wellbeing of his people. Our Emperor is actuated by the highest motives, he sees things from a standpoint which the common run of men can hardly attain, and then, what is more, he rules the country, not for himself, but for his people. He has revolutionised the whole country, the whole system of government. 'God,' he says often, 'has sent me, not for the gratification of my own desires, but for the guidance and government of my people.' He is really indefatigable in his attempts to unite the heterogeneous people into a compact nation. Who could ever think of an Emperor retiring late to bed, and then up again at four A.M. [*sic*] busy with his work.⁹⁴

⁹³ Ironically, the British in India would pose themselves as such from the 1830s onwards.

⁹⁴ Singh 47-48. The very first sentence is suggestive of the way Akbar is going to be portrayed in *Nur Jahan*. The principal components of this portrait will be not those much publicised facts of his public life with which students of history are more or less familiar but those intimate moments of inner struggle, loneliness, and self-doubt which remain hidden from public view. On this showing, the last sentence is there to furnish a concrete proof that it is indeed the case. Obviously, such a portrayal is meant to place the reader in a position of empathy with the character thus portrayed. The characterization of Macbeth is possibly the most celebrated case in point. For a contrary point of view regarding the portrayal of Macbeth, see chapter 4 in Hays. Hays argues that Shakespeare deliberately tempers his sources so as to present Macbeth in an unsympathetic light. Macbeth is demonised so that Shakespeare can please James I, who was descended from the line of Banquo.

Not surprisingly, Akbar does not entertain blackguards like the robber chief Bir Singh in his court, who the Prince uses to assassinate the philosopher friend of his father, Abul Fazal. It is rather full of gifted courtiers who cherish the same high ideals as the Emperor and work whole-heartedly for their realisation:

Deep thinkers like Abul Fazal, poets like Faizi, financiers like Todar Mal, soldiers like Man Sing, and councillors like Bir Bal, adorn his court, all inspired by the same selfless devotion for work and the wellbeing of the country, which is characteristic of the Emperor. A country which can produce men like these may well have a great future before it.⁹⁵

By accommodating the diverse cultural elements of India (mainly but importantly Hindu and Muslim), the imperial court of Akbar offers an ideal image of the inclusive Indian nation the author of *Nur Jahan* is ideologically committed to promoting. Although the optimism of the last sentence seems to derive from the fact of India's capacity to produce such talented men as Akbar's courtiers, the deeper suggestion is that India will have 'a great future' only when her different cultural elements will be able to work together in harmony.

One can hardly miss the high-blown rhetoric of the passages above. Lest they are dismissed as mere effusions of a courtier who has every reason to feel grateful to Akbar, the narrator uses the greater part of Chapter VI for showing that the Emperor is not merely a simple visionary untutored in the ways of the

⁹⁵ Singh 49. To employ ethically sound counsellors (a recurrent Romance motif) is a reliable measure of the moral soundness of the person who employs them. Consider King Arthur and his round table.

world but is also a keen observer of men and manners.⁹⁶ The main burden of this wonderfully crafted chapter is to give a clear idea as to how Akbar goes about attaining ‘the well being of his people.’⁹⁷ He seems to know by intuition that the best way he can serve his people is not just to rule them impartially by maintaining order and justice in the land, but also to teach them the great lesson of solidarity. For this to happen, religious fanaticism must give way to love, infusing them all with a sense of patriotism. To state the obvious, Akbar dreams of fathering a cohesive nation:

I wish to kindle the fire of love in the hearts of all my subjects, to burn away all differences which separate brother from brother and father from son. I have told them, nay, demonstrated to the world, that there is only one God, the God of love, and the only path leading to Him, the path of devotion, though there are many modes of worshipping Him. May the lesson bear fruit and unite these heterogeneous, wrong-thinking, narrow-minded, blind people into an [*sic*] united Indian nation.⁹⁸

Salim’s love for Mihar-ul-Nissa seems to put Akbar’s love for his people on trial. The Emperor is now faced with a situation that will decide which of his two loves is greater: his fatherly love for his son (‘filiations’) or his father-like

⁹⁶ Ghias Beg, a Persian, had to flee from his homeland as a consequence of political persecution. In *Nur Jahan*, he becomes an influential courtier during the reign of Akbar (hence the question of his gratitude to the Emperor); but according to historical sources, he rose to prominence at the Mughal court after Emperor Jehangir married his daughter, Mihar-ul-Nissa, who the latter gave the name of Nur Jahan.

⁹⁷ One of the beauties of this chapter is its masterly use of conversation to develop plot and probe into the inner worlds of the characters involved.

⁹⁸ Singh 75.

love for his subjects ('affiliations').⁹⁹ *Nur Jahan* could have been, I hold, a much more engaging work, if its author had chosen to make Akbar 'waver' for a while before allowing him to reach his preference. But since his singular intention is to present Akbar as the *ideal* father of his *erring* people, he is happy to spare him the moral dilemma such a delicate situation is likely to give rise to. The Emperor is unequivocal in his conviction that the cause of the people must be upheld even at the cost of personal sacrifices:

It is most unfortunate, but I cannot give way to fondness for my own son, and try to influence Ali Kuli Beg or Mirza Ghias Beg to break off the engagement. God has given me a whole people to be my children, and the happiness of them all is as dear to me as that of Prince Salim. I do not wish to darken my reign with a single act of injustice and cruelty.¹⁰⁰

Not surprisingly, the father of a people can hardly afford to act otherwise. But the Akbar in *Nur Jahan* is the (anachronistic) father of the would-be Indian nation. His national fatherhood is anachronistic in a double sense: at the time when he ruled, the very concept of nation had not yet been conceived; and also because when *Nur Jahan* actually appeared (in 1909), Indian nationalism had already been on its way to becoming Hindu nationalism, having lost much of its initial secular spirit which is what informs the Indian nation that Akbar envisages.¹⁰¹ In the

⁹⁹ The terms in parenthesis are from Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1983) 1-30. See note 129 in chapter 8 in the present study.

¹⁰⁰ Singh 77.

¹⁰¹ Akbar was the third Mughal Emperor who ruled (not the whole, though most, of) India from 1556 to 1605.

latter sense, then, it is not the inclusive Indian nation of Akbar that is anachronistic so much as the exclusive one of Indian nationalists, the majority of whom by 1900s were Hindu revivalists. For them, India was (to be) a land of the Hindus, whereas the India of Akbar is a land full of cultural diversity.¹⁰² So in imagining the Indian nation, Akbar is clearly much ahead of his latter-day nationalist successors (provided that one sees the turn of Indian nationalism from secular inclusiveness to Hindu exclusiveness as regressive). The Indian nation as envisioned by Akbar in *Nur Jahan*, inclusive and secular, would possibly have caused Indian/Hindu nationalists of the day not a little discomfiture.

The two nations in *Padmini* and *Nur Jahan*—one communal-exclusive, the other secular-inclusive—testify to the fact that there was still room for diversity in constructing the Indian nation in the first decade of the twentieth century. More importantly, the two imaginings of the nation entail representation of two different Indian pasts. Ramakrishna Pillai invokes a sixteenth-century Hindu past in *Padmini* to forge an exclusive cultural identity, whereas Jogendra Singh revives a Mughal past associated with Akbar—a past much celebrated for its culture of harmony, tolerance and understanding among various Indian communities—to project an inclusive national self. From the late 1920s onward, as the anti-colonial national movement gathered momentum, this multiplicity in both the construction of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation and the representation of history/past would gradually disappear from Indian historical

¹⁰² Not a few of them preferred ‘Bharata’ to India to designate their motherland.

fiction. Nationalist history fiction, two examples of which (*Kanthapura* and the Lalu trilogy) I am going to discuss in the next two chapters, would gain in anti-British sentiment but would construct cultural identity exclusively in terms of Hinduism.¹⁰³ It would also lose variety in the representation of history/past. Both Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao focus on self-experienced pasts—the early 1920s in the last volume of the Lalu trilogy and the early 1930s in *Kanthapura*—decades of intense anti-colonial national struggle in India.

¹⁰³ Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (New York: New Directions, 1963). The Lalu trilogy by Mulk Raj Anand comprises *The Village*, 2nd Indian ed. (1939; Bombay: Kutub-Popular, 1960); *Across the Black Waters*, 1st Indian ed. (1940; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955); *The Sword and the Sickle*, 1st Indian ed. (1942; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955). Subsequent references are to these editions.

CHAPTER 5

Nationalist History Fiction 1: *Kanthapura* (1938)¹

India then will live in a temple of our making.

Raja Rao²

Before I move on to discuss what I have called nationalist history fiction, it is worth going over the defining characteristics of revivalist historical fiction described in the preceding chapters. A fresh look at the distinguishing features of one will, I hope, facilitate the appreciation of those of the other. For juxtaposition throws into sharp relief things juxtaposed (which is one of the beauties/strengths as well as one of the blind spots of the historical novel). Understandably, I begin with the question of the past, historical fiction being my primary archive. The past which the revivalist historical novel chooses to deal with is usually a remote and invariably a pre-colonial one. It is either glorious or ignominious. When

¹ An earlier version of this chapter appeared in *Transnational Literature* (vol. 4, no. 1, November 2011) as ‘The Nation and One of Its Fragments in *Kanthapura*.’ The article went on to win the Best Student Research Paper Award 2011 in the Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law at Flinders University, South Australia. I would like to thank my principal supervisor, Rick Hosking, and the anonymous reviewers of the article whose perceptive suggestions went a long way towards shaping the argument I have finally been able to construct in both the article and the chapter in which it appears here.

² Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (New York: New Directions, 1963) 181. Subsequent references are to this edition. Incidentally, E.M. Forster chose to represent Hindu culture/India by temple and Muslim culture/India by mosque, that is, by places of worship of the two communities in his 1924 novel *A Passage to India*. In contrast, British culture/India is represented by club, a non-religious, if not exactly, secular place. For all his liberal humanism, Forster tended to see the religious/spiritual India as the Other of the secular West. *A Passage to India*, rpt. (1924; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973). Subsequent references are to this edition. For a biting critique of Forster and his novel, see Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993) 241-8.

glorious, it is a source of inspiration as well as nostalgia; when ignominious, it is a lesson to be critically engaged with so as to prevent its repetition in future. Although past-oriented, revivalist historical fiction envisages a better (national) future and thus furnishes one of the reasons why theorists of nationalism characterise the nation as ‘the modern Janus.’³ Not only in its ideological content but also in its narrative form does the revivalist historical novel bear the imprint of the time of its emergence, in that it flourished at a time when the British Raj seemed to possess an ‘illusion of permanence.’⁴ Structurally, the Raj appeared so invulnerable at the turn of the nineteenth century that the idea of its ultimate disintegration was hard—if not downright impossible—to imagine even by the boldest of its antagonists.⁵ Since a colonial regime is an outcome rather of coercion than of consent, it reflects such self-confidence, it can be argued, only when each of its repressive apparatuses is at its effective best.⁶ At the height of self-confidence, the Raj was, therefore, in no mood to appreciate any challenge to its (*il*)legitimacy.⁷ How could revivalist historical fiction then make a call for national regeneration? The strategy was to combine allegory with Romance, a mix that assigned the elements of Romance a greater prominence than those of

³ Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London: Verso, 1981) 348.

⁴ The phrase comes from Francis G. Hutchins, *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1967).

⁵ It was, as Allen J. Greenberger calls it, ‘the era of confidence.’ *The British Image of India: A Study in the Literature of Imperialism 1880-1960* (London: Oxford UP, 1969) 5.

⁶ For a compelling discussion of the point in the Indian context, see Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1997).

⁷ Nowhere is the anxiety of illegitimacy of colonialism/imperialism perhaps as marked as in its humanitarian rhetoric of the civilising mission, maintenance of law and order, progress, and so on.

history, thus turning the lessons of history into sub-text. Meant to save the revivalist historical novel from the fate of being silenced by the Raj, this narrative improvisation or subterfuge would ultimately create real problems for the national movement in the years to come.⁸

In contrast, the nationalist history novel enacts what Josna E. Rege has called ‘the theme of deferred desire.’⁹ The protagonist is so dedicated to the cause of national struggle that s/he hardly has any time left to indulge in romance. Personal fulfilment must await national liberation/consolidation.

From what I have said so far, it may appear that revivalist historical fiction is blissfully free from the ambivalences, contradictions, and tensions to be found in other kinds of nationalist discourse. The truth is that it is not; in fact, it cannot be. There are two major sources of tension in the revivalist historical novel. While the one has to do with the question of moral allegiance: pro-colonial vs. pro-national (as in *Padmini: An Indian Romance*, chapter 3), the other with the

⁸ Most revivalist historical novelists (both in English and other Indian languages) use examples of Hindu resistance to the Muslim invasion of India allegorically, that is, as allegories of Indian resistance to British colonialism. The desired effect is to infuse readers with the spirit of nationalism. While it cannot be doubted that they did produce the intended effect with the Hindu readers, the same cannot be claimed to be true of the Muslim readers. For example, the historical novels of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (Chatterjee in English), the Scott of Bengal, were a major source of inspiration for the *Swadeshi* Movement of 1905-8, which is usually taken to be the first openly militant anti-British nationalist movement of the twentieth century. But the Muslim response to both Bankim and the *Swadeshi* was far from enthusiastic, if not totally indifferent. In course of time, Bankim came to be seen by the Muslim elite as the leading exponent of Hindu nationalism and the *Swadeshi* as serving Hindu interests. It was in fact Bankim who initiated the trend of depicting Muslim characters *negatively* in Bengali fiction. His portrayal of a Muslim female character called Ayesha in *Durgeshnandini* (1866) so offended the emerging Muslim intelligentsia that they thought it imperative to ‘write back’ (after Salman Rushdie). Prompted, Syed Ismail Hossain Siraji (1880-1931) wrote *Ray Nandini* (1915) in which he set out to show who the real rogue is.

⁹ Josna E. Rege, *Colonial Karma: Self, Action, and Nation in the Indian English Novel* (Hampshire and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 83.

question of Indian past: Hindu past vs. Muslim past (as in *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen*, chapter 4).¹⁰ The main source of dilemma for T. Ramakrishna Pillai, the author of *Padmini*, is not so much which Indian past to choose as which side of the colonial divide to go with. Pillai believes in the historical existence of a glorious Hindu past, but at the same time recognises the so-called blessings of British presence in India (hence the predicament). In between comes the dark chapter in Indian history under a long line of Muslim despots. Hindu grandeur would have continued to flourish but for the arrival of Islam in India. For Pillai, as for many of his contemporaries, the degeneration of Hindus begins with the Muslim conquest of India. It is due to the British intervention, they argue, that India has finally been able to break free from centuries of Muslim tyranny. With such a view of Indian history, Pillai appears fully justified in eulogising the British take-over of India as a divinely ordained occurrence. There is thus at least one solid reason why the author of *Padmini* tends to be rather more pro-colonial than pro-national. And when it comes to imagining the Indian nation, it seems equally reasonable on his part to imagine it in terms of Hinduism. But to subsume national identity into communal/religious identity is apparently to betray the very spirit of nationalism, that is, secularism,

¹⁰ T. Ramakrishna [Pillai], *Padmini: An Indian Romance* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd., 1903); Sirdar Jogendra Singh, *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (London: James Nisbet & Co., [sic] Limited, 1909). Subsequent references are to these editions.

and be trapped into one of its many ambiguities, provided one accepts secularism as the cornerstone of the ideology of nationalism.¹¹

In all these respects, the opposite is true of Sirdar Jogendra Singh, the author of *Nur Jahan*. Singh is able to envision the Indian nation in terms of her cultural pluralism because the lesson that the history of India seems to have taught him is that it is a land where creeds, cultures, and customs of all descriptions have co-existed for centuries together, not in isolation from one another but in creative interplay among themselves. Only a robust secularism can be the defining ideology of this inclusive image of the Indian nation. As far as revivalist historical fiction is concerned, I would argue, the contours of the imagined community of the nation remain indeterminate. It can be a space where the previously existing parochial identities give way to the formation of a broader cultural identity. The opposite may also happen: that is, the nascent national identity may lose itself in the chaos of local identities. In other words, the nation in the revivalist historical novel can be both exclusionary and inclusive, depending on who is doing the imagining and how s/he approaches the history of India in general and the Muslim period in it in particular.¹²

Apparently, no such dichotomy seems to mark the imagining of the nation in those fictions written just before and after independence in 1947. A number of historical reasons can be put forward by way of explaining the phenomenon.

¹¹ Secularism is not what informs all nationalisms. The *religious* birth of Pakistan in 1947 is the clearest proof.

¹² How an Indian author approaches the Muslim invasion of India can legitimately be taken to determine his/her vision of the Indian nation.

Perhaps the most decisive one has to do with the character of the nationalist politics of the day. With the advent of Mohandas K. Gandhi on the Indian political scene in the late 1910s, the national movement expanded both horizontally and vertically. That is, slowly but surely, it developed into a mass movement. More importantly, it became radicalised through contact with a number of peasant and working-class movements. As the movement gathered momentum from the late 1920s onwards, it became single-mindedly anti-colonial, channelling all its energy into the overthrow of the alien rule and the establishment of, as Jawaharlal Nehru phrased it, *Purna Swaraj* (complete independence). The Independence Pledge of 1930 stated in plain terms:

The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain *Purna Swaraj* or Complete Independence.¹³

The here and now became the field of operation of national politics. At long last, the Indians could say, ‘We are making history.’¹⁴ It is precisely this moment of entry into history that the nationalist history novel chooses to commemorate. That is, from being an onlooker/Other of colonial history, the emerging nation engages

¹³ Cited in Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, Sucheta Mahajan, and K.N. Pannikar, *India's Struggle for Independence: 1857-1947* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1988) 268.

¹⁴ As early as 1919 M.K. Gandhi could say: ‘[. . .] whether you are satyagrahis or not, so long as you disapprove of the Rowlatt legislation, all can join and I hope that there will be such a response throughout the length and breadth of India as would convince the Government that we are alive to what is going on in our midst.’ *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Electronic Book), vol. 17 (New Delhi: Publications Division Government of India, 1999) 353.

its colonial adversary in nationalist (history) fiction in a tough struggle, and in the process marks itself as the maker of its destiny/future/history. That is why the nationalist history novel is so resolutely focused on the recent past, a past still fresh in collective memory, a past when the native psyche begins to recover from the multiple traumas of colonial violence, a past *lived through* by many writers. Unlike revivalist historical fiction, it has nothing to do with the pre-colonial era. The dilemma to choose either a Hindu or a Muslim past is no more a vital issue. Nor is there the tendency to look back at the (pre-colonial) past critically or nostalgically. The nation is about to be born, politically. The past has to be left behind to usher in a new future.

From one perspective, the anti-colonial drive of Indian nationalism is what nationalist history fiction derives its strength from, a strength at once apparent in the commitment of its protagonists to the cause of national struggle, the relegation of romance to social conscience, and the dedication to documentary realism, a narrative mode far removed from that of Romance. From another perspective, it is a source of its weakness too, a weakness discernible in the construction of the nation itself. A common tendency in all types of nationalist discourse is to construct a well-formed narrative, smoothing away the many tensions within the national movement.¹⁵ This homogenising/sanitising

¹⁵ In his impressive work on Salman Rushdie, Timothy Brennan shows how (in *Midnight's Children*, for example) Rushdie critiques 'the national longing' for a 'linear,' restrictive, and well-knit narrative, by positing the elephant-headed god Ganesh as 'an appropriate paradigm for India's national form, not simply because of India's mammoth diversity, but because all-inclusiveness finally undermines the idea of national distinctions themselves, which are orderly and bordered.' See, especially, chapter 4 in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*, rpt. (1989; Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1991) 79-117.

propensity works to reduce the impressive plethora of voices to a dull unison, resulting in a discrepancy between (varied) history and its (monolithic) reconstruction in the nationalist history novel. And it is by virtue of its journalistic realism that nationalist history fiction is able to hide it (though not completely) from view. Because of its emergence at a time when the national movement had set itself the one and only objective of complete independence, the nationalist history novel is tenaciously realistic.¹⁶ The implication is that there is no need for the cover of Romance, as there was for revivalist historical fiction. The nation(-in-the-making) has grown bold enough to look straight into the eyes of its adversary. In shifting from Romance to realism, Indian historical fiction reflects, as I see it, the development of Indian nationalism itself: from moderation to radicalism, from soft equivocation to bold assertion, from doubt to self-confidence, from nostalgia and self-criticism to a sense of arrival. Despite its photographic realism, nationalist history fiction is therefore not able to be completely free from serving an explicit allegorical (read ideological) function.¹⁷

As its very name suggests, it cannot escape the fate of being created as well as

¹⁶ The 1930s were 'a pink decade' not only in Britain but also in India. The Bengal of the 1930s, for example, saw a vigorous Marxist reaction against Rabindranath Tagore. A younger generation of writers alleged that Tagore was incapable of depicting the life of working-class people because of his elite family background. They embraced realism in place of lyricism, which they regarded as the hallmark of Tagore and his work. Both Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, who I discuss as nationalist history novelists, came under the influence of the Marxist theory of literature, though Rao eventually broke away with it. From that perspective, it can be argued that the social(ist) realism of nationalist history fiction is a product of Marxist influences of the 1930s and 1940s. See Mulk Raj Anand, *Apology for Heroism: A Brief Autobiography Of [sic] Ideas*, 2nd ed. (1946; Bombay: Kutub-Popular, 1957).

¹⁷ That realism itself is not free from ideology needs to be stressed if only because realism is often equated with reality itself. In *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1985), Meenakshi Mukherjee has convincingly shown how European realism was an inadequate mode for the representation of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indian reality.

consumed as, to use the contentious Jamesonian term, ‘national allegory.’¹⁸ One of the ironies of realism in the nationalist history novel (which I am going to address in terms of its imagining the nation) is that it did prove a fertile ground for the growth of the ‘myths of the nation.’¹⁹ And it is here in the interface of (national) myth and (narrative) realism that the implications of its exclusionary politics are both encoded and can be profitably teased out.

Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao are generally thought of as two radically different practitioners of the Indian novel in English.²⁰ If Anand is famous for his socialism, Rao is for his spiritualism. Anand has no respect for caste hierarchy; Rao is all for it. Although both Anand and Rao came in close contact with western culture, it cannot be said that they developed the same kind of positive attitude to it. The former is a cultural syncretist; the latter, its opposite, that is, a cultural chauvinist.²¹ The list of oppositions can be stretched further. Yet the two stand on the same ideological plane as far as the construction of Indian cultural/national identity is concerned. For both of them, the decisive marker of

¹⁸ I have discussed Jameson in some detail in chapter 1.

¹⁹ *Myths of the Nation* is the title of a study (by Rumina Sethi) on *Kanthapura*, one of the classic texts of Indian nationalism by Raja Rao. I have extensively drawn on Sethi in my discussion of *Kanthapura* in this present chapter.

²⁰ For example, according to Dennis Walder, *Post-Colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory*, rpt. (Oxford and Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1999) 94: ‘Anand, the social realist,’ is committed to ‘expos[ing] the sham of caste; and Rao, the mythmaker,’ to ‘assert[ing] an indigenous “idea” of India.’ In my view, both Anand and Rao are ‘mythmakers’ as far as the construction of nation is concerned, for both are selective, though not to the same degree. Both are capable of creating the ‘myth’ of an inclusive Indian nation.

²¹ In a sense, Rao is also a cultural syncretist, building bridges between East and West, especially in his second novel *The Serpent and the Rope*. But my point here is that he is ideologically committed to the rich Indian (read Aryan/Hindu) culture of the Vedic past, the so-called Golden Age of Indian civilisation. Anand could never have written as Rao does in *The Serpent and the Rope* (London: John Murray, 1960) 7: ‘Brahmin is he who knows Brahman.’ Subsequent references are to this edition.

the Indian nation is Hinduism. While a robust egalitarianism enables Anand to imagine the community of the nation across caste and class divides, he is hesitant to do the same with regard to the communal and gender divides. Rao is even more parochial than Anand in that his ‘imagined community’ tends to be a replica of the age-old structure of Indian society.²² In this chapter and the one following, focusing on the treatment of (Indian) Muslims, I analyse *Kanthapura* (1938) by Rao—one of the most celebrated Indian English novels dealing with the Indian national movement of the 1930s—and the Lalu trilogy (1939-42) by Anand, respectively, to delineate the communal figuration of the nation in both.²³

The Historical Context of Kanthapura

It can be safely proposed that British-Indian relationship following the Ilbert Bill affair (1883) was in the main one of collision. The steady deterioration of Indo-British relations at the time may lead one to assume that a greater unity might

²² The now-famous expression ‘imagined community’ has been taken from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1983).

²³ The (Hindu) nationalist intelligentsia tended to treat Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism as deviations of Hinduism. That is, these faiths were not as decidedly (construed as) the Others of Hinduism as Islam has always been and perhaps is even today. The Lalu trilogy by Mulk Raj Anand comprises *The Village*, 2nd Indian ed. (1939; Bombay: Kutub-Popular, 1960); *Across the Black Waters*, 1st Indian ed. (1940; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955); *The Sword and the Sickle*, 1st Indian ed. (1942; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955). Subsequent references are to these editions.

have developed among the different Indian communities, especially between Hindus and Muslims. Surprisingly, an unprecedented opposition is what actually came to characterise the relationship between the two communities, despite some sincere efforts to bring them closer together. The frequency of communal riots with which the nineteenth century ended is its most eloquent testimony. It is instructive to read *Kanthapura* in the context of these fresh developments in Indian politics. Only then will one be able to understand the exclusionary nature of its envisioning of the Indian nation. In what follows, I attempt to provide a broad overview of Indian national politics from the time of the advent of Gandhi in 1915 to its culmination in the Quit India Movement in 1942. The focus is consistently on the complex and evolving contours of Hindu-Muslim relationship.

The second decade – that is, the 1910s – was a quieter one, as far as nationalist agitation in India is concerned. The main reason was the First World War. With the advent of the War, the political climate in India began to cool down, with the political parties competing with one another to put on show how loyal they were to the British Raj. By contrast, nationalist activities geared up abroad, especially in North America where through the weekly paper *The Ghadar* ‘the entire nationalist critique of colonialism [. . .] was carried, in a powerful and simple form, to the mass of Indian immigrants.’²⁴ At home, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Annie Besant started the Home Rule movement based in Bombay and Madras, respectively. As the name of the movement suggests, the demand was self-government for India on the lines of the white dominions after the War was

²⁴ Chandra *et al.* 155.

over. The two most remarkable events of the decade were the appearance of Gandhi in 1915 on the Indian political scene and the Lucknow Pact of 1916. The former would have a long-term impact on national politics in general and Hindu-Muslim relationship in particular: Gandhi would relentlessly work for Hindu-Muslim amity till the very end of his life, consistently earning undue criticism from almost all vested quarters in the process. The latter – the pact between the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League – would reconcile the interests of the two communities for a while. But they would soon fall apart on the issue of separate electorate, a persistent bone of contention.

For the national leadership in India, the second decade of the twentieth century was one of steady disillusionment. The ‘great expectations’ that they had entertained during the War did not materialise when it was over. They had expected that Britain would grant India self-rule in return of her huge contribution to the overall War effort.²⁵ But the leaders of both Hindu and Muslim communities were soon to be disillusioned. If the Government of India Act of 1919 disappointed them all, the British attitude to Turkey angered the Indian Muslims in particular. It was clear from the Treaty of Sevres signed in May 1920 that the Ottoman Empire was already a thing of the past. The anger led to the resurgence of what has come to be known as the Khilafat Movement. Although the Movement concerned the Muslims of India who looked upon the Caliph of Turkey as the spiritual leader of Muslims all over the world, Gandhi chose not

²⁵ For data on the Indian contribution to the War, see the introductory section in Santanu Das, ‘India, empire and First World War writing,’ in *The Indian Postcolonial: A Critical Reader*, eds. Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri (London and New York: Routledge, 2011) 297-315.

only to align himself with it but also to become, along with the two Ali brothers, its moral and political anchor. By getting himself involved in the Khilafat Movement, Gandhi was able to turn it into, in the words of B.R. Nanda, ‘a rallying cry for Hindu-Muslim unity.’²⁶

If such developments as the Rowlatt Bills, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the Khilafat and Non-cooperation Movement brought the Hindus and Indian Muslims together for a while, other developments in the late 1920s worked to pull them apart, creating in the process a chasm that would continue to widen and would eventually pave the way for the decisive entry, spread and consolidation of communalism in Indian national politics, culminating in the partition of India. Chief among them was the appointment of the all-white Simon Commission, so called after the name of its chairman. The primary task of the Commission was to decide ‘whether India was ready for further constitutional progress and on which lines.’²⁷ The formation of the Commission without a single Indian member on it was enough to provoke opposition from the various nationalist fronts operating at that time. The consequence was either total boycott of the Commission by most of them or cold indifference to it by the rest. Ironically, the boycott did not result in a positive outcome for Indian nationalism. That is to say, it failed to generate a greater understanding between the different political parties claiming to represent the different communities of India. Instead, each decided to pursue its own parochial interests, in the process divesting the Congress of the legitimacy of its

²⁶ B. R. Nanda, *Gandhi: Pan-Islamism, Imperialism and Nationalism in India* (Bombay: Oxford UP, 1989) 102.

²⁷ Chandra *et al.* 260.

claim to represent all Indians. From now onward, two distinct but inter-related tendencies would run parallel in Indian national politics: one would emphasise the fight against the colonial rule; the other, the conflict of interests of the different Indian communities.

In 1928, the political parties of India jointly issued what has come to be known as the Nehru Report, after the name of Motilal Nehru (father of Jawaharlal Nehru). The Report was an answer to the British ‘challenge’ that the Indians were incapable of devising ‘a concrete scheme of constitutional reforms which [would have] the support of wide sections of Indian political opinion.’²⁸ Since it was an outcome of joint efforts, the Report ‘rejected the principle of separate communal electorates on which previous constitutional reforms had been based.’²⁹ Both sections of the League – the one that had refused to have anything to do with the Congress and the other led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah that had agreed to cooperate with the Congress – saw in the rejection of ‘the principle of separate communal electorates’ a threat to Muslim interests. To protect those interests, Jinnah came up with his famous ‘Fourteen Points’ which the Congress could not accept because accepting them would mean, the Congress leadership thought, weakening the spirit of nationalism and strengthening that of communalism.

There was another side to the issue. Hindu communalism had also become a force too strong not to be taken cognizance of. Hindu communal parties such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) were out

²⁸ Chandra *et al.* 263.

²⁹ Chandra *et al.* 263.

now to safeguard Hindu interests. The Communal Award of 1932 was thus an inverse recognition of Indian nationalism having become communal in character, for even the Congress did not raise any protest against it. Just as the colonial government could no longer deny the force of Indian nationalism of the day, Indian nationalism could no more hide its communal character.

Within the Congress, the leadership passed from Gandhi to Nehru and his followers who embraced a Marxist-socialist politics, rejecting the kind of politics that Gandhi stood for. The socialist focus of the new Congress leadership meant that from now on (the causes of) class conflict would receive far greater importance than (those of) the communal one. Of all the national agendas, the problems of peasants and workers became the number one agenda for the Congress. The question of Hindu-Muslim unity was no longer *the* central issue. Under the Government of India Act of 1935, the Congress went into provincial elections in 1937, won a majority in most of the provinces and formed government in them. Interestingly, during its twenty-eight-month-long rule, the Congress did little to improve Hindu-Muslim relations but everything to redress the plight of the working classes, possibly in the hope that prosperity would reduce communal conflict. The Congress provincial governments resigned in October 1939, and in the din and bustle of the Second World War that had started in September 1939, the Hindu-Muslim issue was almost forgotten.

So during the decades between the 1910s and the 1930s, Indian politics had become an arena of conflicting interests. In the process, Indian nationalism

also became a constellation of parochial nationalisms. With the two major Indian communities—the Hindus and the Muslims—each taking care of its own communal interests, Indian nationalism could no longer remain Indian nationalism, pure and simple. The paths of the two communities had diverged. The resultant ambience of communal tension all but drowned the voice of moderation, sanity, and tolerance. Only here and there a solitary voice could be heard, urging harmony between the different Indian communities; projecting an Indian identity free from such parochial considerations as caste, class, or creed; and inviting fellow Indians to accept the cultural plurality that is India. If Rabindranath Tagore is one such voice, Gandhi is no doubt another. But the Rao of *Kanthapura* is certainly *not* such a voice.

The Nation and One of Its Fragments in Kanthapura

In erasing the Hindu-Muslim question from its construction of the nation, *Kanthapura* participates in parochial nationalism, a type of nationalism that takes care of the interests of one particular community (the Hindus) and ignores those of the Others. The nationalist imagination that goes into the making of the novel is all the more dangerous in that it chooses to pit itself against one of the Indian minorities (that is, the Indian Muslims) and cast them as the Other of the nation,

instead of confronting the real Other (British rule) face-to-face. In line with mainstream nationalist discourse, *Kanthapura* forms national identity on the basis of Hinduism. In this formulation, to be an Indian is to be, first of all, a Hindu. Exclusion on the basis of community/religion is, however, not the only exclusion. There are some others along lines of gender, class, caste, and age. These multiple exclusions from the figuration of the national subject have been, and continue to be, vigorously contested not only in the (history-based) fiction but also in other literary genres of the post-independence period. Scholarly discourses too have questioned what Josna Rege phrases as ‘the success of the nationalist synthesis.’³⁰

In her provocative study, *Myths of the Nation: National Identity and Literary Representation*, Rumina Sethi reads *Kanthapura*, one of the classic texts of Indian freedom movement, in terms of its selective construction of Indian national identity. According to Sethi, Rao is ‘ahistorical’ (and the charge is a serious one) in his ‘representation of the contemporary politics of the 1930s.’³¹ Shethi substantiates her case by way of showing how Rao uses Gandhian ideology in his novel: now upholding, now downplaying, that is, using it to serve his own ideological purpose. Conceding that the Gandhian philosophy is full of ‘contradictions,’ caught as it was between ‘fixity and resistance,’ Sethi argues that *Kanthapura* derives its tensions not so much from these Gandhian contradictions as ‘from the way in which they have been written into the novel.’³²

³⁰ Rege 81.

³¹ Rumina Sethi, *Myths of the Nation: National Identity and Literary Representation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999) 72.

³² Sethi 72. The phrase ‘fixity and resistance’ is the title of the final chapter in Sethi.

In other words, Rao appropriates Gandhian thought so as to cover up his ‘implicit bias towards brahminism which can be seen as a feature of chauvinist Hinduism employed by revivalist nationalists.’³³ Through a detailed analysis of the treatment of the two ‘fragments’ of the nation, peasants and women, Sethi is able to demonstrate the exclusionary character of the nation Rao constructs in *Kanthapura*.³⁴ Deploying a new critical idiom that came into prominence in the wake of (postcolonial) cultural studies in the late 1970s, *Myths of the Nation* is one of those rare works on Indian English fiction that have persistently stressed—contrary to the dominant critical trend of the time—the need ‘to pose a series of interruptions in one’s conceptualization of a homogeneous cultural identity.’³⁵

My approach to *Kanthapura* is both a continuation and an expansion of what Sethi has done in her outstanding work. Although Sethi is aware of the exclusion of minorities (especially that of Indian Muslims) from the projected nation in the novel, she does not pay (in fact, does not choose to pay) these ‘fragments’ of the nation the amount of attention they really deserve. In my opinion, the question of exclusion/inclusion of the (Indian) Muslims in *Kanthapura* is as important as the other two exclusions. For Rao would not have been able to write the novel at all, or at least not the way in which he did, if he had not chosen to treat the Indian Muslims the way in which he has treated them in it.

³³ Sethi 72.

³⁴ Sethi is using the term ‘fragments’ in the sense Partha Chatterjee has used it in his brilliant study of the exclusionary politics of Indian nationalism, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993). I use it in the same sense here.

³⁵ Sethi 110.

Kanthapura is set in the (early) 1930s, incontrovertibly one of the most challenging decades in the history of Indian nationalism, marked by the increasing impact of the Gandhian programme of civil disobedience. Responding to the call of Mahatma Gandhi to join the programme, a small community living in the village of Kanthapura – which, according to C.D. Narasimhaiah, is ‘[a]n unmistakable South Indian village’ – gets involved in the national struggle for independence under the leadership of Moorthy, the Gandhi of Kanthapura.³⁶ In the process, the villagers lose everything. Still they remain hopeful that today or tomorrow ‘he will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall all be happy.’³⁷ In ending on an unmistakable note of triumphant optimism, *Kanthapura* is typical of nationalist (history) fiction. This optimism is indicative of the approach of the nationalist history novel to the past it deals with: it is neither nostalgic nor critical as revivalist historical fiction tends to be. It is resolutely focused on the self-experienced past of the writer, looking forward to a better national future. Elleke Boehmer has drawn attention to the contrastive moods of ‘idealistic hope of renewal’ and of ‘pessimism of late imperial culture,’ characterising the literatures of the period when *Kanthapura* was published (that is, the early twentieth century): the former marking the literatures of the so-called peripheral colonies; while the latter, those of colonial centres.³⁸

³⁶ C.D. Narasimhaiah, *Raja Rao* (New Delhi and London: Arnold-Heinemann, 1973) 39.

³⁷ Rao, *Kanthapura* 181.

³⁸ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 97.

Both M.K. Naik and Narasimhaiah commend *Kanthapura* for its 'authentic' portrayal of life in rural India.³⁹ If one accepts rural India as Hindu India, there will be nothing to take issue with. If otherwise, there will possibly be no end of reservations. Even though Narasimhaiah seems more perceptive than Naik in noting 'socio-economic divisions' in *Kanthapura* (the village, and, significantly, not in *Kanthapura*, the text), he does not pause to think out the implications of these divisions in terms of caste/class hierarchy and the power-relations they assume.⁴⁰ *Kanthapura* has 'a complex structure' because 'it is there in the village, has always been there, in this land of villages.'⁴¹ By refusing to question socio-economic reality and its reverberations in the daily life of the people concerned, Narasimhaiah accepts no discrepancy between reality/history and its discursive/novelistic representation. In simple terms, Narasimhaiah does not read culture/literature in terms of the ideology that is embedded in it, or it seeks to project. Yet he is not totally unaware that all art is selective. Explaining why Rao does not 'individualize' non-Brahmin characters in the novel, Narasimhaiah argues 'it is obviously because he [Rao] doesn't like to crowd his canvas.'⁴² As if to apologise for Rao, he adds: 'But even then he would not dismiss [them] without a thought for he has felt for them in their wretchedness.'⁴³ Not surprisingly, it does not strike Narasimhaiah that the national 'canvas' in

³⁹ See chapters (respectively 4 and 2) on *Kanthapura* in M.K. Naik, *Raja Rao* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972) and Narasimhaiah.

⁴⁰ Narasimhaiah, 39.

⁴¹ Narasimhaiah, 39.

⁴² Narasimhaiah, 40.

⁴³ Narasimhaiah, 40.

Kanthapura is absolutely free of any Muslim presence.⁴⁴ Nor is there representation of any other community in it. The national ‘canvas’ in *Kanthapura* is crowded only with Hindus, just as the village of the title is an exclusively Hindu village.⁴⁵ The only Muslim character in the novel is the policeman Badè Khan, the (surrogate?) villain, who comes from outside. He is *not* a Kanthapurian and is thus *disqualified* to be an Indian. For, on an allegorical plane, Kanthapura is India or, as one critic puts it, ‘pre-independence India in miniature.’⁴⁶

One is able to form, I contend, a fairly accurate idea of the nation Rao intends to construct in *Kanthapura* from a consideration of the way in which the very first chapter of the novel is structured. In fact, it is possible to read it as the ideological blue-print of the entire novel as far as imagining the (Indian) nation is concerned. The chapter is composed of five small units of unequal length: three basically descriptive units followed by two mainly narrative ones. The first one introduces Kanthapura, the village of the title and also the scene of narrative action; gives its precise geographical location; and ends with an invocation to Kenchamma, the local goddess.⁴⁷ The ritual of beginning an (individual/collective) activity by invoking gods/goddesses is a standard Hindu

⁴⁴ Here is John B. Alphonso Karkala, ‘Myth, Matrix and Meaning in Literature and in Raja Rao’s Novel, ‘Kanthapura’,’ *Perspectives on Raja Rao*, ed. K.K. Sharma (Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1980) 76: ‘Raja Rao does not use th[e] Judaeo-Christian-Islamic myth of the unknown and unknowable. Instead, to make his tale of modern India more meaningful, he goes deep down into the roots of continuing Indian cultural tradition, and draws out from the most ancient of mythic conceptions [. . .].’ Like Naik and Narasimhaiah, Karkala also fails to see through the politics of representation (in his case it is the Indian/Hindu myths deployed by Rao) in *Kanthapura*.

⁴⁵ It can possibly be argued that at the time of Rao a South Indian village would typically be one populated only by Hindus.

⁴⁶ Suresh Nath, ‘Gandhi and Raja Rao,’ in Sharma 58.

⁴⁷ As a postcolonial concern, geography/space is no less crucial than history/time. As Said has argued: ‘The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course.’ *Culture* xiii.

practice (the equivalent Islamic/Muslim practice is to recite a certain verse from the *Qur'an*). Readers are thus positioned as to what to expect in what follows. They are about to enter a Hindu world which is strategically given the name of 'Bharatha' in the final unit in which 'Gandhiji' appears.⁴⁸ Brahmins enjoy the topmost position in the Hindu social order. Accordingly, some of the prominent Brahmin men and women of Kanthapura are introduced in the second unit, technically the first unit describing the population of the village. It is not without significance that the smallest unit is the third one which deals with the non-Brahmin population of the village: pariahs, potters, *sudras*, weavers, and so on. This confinement of non-Brahmin Hindus to a narrower narrative space is in my view emblematic of the marginal position they actually occupy in a society dominated by the Brahmins. With the third unit, the description of Kanthapura and its (Hindu) population ends. One is thus left in no doubt that in Kanthapura there is not a single man or woman belonging to a faith other than Hinduism. In short, Kanthapura is a Hindu village.

The story begins to unfold in the fourth unit which is technically the first narrative unit. Three years back from the time of actual narration, the protagonist of the novel, Moorthy, discovers 'a half-sunk linga,' which is then housed in a temple hastily built for that purpose, triggering a series of Hindu festivities

⁴⁸ Rao, *Kanthapura* 10. The name of *Bharatha* links India to its Aryan/Hindu past, Bharatha being the name of Lord Rama's younger brother in the epic *Ramayana*. Incidentally, it is also India's official Sanskrit name.

culminating in *Harikathas*.⁴⁹ It is through one of these *Harikathas* (which forms the second half of the fifth unit) that Gandhi enters the small and as yet unpoliticised psyche/world of (Hindu) Kanthapura. The chapter/unit ends with the policeman Badè Khan, who is sent by the colonial government to live in Kanthapura so that he can closely monitor the impact of Gandhian politics on the Kanthapurians.

Now, if Kanthapura is India and all its inhabitants are Hindus, the message is clear: the Indian nation-in-the-making is a nation of Hindus, with Brahmins and non-Brahmins joyfully (though not equally) appropriating ‘the nation-space’ between themselves.⁵⁰ Despite being the last of all the characters to enter Kanthapura, Badè Khan and, by extension, the community he belongs to, might have become at least one of the many ‘fragments’ of the nation, if Rao had willed so, one must add. In choosing Badè Khan to embody the evil – the narrator describes it as ‘the serpent of the foreign rule’ – against which Gandhi has been expressly sent by Brahma, ‘God of Gods,’ to wage war, Rao recoils from allowing him/them even that minority status.⁵¹ Although inspired by the kind of politics Gandhi stood for, in its execution *Kanthapura* is both an unhealthy appropriation and an unpleasant distortion of history in that whereas Gandhi had relentlessly worked for Hindu-Muslim harmony to the very end of his life, the

⁴⁹ Rao, *Kanthapura* 7. As Rao himself explains the term in the Notes appended to the American edition of the novel (which I am using here), *Harikatha* literally means ‘story of God.’ 189.

⁵⁰ The term is from Homi K. Bhabha, ‘DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,’ in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) 294.

⁵¹ Rao, *Kanthapura* 12, 11.

author of *Kanthapura* seems to work for a completely opposite outcome.⁵² Why else should he have chosen a Muslim character to play the villain in a work whose primary concern is to imagine the Indian nation? With the Indian National Congress already in power in 1937, could it be that in 1938, the year of publication of *Kanthapura*, the question of Hindu-Muslim unity was no longer so crucial a vector in the calculus of anti-colonial national struggle as it had been even a decade earlier?⁵³

At least three very powerful objections can be raised against what I have so far said about Rao and his novel. First, it can be argued that Badè Khan is not the only villain in *Kanthapura*. There are other (European and Hindu) characters as well in the novel, who are depicted in as negative a light as Badè Khan. To choose to single out the villainy of Badè Khan is a distortion in itself. Secondly, it is possible to argue that Badè Khan is not meant to represent the Muslim community of India. To take him as such—that is, as a representative Muslim character—is to misinterpret authorial intent. As a member of the colonial police force, he is rather part of the colonial government against which the villagers of

⁵² In his English weekly *Young India* of 29 May 1924, for example, Gandhi had written: ‘For me the only question for immediate solution before the country is the Hindu-Mussalman question [. . .] I see no way of achieving anything in this afflicted country without a lasting heart unity between Hindus and Mussalmans of India.’ *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Electronic Book), vol. 28 (New Delhi: Publications Division Government of India, 1999) 61. For a clear exposition of how Gandhi came to regard Hindu-Muslim unity as ‘the greatest question’ in the context of Indian national movement, see Judith Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1990) 140-44 and 185-89. See also S. Abid Husain, *Gandhiji and Communal Unity* (New Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1969).

⁵³ See Judith Brown, *Modern India. The Origins of an Asian Democracy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994) 293-316. For the new leadership who took charge of the national movement after Gandhi, the question of Hindu-Muslim unity did not seem to carry as much weight as it had for Gandhi.

Kanthapura, inspired by Gandhi and his followers, are struggling. If anything, then, it is one of the repressive apparatuses of the colonial state which Badè Khan should be seen as standing for. And finally, the treatment of Badè Khan at the hands of the villagers, it can be further argued, has nothing communal in it. Even if he had been a Hindu or a Sikh, there would have been no difference. In those heady days of anti-colonial national struggle, whosoever had acted on behalf of the British would have been treated likewise by the Indians. In other words, the villagers of Kanthapura treat Badè Khan as a villain not because he is a Muslim but because he is a collaborator who works for the perpetuation of colonial hegemony rather than its end. For to serve the ‘small alien minority’ of white sahibs in any capacity (and Badè Khan is no less than a policeman) is to betray the vast majority of Indians.⁵⁴

Although powerful, these objections are not hard to refute. In what follows, I attempt to construct a counter-argument, mainly focusing on the portrayal of the villainous characters in the novel. As to the first and third objections, it is true that *Kanthapura* does have villains other than Badè Khan; but it is also true that they are treated *differentially*. The two characters who have no truck with what they call ‘Gandhi business’ and are bold enough to say so are the priest-turned-moneylender-cum-landowner Bhatta and the Swami, a rather shadowy figure.⁵⁵ Both work together (in the name of caste and religion) to foil the success of ‘Gandhi business’ by all means. Bhatta plays an underhand role in

⁵⁴ William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (London: Flamingo, 2003) xlvi.

⁵⁵ Rao, *Kanthapura* 26.

the arrest of Moorthy, while it is the Swami who is to blame for the death of his mother. Yet neither Bhatta nor the Swami appears to be as despicable to the villagers of Kanthapura as Badè Khan who is after all *on duty* there. Bhatta is more fortunate than the Swami in that he is never supposed to have anything to do with the white masters. When the pariah women set his house on fire, it is not because he is finally identified with what Badè Khan has come to represent (that is, the repression of the colonial state) but because his high interest rate has ruined most of them. The narrator explains:

Well done, well done; it is not for nothing Bhatta lent us money at 18 per cent and 20 percent interest, and made us bleed [. . .] he has starved our stomachs and killed our children [. . .]. Well done, well done.⁵⁶

In addition, there is a clear tendency both in the author and the narrator to play down the wickedness of both. The narrator is explicit about why Bhatta has become what he is now. In his case, the two sources of corruption are his frequent visits to the city and love of money. Previously, the reader is informed, ‘Bhatta was a fine fellow for all that. With his smiles and his holy ashes, we said he would one day own the whole village.’⁵⁷ So Bhatta is not a born criminal. Since his aberration (like that of Waverley?) is temporary, there is every possibility of his coming back to the path of virtue. The possibility is translated into reality

⁵⁶ Rao, *Kanthapura* 153. The extract shows the extent to which Gandhian ideology has been able to penetrate the psyche of the Kanthapurians. There can be no doubt that the narrator savours the burning of the house with obvious relish, revealing in the process an attitude which can by no means be called Gandhian. Gandhi wanted his followers to extend love in exchange of hatred, an ideal encapsulated in his notion of *ahimsa* (non-violence). In the Gandhian scheme of things, *ahimsa* occupies as important a place as *satyagraha*.

⁵⁷ Rao, *Kanthapura* 20.

when Rao sends (a supposedly repentant) Bhatta on a pilgrimage to Kashi immediately after the arrest of Moorthy, though the narrator remains a little sceptical about its final outcome.

A slightly different strategy is used to make light of the foul play of the Swami. Although it is no secret that ‘the Swami is a Government man,’ the (open) secret is in circulation only in the city.⁵⁸ Thus the authority of the Swami as the spiritual leader of his community, though challenged in the city, remains secure in the orbit of Kanthapura. Rangamma, who is ‘no village kid,’ is chosen ‘the third member’ of ‘the Congress panchayat committee of Kanthapura,’ and herself organises a *Sevika Sangha* – that is, an association of female volunteers – has real difficulty to come to terms with the idea that Gandhi wants the caste-system to go.⁵⁹ She cannot accept that Gandhi has approved of ‘all this pollution’ resulting from ‘the confusion of castes.’⁶⁰ In doubting the Gandhian stand on the caste question, Rangamma is in effect endorsing, though not as forcefully as Bhatta, the authority of the Swami in such matters. Even Moorthy—who suffers considerably as a consequence of his excommunication by the Swami—does not characterise him as a villain.

In comparison, Badè Khan is not so fortunate. He is consistently represented as a villain from the moment of his entry into *Kanthapura*/Kanthapura to the very end. Except for one indeterminate moment when he comes to join the *bhajan* that Moorthy asks Rangamma to organise after

⁵⁸ Rao, *Kanthapura* 89.

⁵⁹ Rao, *Kanthapura* 28, 75, 76, 105.

⁶⁰ Rao, *Kanthapura* 27.

his fast, Badè Khan is never allowed to reveal a single redeeming feature. The recurrent use of animal imagery in the characterisation of Badè Khan is in effect a refusal to grant him humanity.⁶¹ He ‘growl[s],’ ‘prowl[s],’ is a ‘bearded monkey,’ a ‘bearded goat,’ a ‘dog,’ and so on.⁶² Badè Khan is further divested of humanity by way of metonyms/synecdoches: often he is no more than ‘a beard, a lathi, and a row of metal buttons.’⁶³

The second objection that there is nothing communal in the characterisation of Badè Khan is easily refuted. In his depiction of Badè Khan, Rao *is* prejudicial, subscribing to the stereotypes of the (Indian) Muslims generated by colonial discourse, a tendency from which his portrayal of Hindu characters is remarkably free.⁶⁴ Moorthy, for example, is a man of action.⁶⁵ Instead of being resigned to fate, he takes responsibility for what he himself does

⁶¹ Other characters are also compared with animals. But the comparison works to stress some positive aspect of the character concerned. For example, Moorthy is compared with ‘a noble cow.’ Rao, *Kanthapura* 5.

⁶² Rao, *Kanthapura* 13, 19, 59, 60, 69.

⁶³ Rao, *Kanthapura* 31. In ‘An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,’ Chinua Achebe detects Joseph Conrad deploying the same strategy to dehumanise the Africans in his novella *Heart of Darkness* (1902). It is ‘rare’ to find in the book, according to Achebe, ‘an African who is not just limbs or rolling eyes.’ *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York and London: WW Norton, 2001) 1786.

⁶⁴ Both images are to be found in *A Passage to India*, the classic Anglo-Indian text dealing with the colonial encounter. Dr Aziz and Dr Panna Lal are both stereotypes. One represents Islamic/Muslim militancy and sensuality, while the other Indian/Hindu clumsiness and irresponsibility. For a perceptive discussion of Muslim stereotypes in Anglo-Indian fiction, see Benazir Durdana, *Muslim India in Anglo-Indian Fiction* (Dhaka: writers.ink, 2008), particularly chapter 4: Dehumanization of Muslim Characters. According to Durdana, Anglo-Indian fiction is full of ‘stereotypes of the amoral, libidinous and violent Muslim.’ 11. Of the three characteristics of amorality, lust and aggression, Badè Khan is deficient in none, though the last two are perhaps more pronounced in him than the first. See also Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India’s Muslims since Independence* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997) 25-36; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁶⁵ In his vision of the Mahatma, Moorthy is repeatedly exhorted to act: to seek truth, to forgo foreign cloth and university (that is, English education), and to work for ‘the dumb millions of the villages.’ Rao, *Kanthapura* 34.

as well as what others do under his leadership. His decision to ‘fast for three days’ after the disastrous outcome of the first skirmish is a result of his realisation that ‘much violence ha[s] been done because of him.’⁶⁶ This image of a responsible Indian/Hindu is the obverse of what one comes across in colonial discourse (for example, in the short stories of Rudyard Kipling).⁶⁷ In contrast, true to the colonial image of the Indian Muslims, Badè Khan is given both to sensuality and violence.⁶⁸ As if to emphasise how strong these Muslim proclivities are, they are made to come to the fore on the very day that Khan arrives in Kanthapura. The narrator reports:

At the temple square he [Badè Khan] gave such a reeling kick to the one-eared cur that it went groaning through the Potters’ street, groaning and barking through the Potters’ street and the Pariah street, till all the dogs began to bark, and all the cocks began to crow, and a donkey somewhere raised a fine welcoming bray.⁶⁹

There is certainly a touch of humour in the effect of the kick on the other animals. However, contrary to what humour frequently does, here it does not work to lessen the culpability of the agent of violence, for it is an act of heedless violence: together the scene (a place of Hindu worship) and the victim (a mute animal and ‘one-eared’ at that) of violence deprive the humour of its intended effect. In fact, it is held back at the precise moment from what it might have

⁶⁶ Rao, *Kanthapura* 61.

⁶⁷ See, for instance, ‘The Head of the District’ in *Life’s Handicap*.

⁶⁸ See note 64 above.

⁶⁹ Rao, *Kanthapura* 15.

achieved in terms of comic relief and then turned on its head instead. In the process, humour becomes *black* humour.⁷⁰ If it were humour pure and simple, Rao would not have allowed his narrator to talk about the lechery of Khan immediately after she has so artfully captured his propensity for violence.

With nowhere to live in Kanthapura, Badè Khan goes ‘straight’ to the nearby Skeffington Coffee Estate where the owner of the Estate (a European) gives him a hut in which to live.⁷¹ No sooner has the problem of accommodation been fixed, Khan goes out and procures ‘a Pariah woman among the lonely ones.’⁷² The woman ‘[brings] along her clay pots and her mats and her brooms,’ and makes the best use of each of these items: in addition to doing cleaning and cooking for Khan, she gives him ‘a very warmful [*sic*] bed.’⁷³ Readers may continue to doubt if Rao is really working with the colonial stereotypes of Indian Muslims, for to generalise from a single example is always suspect. But doubts give place to conviction when ‘a young Badè Khan’ comes to join ‘the bearded one.’⁷⁴ Khan the junior repeats what Khan the senior has been doing previously: ‘he too [takes] a hut and a woman and settle[s] down in the Skeffington Coffee Estate.’⁷⁵ Lechery is a Muslim monopoly in *Kanthapura*!⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Even humour is not free from racial undertones!

⁷¹ Rao, *Kanthapura* 15.

⁷² Rao, *Kanthapura* 15.

⁷³ Rao, *Kanthapura* 15.

⁷⁴ Rao, *Kanthapura* 117.

⁷⁵ Rao, *Kanthapura* 117.

⁷⁶ It is true that the present boss of the Skeffington Coffee Estate is also a lewd who satisfies his lust by procuring women from among the female workers on his estate. But his uncle, the original owner of the estate, was not like his successor.

The communal element in the portrayal of Badè Khan is, in fact, too marked to be missed. Of all his physical features, none is as frequently singled out as his beard. The recurrence of the feature is so obtrusive that one must pause to think out its possible significance. One must pause to ask, ‘What is so extraordinary about the beard of Badè Khan, an ordinary policeman?’ It is extraordinary only in the sense that it is one of the most visible markers of a (pious) Muslim in the Indian subcontinent. Symbolically, the beard of a Muslim is taken to be as sacred as the holy thread of a Hindu. To jeer at a Muslim’s beard would generate as great an outrage as to laugh at a Hindu’s sacred thread.⁷⁷ In both cases, the insult is likely to be judged on a communal rather than personal level. On most occasions in *Kanthapura*, Badè Khan is insulted with specific reference to his beard. In due course, the tendency degenerates into a crude equation: to defy Badè Khan is to pull at his beard. In the very first scuffle between the Gandhians (the nationalist force headed by Moorthy) and the non-Gandhians (the colonial or anti-nationalist force led by Badè Khan), both parties engage in ‘a battle of oaths,’ hurling obscenities at each other, whose targets remain unspecified.⁷⁸ The only exception is Badè Khan who is identified by no

⁷⁷ It is true that Hindu ascetics and gurus also keep a (long) beard. But they do so in order to create a halo of otherworldliness about themselves. For a Hindu, to keep a beard is *not* a religious obligation. By contrast, a Muslim grows a beard as part of his commitment to the *sunnah*. Put simply, the Arabic term *sunnah* means what the Prophet of Islam said and did. In Islam, following *sunnah* is no less important than following the *Qur’an*. In terms of religious significance, the beard of a Muslim is possibly comparable to the Five Ks of the Sikhs: *kēs* (uncut hair), *kangha* (small comb), *karā* (circular iron bracelet), *kirpān* (dagger), and *kacchā* (special undergarment).

⁷⁸ Rao, *Kanthapura* 59.

other means but by his beard: ‘Oh, you bearded monkey.’⁷⁹ Eventually the parties come to blows:

Badè Khan swings round and – bang! – his lathi has hit Moorthy and his hands are on Moorthy’s tuft, and Rachanna and Madanna cry out, ‘At him!’ and they all fall on Badè Khan and tearing away the lathi, bang it on his head. And the maistri comes to pull them off and whips them, and the women fall on the maistri and tear his hair, while Moorthy cries out, ‘No beatings, sisters. No beatings, in the name of the Mahatma.’ But the women are fierce and they will tear the beard from Badè Khan’s face.⁸⁰

How may one explain why the women choose to tear the maistri’s *hair* but Badè Khan’s *beard*? Is there really nothing communal in it? In attracting the violence of the non-violent Gandhians, the beard of Badè Khan becomes a site more of communal violence than of anti-colonial national struggle. The sub-text of communal prejudice gets exposed here.

It is important to note that *Kanthapura*, though written between 1929 and 1933, was actually published in 1938. As can be seen from the discussion of the historical context of the novel above, by then the political situation in India had greatly changed. Of the new developments, the most remarkable one was the rapidly shifting positions of ruler and ruled in terms of political power, a phenomenon more true of the Congress than of any other political party of the time. By virtue of being already in power in the majority of provinces of British

⁷⁹ Rao, *Kanthapura* 59.

⁸⁰ Rao, *Kanthapura* 59.

India (seven out of eleven) in 1937, the Congress could legitimately claim itself to be the voice of all India.⁸¹ It was thus in a position to define, if not dictate, the terms of negotiation with its colonial counterpart. At a time when Indian nationalism was clearly the more legitimate political force than its imperial opponent, what need could there possibly be for Rao to choose a brown-skinned Muslim instead of a fair-skinned sahib as the villain of *Kanthapura*, a novel much celebrated for its depiction of anti-colonial national struggle in the Indian context? At the turn of the nineteenth century when Indian nationalism was just beginning to make itself felt at an all-India level for the first time in the history of India, it was apt that its exponents judiciously avoided direct confrontation with the most formidable imperial power in modern history. For several decades after its birth in 1885, for example, the Indian National Congress practised what historians have sardonically called the politics of petitions and prayers, that is, a moderate form of negotiation. In the arena of culture, the articulations of nationalism were just as muted. As I have shown in the preceding chapters (3 and 4), in order to articulate its call for national regeneration, revivalist historical fiction (mostly written at the turn of the nineteenth century) had to combine allegory with Romance, apparently undermining historicity only to bring about (for the nation) the moment of its entry into history, a moment that arrives in nationalist history fiction. Evidently the times of *Kanthapura* were very different from those of the revivalist historical novel both in Britain and India. Even though the Second World War, which would ultimately cause the dissolution of

⁸¹ See note 53 above.

the European empires, was just looming on the horizon, shattered by the trauma of the First World War and shaken by the economic depression of the 1930s, Britain was in a subdued mood both at home and in her colonies, where the tendency to resort to repression could still be seen every now and then. The Government of India Act of 1935 is an eloquent testimony to the fact that Britain was indeed in a mood of conciliation in India.

Yet the author of *Kanthapura* is hesitant to call a spade a spade when there is apparently no need for such circumlocution! If it did not arise from an overt need for narrative improvisation, one cannot but ask, then what else could possibly have led Rao to deflect white villainy onto brown skin in *Kanthapura*? Why does the novel have a Muslim villain at all? Badè Khan is, in the final analysis, an inverse projection of what R.K. Ramaswamy, the narrator-protagonist of *The Serpent and the Rope*, terms ‘Brahminic autocracy.’⁸² In simple terms, ‘Brahminic autocracy’ is what Sethi has called ‘chauvinist Hinduism,’ coupled with upper-caste male/patriarchal prejudices. It has four basic components. First, Hinduism is far superior to any other religion of the world, including even those born of Hinduism itself (e.g. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism). While the other religions (especially the monotheistic ones such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) seek God, Hinduism alone seeks Truth. Secondly, Truth is *not* readily available to all Hindus. Only the Brahmins have a privileged access to it. Thirdly, Truth has a masculine face. And finally, Hindus are the only legitimate inhabitants of India. Rao is proud of his Aryan ancestors

⁸² Rao, *The Serpent and the Rope* 148.

but seems oblivious of the fact that the Aryans themselves were outsiders. For Rao the arrival of the Aryans in India is not a source of irritation, while it *is* in the case of Others, especially the Muslims.

One may argue that the Rao of *Kanthapura* is not the Rao of *The Serpent and the Rope*, if only because the two novels are separated (in terms of publication) by a period of more than two decades.⁸³ True, but it is equally true that the Rao of the first novel is also the Rao of the second in embryo.⁸⁴ If *The Serpent and the Rope* is a full-blown illustration of ‘Brahminic autocracy,’ its intimations are unmistakable in *Kanthapura*, especially in its conceptualisation of the Indian nation.⁸⁵ It is perfectly in tune with the later development of Rao that the nation in *Kanthapura* is selective in terms of caste/class, community, and gender. While the ‘fragments’ of the nation Sethi deals with – peasants and women – have at least been recognised as ‘fragments,’ the community of Indian Muslims is not (deemed authentic enough to be) even a ‘fragment’ of the nation Rao envisions in his novel. If the absence of Muslim men and women in the village of *Kanthapura* is one proof of the exclusionary logic informing the

⁸³ *The Serpent and the Rope* came out in 1960 and won the Sahitya Akademi Award of the year.

⁸⁴ Rao offers an interesting contrast to Rabindranath Tagore. Unlike Tagore, who moved from the lyricism of earlier years to the prose of later years, from the ivory tower of art to the sordid reality of life, from individual longing to collective belonging, from escape to engagement, Rao moves the other way round, from politics to metaphysics, from a half-hearted dalliance with Marxism to a full-fledged dedication to Vedanta, from a brief affection for the Gandhian ideology to a lasting attachment to whatever Gandhi opposed in Hinduism such as ‘Brahminic autocracy.’ In short, while Tagore grows in humanism and liberalism, Rao in chauvinism and parochialism.

⁸⁵ K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar gets it right when he argues that ‘*Kanthapura*, *The Serpent and the Rope*, and *The Cat and Shakespeare* make a trilogy, and present a steady progression in Raja Rao’s own *sādhana*.’ ‘Literature as “Sadhana”’: A Note on Raja Rao’s “The Cat and Shakespeare”,’ in Sharma 108.

imagining of the nation in *Kanthapura*, the vilification of Badè Khan, the only Muslim character of any consequence in the novel, is another.

In *Inventing India: A History of India in English-Language Fiction*, Ralph J. Crane discusses Rao's *Kanthapura* along with E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* in a chapter significantly titled 'Bridges.'⁸⁶ The grouping is premised on two assumptions. First, the historical period represented in all three novels is more or less the same. Secondly, together they offer a comprehensive view of the then India. If Forster's India is predominantly British, Rao's is primarily 'Indian,' while Jhabvala's is perhaps both. As Crane reads them, the three novels are all concerned with building bridges (hence the title of the chapter): *A Passage to India* and *Heat and Dust* between East and West, while *Kanthapura* between 'the various Indian communities.'⁸⁷ Given the communal configuration of the Indian nation-in-the-making in *Kanthapura*, it is difficult to accept the conclusion Crane draws about the novel. To be true to the spirit of the work in question, one has to admit that the India in *Kanthapura* is *not* an 'Indian India' but a *Hindu* one and that it builds bridges *not* between 'the various Indian communities' but between the various Hindu castes. The nation in *Kanthapura* is a nation of Hindus, not of Indians.

⁸⁶ See chapter 4: Bridges in Ralph J. Crane, *Inventing India: A History of India in English-Language Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1992) 75-99.

⁸⁷ Crane 99.

CHAPTER 6

Nationalist History Fiction 2: The Lalu Trilogy (1939-42)

[. . .] Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.

Frantz Fanon¹

Of the three founding fathers of the Indian novel in English, Mulk Raj Anand is unanimously considered the least parochial. One of the reasons why he is far more positively spoken of than the other two (R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao) has to do with the robust egalitarianism and angry protest that is at the heart of his early fiction, comprising *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), for example, which exposes the evils that work to crush the life of the underdogs in Indian society.² By virtue of raising his voice against these evils (casteism, for instance, in *Untouchable*), Anand has come to be identified as a humanist, liberal, Marxist, socialist, and so on. In this chapter, I argue for a reappraisal of this image, especially in relation to what has come to be known as the Lalu trilogy, which marks, as I read it, a new ideological turn in his long

¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, rpt. (1967; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) 31.

² Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable*, rev. ed. (1935; New Delhi: Arnold Publishers, 1981), *Coolie* (1936; New Delhi and London: Penguin, 1993), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937; New Delhi: Arnold Associates, 1994). Subsequent references are to these editions.

writing career.³ From now on, Anand is less interested in fighting the evils that are responsible for the various sufferings of the Indian working classes than in envisioning the Indian nation, delineating the *Private Life of an Indian Prince*, or writing about his own private self.⁴ Another aspect of his turning away from social(ist) concerns is that by the time he comes to write the trilogy he fails to treat his characters in terms of class only. A subtle communal bias now underwrites the project of imagining the nation, a nation that apparently looks to be an inclusive one but actually operates on an exclusionary politics. Although this nation does not straightway exclude one of the Indian communities, namely the Indian Muslims, as the one in *Kanthapura*, the classic text of national formation in India by Rao, does, it is still hesitant to take the community in question in, a tendency clearly reflected in the way that Anand treats his Muslim characters in the trilogy, especially in its last volume.⁵ To put it bluntly, the nation in the trilogy is imagined in narrow communal terms. It cannot be otherwise because imagining the nation entails imagining its multiple Other(s)—both external and internal—at the same time.

In several respects, *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942)—the last book of the Lalu trilogy, so called after the name of its protagonist—is a representative Anand novel. It is a *bildungsroman* in the historical realist mode, charting,

³ The Lalu trilogy by Mulk Raj Anand comprises *The Village*, 2nd Indian ed. (1939; Bombay: Kutub-Popular, 1960); *Across the Black Waters*, 1st Indian ed. (1940; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955); *The Sword and the Sickle*, 1st Indian ed. (1942; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955). Subsequent references are to these editions.

⁴ *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953) is the ninth novel by Anand.

⁵ Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (New York: New Directions, 1963). Subsequent references are to this edition.

together with its prequels, *The Village* (1939) and *Across the Black Waters* (1940), the making of Lalu into a revolutionary. Although a typical Anand protagonist, Lalu is an improvement too, in that he not only dreams of but, unlike his predecessors, also strives for a society where there will be no coercion, deprivation, or exploitation – a society free from all the evils of capitalism, casteism, colonialism, feudalism and, if possible, from those of industrialism as well.⁶ Only a utopia can ever hope to come close to matching such a blessed society. But the point to be noted about the utopia in question is that its spatio-temporal matrix is not at all fuzzy: it is postcolonial India and is, for that very reason, concretely situated in space and time. It is, in the words of Edward W. Said, ‘worldly,’ and is therefore free neither from ideological determination nor from politics.⁷ But the ideology/politics according to which the (national) utopia functions is a discriminatory one, not allowing *all* Indians an equally free entry. Nor are they all *equally* welcome.

⁶ Like so many postcolonial thinkers, Anand would also appear to be ambivalent towards modernity, an approach most clearly evident in his attitude to industrialism. In contrast to M.K. Gandhi, however, Anand finds modernity much more preferable to tradition, though a case can perhaps be made to the contrary. As is well known, in his distrust of industrialism Gandhi was influenced by such romantic thinkers as Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin, and so on.

⁷ By a text being in the world or ‘worldly,’ Edward W. Said means it to be a product of the cultural and historical context in which it comes into being. See *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1983) 1-30.

Anand in Socio-cultural Context

In the Lalu trilogy, Anand, it has to be acknowledged, is far more open-minded than his contemporary Raja Rao. In contrast to Rao, who strives to project a homogeneous (essentially Hindu) India in his fiction (especially in *Kanthapura*), in the trilogy Anand at least admits (but hesitates to celebrate) the fact that the Indian nation comprises people belonging to different classes, communities, cultures, languages and religions. Unlike Rao, Anand is happy to allow his narrative space (a space which is more often than not coextensive with ‘the nation-space’ in nationalist history fiction) to be shared by a heterogeneous group of characters as diverse as are Indians in reality.⁸ Yet the narrative space in the trilogy is *not* equally distributed. Nor is the hold over the narrative equally shared. Non-Muslim characters (mainly *male* Hindus and Sikhs) have a greater share of both narrative control and space for the simple reason that they, along with fighting other forms of injustice such as feudal oppression, commit themselves to the national programme of driving away the alien authority, whereas the Muslim characters are often represented as working in the interests of the British. The logic (one among many) seems to be that one is entitled to enjoy the fruits of nationalism only if one has in the first instance planted and raised the tree of nationalism.⁹ The loyalties of the Indian Muslims lie elsewhere. In the majority of cases, Anand suggests, they are indifferent, if not outright hostile, to

⁸ The term comes from Homi K. Bhabha, ‘DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,’ *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) 294.

⁹ The grandmother of the unnamed narrator-protagonist in *The Shadow Lines* (1988) by Amitav Ghosh is a staunch advocate of such kind of nationalism.

the cause of Indian nationalism. They do not therefore merit inclusion into the community of the (Indian) nation.

Two notable critics of Anand divide his characters into three types. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, they are: the victims, the tyrants, and ‘the good men.’¹⁰ Retaining the first two groups, Suresht Renjen Bald subdivides the third one into ‘true revolutionaries’ and ‘false prophets.’¹¹ Given the fact that Anand is much talked about for his humanism and Marxism, is it not surprising that most of his Muslim characters in the trilogy belong to the class of oppressors, big and small? Why is it invariably the case that Anand makes his non-Muslim characters the architects of the national utopia in the trilogy?¹² Does he really examine the phenomena of exploitation of the Indian working classes and of injustices that they daily endure strictly in terms of class antagonism (as in Marx/ism)? Or is the conflict between the haves and the have-nots undercut by other non-Marxist concerns such as caste, community and gender? The conflict between exploiters and exploited in the trilogy is not a case of class antagonism *per se*. Why else should the oppressors come not only from one particular class but also from one specific *community* and the oppressed from another?

A possible answer is to be found in the way Anand grew up in a family which was literally a site of the play of the antagonistic forces of modernity and

¹⁰ Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English* (New Delhi and London: Heinemann, 1971) 77.

¹¹ Suresht Renjen Bald, *Novelists and Political Consciousness: Literary Expression of Indian Nationalism 1919-1947* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1982) 121.

¹² I read this as a strategic ideological/narrative move meant to legitimise the claim of his non-Muslim protagonists to India soon to be freed from colonial domination.

tradition, though it should be noted that the tradition in question was predominantly a Hindu one.¹³ Lall Chand, the father, was in the British Indian army by virtue of which he came to represent the neat and tidy world of the white sahibs – efficient, punctual and rational.¹⁴ In contrast, the mother represented the not-so-pleasant world of rustic India: clumsy, listless and superstitious. Of the two worlds, the world of the mother was emotionally more satisfying as well as more secure than that of the father, if only because it was remote from the world of politics and statecraft.¹⁵ Like many thousands of lower-middle- and middle-class children of his generation, however, Anand took his father as role model, aspiring to enter his world one day.¹⁶ In due time, the father was elevated to superhuman level, becoming in the process a hero.¹⁷ But as Anand grew up, he could see that his father, Lall Chand, was at best a ‘shadow colonel.’¹⁸ The elaborate edifice of heroism was built on a series of base compromises. The lack of ideological and moral commitment they pointed to was beyond what an (Indian) adolescent (and a non-conformist one at that) could have coped with.

¹³ Like many middle-class families at the turn of the nineteenth century, the family in which Anand grew up was directly exposed to several of the institutions the British had introduced in India such as the army, the bureaucracy and, more importantly, English language and education.

¹⁴ Or, more accurately, its adulterated/(mis)translated (Anand would prefer ‘bastardized’) native version. The phenomenon was not uncommon with many of his generation with an exposure to English education.

¹⁵ The idea of a seamless division of socio-cultural space into the private and the public is fast becoming a problematic one, much more difficult to sustain in a (post)colonial context.

¹⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru expresses similar ambition in his autobiography. See *An Autobiography* (1936; Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1962) 6-11.

¹⁷ Mulk Raj Anand, *Seven Summers: The Story of an Indian Childhood* (Bombay: Kutub-Popular, n.d.) 12. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁸ Cited in Saros Cowasjee, *So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1977) 2. Cowasjee’s first chapter gives the most detailed account of Anand’s life up to the early 1970s.

On most occasions Anand recalls his mother in terms of the stories she used to tell her children, especially when the father was away at work, and the songs she used to sing to lull them to sleep. The point worth noting about these songs and stories is that they were a rich mix of folk elements: fables, legends, myths, superstitions, and so on, mostly (and surprisingly for a proud Sikh peasant woman that she was) deriving from the Hindu tradition. Anand relates to them in a manner completely different from the way he relates to the world of his father. In the case of the father, Anand moves from admiration to abhorrence. But the mother and the world she represents receive uninterrupted and unquestioned loyalty. This relationship, I argue, can be taken as emblematic of his relationship with the larger Mother (India), her culture and history, which has in turn a direct bearing on his conception of the postcolonial nation.

As I read him, Anand is a classic case of a split (colonised) self, divided between the claims of modernity on the one hand and those of tradition on the other. Rarely has an Indian writer been able to express the inherent tension of the in-between situation so aptly.¹⁹ In his *Apology for Heroism*, Anand writes: '[. . .] I struggled to weigh up the double burden on my shoulders, the Alps of the European tradition and the Himalayas of my Indian past [. . .].'²⁰ This split is best explained, I think, in terms of Freudian psychology.²¹ That is, at the conscious level, which can also be taken as the level of intellect/rationality, Anand is

¹⁹ In diaspora studies, the more frequently used term is hyphenated self/identity.

²⁰ Mulk Raj Anand, *Apology for Heroism: A Brief Autobiography Of [sic] Ideas*, 2nd ed. (1946; Bombay: Kutub-Popular, 1957) 67. Subsequent references are to this edition.

²¹ In neo-/Marxist scheme of things, ideology operates at the level of superstructure.

committed to modernity, to which the world of his father is closer than that of his mother, whereas at the unconscious level, that is, at the emotional level, he is committed to an Indian tradition, which is invariably a Hindu tradition, and is thus closer to the world of his mother than to that of his father.

Anand in Critical Context

A notable foreign critic sees the tension between modernity and tradition in Anand reflected in the time-honoured content-form dichotomy of his work. In his perceptive essay, 'Quest for Structures: Form, Fable and Technique in the Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand,' S.C. Harrex maintains 'that any discussion of formal and technical aspects of Anand's fiction necessitates consideration of Anand's intensions, attitudes and themes.'²² Accordingly, Harrex sees 'a close correlation between [Anand's] quest for ideological structure and his quest for the fictional form most compatible with his instincts and prejudices as a writer.'²³ After a close examination of the fit between formal and ideological structure in *Untouchable* (a fit, according to Harrex, Anand is able to achieve in his other novels as well), Harrex concludes, '[. . .] Anand's fictional forms are allegorical

²² S.C. Harrex, 'Quest for Structures: Form, Fable and Technique in the Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand,' in *Perspectives on Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. K.K. Sharma (Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1978) 153.

²³ Harrex 153.

representations [. . .] of his soul theories and philosophical ideas.’²⁴ But how did Anand achieve the happy marriage of ideological content and narrative form? Harrex explicates,

[. . .] in his quest for form Anand has Indianised a Western materialist structure derived largely from Marx (perhaps via Caudwell) and has tried to find for this structure, applied to Indian conditions, an alternative to the social realist mode of expression which, in the West, has been the dominant methodology of fiction.²⁵

The alternative in question comes from ‘the Indian tradition of fable (which assumes that art and didacticism are not incompatible).’²⁶ Thus ‘a fusion of Indian fable and the European realist novel,’ argues Harrex, is what provides Anand with a narrative form best suited to articulate his ideological programme.²⁷

From what Harrex says, it can be concluded that, though Anand might initially have difficulties to fuse form and content together, he was ultimately successful in reconciling the demands of both by a double process of hybridisation, that is, by Indianising both ideological (humanist Marxist) and narrative (realist) structure, both derived from the West. In other words, Anand Indianised ideological structure to be applicable to the Indian situation, and narrative structure to suit the (already) Indianised ideological structure. For Anand, if India posed problems, it offered solutions too. Reading Anand from the

²⁴ Harrex 166-167.

²⁵ Harrex 159-160.

²⁶ Harrex 160.

²⁷ Harrex 158.

point of view of Harrex is like reading Hegelian dialectics at the stage of synthesis, when the historical conflict between thesis and anti-thesis out of which synthesis is born is blissfully over. I would rather prefer to read Anand at that stage when the tensions are both sharpest and subtlest. For I am sceptical about the resolution of tensions Harrex believes to have been achieved by Anand. And nowhere are they perhaps so patently clear as in the construction of the Indian nation in the trilogy.

Contrary to Harrex, therefore, I would argue that the very attempt to incorporate a socialist/utopian vision (for example, a classless society) in a realist narrative framework (a typical bourgeois form) is a contradiction in itself, whose reconciliation is next to impossible, no matter however much they are indigenised/Indianised. It cannot but lay bare the tensions that a typical Anand novel such as the trilogy is bound to be carrying. (In the case of *Across the Black Waters* and *The Sword and the Sickle*, the last two volumes of the trilogy, the tensions rather multiply, for they are what I have decided to call 'history novels.')

Therefore, the split I have briefly discussed above, I would suggest, is what makes Anand the kind of writer that he is. (It never heals, as Harrex would have one believe.) It is the source of both his strength and weakness, his possibilities and limitations, his charm and chagrin. This split is also what defines the logic of exclusion/inclusion at work in his construction of the nation in the trilogy. For one of the clearest manifestations of the impact which tradition has on modernity in a colonial context is the way nation is imagined in such a context. If the pull of

modernity – ‘the Alps of the European tradition’ – impels Anand to imagine the nation in terms of a community greater than any other community in existence, the pull of (Hindu) tradition – ‘the Himalayas of my Indian past’ – propels him to do so in terms of the community he (half) belongs to. The Indian nation in Anand is a nation of Hindus, interspersed with Sikhs. Other communities have at most only token presences.

The Nation in the Trilogy

The interplay of tradition and modernity in the trilogy generates subtler tensions. These micro tensions are more important as well as more interesting than the macro one from which they issue, in that they tend to contradict more explicitly what Anand is so often taken for granted. So read, the utopian vision that the trilogy seeks to project loses much of its beauty and validity, and the much acclaimed humanist Marxism becomes suspect, as one turns to focus on the smaller details of the national canvas Anand paints, and begins to examine the coordinates he employs to imagine the postcolonial (Indian) nation. The broader embrace of the liberal-secular ideal of the nation narrows down as the parochial interests of caste, community, and gender override those of the greater community. In what follows, I shall examine the construction of the nation in the

trilogy in terms of one of its hesitations, the hesitation to include the Indian Muslims. The strategies Anand employs in his depiction of the Muslim characters in the trilogy will be what I will be primarily concerned with.

As can be inferred from its title, the setting of the first volume of the trilogy *The Village* is a small village, called Nandpur, in the Punjab where the entire action of the novel takes place, except those decisive events partly responsible for the expulsion of the protagonist Lal Singh (fondly called Lalu) from the village. To escape the tyranny of tradition, Lalu decides to join the army. The scene of the fateful incidents is the district town of Manabad, a ten-mile journey from Nandpur by train. Lalu and a couple of his friends visit Manabad to take part in the Diwali fair.²⁸ The care-free jubilant atmosphere of the fair works to release them from the age-old inhibitions they have grown up with in the close-knit village society. Rebellious by instinct and adventurous by temperament, Lalu commits two acts of defiance, both taboos for a Sikh, the second being more serious than the first from a Sikh point of view. He flouts religious tradition, first, by eating meat cooked in a Muslim eating place and, secondly, by getting his hair cut at the *King George Vth Haircutting and Shaving Saloon*.²⁹ On returning home, Lalu is abused and beaten by the elders of his family who regard it as ‘the most shamefullest [*sic*] shame that could be for a Sikh to have a siigle [*sic*] hair of

²⁸ Diwali (the festival of lights) is celebrated by the Hindus to commemorate the return of Lord Rama from Lanka. In Lanka, Rama vanquishes Ravana, the evil incarnate, to rescue his wife, Sita, whom the latter had abducted in disguise.

²⁹ Anand, *The Village* 86-87.

his body shorn,' as one of them puts it.³⁰ Led by the son of the village landlord, Hardit Singh, and the priest of the Sikh temple, Arjan Singh, 'a clamorous crowd' does all it can to disgrace him publicly.³¹

It is however not long before the elders relent and forgive Lalu. Some months later, as his family is making arrangements to celebrate the marriage of his elder brother, Dayal Singh, the landlord, Sardar Bahadur Harbans Singh, brings a false charge of theft against him. To avoid arrest by the police, Lalu flees the village and enlists in the army. The novel ends with his embarking the troopship *S.S. Mongara* to join the allied forces, fighting on the Western front at the start of World War I. The westward journey 'across the black waters' (the title of the next volume) begins but not before Lalu has come to know (through a telegram sent by his uncle Harnam Singh) that his father, Nihal Singh, has passed away.³²

Unlike Rao's Kanthapura, an *absolutely* Hindu village, Anand's Nandpur is *predominantly* a Sikh village. Whereas there is not a single villager in Kanthapura belonging to a faith other than Hinduism, Nandpur has 'the various houses of God for prayers,' a clear indication that the village has a (religiously) mixed population.³³ This difference in the composition of community/population of the two villages is not without (narrative/national) significance. As I have

³⁰ Anand, *The Village* 92.

³¹ Anand, *The Village* 94.

³² In nationalist (history) fiction, the protagonist is usually parentless. If not, the death of a parent (more frequently that of the father) is symbolic of the end of the old way of life. The new way of life emerges as the protagonist grows into manhood without parents.

³³ *The Village*, 36

argued in the preceding chapter, if Kanthapura is India (and there is not the least doubt that Rao means his village to be so read), the Indian nation is by logic a nation of Hindus; other communities do not belong. They are not even its 'fragments.'³⁴ Except for Badè Khan, the Muslim villain, who is an outsider, they are simply non-existent.³⁵ By the same logic, the mixed community/population of Nandpur would imply a nation as heterogeneous as is India in reality. In comparison to the exclusionary Rao of *Kanthapura*, the Anand of *The Village* is decidedly more inclusive.

This inclusiveness is foregrounded in two ways. First, there are characters in the novel from almost all castes, classes, and communities of India. One comes across even such characters as those living on the farthest fringes of the society. For example, there is 'Chandi, the demented old witch woman. She lived in a straw hut by the cremation-ground of the village in the ravine with a couple of stray dogs in the summer, and in the caravanserai in the winter.'³⁶ Secondly, Lalu has a wide circle of friends, not only from different castes/classes but also from different communities. Given the rich mix of (Indian) characters in the novel as well as in the trilogy as a whole, Anand can legitimately claim to have presented an inclusive India in it/them (for the moment at least, the question of gender has

³⁴ The term 'fragments' has been taken from Partha Chatterjee *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993). Chatterjee uses it to refer to the Others of the bourgeois-patriarchal Indian nation.

³⁵ Rao can thus be seen as subscribing to the orientalist-revivalist tendency which saw the Aryans/Hindus as the original inhabitants of India and the Indian Muslims as aliens/outsideers.

³⁶ Anand, *The Village* 45-46.

to be put aside). But before that claim can be finally established, the dynamics of exclusion/inclusion he works with has to be thoroughly examined.

As far as caste is concerned, Anand is forever uncompromising, always up in arms against every kind of injustice and insult perpetrated in the name of caste. In brief, Anand and caste simply do not mix. And it has its reflection in his treatment of characters belonging to different castes. In *The Village*, for example, the depiction of Seth Chaman Lal, the local merchant-cum-moneylender, who is ‘a bania [tradesman] by caste,’ is as devastating as that of Jhandu, the outcaste-turned-Muslim, is elevating.³⁷ The same is more or less true of class. Anand is ever so positive to the have-nots. Conversely, the haves, that is, upper middle- and middle-class characters, especially those who enjoy power and wealth and use them as instruments of exploitation, tend to be targets of his harshest indictment. Anand is unequivocally indignant towards the scheming landlord, Sardar Harbans Singh; ‘that thief of a vakil [lawyer], Balmukand’; the tyrannical head master, Hukam Chand; and the vicious Mahant in *The Village*, whereas most of the have-nots from landless labourers to hard-pressed peasants receive his admiration.³⁸

But when it comes to the question of community (defined in terms of religion), Anand tends to be ambiguous and at least a little hesitant. In most cases, he is all sympathy for the lower-caste, lower-class non-Muslim characters, if only because they are the underdogs of the caste- and class-ridden Indian (read Hindu)

³⁷ Anand, *The Village* 114.

³⁸ Anand, *The Village* 21.

society. The same attitude is not shown, at least not consistently, to the lower-class Muslim characters. In the case of upper-class Muslim characters, Anand seems to be what he is to the non-Muslim characters from the same class: angry, belligerent, contemptuous, and dismissive. Yet a subtle difference can be detected. On the whole, I would argue that Anand treats his Muslim characters *differently*, often with contempt, at times with coldness, but rarely with real compassion.³⁹ And this difference has a lot to do with his figuration of national identity in the trilogy.⁴⁰

There are good reasons why *The Village* is ambivalent in its representation of Muslim characters. First, it deals with a period in Indian history before the outbreak of World War I when the Indian national movement had entered one of its quieter cycles.⁴¹ The *Swadeshi* Movement (1905-8), born in the wake of the partition of Bengal, had petered out.⁴² But one of its legacies, that is, the question of Hindu-Muslim unity, was still fresh in the air. To the national leadership, it had become the most vital item. The dominant mood of the time was one of reconciliation. Both the communities were disposed to live together as peacefully as possible. An Indian (Hindu) writer was *historically* constrained not to attempt

³⁹ It should be pointed out here that caste is a Hindu social phenomenon, not an Indian one. Other Indian communities are differently structured.

⁴⁰ Anand has given Indian English fiction a number of Muslim characters drawn, one may venture to say with no use of irony, with empathy. But the crucial point about them is that the works they feature in are either from post-independence period or national politics, if present, is of marginal interest in them. One good example is the post-independence novella *Death of a Hero: Epitaph for Maqbool Sherwani* (Bombay: Kutub-Popular, 1963).

⁴¹ In his autobiography, Nehru writes, 'Towards the end of 1912 India was, politically, very dull. Tilak was in gaol, the Extremists had been sat upon and were lying low without any effective leadership, Bengal was quieter after the unsettling of the partition of the province, and the Moderates had been effectively "rallied" to the Minto-Morley scheme of councils.' 27.

⁴² The Punjab was one of the most audible voices against the partition of Bengal.

a completely negative portrayal of the Muslim character in his/her work set in the early 1910s (that is, in between the partition of Bengal and the outbreak of World War I). But *The Village* was actually written in the late 1930s, when the mood of national politics had greatly changed. In that decade the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity did not seem so important a factor in the arithmetic of anti-colonial national struggle as it had even a decade earlier. In the late 1930s, it was possible for an Indian (Hindu) writer to be biased in his/her treatment of the Muslim character.⁴³

Second, the idea of the nation is not fully developed in *The Village*. Its outlines are just beginning to emerge. Accordingly, the protagonist, though a rebel, has on the whole no definite idea of politics. All he wants to achieve is the removal of the misery of the peasantry in his village. His greatest happiness will be to see them all happy: free from debt, ignorance, prejudice and superstition.⁴⁴ If he has national consciousness at all, the domain of its expression is socio-economic reform of the village society to which he belongs. National politics at an all-India level is still beyond him. The nation has yet to be imagined. It is therefore too early to raise the question who will be its legitimate inheritors. Yet the kind of treatment Muslim characters receive in *The Village* gives a foretaste of the kind of nation its last sequel, *The Sword and the Sickle*, will eventually be able to project.

⁴³ See Joya Chatterji, *Bengal divided: Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

⁴⁴ Interestingly, the more Lalu progresses in understanding the politics of nationalism, the more he moves away from social reformation and revolutionary socialism.

Muslim characters are *marginal/minor* characters in *The Village*. Except for two of them, Anand has given them little attention. The rest are *not* creations of ‘his intimate brush,’ as Krishna Nandan Sinha believes of some of the minor characters in Anand.⁴⁵ And the two in question are drawn rather negatively. There is hardly any reason why Lalu, his uncle Harnam Singh, and his two elder brothers Sharm and Dayal Singh should treat Fazlu, a Muslim peasant neighbour, so savagely in the presence of the old patriarch Nihal Singh. The whole episode of Fazlu and his Sikh neighbours is shot through with tension, whose source is not hard to identify. Right from the moment of his entry, Fazlu is bullied, contradicted, or just ignored. Why is it so? Apparently, Fazlu has three drawbacks: he is proud of ‘his big connections’ (one of his cousins, ‘Muhammad Raffi, a vakil [lawyer] is standing for election to the Municipal Committee’); by cultivating vegetables for the market, Fazlu has prospered; and he is a little dismissive of religions other than the revealed ones – Christianity, Islam.⁴⁶ Fazlu has thus none of the vices Anand disapproves of: he is neither tyrannical, nor hypocritical, nor even exploitative. The narrator comments:

Neither the old man [Nihal Singh] nor Harnam Singh answered because the way in which Fazlu talked big, and the fact that he was prospering on his patch of vegetables, while the Hindu and Sikh peasants were gradually

⁴⁵ Krishna Nandan Sinha, *Mulk Raj Anand* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972) 118.

⁴⁶ Anand, *The Village* 23

deteriorating, although still too proud to condescend to cultivate vegetables for the market, annoyed them.⁴⁷

This narratorial prognosis of the reasons why Fazlu is so treated by his Sikh neighbours works to demonstrate that the narrator is able to observe things dispassionately, a highly-prized quality especially in a work that sets out to imagine the nation in such a culturally diverse context as India.

But the problem is that the narrator is not always so discreet and forthcoming. Often what the fictional characters do or say is left unqualified, thus inviting the reader to equate the opinions of the characters with those of the narrator and, in the absence of (authorial) irony, with those of the author.⁴⁸ One such case in *The Village* is to be found in the characterisation of Muhammad Ali, the Muslim divine-cum-apothecary.⁴⁹ The reader meets Ali at a time when Lalu is visiting his family on a short leave from the army. His father, Nihal Singh, is seriously ill and is about to die. Ali has come to check his condition and prescribe medicine accordingly. After a brief account of the physical appearance of Ali, the narrator continues:

A pious man with orthodox views, he [Ali] commanded respect among the peasants in spite of his ridiculous bearing, though Ghulam [Lalu's friend] and the younger generation of the village muslims [*sic*] having suffered

⁴⁷ Fazlu had asked how vegetables were selling in the markets of Manabad and Sherkot. Anand, *The Village* 24.

⁴⁸ In the case of Anand, the tendency gets further validity in that his works are predominantly autobiographical.

⁴⁹ Is the name deliberate? There is a strong possibility of its being so, especially in view of the name of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who broke with the Indian National Congress and finally became the loudest spokesman of a separate state for the Muslims of India to be called Pakistan.

from the vicious cane he kept soaked in urine in order to beat the boys who came to learn the Koran by rote in the primitive mosque school, felt differently about him.⁵⁰

Apart from noting the ‘ridiculous bearing’ of Ali, the narrator juxtaposes two perspectives here. While the older generation of Muslims respects Ali, the younger one is critical, if not downright contemptuous, of him. There is no doubt as to which point of view the narrator subscribes to. In choosing Ghulam to represent the younger generation of Muslims, the narrator allows his perspective to be usurped by that of the focaliser, who is undoubtedly Lalu here. If the narrator had kept his distance from the protagonist, it would have left space for irony to do its job. The conflation of the two points of view could have been avoided. A simple rhetorical device could have enabled Anand save his face. For what happens next is serious business:

Gujri [Lalu’s mother], who would under ordinary circumstances have resented the entrance of a Muhammadan into the barn through the kitchen, just contented herself with lifting the shoes which the Maulvi had discarded at the door by means of a stick and throwing them into the courtyard.⁵¹

Although brief, it is a telling episode, loaded with (communal) suggestions. Since the two perspectives have merged in the absence of irony, it is through the eyes of Lalu, focaliser-cum-narrator, that the reader sees and tends to

⁵⁰ Anand, *The Village* 202.

⁵¹ Anand, *The Village* 202-203.

evaluate what Gujri does here. Yet it is possible to stand back and read her action from a fresh point of view, that is, from a non-Lalu perspective, which is what I attempt below. From what Gujri does, there can be no doubt that she, like the ‘orthodox’ Ali, is an orthodox Sikh peasant woman. As such, her outrage at the violation of the sanctity of her kitchen by the entry of a Muslim is plausible. But how does Lalu, who is so intolerant of orthodoxy in others and spares no opportunity to flout it, see it in his mother? Lalu drops no hint at all that he disapproves of what has just happened. His silence can be interpreted as acquiescence.

To be fair to Lalu and by implication to Anand, it is not, it should be noted, that Lalu is *never* critical of his mother and her at times illogical behaviour. For once at least, he thinks her unreasonable. The judgement comes as Lalu reflects on how shallow his mother can sometimes be in her estimation of people. Ghulam, one of Lalu’s Muslim friends, is a ‘weaver boy, [who] live[s] with his mother in a small hovel’:

It was a filthy room, cramped with a loom in the middle, an oven on one side and a huge bedstead on which the whole family slept on the other. And sheep, hens and cocks revelled among their droppings all over the place, reeking with several varieties of smell, and slimy with dirt.⁵²

⁵² Anand, *The Village* 51.

Such vivid sketches of squalid existence abound in Anand.⁵³ What is most remarkable about them is that they are not mere descriptions. They are at the same time expositions of the forces responsible for the kind of subhuman life some people are forced to live. If not poverty, what else can drive a family to use a single room for such various purposes as weaving, cooking and sleeping? A typical Anand protagonist sees, as Lalu does here, both the unsavoury situation and its causes, whereas Gujri sees only the filth: ‘These Muhammadans are dirty [. . .] all they live for is to eat meat twice a day.’⁵⁴ What Gujri fails to grasp is the fact that if the family could afford ‘to eat meat twice a day,’ they would be living in much healthier conditions. Lalu knows better: ‘They were dirty, indeed, but they were the poorest people in the village.’⁵⁵ Cleanliness has less to do with community/race than with class and its socio-economic nexus.

In addition to being ‘flat’ characters, the Muslim characters in *The Village* are marginal/minor characters in another sense too. They contribute nothing to the development of the plot of the novel. Accordingly, they play no part in the growth of the protagonist which is what the novel is basically about, a *bildungsroman*. They are neither agents nor agent-makers. In contrast, though the British are no less flat in *The Village*, they do have a positive role to play in what Lalu becomes at the end of the day. This assignment of no role to Muslim characters in the

⁵³ On reading these passages, one is likely to be reminded of the underworld in Charles Dickens. In several of his poems in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, William Blake also depicts the darker side of life at the advent of industrialisation in Britain. See especially “The Chimney Sweeper,” “London,” and “Holy Thursday” (in the *Experience* section). Significantly, the title of the last volume of the trilogy *The Sword and the Sickle* is from Blake suggested by George Orwell.

⁵⁴ Anand, *The Village* 51.

⁵⁵ Anand, *The Village* 52.

novel is strategic, based on a simple but sound logic: no pains, no gains. Since the Muslim characters have not invested (in fact, have not been allowed to invest) in the national project, they are logically not entitled to its benefits. More explicitly, as non-participants, they have no right to the national utopia Lalu endeavours to bring about through reform in *The Village* and through revolution in *The Sword and the Sickle*, in which from non-agents of the earlier volume they become downright villains. Just as colonial discourse imagines the colonising Self in terms of colonised Others who are either passive or villainous, national discourse in the trilogy imagines national self not only in terms of the colonial Other but also in terms of non-national Others who are either the Muslim non-participants of *The Village* or the Muslim villains of the last volume.

Before I proceed to discuss *The Sword and the Sickle* and its construction of the Indian nation, one last point about the trilogy whose initial signs are already there in its first volume must be taken into account. What exactly is the ethnic character of the national self in the trilogy? To say that it is communal is to offer half an answer. The nation in the trilogy is *not* one of Sikhs, as it may appear; it is a nation of Hindus. It is true that, by having his hair cut, Lalu defies an age-old religious tradition of the Sikhs. But the same act of defiance enables him to enlist in the army as ‘a Hindu Jat.’⁵⁶ (Deliberately?), Anand leaves it unexplained as to why Lalu who is ever so conscious of his individuality translates (and lets other characters translate) his Sikh identity into a Hindu one. It is, however, quite clear as to how Lalu feels about it: he is never troubled by the

⁵⁶ Anand, *The Village* 188.

erasure of his former Sikh self by the later Hindu self. No wonder that it should be so, for the underlying (un)consciousness of the trilogy is none other than Hindu, a legacy Anand inherits from his father, as his mother was a Sikh.⁵⁷

There are a number of instances in *The Village* when the Hindu consciousness makes itself felt. I would focus on two. The first one occurs early in the novel, when Lalu and his friends are going to Manabad to enjoy themselves in the Diwali fair. It is a moonlit night, with the stars '[hanging] down from the azure sky as if the heavens were celebrating their feast of lanterns a day earlier than the men on earth.'⁵⁸ Even the Indian sky is responsive to the Hindu festival of Diwali, celebrating it a day earlier than its celebration (by the Hindus) on the (Indian) earth. The second eruption is stronger than the first, taking in the animal world of India:

But the Indian buffalo is not unlike the Hindu race, a tame, docile species, tolerant and hospitable in the extreme, spontaneous and natural, weak-willed through want, and yet possessed of a curious fire which has helped it to endure through thousands of years.⁵⁹

In a narrative embedded in the past, the appearance of the extract above must stand out if only by virtue of its tense: it is written in the ethnographic present, the present tense, a verbal metaphor of the endurance of the Hindu race

⁵⁷ I take the Hindu (un)consciousness as the textual unconscious of the trilogy.

⁵⁸ Anand, *The Village* 58.

⁵⁹ Anand, *The Village* 128.

‘through thousands of years.’⁶⁰ Despite all odds, Hindus had managed to live, are living, and will be living in India. Each and every attribute Anand invests the Hindu race with is traceable to nineteenth-century orientalist and twentieth-century revivalist discourse. However, to invest the non-human world of a predominantly Sikh village with the attributes/concerns of the Hindu race can only be explained in terms of the (Hindu) unconscious of its creator. To borrow from Freud: Anand is a modernist at the level of superego, a Sikh at the level of ego, and a Hindu at the level of id.

The second volume of the trilogy, *Across the Black Waters*, furnishes further proof. Fighting on the Western Front, Lalu is haunted by nightmares (the site of the play/pressure of id, according to Freud) featuring the Hindu goddess Kali and the Hindu god of death Yama. The Hindu unconscious of the creator of the trilogy is also its textual unconscious.

The Nation in The Sword and the Sickle

The three volumes of the trilogy have three different settings: the first is set in Nandpur in the Punjab; the second, in the Western Front in France; and the final one, in Rajgarh in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. In one of the brilliant

⁶⁰ See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983).

works on Anand, Cowasjee asks, ‘Why, one may ask, does Anand move the scene of action from Nandpur in the Punjab to Rajgarh in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh?’⁶¹ There are, according to Cowasjee, two reasons: one, fictional; the other, historical. ‘For one thing,’ argues Cowasjee,

Anand wanted to introduce a love story into his theme of revolution, and it would not have been easy for Lalu to marry Maya, his landlord’s daughter, and live in the village. The domestic troubles resulting from Lalu and Maya living in Nandpur would have got in the way of his protagonist’s desire to bring about a revolution. Anand solved the problem by making Lalu elope with Maya to Rajgarh [. . .].⁶²

The historical reason has to do with the question of historical veracity. Historically, the peasants in the United Provinces were worse off than those in the Punjab. The deep resentment of the peasants of the United Provinces would therefore be more readily exploited for purposes of revolution than the not-so-deep resentment of the peasants of the Punjab. In choosing to set *The Sword and the Sickle* in Rajgarh, Cowasjee concludes, Anand has been able brilliantly to serve the demands of both fiction and history: ‘His achievement lies in using historical material in fiction to remarkable effect – in fusing literature and politics into a work of art.’⁶³

I have no grounds for disagreement with Cowasjee. What I would like to do is just to delve a little further into ‘the historical material’ on which Anand

⁶¹ Cowasjee 114.

⁶² Cowasjee 114.

⁶³ Cowasjee 115.

builds his novel. Anand is dealing here with a phase in Indian history whose hero is Nehru, not Gandhi. The choice is apt: in a novel embedded in the ideology of revolutionary politics, of the two politics, the pacifist traditionalism of Gandhi and the robust socialism of Nehru, it is no wonder that the latter should be the obvious choice. Both Gandhi and Nehru appear as characters in the novel. In his depiction of them, Anand lays his preference bare: while Gandhi is ‘a physical deformity,’ Nehru is ‘gracious.’⁶⁴ Yet the twin ideals of Nehruvian politics – secularism and socialism – are not, in the final analysis, what inform the construction of the national utopia in *The Sword and the Sickle*, though Anand would (to an unwary reader) seem to be doing just that.

The Sword and the Sickle opens with Lalu returning home. He is full of great expectations, confident that his military services in World War I (recounted in the second book of the trilogy) have entitled him to favours and privileges from the Sarkar, that is, the colonial government of India. He is soon disillusioned. Instead of recognising the physical and psychological hell he had been through at the Western Front, he is discharged from the army on the grounds that he had been exposed in Germany to the ‘dangerous words’ of ‘some Indian scoundrels who had escaped the gallows in this country [India]’ after he had fallen (as prisoner of war) into the hands of the Germans.⁶⁵ Disillusionment is followed by sorrow. From Gughi, one of his old friends, Lalu learns that his mother died two years ago, that his brother Dayal Singh has turned a ‘mystic Sadhu,’ and that

⁶⁴ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 216, 252.

⁶⁵ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 24.

Kesari, the widow of his eldest brother Sharm Singh, is now married to a coppersmith.⁶⁶ Amidst all these heartbreaks, Lalu meets Maya, the girl of his dreams, if not exactly his beloved, and elopes with her to Rajgarh, where he joins Kanwar Rampal Singh, a declassified count, and his small band of comrades, who are working to organise the local peasantry to revolt against the numerous injustices of the landlords there.

Significantly, the trouble begins not in Rajgarh but in Nasirabad, an adjoining Muslim estate. Led by One-eyed Sukhua, a group of evicted tenants from the village of Nasirabad comes to Rajgarh to tell the count the stories of how they have lost everything at the hands of the officials and the landlord of Nasirabad.⁶⁷ The count visits Nasirabad with his comrades, now including Lalu, with a view to interceding with the Nawab of Nasirabad on behalf of the victims. The episode ends in bitterness, hardening the two parties against each other – one bent on bringing about a classless society (a new India); the other, on maintaining the *status quo*.

The main action of the novel begins with the death of a young lad, called Chandra, the son of a tenant of the Nawab of Nasirabad:

Chandra had refused to get up from the bed, where he lay ill, to go and do forced labour; whereupon he had been fetched before the Manager of the estate, and flogged till he collapsed. But he had been dragged out and

⁶⁶ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 41, 42.

⁶⁷ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 101.

forced to cut wood. He had hardly climbed the tree when he had fallen and died.⁶⁸

The revolutionaries decide to march with the bier of Chandra to Allahabad so as to draw the attention of the Congress leadership to the plight of the peasantry in Nasirabad. On the way, one of the revolutionaries, Nandu, is killed by Sheikh Hadayat Ullah, the Manager of Nasirabad estate. Casting the two dead bodies into the Ganges, the marchers reach Allahabad in time to attend a feast given to untouchables in honour of Mahatma Gandhi. Having 'a very full programme,' Gandhi is unable to come to the rescue of the peasantry of the United Provinces.⁶⁹ Instead, the young Nehru agrees to visit Partabgarh in a few days.

In view of the imminent visit of Nehru, work begins to renovate the ruined hut of Nandu to shelter the homeless tenants. This new home of the hapless victims of 'landlordism' is to be called Kisan Nagar (Peasant City) and opened by Nehru.⁷⁰ A couple of hours before the opening ceremony, however, Nehru has had to leave Rajgarh 'in response to a telegram' from Allahabad.⁷¹ The opening ceremony is a disaster, wrecked by the police. Along with several of his comrades and followers, Lalu is arrested by Captain Effendi, son-in-law of the Nawab of Nasirabad. Using one of his contacts in the Civil Service, the Deputy Commissioner of Partabgarh, the Count is able to get them released on bail. The

⁶⁸ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 172.

⁶⁹ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 208.

⁷⁰ The suggestion of paradox invoked through the juxtaposition of 'peasant' and 'city' should be noted.

⁷¹ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 255.

ten accused of Kisan Nagar are tried at the court of the special magistrate, Mr Buckle. The case is decided in favour of the defendants.

This sweeping victory against the forces of law and order so emboldens the peasants that one of them, blind Sukhua, dares give the Manager of Rajgarh estate, ‘a resounding slap.’⁷² To avenge his humiliation, the Manager gets an order issued to the effect that the revolutionaries ‘get out of Rajgarh and remain interned in Kisan Nagar where the police can keep a watch on [them].’⁷³ In order to get the order rescinded, the Count, accompanied by two of his comrades, sets out to see the high officials. They are arrested and detained at Rae Bareilli for defying police orders. On hearing the news, Lalu rushes off to Rae Bareilli, followed by a thousand peasants. Several of the peasants are killed, as ‘tall bearded Sikh and Punjabi Mussalman soldiers, with long “turrad” turbans,’ open fire.⁷⁴ Lalu and the peasants, arrested after the shooting, are kept in barrack cells with other convicts, awaiting trial. One day an assistant jailer informs Lalu that he has become the father of a son. *The Sword and the Sickle* ends with Lalu, ‘look[ing] back over the whole of his life in its successive stages,’ to learn ‘how to make a real Revolution!’⁷⁵

Cowasjee has identified the historical source from which Anand draws his material for *The Sword and the Sickle*. It is the autobiography of Nehru, first published in 1936. ‘Anand makes the ten pages that Nehru gives to the Kisan

⁷² Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 330. In the fray with the police at the opening ceremony of Kisan Nagar, One-eyed Sukhua loses his other eye.

⁷³ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 342.

⁷⁴ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 381.

⁷⁵ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 384, 391.

[peasant] movement and his two visits to Partabgarh,' writes Cowasjee, 'the core of his plot.'⁷⁶ The 'ten pages' in question are the chapters VIII (48-55: I am Externed and the Consequences thereof) and IX (56-62: Wanderings Among the Kisans) in the autobiography. A comparison of the account of what Nehru calls 'the Oudh agrarian upheaval' in his autobiography with its fictional reconstruction in Anand reveals two important truths about the way Anand uses history in his novel and the purpose(s) he makes it to serve.⁷⁷ Nowhere in his two chapters does Nehru drop a single hint that suggests that the peasant movement of Oudh was communal in character. It was a conflict between the immoral landlords on the one hand and the landless peasants on the other. If Nehru had had to choose a term to describe its character, he would perhaps have decided on class conflict, with no suggestion of communal antagonism between Hindus and Muslims. In a later chapter (XXXIX: Agrarian Troubles in the United Provinces), he does describe it as 'a class issue.'⁷⁸ That Nehru does view 'the tenant *versus* zamindar [landlord] question' from a class/secular perspective is also evident from the terms he employs to designate the two parties.⁷⁹ To him, the landlords are 'a class' 'physically and intellectually degenerate,' and the peasants a 'vast multitude of semi-naked sons and daughters of India.'⁸⁰ By calling the landlords 'complete parasites on the land and the people,' Nehru makes it abundantly clear

⁷⁶ Cowasjee 116.

⁷⁷ Nehru 63.

⁷⁸ Nehru 310.

⁷⁹ Nehru 310.

⁸⁰ Nehru 58, 52.

which party his sympathy lies with.⁸¹ Finally, in being ‘the spoilt children of the British Government,’ ‘the lords of the land’ were also part of the Other of the emerging bourgeois nation.⁸² Insofar as Nehru is concerned, colonialism and feudalism are both anti-national forces whose demise is *the* precondition out of which the Indian nation(-state) will emerge.

Nehru is quite explicit in his account about who are to be credited with having organized ‘a big agrarian agitation’ in Oudh.⁸³ It is the peasants themselves. Nehru writes in his autobiography:

What was surprising to me then was that this should have developed quite spontaneously without any city help or intervention of politicians and the like. The agrarian movement was entirely separate from the Congress and it had nothing to do with the non-co-operation that was taking shape.⁸⁴

Nehru continues:

What amazed me still more was our total ignorance in the cities of this great agrarian movement. No newspaper had contained a line about it; they were not interested in rural areas. I realised more than ever how cut off we were from our people and how we lived and worked and agitated in a little world apart from them.⁸⁵

The only individual Nehru mentions in connection with the peasant movement of Oudh is ‘a remarkable person, Ramachandra, Baba Ramachandra as he was

⁸¹ Nehru 58.

⁸² Nehru 58.

⁸³ Nehru 54.

⁸⁴ Nehru 54.

⁸⁵ Nehru 54-55.

called.’⁸⁶ From what Nehru says about Ramachandra, it is obvious that he was not a professional middle-class politician with a subtle knack for joining issues with issues, even though he might have been partly motivated by self-interest:

Ramachandra was a man from Maharashtra [Mumbai is its capital today] in western India and he had been to Fiji as an indentured labourer. On his return he had gradually drifted to [the] districts of Oudh and wandered about reciting Tulsidas’s *Ramayana* and listening to tenants’ grievances. He had little education and to some extent he exploited the tenantry for his own benefit, but he showed remarkable powers of organisation.⁸⁷

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the peasant movement of the United Provinces and, more specifically, of Oudh was a movement of the peasants, by the peasants, and for the peasants. It was a class issue with no communal undertones. On both these scores, Anand deviates from history, if one is ready to take its Nehruvian version to be more accurate and thus more reliable.⁸⁸

In the hands of Anand, the peasant movement of Oudh becomes a movement of the peasants, for the peasants, but *not* by the peasants. In other words, it is appropriated.⁸⁹ Contrary to the history of the movement, the initiative

⁸⁶ Nehru 53.

⁸⁷ Nehru 53.

⁸⁸ For a subalternist reconstruction of the peasant movement of the early 1920s in Oudh vis-à-vis Indian nationalism, see Gyan Pandey, ‘Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: The Peasant Movement in Awadh, 1919-1922,’ in *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1982) 143-197. In line with his subalternist position, Pandey is critical of the mainstream nationalist perspective (as represented by the Indian National Congress and its leading icons) on the movement.

⁸⁹ For a powerful discussion of how colonial/national elitist historiography appropriates subaltern agency/activism, see Ranajit Guha, ‘On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India,’ in Guha, *Subaltern Studies I* 1-8.

for it comes from above. Although it is true that the characterisation of the Count is often shot through with a good deal of irony, it is he who Anand chooses to give all the credit for taking the first step to organising the peasantry of the big estates in his province into Kisan Sabhas (peasant associations).⁹⁰ Excepting Lalu, most of the comrades the Count works with to bring about a revolution which will ultimately free the peasants from all kinds of feudal oppression are not peasants themselves. M.K. Naik is absolutely right in his observation that for organising ‘revolution they are a surprisingly ludicrous bunch of clowns.’⁹¹ Even Lalu rarely acts independently. Every time he is ‘rudderless,’ that is, at a loss as to what to do, a superior comrade is there to show him what he ought to do.⁹² Not surprisingly, the final word on revolution comes from Comrade Sarshar. It is thus justified to argue that Anand appropriates subaltern activism/history/politics in *The Sword and the Sickle* to bourgeois ends. In the process, the peasant movement of Oudh – a movement concerning the very survival of the peasants of the province – is trivialized, reducing the efforts, sacrifices, and tribulations of the peasants to a farce, so much so that, to cite Naik again,

[. . .] the birth of a son to Lalu at the end, which should otherwise have produced the impact of a symbolic suggestion that the struggle will be

⁹⁰ I would rather argue that the Count harms the peasant movement more than he does it good by the very fact of his half-hearted commitment to communism/socialism. It is precisely to highlight this point that Anand uses irony in his portrayal of the Count. Yet the final treatment of the Count is not, it has to be admitted, consistently ironical.

⁹¹ M.K. Naik, *Mulk Raj Anand* (London and New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1973) 75.

⁹² Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 357.

carried on by the new generation too, appears to be merely in the nature of a routine happy ending.⁹³

But to appropriate subaltern activism/history/politics to bourgeois ends is *perhaps* a less pernicious act than to appropriate it to communal ends. Anand mentions three estates in *The Sword and the Sickle*. They are the estates of Rajgarh, Nasirabad and Nanakpur. Rajgarh and Nanakpur are Hindu estates, while Nasirabad is a Muslim one. There is no agrarian trouble in the Hindu estates of Rajgarh and Nanakpur, whereas the Muslim estate of Nasirabad is full of it! Here peasants are victims of all kinds of feudal oppression. The landlord of Nasirabad has established an unusual custom for his tenants: they must pay four *annas* (a quarter of a rupee) to be able to obtain an audience with the great man. One-eyed Sukhua has to pay Bhoori Singh, an agent of the landlord, regular bribes to avoid eviction, which he is finally unable to escape. He has to pay a special tax on the occasion of the landlord's daughter's marriage to Captain Effendi.

The story of Chandra is more painful. Refusing to undertake forced labour due to illness, he is flogged to death by the Manager of Nasirabad. Another victim of the Manager is Nandu, one of the revolutionaries, who is shot dead. The son-in-law of the landlord, Captain Effendi, is no saint either, though he works from behind the cover of law and order, being in the police department. It is he who instructs one of his subordinates, the Sub-Inspector Brij Bhushan Singh, to frustrate the efforts of the revolutionaries at peasant mobilisation by turning them

⁹³ Naik 75.

into communal/religious conflicts. Is it not surprising that in a novel full of evicted peasants there is *not* a single Muslim peasant who is evicted? Only the Hindu tenants of a Muslim landlord get themselves evicted by his accomplices! Does one need any further evidence to conclude that Anand has communalised the history of the peasant movement of Oudh? But the more important question is: why does he do so?

Both appropriations derive from the same ideological programme which is to imagine the nation and, more crucially, its major and minor Others.⁹⁴ A close reading of *The Sword and the Sickle* reveals how the novel gradually veers away from the theme of exploitation which it had seemed initially to treat in terms of class, positing the corrupt landlords against the hapless peasants. In its place, a vague concept of revolution comes into focus, a revolution geared more to demolishing colonial bondage than to abolishing class discrimination. A good measure of the distance from the initial engagement of the narrative with ‘the tale of [peasants’] woes’ to its turn to an ill-defined anti-British campaign is the introductory part of the speech that Lalu makes to ‘a dense crowd of peasants’ gathered to attend the opening ceremony of Kisan Nagar.⁹⁵ Getting his clue from the Count who has spoken before him, Lalu attempts to explain to the peasants ‘who the Sarkar [Government] is.’⁹⁶ The British Raj, Lalu explains, is an open

⁹⁴ Contrary to received wisdom as regards imagining the nation, I would argue that it is imagined not in terms of a single immutable Other but in terms of several contingent Others, though it should be conceded that these Others are more often than not assigned differential importance. Hence the suggestion of major and minor Others in the construction of cultural/national self.

⁹⁵ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 54, 263.

⁹⁶ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 268. The very necessity to explain ‘who the Sarkar [Government] is’ suggests the extent to which the proposed revolution has swerved from its

burglar. The target of the revolution-in-the-making is to drive away ‘this daylight thief.’⁹⁷ The rest of his speech is taken up with enumerating some of the evils that the Sarkar has recently caused both in Europe and in India. It is only towards the close of his speech that Lalu seems to remember that he is actually addressing a crowd of Indian peasants and hastens to bring the problem of the peasants back into focus: ‘Now the English thieves and the Indian thieves, the landlords and capitalists, have joined hands together and are robbing us in broad daylight.’⁹⁸ Clearly, the priorities of *The Sword and the Sickle* have changed: the socialist agenda has been usurped by a nationalist one and an exclusionary one at that. For to imagine a nation is to imagine its Other(s) at the same time. In the Indian context, to state the obvious, the most visible Other of nationalism was colonialism. In finally pitching itself against the British Raj, that is, against the major Other of the nation, *The Sword and the Sickle* has in fact set itself to imagining the nation the other way round, that is, through deciding who is to be excluded from the community of the nation rather than who it is to include.

One has to come to terms with this exclusionary dynamics animating the project of imagining the nation to understand why Anand treats his Muslim characters the way he does. As *the* Other of the Indian nation, the British Raj is in a category of its own. The very fact that it is an alien as well as oppressive regime is enough for it to be qualified as the arch Other of the nation. But to assign the

original tangible goal of freeing the peasants from the tyranny of the landlords towards an abstract, ill-defined objective of political freedom which the peasants find hard to grasp.

⁹⁷ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 268.

⁹⁸ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 269.

Muslims the position of an Other, albeit a minor other, is not so straightforward an affair. Anand has had to devise *a set of dis/qualifications* to exclude the Muslims from the imagined community of the Indian nation. The Anandian criteria for inclusion in the national community are: open hostility to the colonial presence in India, firm commitment to the cause of Indian nation(alism), deep sympathy for the Indian poor, unfaltering willingness to sacrifice for the nation to be free from the foreign yoke (that is, tangible investment in the national project), deep understanding of India and the handicaps that constrain her entry into modernity, and unshakeable resolve to be part of the proposed revolution to bring about a new India.

(Not) surprisingly, not a single Muslim character in *The Sword and the Sickle* is seen to possess any of these requisite national qualifications. The only Muslim landlord in the novel, Nawab Sir Muhammad Amin Khan of Nasirabad, is unashamedly a pro-colonial loyalist, not only indifferent to the troubles and tribulations of the peasants of his estate but also apt to devise various means to tyrannise them.⁹⁹ He lives in luxury while his tenants starve.¹⁰⁰ The few educated Muslims are more Muslim than Indian. They are committed to one of the two kinds of politics: Pan-Islamism (whose underlying fantasy is the utopian idea of an Islamic imperium) or Muslim separatism. The first kind of politics demands

⁹⁹ The British Raj would not have knighted the Nawab for nothing. Significantly, the Nawab is also the only character in the novel to have been (dis)graced with a pure colonial title. Incidentally, Rabindranath Tagore returned his knighthood to protest the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in 1919.

¹⁰⁰ Anand describes the lavish lifestyle of the Nawab at length. The description is an odd mixture of admiration and resentment. *The Sword and the Sickle* 121.

the restoration of Khilafat (Caliphate) to Turkey, while the second one asks the Muslims of India to join the Muslim League. Both the Count and the Manager of Nasirabad, Sheikh Hadayat Ullah, were in the same class at Canning College in Lucknow.¹⁰¹ Whereas the Count has become a comrade who misses not a single opportunity to poke fun at religion and its practitioners, and is now organising Kisan Sabhas to save the peasants from the ever-tightening clutches of the despotic landlords, the Manager has become ‘a fanatical prayer-sayer’ who has joined the Muslim League after having had ‘a vision of the Almighty’ and invites his former classmate to join the Landlords’ Association he is working hard to form and hopes soon to launch.¹⁰²

Jamal, the son of the Nawab, is the only foreign-educated Muslim in the novel. He has just returned from Cambridge. Apart from being ‘effeminate,’ he is full of ‘bookish theories,’ completely out of tune with the myriad problems of ‘this uncivilized, crude Hindustan [India],’ as he puts it.¹⁰³ Exposure to Europe has thus diametrically opposed effects on Hindus and Muslims. It makes of the Count and Professor Verma revolutionaries, dedicated to the cause of the Indian poor. On the other hand, on his return to India after Sherborne and Cambridge, Jamal has nothing but contempt for everything India stands for. In a novel embedded in revolutionary politics, it does not require much mental effort to see the desirability or otherwise of effeminacy as a character/personality trait.

¹⁰¹ Lucknow is the setting of the famous revisionist history novel *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988) by I. Allan Sealy. It appears as ‘Nakhlau’ in that text.

¹⁰² Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 126, 128.

¹⁰³ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 118, 123, 126.

Professor Verma is just as bookish as Jamal but ‘he ha[s] been pushed by his intellect to recognize the deeper implications of the evil in India.’¹⁰⁴ Finally, there is the illiterate working-class Muslims such as Fazlu who sink into despair instead of joining revolution like Harnam Singh. On top of everything else, the Muslims invest nothing in the national project. How can they be then part of the new India about to come into being?

With the exception of Fazlu, all other Muslim characters I have discussed above have something to do with the estate of Nasirabad. If Anand has chosen to depict the Nawab of Nasirabad in a negative light, one may argue, it follows that his manager and son should also have the same representational fate. It is therefore important to check how Anand portrays other Muslim characters from other parts of India, especially those who have no personal stake in the fortunes of Nasirabad estate, in order to reach a definite conclusion regarding his treatment of Muslim characters in *The Sword and the Sickle*. Of the first four Muslim characters Lalu meets (or, more accurately, happens to meet) even before he goes over to the estate of Rajgarh, three are plainly meant to be butts of criticism.¹⁰⁵ The anonymous ‘Muhammadan Babu’ Lalu comes across in the train on his way to Lahore is at best a fop, additionally embodying a number of the disqualifications I have just enumerated above. He reads ‘an Urdu paper called

¹⁰⁴ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 340.

¹⁰⁵ It is remarkable that Lalu, an organiser of revolution, never goes out to meet Muslims. It is always the case that he *happens* to meet them. Significantly, it is the Nawab of Nasirabad who invites the Count and his comrades through his son to tea in his palace, though his purpose in doing so is to ask them refrain from organising the peasants in his estate.

Zemindar [*The Landlord*].¹⁰⁶ In an anti-landlord novel, the implication of reading a pro-landlord newspaper is too obvious to need decoding. It is tantamount to committing one of the seven deadly sins, enough to ensure the exclusion of the sinner from the paradise (one of the first utopias in human history) to be brought about at the annihilation of the landlords. The political outlook of the man, ‘who [has] made himself look like the son of Anwar Pasha himself,’ is not only far from egalitarian/socialist (which is the norm against which all other political stances are to be judged) but also parochial, if not communal.¹⁰⁷ He is full of ‘our Khilafat movement,’ a movement by a section of Indian Muslims demanding the restoration of the Khilafat (Caliphate) to Turkey, while one of his non-Muslim co-passengers, ‘a Hindu merchant in muslin,’ worries about ‘the whole cause of our Bharat Mata [Mother India].’¹⁰⁸ Apparently, the Muslims of India seem to be more concerned about the lot of the Muslims the world over than about that of the fellow Indians. They are first Muslims and then Indians. In the immediate historical context of the Khilafat Movement, the majority of them are ‘Turkophiles,’ to borrow from Aijaz Ahmad, who uses the term (in singular) with reference to Sajjad Hayder, father of the famous Urdu novelist, Qurratul ’Ain Hayder.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 9. A paper called *Zamindar* really existed at the time. It was founded by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan in 1910. The association of Urdu with the Muslims of India is another problematic issue. See Amina Yaqin, ‘The Communalization and Disintegration of Urdu in Anita Desai’s *In Custody*,’ in *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism*, eds. Peter Morey and Alex Tickell (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005) 89-113.

¹⁰⁷ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 10.

¹⁰⁸ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 10.

¹⁰⁹ Aijaz Ahmad, *Lineages of the Present: Political Essays* (New Delhi: Tulika, 1996) 196n5.

A police sergeant stops the lorry in which Lalu is travelling from Manabad to Nandpur and asks the driver to produce his driving license and other papers. As Gughu, the lorry driver, fails to do so, the sergeant starts to take down the particulars in a notebook. But Gughu knows better how to disentangle himself from such troublesome situations. A small bribe settles everything. The police sergeant turns out to be a 'Khan Sahib,' that is, a Muslim.¹¹⁰ In Nandpur, Lalu happens to meet the old Muslim peasant Fazlu.¹¹¹ Like most of the peasants of Nandpur, Fazlu has also suffered due to severe economic hardship, in the wake of World War I. Yet his suffering does not move at the least the comrade-in-the-making Lalu who is out to change the lot of the peasants. His attitude to his old Muslim neighbour Fazlu remains as hostile as before.

From what I have so far said about the characterisation of Muslim characters in the trilogy in general and in *The Sword and the Sickle* in particular, it is possible to see plainly the anti-Muslim attitude of Anand, a writer supposedly famous for his egalitarianism, humanism, liberalism, and Marxism, so much so that these -isms have become watchwords for him and his work. It is true that there are non-Muslim characters in the novel who are as wicked as the Muslim ones. But there are upright non-Muslim characters as well, who are entrusted with the noble task of bringing about a new classless India, free from all kinds of injustices and prejudices. In contrast, there is not a single positively drawn

¹¹⁰ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 39.

¹¹¹ I have discussed in some detail the kind of treatment Fazlu receives (and the reasons for it) in the first volume of the trilogy, *The Village*, above.

Muslim character in the trilogy.¹¹² Irrespective of class, education, language, profession and region, they all are the same; they are marked out by such attributes as aggression, conservatism, despair, fanaticism, ignorance, lasciviousness, pretentiousness, violence, and even effeminacy, a characteristic (Indian) Muslims are hardly ever invested with even in colonial discourse, the notorious storehouse of Indian stereotypes.

It could not possibly be otherwise, given the agenda of Indian nationalism which defined itself against the British Other as well as against a number of minor Others, chief among them being the Indian Muslims. In his first three novels (namely *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, and *Two Leaves and a Bud*), Anand is, it is fair to say, more or less a socialist. At the heart of each of these novels is the theme of exploitation of the have-nots by the haves. Each dramatises the theme purely in terms of class. All other concerns are subsidiary concerns. Hence the exploiters are exploiters pure and simple. They have no other identity. The same is true of the exploited. With the trilogy, however, the priorities of Anand seem to begin to change. Away from socialism Anand moves towards nationalism and an exclusionary one at that. If his appropriation of the history of the peasant movement of Oudh to bourgeois and communal ends testifies anything, it is that Anand subscribes to Hindu nationalism as much—though not so overtly—as his contemporary Rao. A clear sign of his move from a broad socialism to a parochial

¹¹² The fact that Anand is biased against the Muslims puts a big question mark on his legendary commitment to realism. After all, not all of a particular community can be bad characters nor even to the same extent!

nationalism may briefly be touched upon. Never before has Anand allowed an upper-caste, upper-class character play such an important role in his fiction as the one the Count plays in the last book of the trilogy. There is much truth in what Naik says in this regard:

Unfortunately, the Count and his communist set enter the action fairly early (and with typical communist strategy) infiltrate the story and sabotage it. [. . .] interest is now divided between the ostensible protagonist and the Count and his followers, and in artistic terms, Lalu (like other peasants, though in a different way) becomes a victim of feudalism, as he yields prominence to the Count.¹¹³

The point that Lalu becomes a different kind of victim of feudalism is well taken. Yet it will be no less unfortunate to explain the Gandhian discomfort of communism/socialism on the part of Naik in artistic terms only. The anxiety concerning communist revolution is not so subtle here as to escape detection. There is thus a paradox at the heart of the last volume of the trilogy. It grants the subaltern agency only to be appropriated by the bourgeois/feudal power structures. When Gayatri Charavorty Spivak asks, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, the context of her question is the historical evidence of such appropriation, especially in the case of the gendered subaltern.¹¹⁴ Such appropriation is, however, a common phenomenon in anti-colonial nationalisms the world over.

¹¹³ Naik 73.

¹¹⁴ Gayatri Charavorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 271-313.

The paradox in question is an outcome of the tensions between the rival claims of nationalism on the one hand and socialism on the other. If Anand had continued to deal with the theme of the exploitation of the masses/subalterns in terms of class, that is, from an exclusively communist/Marxist/socialist perspective, *The Sword and the Sickle* would not have been ‘a very confused book,’ as Naik rightly thinks it to be.¹¹⁵ But the confusion derives, I believe, not so much from the communist sabotage of the Gandhian type of nationalist agenda, as Naik takes it to be the case, as from the nationalist sabotage of the socialist agenda of the exploitation of the peasants. To imagine a nation is after all not a class issue. Its success depends on blurring class discriminations, not on accentuating them.

From the preceding discussion it is possible to argue that Anand—especially the Anand of the Lalu trilogy—is essentially not very different from Rao. In constructing the nation, both resort to an exclusionary politics. The Indian Muslims are not only excluded from the imagined community of the nation in both *Kanthapura* and the trilogy but are also cast as one of the Others of the nation. Anand is only a little better in his treatment of the Muslims of India. He at least recognises the existence of the Muslim community in India, which amounts to assigning them the status of a ‘fragment’ of the nation. Rao declines to grant them even that status. But exclusion on the basis of community/religion is not the only exclusion to be found in the imagining of the nation in the dominant narratives of the nation. In fact, these exclusions are multiple, involving age, caste/class, gender, and so on. By way of revisiting the official history of the

¹¹⁵ Naik 70.

nation, feminist history fiction, discussed in the next chapter, engages with the politics of representation informing mainstream national stories, with a view to understanding how these stories appropriate, distort, erase and marginalise the Indian woman, to serve the interests of the bourgeois-patriarchal-male postcolonial nation-state.

CHAPTER 7

Feminist History Fiction: *Some Inner Fury* (1955)

“Women” are the unhistorical other of history.

Christina Crosby¹

It has variously been alleged by traditionalists, political conservatives and even certain leftists, that feminism is a product of ‘decadent’ Western capitalism; that it is based on a foreign culture of no relevance to women in the Third World; that it is the ideology of women of the local bourgeoisie; and that it alienates or diverts women, from their culture, religion and family responsibilities on the one hand, and from the revolutionary struggles for national liberation and socialism on the other.

Kumari Jayawardena²

Perhaps the best introduction to feminist history fiction is to look back at the female protagonists of nationalist history fictions (for example, Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* and Mulk Raj Anand’s *Lalu* trilogy) I have discussed in the previous two chapters.³ Such an approach—a basically comparative one—is especially

¹ Christina Crosby, *The Ends of History: Victorians and “The Woman Question,”* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991) 1.

² Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1986) 2.

³ Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (New York: New Directions, 1963). The *Lalu* trilogy by Mulk Raj Anand comprises *The Village*, 2nd Indian ed. (1939; Bombay: Kutub-Popular, 1960); *Across the Black Waters*, 1st Indian ed. (1940; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955); *The Sword and the*

suitable for what I want to do here, for the immediate discursive and ideological context out of which feminist (history) fiction can be said to have emerged in India, particularly after the Emergency of 1975, I contend, is nationalist discourse in general and nationalist (history) fiction in particular. It is, however, imperative first to situate the emergence of feminist discourse/(history) fiction within the broader context of the rise of feminist consciousness in India, in order to understand the kind of dialectical engagement and negotiation that the two opposing discourses/fictions manage to obtain between themselves.

Feminist Consciousness in India: A Brief Historical Overview

The emergence of feminist consciousness in India, to state the obvious, is not a new phenomenon. It dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period when political consciousness in India was increasingly becoming what Georg Lukács says about (European) history in the wake of the French Revolution: that is, ‘a *mass experience*.’⁴ The two were parallel developments: a number of scholars working on the interface of gender/woman and nation in the Third World has emphasised a direct, even if ambivalent,

Sickle, 1st Indian ed. (1942; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955). Subsequent references are to these editions.

⁴ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (1937; London: Merlin Press, 1962) 23. Emphasis in original.

relationship between Third-World nationalism and what has come to be known as the 'woman question.'⁵ In her essay on 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929,' for example, Bharati Ray identifies the movement for Indian independence as the main driving force behind the formation of feminist consciousness in India. Ray writes:

I argue that the twentieth-century women's movement in India was inextricably bound with the freedom movement. This is not to say that the women's movement in India is unconnected with the growth of other movements like the workers' or peasants' movements, but, rather to state that the crucial juncture or the historical point from which feminist consciousness began to be fashioned, arrived with the freedom struggle.⁶

However, as in many postcolonial contexts, in the case of India too, nationalism is to feminism just as colonialism/imperialism has been to nationalism: enabling on the one hand and debilitating on the other. It is not that Indian women were totally unaware of the male-centred politics of the Indian national movement. It is, in fact, to avoid accusation of 'start[ing] a civil war between men and women,' that they seem to have decided to wait till the

⁵ See, for example, Jayawardena; Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste, and Class in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women; London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986). The first title has not evoked as heated a response as the second one. For a discussion of gender vis-à-vis nation in a broader politico-cultural framework, see Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

⁶ Bharati Ray, 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929,' in *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, ed. Bharati Ray, Oxford India Paperbacks (1995; Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997) 177. In her account of the 'internal' forces that contributed to 'women's emancipation in India under British colonial rule,' Jayawardena considers 'two important movements: one, a political movement of challenge and resistance to imperialism, and the other, a social movement to reform traditional structures.' The ideological basis of both these movements was 'the concept of a free and modern India.' 73.

movement has achieved its ultimate goal: that is, political independence.⁷ A politically *free* Indian nation is born but the wait for the Indian women to be *free* is yet to be over. As far as the ‘woman question’ is concerned, the liberal face of nationalist ideology is revealed to be no more than a mask. Even more problematic for women is its collusion with age-old patriarchy. Especially after its political birth, the nation tends to treat its male and female members *differentially*: while national fathers and sons are entitled to enjoy all the rights and privileges of the nation as its citizens, the mothers and daughters of the nation are discriminated against on the basis of gender/sex.

Even if nationalist consciousness had once stimulated feminist consciousness, it comes as no surprise that Indian women would necessarily re-visit nationalist discourse to see how it represents women, especially at a time when the nation seems to have betrayed and reduced them into one of its ‘fragments,’ instead of honouring the pledges it had made them at the time of its birth.⁸

What is surprising is the fact that the urge on the part of Indian women to re-visit national archives appears never to have been felt to be as strong as in the years when India had its first *female* prime minister, Indira Gandhi. In particular, the imposition of the Emergency in 1975 seems to have posed a serious threat to whatever little the women of India had achieved since the birth of the new nation.

⁷ Shantisudha Ghosh, ‘The Signpost,’ trans. Sukhendu Ray, cited in Ray 175.

⁸ In his impressive study of Indian nationalism, Partha Chatterjee shows how the nation marginalises minorities, women and working classes, turning them in the process into ‘fragments.’ *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993).

Like the British/European women at the end of the First World War, they must have felt ‘hoaxed.’⁹ Catherine A. Robinson notes:

Women were active participants in the political life of independent India, universal adult suffrage gave women the vote and women occupied prestigious political offices. Reform of Hindu personal law, though not a uniform civil code, was enacted to enhance women’s marital and familial roles. All of this led many to believe that the equality of women, if not yet attained, would be attained in due course as the measures already taken eventually bore fruit.¹⁰

There was, however, an unrecognised ‘chasm between the constitutional principle of women’s equality and the unequal condition of women.’¹¹ The reality of ‘the unequal condition of women’ was most forcefully brought to light by a report, titled *Towards Equality*, published in May 1975, barely a month before the declaration of the Emergency.¹² The report, ‘a damning indictment of the present position of women, pointing not only to a lack of progress towards equality but even to a worsening of conditions in certain respects,’ turned out to be an eye-opener for the Indian women.¹³ In response, they began to mobilise. A number of radical organisations came into being, while some were already operating.¹⁴ The first wave of post-independence feminism was about to make its mark on an all-

⁹ Cited in Diana Wallace, *The Woman’s Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 26.

¹⁰ Catherine A. Robinson, *Tradition and Liberation: The Hindu Tradition in the Indian Women’s Movement* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999) 148.

¹¹ Robinson 148.

¹² Robinson 148.

¹³ Robinson 149.

¹⁴ Robinson 153-56.

India level, when the first *female* prime minister of India proclaimed the Emergency in June 1975. Robinson offers a neat account of the negative effects and positive responses that the Emergency produced:

The Emergency involved the systematic violation of human rights and infringement of civil liberties. Under its provisions, unrest was controlled and contained. When the Emergency was lifted, discontent which had been so brutally repressed finally erupted and overflowed. For women, as for other groups with grievances about their position in independent India, the Emergency imposed restrictions on their activities so that the reappearance of these activities was even more marked once those restrictions no longer applied and the political situation returned to normal.¹⁵

One of the primary agendas of the Indian feminist movement after the withdrawal of the Emergency was to ‘re-examine everything,’ to borrow from the title of the editorial of the inaugural issue of *Manushi* (January 1979). In bold letters, the editorial concluded:

Let us re-examine the whole question, all the questions. Let us take nothing for granted. Let us not only re-define ourselves, our role, our image – but also the kind of society we want to live in.¹⁶

The creation of a better society for the Indian women to live in is predicated crucially on the success of the enterprise of reassessment. But what it is that has to be re-examined in the first instance? Even questions do not exist in a vacuum.

¹⁵ Robinson 153.

¹⁶ Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, eds., *In Search of Answers: Indian Women's Voices from Manushi*, 1st rpt. (1984; London: Zed Books Ltd., 1985) 245.

They need a discursive/ideological space to issue from before they can hit the mark. The editorial pits ‘we’—that is, women— against an Other that it chooses to call by the euphemism of ‘society.’ The implied target is too obvious to be missed: the chief adversary is male domination and, by the same token, the ideologies that articulate, justify and safeguard it, namely, nationalism and patriarchy. In its post-independent version, Indian feminism would thus appear to engage with Indian nationalism-patriarchy just as the latter itself had previously done with British colonialism/imperialism. Feminist history fiction is one of the many sites where the encounter of Indian feminism with Indian nationalism is captured with all the irony and pathos that it is shot through with.

Women and the Nation: Nationalist Representations of Indian Women

Both engagements—the nationalist engagement with colonial/imperial discourse and the feminist engagement with nationalist/patriarchal discourse—revolve around the question of representation: in one, the colonial construction of Indian history and the images of the Indians/natives therein is challenged; in the other, the nationalist construction of national history and the images of (Indian) women therein is disputed. Being ideologically locked in dialogue with each other, the two discourses/fictions are thus best understood when analysed within a

comparative framework. However, in addition to looking back at *Kanthapura* and the Lalu trilogy for an understanding of the politics of representation in the construction of Indian women in nationalist discourse, it is necessary also to analyse a post-independence text if only to check whether there has been any shift at all in the attitude to the female character/protagonist in the mainstream narratives of Indian nationalism. The post-independence text I have chosen to examine is the 1955 novel of R.K. Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma*, the only novel by Narayan in which nationalist politics is so overtly present and the closures of nationalist thought are so vividly brought out into the open, though the latter could not possibly have been what its author had actually meant it to achieve.¹⁷ Although not intended as such, the nationalist betrayal of Indian women is most aptly captured even in the title of the novel.

The three female protagonists of these ‘national fictions,’ Ratna (*Kanthapura*), Maya (the Lalu trilogy) and Bharati (*Waiting for the Mahatma*), are similar in some respects and dissimilar in some others.¹⁸ I begin with the dissimilarities and then move on to demonstrate how they are in the final analysis similar because of the very idea(l) they are both happy and proud to align themselves with.¹⁹ Two of them, Ratna and Bharati, are South Indian Hindu girls, whereas the third, Maya, is a North Indian Sikh girl. Bharati is waiting for the

¹⁷ R.K. Narayan, *Waiting for the Mahatma* (N.p.: Michigan State UP, 1955). Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁸ The term comes from Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, Film and the Construction of Australian Narrative* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

¹⁹ Except for Maya, none of these female protagonists seems to be aware of the fact that nationalism aims not so much at liberating women as (middle-class) men.

Mahatma (hence the title of the novel) to give her permission to marry Sriram, the reluctant nationalist, while Maya (in the last book of the trilogy) and Ratna are widows.²⁰ Although there seems to develop a kind of relationship between the Gandhian protagonist Moorthy and Ratna in *Kanthapura*, eventually it gets nowhere; and Ratna remains a widow.²¹ In contrast, Maya elopes with Lulu, marries him, and gives birth to a child at the end of the novel.

The different destinies of these protagonists are not what they have chosen for themselves, though all of them are initially granted some measure of agency and independence: though a widow, Ratna goes her own way without caring much about what society has to say about her non-conforming behaviour.²² While she is also a widow, Maya takes the risk of eloping with someone whose family has never been on good terms with hers and has greatly suffered in consequence; and collapsing the traditional boundary separating the domestic sphere from the political one, Bharati is allowed to join the Indian national struggle under the enigmatic leadership of M.K. Gandhi.²³ Yet at the end of the day these female protagonists of nationalist texts take on the form into which the destiny of the

²⁰ It could possibly be the case that, despite his intentions to the contrary, Narayan is able to foreground the hegemony of the ideology of nationalism in his title: the individual citizen must not pursue his/her ambitions till the greater aspirations of the nation have been realised. See Josna E. Rege. *Colonial Karma: Self, Action, and Nation in the Indian English Novel* (New York and Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 80-84.

²¹ It is worth noting here that an astonishing number of novels and short stories with widows at the centre of the narrative appeared in the early decades of the twentieth century when Indian nationalism began to gather momentum. The writer who can be credited with having founded the tradition is the Bengali novelist Saratchandra Chattopadhyay (1876-1938).

²² There is a detailed catalogue of the dishonourable things Ratna does: she 'not only [goes] about the streets alone like a boy, but even [wears] her hair to the left like a concubine, and she still [keeps] her bangles and her nose rings and earrings [. . .].' Rao 30.

²³ In her impressive work on the life, thought and work of Gandhi, Judith Brown characterises 'the father of the nation' as 'an enigmatic figure.' *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1990) 4.

nation has shaped them. The roles they are allowed to perform and the subject positions they are granted are strictly in accordance with the demands and needs of the nation. In short, they exist not so much for themselves as for the larger community called the nation.

Interestingly, Ratna is not the only widow in *Kanthapura*.²⁴ There are two others: her aunt, Rangamma, and the elderly narrator who describes herself as ‘a daughterless widow.’²⁵ The important point about these three widows is that they are the most *active* characters as far as national politics is concerned. It is in recognition of her commitment to the national/Gandhian cause that Rangamma is chosen ‘the third member’ of ‘the Congress panchayat committee of Kanthapura’.²⁶ In the absence of Moorthy, she organises what she proposes to call *Sevika Sangha*, that is, an association of female volunteers in Kanthapura.²⁷ When she is gone, Ratna fills in for her. Although not an organiser like Rangamma and Ratna, the elderly widow is no less powerful than the other two. Only she has the distinct privilege of both participating in the national movement and narrating it. Yet the privileged positions of the three widows are ‘derivative,’ to borrow from Partha Chatterjee.²⁸ Both Rangamma and Ratna are no more than proxy leaders or organisers. They are, in other words, stand-ins, substitutes. Ideally as well as *unconventionally*, they are the ones who can fill in for Moorthy,

²⁴ Significantly, Indira Gandhi, the Madam, as she is sometimes called in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), is also a widow (in fact, the Widow) in the novel.

²⁵ Rao 5.

²⁶ Rao 75, 76.

²⁷ Rao 105.

²⁸ The term ‘derivative’ has been used in the sense in which Partha Chatterjee uses it in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986).

though not exactly replace him, because they are not only widows but also childless and thus free from the usual demands of domestic life. Themselves neither mothers nor wives, they are best suited to be ‘the heroic daughters who fight for the Mother.’²⁹

The active and important roles that the (childless) widows are allowed to play in national politics in *Kanthapura* problematise and thus necessitate a re-thinking of the prominence other figures of women are accorded by scholars who work on the interface of gender and nation in nationalist discourse. The impression they tend to give out is that barrenness is not what nationalism speaks of highly. Biologically non-productive women are best left aside both in national programmes and social transactions, though quite a number of reform movements in pre-independence India were exclusively focused on improving the socio-economic condition of the widows, childless or otherwise. In other words, the privileged female figures in nationalist political rhetoric are those of daughter, mother and wife, women capable of reproducing the nation now and in the future. Widows do not feature prominently in the representational economy/repertoire of nationalism. Playing a central role in the Indian national movement, the three childless widows in *Kanthapura* would thus seem both to conform to and deviate from nationalist thinking in India. They conform insofar as they are figures of desexualised womanhood. The deviation comes from the fact that they are no less

²⁹ Rao 104-5.

capable of heroic sacrifices than the sons, daughters, father(s) and mothers of the nation.³⁰

To narrate is without doubt a powerful act or an act of empowerment. But the power in question is seriously undermined, if there is a larger (male authorial) frame encasing the female narrative voice and thus policing its free play.³¹ Indeed, the elderly widow narrates not so much her own story as that of the nation-in-the-making. She has been chosen as narrator because only she can afford to spare time enough to narrate the hundred-and-eighty-two-pages-long story of the nation. The contrast between the narrator in *Kanthapura* and Saleem Sinai, the narrator-protagonist in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), is worth touching upon here.³² In telling the story of the nation, Saleem also tells his own personal story. In fact, the two are so intimately and intricately bound up that one reflects the other. The reader of *Kanthapura* comes to know very little about its female narrator.

The ending of *Kanthapura* foreshadows what is in store for the women (irrespective of the question of biological productivity) of the nation once it is free from foreign domination. In a letter to Ratna, who has lately become 'deferential'—the reason is not hard to comprehend—Moorthy writes,

³⁰ The nation is hardly ever willing to accept more than one father, for to accept more than one father is to be called a bastard nation. No nation in the world would possibly desire to earn such a 'hybrid' postcolonial identity for itself.

³¹ In her provocative essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 271-313, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak demonstrates the (im)possibility of representing/representing the (female) subaltern by way of engaging with some of the foremost poststructuralist theorists such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Louis Althusser.

³² Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981; London: Picador, 1982). Subsequent references are to this edition.

Oh no, Ratna, it is the way of the masters that is wrong. And I have come to realize bit by bit, and bit by bit, when I was in prison, that as long as there will be iron gates and barbed wires round the Skeffington Coffee Estate, and city cars that can roll up the Bebbur mound, and gaslights and coolie cars, there will always be Pariahs and poverty. Ratna, things must change. Jawaharlal will change it. You know Jawaharlal is like a Bharatha to the Mahatma, and he, too, is for nonviolence and he, too, is a Satyagrahi, but he says in *Swaraj* there shall be neither the rich nor the poor. And he calls himself an ‘equal-distributionist.’³³

Disillusioned with the politics of Gandhi, Moorthy shifts to Jawaharlal Nehru. The focus of the national movement also shifts from achieving political independence to ensuring social justice.³⁴ In aligning himself with Nehru, Moorthy commits himself to a kind of decolonisation which does not congratulate itself on being able merely to drive away the colonial power. Rather it sets out to end iniquities and injustices based on class. So the implication is that ‘in *Swaraj* there shall be neither the rich nor the poor,’ that is, there will be no class or caste discriminations in free India under Nehru. Significantly, the question of gender discriminations is left unaddressed. Only history will unfold what is awaiting the women of the nation after it has gained entry into history. The entry of the nation

³³ Rao 180, 180-81.

³⁴ Although Gandhian and Nehruvian politics differed to a great extent, especially towards the end of the British Raj, the point of difference that Rao emphasises between the two kinds of politics in *Kanthapura* is not the one on which the two differed most. Gandhi wanted to reform the psyche of his people before they achieved *swaraj* (for Gandhi *swaraj* meant self-control more than political independence), while Nehru followed the more formulaic socialist ideal.

into history is, in fact, the entry of men (nationalist fathers and sons) only. The women of the nation will have to write themselves into the history of the nation. Needless to say, a new history will necessitate a re-imagining of the nation too.

Although the Indian nation is always imagined and troped as a female figure, the question of the status of women has never been at the top on the list of nationalist agendas.³⁵ The final volume of the Lalu trilogy, *The Sword and the Sickle*, shows precisely where women fit in in the nationalist scheme of things. As the novel opens, Maya is an obvious presence, a woman with a magnetic hold on Lalu. The hold begins to diminish as soon as Lalu becomes one of the comrades who set out to mobilise the local peasantry against the immoral landlords and the British colonial masters who offer them protection in troubled times. Even before the novel is half way through, Lalu gets so involved in nationalist/revolutionary politics that he does not have time enough to spare for Maya. In Chapter IV, the Queen-mother takes him to task for not taking proper care of his wife:

Why do you torture this innocent girl so? Why did you bring her to Rajgarh if you couldn't look after her, hein? Why do you leave her alone for whole days when you go making trouble on our estate?³⁶

Having no satisfactory answer to defend himself with, Lalu recoils before 'this blunt challenge.'³⁷ But it is possible to speculate the kind of explanation he

³⁵ Two important works dealing with the cultural/literary representation of the fraught relationship of nation and woman in the Indian/South Asian context are Neluka Silva, *The Gendered Nation: Contemporary Writings from South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004); Sangeeta Ray, *En-Gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000).

³⁶ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 150.

³⁷ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 150.

could have offered if he had ventured to do so. In all probability, he would have argued that one's *motherland* comes before one's wife, as Gora does in *Gora* by Rabindranath Tagore. Before the national question, all other questions pale into insignificance. Going a step further, he would have asked his interlocutors—his wife, the Queen-mother and her daughter-in-law, Prem Vati—to come forward and join the nationalist/revolutionary programme. Lalu is thinking aloud:

If only she and her like would come out, he felt, if only she could come and talk to the peasants, though they would love and fear her more than the truth.³⁸

In his vision, Lalu mobilises female energies to nationalist/revolutionary ends, instead of mobilising nationalist/revolutionary energies to bring about a change in the lives of Indian women. Maya is however not as eager in joining the nationalist/revolutionary cause as Lalu would have liked her to be. Not surprisingly, he and his creator seem to forget her existence for long stretches of time as the nationalist/revolutionary zeal begins to pick up momentum.

As I have tried to show above, *Kanthapura* gives a foretaste of the condition in which the women of the nation will find themselves in postcolonial times. Being a post-independence text, *Waiting for the Mahatma* enacts what *Kanthapura* gestures to. The female protagonist of the novel, Bharati, waits for the moment when the nation will achieve political independence, for the same moment will also bring about an end to her waiting for the Mahatma who will at

³⁸ Anand, *The Sword and the Sickle* 153.

long last allow her to marry Sriram, the stray nationalist activist.³⁹ The moment comes, but it comes loaded with ironies. In the theatre of Indian nationalism, climax and bathos occur at the same instance. The birth of independent India is also the moment of its dismemberment. The gleam of arrival is eclipsed by the gloom of partition. As if to add further complications, Gandhi himself is killed. However, the Mahatma does give Bharati and Sriram permission to marry before he is killed. For Bharati and Sriram the waiting seems to be over. In one sense, it is; in another, it is not. For the Mahatma enjoins them to be ‘father and mother’ of/to ‘thirty children,’ victims of the recent communal frenzy.⁴⁰ Even before they are husband and wife, Sriram and Bharati become parents. In the nationalist scheme of things, father and mother are viable categories, while husband and wife are not, because the latter are predicated on a sexual relationship. As is well known, nationalism is permissive only of desexualised relationships, while at the same time extolling women capable of reproducing the nation.⁴¹ Within the nationalist frame of the novel, the marriage of Bharati and Sriram can at best be a possibility, not a reality.

Given the apparently common fate Bharati and Sriram are now faced with, it may seem that both are equal sufferers. But a little reflection is enough to

³⁹ Who is waiting for whom? There seems to be a devastating irony in the title of the novel. Who is actually waiting for the Mahatma? Is it the assassin or Bharati? Since the novel came out in 1955, it is possible to argue that Narayan was well aware of the ironic slant of his title and could in all probability have relished it. Such a reading is supported by the fact that the Mahatma uses the word ‘late’ in his last two utterances: he hates to be late and apologises for being late. Both the anxiety in and apology for being late seem to be directed to the assassin, as if the Mahatma were saying sorry to his killer for keeping him *waiting*.

⁴⁰ Narayan 240.

⁴¹ The most powerful female figure in nationalist discourse is obviously that of the mother who is further desexualized in the process of being transformed into a goddess.

realise who is the greater loser. When the Mahatma says, ‘You [Bharati and Sriram] have already a home with thirty children,’ its implication is radically different for the two.⁴² For ‘home’ is where *mothers* bring up children. Although the father is the head at/of home, it is not his arena of action. The ‘world’ is where he is supposed to perform. For Bharati the implication of what the Mahatma asks her to do is to go back where she properly belongs, that is, home. The days of camaraderie are over. Confinement takes over free movement in the ‘world.’ The traditional demarcations of the social space are put back in place.

Josna E. Rege comments:

Although Sriram is the reluctant citizen of Narayan’s story, it is Bharathi who loses the most and gains the least. Her superhuman capacity for hard work and self-sacrifice appears to be no more and no less than what is expected of her as an Indian woman. For Sriram, personal fulfilment was deferred for the duration of the independence struggle, but for Bharathi self-denial would seem to be the indefinite prescription for the success of her marriage—indeed, the very definition of her femininity.⁴³

⁴² Narayan 240.

⁴³ Rege 84.

Feminist History Fiction

From the discussion above, it is possible to form some idea of what some of the major concerns of feminist history fiction could possibly be. This fiction confronts nationalist discourse almost at every point where it tries to allow its bourgeois-patriarchal ideology to pass as *natural*. In other words, the primary agenda of the feminist history novel can be defined as laying bare the *constructedness* of the discourse of nationalism in general and of nationalist historiography in particular. Feminist history fiction deconstructs the *constructs/fictions/myths* of nationalist history fiction, especially the ones relating to women.

In order not to lose focus, three broad areas of interrogation—all touched upon above—can be identified. The most common trope of anti-colonial (cultural) nationalism is one borrowed, paradoxically, from the Victorian discourse on the demarcation of social space based on gender (roles). As is well known, the Victorian public space is a male space, which is also a space where action takes place. Hence its occupants are (represented as) active. On the other hand, the counterpart of the Victorian public space, that is, the Victorian private space is a female one. There is no action here. Its occupants are, therefore, passive. Or, at least, so they are in representations. Like many other anti-colonial nationalisms both before and after it, Indian nationalism appropriated the Victorian private-public spatial dichotomy to its own ends. In his influential study of Indian nationalism, Partha Chatterjee has one full chapter on the ‘women’s

question.’⁴⁴ According to Chatterjee, nationalist leadership in India divided ‘the domain of culture’ into two: ‘the material and the spiritual.’ Corresponding to the two halves of the cultural domain, ‘the social space’ was then divided into ‘*ghar* and *bāhir*, the home and the world.’ These two dichotomies were gender-specific too. The active material world was ‘typically the domain of the male’ ‘where the battle [was] waged for national independence,’ whereas the passive spiritual home, ‘far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state,’ was the female domain – ‘the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence.’ The linchpin of feminist history fiction is the deconstruction not so much of the Victorian private-public spatial dichotomy informing Indian nationalist discourse as the set of terms/values it privileges over another set of terms/values. The dichotomy is also the point of departure into the three areas of interrogation I am going to map out below.

Feminist history fiction, to state the obvious, tells the ‘stories of women.’⁴⁵ The three areas of interrogation are encoded in three different kinds of narrative, though each is unflinchingly focused on the nationalist division of the social space into the female/private and the male/public. The first kind of narrative questions the active-passive binary underlying the private-public binary regulating nationalist social space. Contrary to the representations of the female/private space (for example, family and home) in nationalist discourse as

⁴⁴ Chapter 6 in Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* 116-34. All citations in this paragraph are from this chapter.

⁴⁵ Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2005).

passive, it is shown to have been as active as its counterpart in nationalist activities. Before coming out into the open, as they do in *Kanthapura* and *Waiting for the Mahatma*, its occupants, the (so-called) bearers of national culture and tradition, had been busy preparing activists and leaders of the next generation who would confront the colonial power, holding heads high. In *The Golden Honeycomb*, the 1977 historical novel by Kamala Markandaya, for example, the protagonist Rabi, named after Rabindranath Tagore, is initiated into national consciousness not by his father who is no better than a puppet in the hands of the British, but by his mother and grandmother.⁴⁶ It is these women who make Rabi into a champion of the cause of the common people, as opposed to his father who, though a legitimate ruler, has not been able to form any kind of meaningful contact with his people. He has been closer to his white superiors than to those he rules.

The difference of the second type of narrative from the first one lies in its interest not so much in assessing the contribution of women to nationalist activities as in investigating how (national) history impinges on the lives of women. In other words, the second variety of feminist history fiction refuses to subscribe to nationalist thought by way of showing that the march of history has repercussions for both male and female worlds, even if such a neat division can indeed be maintained. Diana Wallace both endorses and resists Georg Lukács as far as the reach of history is concerned. Lukács maintains that the historical novel

⁴⁶ Kamala Markandaya, *The Golden Honeycomb* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977). Subsequent references are to this edition.

emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century because history had become ‘a *mass experience*’ at the time, owing to ‘the French Revolution, the revolutionary wars and the rise and fall of Napoleon.’⁴⁷ What Wallace seems to object to, is the confinement of the mass experience of history by Lukács to the male domain (revolution, wars, and so on) by virtue of which the lives of (European) women could be seen as lived *outside* history. In her chapter on the early twentieth-century historical fiction by (British) women writers, Wallace sets herself to correcting Lukács and his view of the operative limits of history by showing how the experience of the First World War had been a mass experience for the (European) women too. Adapting Lukács, Wallace writes:

Their [women’s] experience of the war and of enfranchisement under the 1918 Representation of the People Act offered, to rephrase Lukács, ‘the concrete possibilities for [*women*] to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned, for them to see history as something which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them.’⁴⁸

In the Indian context, history became a mass experience for women both inside and outside home during the heyday of anti-colonial national movement.⁴⁹

History/politics is an all-pervasive phenomenon, especially when the nation is in

⁴⁷ Lukács 23. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁸ Wallace 25.

⁴⁹ The national leader who did most to bring out Indian women from the confines of home into the world of history and politics was M.K. Gandhi. Gandhi held that women were fitter for the kind of politics he had introduced in India, because they possessed moral/spiritual strength, as opposed to men who possessed physical strength which often led them to berate the other sources of strength. Indian women were exceptionally capable, according to Gandhi, to be successful participants in such political programmes as non-cooperation, passive resistance etc. It is one of the arguments which critics of Gandhi mobilise to accuse him of demasculinising/feminising Indian politics.

the throes of being born (after all, to take the metaphor to its logical conclusion, birthing is a female prerogative and usually occurs in the domestic sphere). When workers of a factory, for example, go on a strike as part of a national movement, the inmates of the inner world suffer as much as those of the outer one. In contrast to the constructions of the lives of women (especially those who stay back at home rather than those who go out and work with the male comrades) in nationalist discourse as *uninterrupted* by the progression of history, what one is offered here is the images of women as much participants in and victims of history as its so-called makers.

The third variety is the most radical of the three and also the one I shall be examining in detail. The text under consideration here is *Some Inner Fury* (1955), the second novel by Kamala Markandaya.⁵⁰ Here women, especially the female protagonists, are no more confined to the space they are usually told by the national fathers and sons they properly belong to. In total disregard of the nationalist division of social space into the private and the public, they take up the challenge of coming out into the open (that is, into the male world of journalism, politics, social work, statecraft, and so on) and are ready to pay the price. Of the first-generation women novelists of postcolonial India, the works of Kamala Markandaya and Nayantara Sahgal are the best illustrations of such a bold engagement.

⁵⁰ Kamala Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* (1955; New York: Signet Books, 1956). Subsequent references are to this edition.

The Furious Forties in Some Inner Fury

Kamala Markandaya (b. 1924), a near contemporary of Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal, had produced a total of ten novels by the time of her death in 2004. Two of them—*Some Inner Fury* (1955) and *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977)—are (feminist) historical/history novels. Although critics tend to regard the latter as an historical novel, they remain divided about the claim of the former to be considered as such.⁵¹ However, the brief Author's Note to *Some Inner Fury* suggests the way Markandaya will seek to engage with the hegemonic discourses of Indian history and nationalism in both the novel in which it appears and the one that follows after a gap of more than two decades. The Note reads: 'In the struggle for independence in India nonviolence was the rule. This book is based on the exception.'⁵² The key word here is 'exception,' clearly pointing to the fact that 'the rule' either did not completely work or was deliberately broken. The subversive gesture is unmistakable.

As is widely known, it was M.K. Gandhi, the 'father' of the Indian nation, who introduced nonviolence in Indian national politics as a political weapon against the British Raj, having used it to great effect first in South Africa.⁵³ In choosing to be 'exceptional,' that is, in pitting herself against the nonviolent politics of Gandhi, Markandaya seems to attempt a *daughterly* take on the politics of the national patriarch, though not so much to show its hollowness as to examine its durability in times of acute political crisis such as the Quit India

⁵¹ As pointed out in the introductory chapter, I treat *Some Inner Fury* as a history novel.

⁵² Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 5.

⁵³ On the South African experience of Gandhi, see chapters 2 and 3 in part 1 in Brown.

Movement of 1942, the historical background against which the narrative of *Some Inner Fury* unfolds.

The critical agenda of the novel is thus to problematise the taken-for-granted nationalist position on the inheritance of the Gandhian politics of nonviolence. The question to be asked is (and there can be no doubt that it *is* a daring question, given its moment of articulation and the gender of the subject who does the articulation): how free from violence was the national movement for independence? The novel makes the case for the view that since the freedom struggle was not totally free from bloodshed, loss of lives and property, and displacement of people on a scale unparalleled in human history, then why should the myth of nonviolence associated with the anti-colonial Indian nationalism be perpetuated?⁵⁴ In short, the Author's Note to *Some Inner Fury* is a metatextual device that Markandaya employs to indicate that she is going to engage with mainstream Indian nationalist ideology in a transgressive way in her second novel. Her effort is all the more telling in that it was undertaken at a time when the question of national consolidation was of paramount importance for the newly born nation. More to the point, for an Indian woman novelist, to deal with the theme of violence is itself a revolutionary step. In Indian culture, as in many other cultures of the world, violence remains a male prerogative and hence of the state too. It is as true in the case of cultural productions as in real life. Ironically, in the

⁵⁴ It is estimated that between eight to ten million people were displaced; the figure for people killed stands between one and five hundred thousand; and over seventy-five thousand women were victims of sexual assault. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1998) 35; and Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1998) 3.

novels of Markandaya too, while violence may be the province of the male characters, her female protagonists are not just passive sufferers: Rukmani, protagonist of the first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), is perhaps the most powerful example of a combatant, who is ready to fight to the last.⁵⁵

Some Inner Fury came out in 1955—that is—less than a decade after the political birth of the Indian nation in 1947. The novel is set in one of the most turbulent periods in the history of the nation. The sun of the British Empire is about to set on India. At the completion of his study at Oxford, Kitsamy returns home, bringing an English friend called Richard Marlowe with him. Although his mother always calls Kitsamy by his proper name, others use the shorter ‘Kit’ which he himself prefers.⁵⁶ The deployment of two names—Kitsamy and Kit—is one of the many small details that Markandaya uses to dramatise the tension between the older and newer generation of Indians: the former tends to cling to tradition, while the latter aspires to socio-economic mobility through westernisation, though a few exceptions are to be found in both generations. Richard stays with the family for about a month during which time he and Mira, the younger sister of Kit, begin to feel drawn to each other. With Richard gone, the family duly sets out to find a suitable bride for Kit. Although England-returned, Kit finally agrees to marry the girl his mother has chosen for him. The

⁵⁵ It is not for nothing that the subject matter of the longest chapter in *Kishwar and Vanita* is Violence Against Women, subdivided into three sections: Caste and Class Violence, Police Violence and Family Violence. Indian women are victims of multiple violence in almost all spheres of life. Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954; Bombay: Jaico, 1957). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁵⁶ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 10. Is Markandaya reversing the process of going native seen in *Kim* (in *Kim* by Rudyard Kipling) by anglicising one of her principal male characters in the novel?

girl is called Premala. During the week-long marriage ceremony, Mira meets Roshan Merchant, one of the many westernised friends Kit has invited to his wedding. The acquaintance ultimately grows into a lasting relationship, a kind of female bonding that enables Mira to see ‘things as they [are].’⁵⁷

Shortly after marriage, Kit leaves home to join the civil service. Govind, an adopted son of the family, also goes away to take up some work. The nature of his work remains a mystery for some time. A few months later, without informing any family member beforehand, Kit suddenly returns home for a day and takes his wife, Premala, away, to set up home in the new district where he is now posted. Soon afterwards, Mira goes to visit the new couple and chances upon Roshan there who happens to be staying with them at the time. Roshan offers Mira a job in her paper which the latter readily accepts. When the editor of the paper sends Mira to cover a peasant resettlement scheme getting under way in a nearby village, she goes there with Richard. Before long Premala follows suit. In her case, however, a very different kind of motivation is at work. Despite all her sincere efforts to please Kit, Premala turns out to be too traditional an Indian woman to cope with the modern ways of her husband. As the cleavage widens, the rural project comes to offer Premala a space (in fact, the only space) where she can breathe freely. Premala begins to spend more and more time in the village, helping Hickey, the missionary, in all possible ways in running the newly founded village school.

⁵⁷ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 64.

A little later Govind turns up on the scene. The initial liking of Mira and Richard for each other now matures into love. At the same time, the mystery surrounding Govind and his work is slowly revealed. The reader comes to know that Govind is a member of the Independence Party and is ready to go to any extent for the achievement of national independence; in other words, he is an extremist. With all the major characters gathered in the same district, the true colours of the historical picture begin to emerge, setting the anti- and pro-British forces against each other: Govind works for the cessation of the colonial regime, while Kit and Richard work for its continuance. Mira finds herself caught in between; she is as strongly attached to Richard and Kit as to Govind. The conflict reaches its peak in ‘that never-to-be-forgotten year of 1942,’ as Mira puts it—that is—the year when the Quit India Movement was launched.⁵⁸

The political situation grows tense. Antagonism between ruler and ruled escalates. When the paper Mira works for is banned on charge of fuelling anti-British sentiment, she and Richard decide to go on a tour of India, beginning in the south and ending in the hills.⁵⁹ As they return from the hills, an unnatural silence meets them in the commercial area of the district. (The silence is due to the observance of *hartal* in the district.⁶⁰) They sense something has happened when they were away. The ‘fury’ bursts open on a wild night. The village school

⁵⁸ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 112.

⁵⁹ One commentator describes this tour as ‘a “honeymoon”,’ even though Mira and Richard are neither formally married nor even engaged. S. Krishna Sarma, ‘*Some Inner Fury: A Critical Perspective*,’ in *Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya*, ed. Madhusudan Prasad (Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1984) 106.

⁶⁰ *Hartal* is a Gujarati word meaning cessation of all activity/work.

so dear to Premala is set on fire. Unable to escape, Premala is burnt to death. When Govind, Kit and Mira arrive on the spot, Hickey is raving. The three men— Govind, Hickey and Kit—blame one another for the death of Premala. As Kit is preparing to leave the terrible scene, someone throws a knife at him. Kit dies in a matter of minutes. Govind is charged with the murder of Kit. The whole town is now divided into two groups: Indians including Mira believe that Govind is innocent, while the whites side with Hickey who does not have the slightest doubt that Govind is *the* murderer. However, before Govind is proved innocent, an angry Indian mob storms the court room and snatches him away. Involuntarily, Mira joins the mob, while Richard stands with a few whites who form a circle to save Hickey from the fury of the mob. The historico-political reality of the day prevents the two lovers from getting united. The larger forces of colonialism and its antithesis, namely nationalism, throttle the smaller aspirations of the individuals. History defeats romance.

Critical Response to Some Inner Fury

The critical history of *Some Inner Fury* makes for interesting reading. Most critics tend to read it as one of the numerous Indian novels in English dealing with the theme of East-West encounter and thus sidestep its critical negotiation of

the ideology and politics of Indian nationalism and patriarchy. In fact, critical obsession with the theme of colonial encounter is perhaps not so strong in the case of any other Indian author writing in English as it is in the case of Markandaya. A few examples will suffice. Meenakshi Mukherjee briefly discusses *Some Inner Fury* in the fourth chapter of her book, *The Twice Born Fiction*. The chapter is significantly titled 'East-West Encounter'—a clear indication of what Mukherjee regards as the main concern of the novel.⁶¹ Similarly, in her 'study of representative Indo-English novelists,' Uma Parameswaran puts Markandaya in the group of South Indian writers she calls 'native-aliens and expatriates.'⁶² The implication is obvious: caught between the two worlds of 'native' East and 'alien' West, Markandaya is at her best when she deals with the theme of East-West encounter. Margaret P. Joseph's monograph on Markandaya and her fiction amounts to a repetition of Parameswaran's views. Joseph begins her analysis of *Some Inner Fury* by noting:

Born and bred in India, married and settled in England, Kamala Markandaya is particularly sensitive to the clash of East and West and the tension born of this clash. In this novel [*Some Inner Fury*], for the first time a theme that is to be repeated in later books is chosen, the conflict between English and Indians [. . .].⁶³

⁶¹ Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English* (New Delhi: Heinemann, 1971) 81-85.

⁶² See chapter 4 in Uma Parameswaran, *A Study of Representative Indo-English Novelists* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1976).

⁶³ Margaret P. Joseph, *Kamala Markandaya* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1980) 23.

The prelude is indicative of what follows. In his introduction to the edited volume called *Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya*, Madhusudan Prasad, the editor, identifies four major themes in Markandaya. They are: ‘poverty and hunger,’ ‘struggle for independence,’ ‘conflict between traditionalism and modernism,’ and ‘East-West dichotomy.’⁶⁴ Although Prasad concedes that *Some Inner Fury* is both a political and tragic novel, he ends up reading it as basically dramatising the East-West conflict, that is, the last of his four themes.⁶⁵ Twenty years or so after Meenakshi Mukherjee, Rekha Jha sets out to examine the theme of East-West encounter in the novels of Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabvala.⁶⁶ The comparative framework is possibly the only justification that Jha can put forward to defend why she has chosen to work on the theme in question as far as Markandaya is concerned.

There are a few critics, however, who have read *Some Inner Fury* differently, paying critical attention more to the politics than to the thematics of the novel. Interestingly, the lead has come mainly from the non-Indian critics. Syd Harrex, for example, situates Markandaya ‘within the context of the modern Indian novel because [her fiction] crystallises various literary directions that the quest for identity has taken since the Thirties.’⁶⁷ The two major directions that the quest for identity has taken—the socio-political and the philosophical—are best

⁶⁴ Madhusudan Prasad, Introduction, in Prasad xiii.

⁶⁵ Interestingly, Prasad cites the Russian critic Elena J. Kalinnikova (whom I cite below) to make the point that *Some Inner Fury* is ‘[e]ssentially [. . .] a political novel.’ iv.

⁶⁶ Rekha Jha, *The Novels of Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Jhabvala: A Study in East-West Encounter* (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1990).

⁶⁷ S.C. Harrex, *The Fire and the Offering: The English-Language Novel of India 1935-1970*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1977) 245.

represented, according to Harrex, by Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, respectively.⁶⁸ In Markandaya, Harrex finds a commingling of the two. If the third and fourth novels of Markandaya—*A Silence of Desire* (1960) and *Possession* (1963)—resolve the question of identity crisis philosophically, that is, by offering ‘a traditional set of values’ as ‘an alternative to a modern materialist way of life,’ her early novels—*Nectar in a Sieve*, *Some Inner Fury*, *A Handful of Rice*—‘do stress the social, economic and political determinants of human identity.’⁶⁹ Accordingly, Harrex begins his brief analysis of ‘the dilemma of identity’ in *Some Inner Fury* by way of emphasising ‘the political background of the Independence struggle as it enters a violent phase.’⁷⁰ In the same way, the Russian critic Elena J. Kalinnikova regards it as imperative to trace ‘the spiritual development of Mira,’ the narrator-protagonist of the novel, against ‘the high incandescence of national liberation struggle of the Indian people against the English colonizers.’⁷¹

It would, however, be unfair to say that the Indian critics of Markandaya have altogether failed to read her politically. Here and there one comes across an Indian critic who approaches her from a political point of view. But they are mostly dismissive of Markandaya as a political novelist. M.K. Naik is probably the best example. In his chapter on the Indian English political novel, Naik

⁶⁸ Harrex 245.

⁶⁹ Harrex 247, 253.

⁷⁰ Harrex 257.

⁷¹ Elena J. Kalinnikova, *Indian-English Literature: A Perspective*, trans. Virendra Pal Sharma, ed. K.K. Sharma (1974; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1982) 153, 154.

describes *Some Inner Fury* as a ‘putative political novel.’⁷² Remarking on the ‘artistic’ failure of the trial scene with which the novel ends and which inevitably reminds him of ‘the famous episode in [E.M.] Forster’s *A Passage to India*,’ Naik concludes rather ungenerously: ‘Some fury indeed, where the inside is all hollow!’⁷³ On the other end of the spectrum is K.R. Chandrasekharan who considers *Some Inner Fury* ‘a novel with an entirely political theme—India’s struggle for freedom, especially the violent forms it sometimes took.’⁷⁴ Chandrasekharan is so taken by Markandaya’s ‘ardent nationalism and her complete identification with and approval of the “Quit India” Movement’ that the novel appears to him ‘politically a war cry against Britain’—a conclusion one would be hard put to agree with, given the foretaste of subversion of the dominant narratives of Indian nationalism in the Author’s Note in particular and its persistent execution in the main body of the novel.⁷⁵

Though different in conclusions, there are two points common to the political analyses of *Some Inner Fury* given by Harrex, Kalinnikova and Naik. None of these critics regards it as an historical or history novel. Nor does any of them detect any feminist concern in it. Only Kalinnikova comes as near as suggesting that ‘[a]lthough during the course of the whole novel the reader does not find in it references to the Indian National Congress or the names of Gandhi

⁷² M.K. Naik, *Dimensions of Indian English Literature* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1984) 122.

⁷³ Naik 122. Wallace notes the same dismissive approach to the historical novel produced by twentieth-century British women writers. 3, 4.

⁷⁴ K.R. Chandrasekharan, ‘East and West in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya,’ in *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English*, eds. M.K. Naik, S.K. Desai and G.S. Amur (1968; Dharwar: Karnatak University, 1972) 312.

⁷⁵ Chandrasekharan 313. Emphasis added.

and Jawahar Lal Nehru [*sic*], but he feels everywhere a historical authenticity.’⁷⁶ Since I intend to read *Some Inner Fury* as a history novel with an explicit feminist agenda, it is very important to review what those critics who have inadvertently read it as an *historical* novel have to say about it. The most remarkable thing about the analyses by these critics is that they have read the novel in contradictory ways, drawing quite opposing conclusions about what it really means. Even self-contradiction is also noticeable. For example, Margaret Joseph first compares the novel with those of Sir Walter Scott:

Just as in Walter Scott’s novels individual lives are moulded *by political, and personal struggles for power*, in *Some Inner Fury* the characters meet, and are separated or killed *because of national events*.⁷⁷

The very comparison of *Some Inner Fury* with the novels of Scott is enough to suggest that Joseph holds history responsible for the human tragedy in the novel.

In the very next sentence, however, she adds the following remark:

Some Inner Fury is *not a historical novel*, but against a historical background it shows *the impersonal forces of national revolution* destroying the private desire for happiness; and this is a reality that can be found valid in any country, in any age.⁷⁸

Although the element of self-contradiction is also to be found in Meenakshi Mukherjee, her ultimate conclusion (though not explicitly stated) is that *Some*

⁷⁶ Kalinnikova 155.

⁷⁷ Joseph 32. Emphasis added.

⁷⁸ Joseph 32. Emphasis added. Strictly speaking, *Some Inner Fury* is *not* a historical novel but not for the reason Joseph advances. It is a *history* novel because the past it deals with is one lived through by its author.

Inner Fury can be read as an historical novel because it is history that determines its final outcome:

But in this novel the climax is brought about by riot and violence in which Mira is separated from Richard. Because Mira is not a free agent, and has no power of self-determination, this novel cannot be regarded as the quest for self-discovery [. . .]. Mira is merely the victim of forces beyond her control, the forces of history as it were.⁷⁹

The reason why these critics seem to contradict themselves regarding the question whether *Some Inner Fury* is an historical novel or not is that they work neither with a clear definition of the historical novel nor with a sound concept of history. The vague idea of history that informs the conceptual framework within which they analyse the novel seems to derive from the classical theories of (western) history/historiography, including those of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx. According to these theories, history is progressive and belongs to the male/public world.⁸⁰ Hence they miss the crucial point that Markandaya is working with a radically different notion of history. As with feminists all over the world, for Markandaya too history (of the male, by the male and for the male) is neither progressive nor is the so-called domestic/female world absolutely sealed off from its orbit of influence. History touches the lives of modern men and women equally in all spheres. In addition, male-centred history grants women neither agency nor visibility. Markandaya studied history at

⁷⁹ Mukherjee 85.

⁸⁰ The world-historical individual in Hegel (as in Sir Walter Scott) is without exception a male. The leaders of class struggle in Marx (as in Mulk Raj Anand) are also male.

Madras University; she thus turns to the historical novel for the same reason as her British counterpart does. In her brilliant book on the twentieth-century woman's historical novel, Diana Wallace observes:

‘History’ has traditionally excluded women, but paradoxically the ‘historical novel’ has offered women readers the imaginative space to create different, more inclusive versions of ‘history’, which are accessible or appealing to them in various ways.⁸¹

In *Some Inner Fury*, Markandaya intends to tell those stories that the mainstream nationalist-patriarchal discourse, including nationalist history fiction, tends not to tell. But both Joseph and Mukherjee shed important, though not feminist, light on how Markandaya is negotiating history in her novel. By pointing to ‘the impersonal forces of national revolution destroying the private desire for happiness,’ Joseph extends the operation of history from the male/public to the female/private sphere. On the other hand, Mukherjee decentres history to bring the element of love/romance into focus.⁸² If these critics had just given a feminist slant to the light they throw on *Some Inner Fury*, they would have come to the conclusion that the personal is political, the ideological template of all feminist deconstructions. For the foregrounding of fantasy, love, romance, and the personal, according to Wallace, is one of the several ways that women have used

⁸¹ Wallace 3.

⁸² On page 51 Mukherjee comments: ‘In *Some Inner Fury* the action takes place in the historical year 1942; yet it is essentially a novel of love.’

the historical novel so that they can engage with history from a perspective ‘that centralises women’s concerns’ and thus investigate ‘issues of gender.’⁸³

Deconstructing Nationalist-Patriarchal Ideology in Some Inner Fury

From the Author’s Note, if not just as clearly from the analyses by these critics, it is possible to characterise the conflict that drives the plot of *Some Inner Fury*: the conflict is between individual aspiration and national/social consideration, between romance and history. Diana Wallace has shown that, while the hybridity of the historical novel has consistently been regarded as its greatest disadvantage by both historians and literary critics, it is what has allowed the twentieth-century British women writers to ‘centralise a female consciousness and explore female fears and desires.’⁸⁴ Markandaya has then rightly chosen the form of historical Romance, for as a hybrid form it is best suited not only to exposing the exclusions in nationalist discourse in general and nationalist (history) fiction in particular, but also to enacting the interplay of the personal/feminine and the historical/masculine. Whatever else it may be and whatever its other de/merits, *Some Inner Fury* is definitely a full-blooded feminist critique of mainstream

⁸³ Wallace 5.

⁸⁴ Wallace 2-3.

nationalist ideology, especially in terms of how that ideology constructs domesticity, home, family, marriage and womanhood.

One important difference of *Some Inner Fury* from what Georg Lukács calls the ‘classical historical novel’ has to do with the interaction of history and romance in it.⁸⁵ In contrast with the mutual collaboration between history and romance in the ‘classical historical novel,’ in *Some Inner Fury* the two are not only mutually exclusive but also downright antagonistic. Since the former is the greater force in the novel, the latter is left with no other choice but to give way. Before the god of history presiding over the birth of the Indian nation, ‘the god of small things’—friendship, love/romance and so on—dare not raise even the softest murmur.⁸⁶

Some Inner Fury ends with Mira reflecting: ‘For us there was no other way, the forces that pulled us apart were too strong.’⁸⁷ There can be no doubt that Markandaya/Mira takes these forces to be the forces of history and not of destiny/fate, as several critics like Margaret Joseph tend to take them to be.⁸⁸ Otherwise the accusing finger raised in the Author’s Note at the (sometimes) violent history of the national struggle for independence is rendered irrelevant. In contrast to the Hegelian and Marxist concept of history as progress, history in *Some Inner Fury* destroys and divides, whereas romance preserves and unites. By

⁸⁵ Lukács 63.

⁸⁶ *The God of Small Things* (1997; New York: HarperPerennial, 1998) is the title of the Booker-Prize-winning novel by the Indian activist writer Arundhati Roy. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁸⁷ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 192.

⁸⁸ It is because Joseph reads Markandaya as a writer of ‘the tragic vision’ that she tends to engage with ‘her view of the world’ on an existential/ontological rather than historical plane. 12.

inserting romance into history and by deploying the narrative technique of flashback in the novel, Markandaya/Mira relates a love/romantic story perforated by history. Personal memory of romance shores up the wreckages of impersonal history. As they belong to the two opposing camps, the lovers—Mira and Richard—could not be united, because the forces of (national) history in the form of coloniser-colonised struggle would not let them.

In order to challenge nationalist and patriarchal ideology, *Some Inner Fury* enacts a series of inversions. These inversions relate to the code of conduct, expectations, mores, norms, prescriptions, prohibitions, roles and values that these discourses/ideologies tend to inculcate in *modern* Indian women.⁸⁹ The tendency is subtly registered in a symbolic episode at the beginning of the novel. The narrator-protagonist Mira and her parents have come to the railway station to receive Kit, returning home after completing study at Oxford. As the youngest member of the family, it falls on Mira to welcome her brother home by garlanding him. In her confusion and embarrassment, Mira garlands Richard instead of Kit. This episode is a not-too-oblique reconstruction of an ancient Hindu marital practice called *swayamvara*.⁹⁰ In the ritual of *swayamvara*, a Hindu girl of marriageable age chooses her life partner from among a number of suitors. In order to be chosen, the suitor must perform an extraordinary feat, exhibiting

⁸⁹ Bharati Ray gives an apt description of the nationalist image of the ideal modern Indian woman: 'In effect, as a result of the double pull in two opposite directions — the Western model and the Indian ideal — Indian women were expected to combine in themselves the womanly qualities prized both in the "modern" West and in the "ancient" East.' 180.

⁹⁰ The earliest examples of *swayamvara* are to be found in the two ancient Indian epics, namely, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. I discuss in some detail one of the instances of *swayamvara* in the latter below.

his exceptional (usually physical) prowess. The girl then garlands the successful suitor. Later on a formal ceremony is held to join the two in wedlock.

The symbolic significance of the episode at the railway station can be made out at both the ideological and formal/structural level of the novel. Ideologically, the image of Mira garlanding Richard, the man she will first choose as her life partner and then lose to the forces of history in the form of colonial-national conflict, inverts the nationalist image of ‘modern but feminine woman’ who is *allowed* to come out in the male public space but not to choose her destiny, including her life partner.⁹¹

The point becomes all the more clear, if Mira is compared with Bharati, the (Gandhian) nationalist-protagonist in *Waiting for the Mahatma* by R.K. Narayan.⁹² As the title suggests, Bharati is waiting for Gandhi both to approve of her love for Sriram, the reluctant nationalist, and give her permission to marry him. Gandhi keeps Bharati *waiting* till India gains independence. In the Gandhian scheme of things, the national cause comes before personal wish fulfilment. As in the novel, in his personal and political life too, Gandhi is represented as attaching more importance to the national than to the personal. In line with his basic ambivalence to modernity, he was a guarded champion of the cause of the Indian woman. On the one hand, Gandhi not only worked to liberate Indian women from the manifold oppression they were victims of in the society they lived in but also

⁹¹ Wallace 102.

⁹² The name of Bharati is significant. It means of, or belonging to, Bharat, the official name for India in Sanskrit. Bharatha is also the name of the younger brother of Rama, the king-hero of the Indian epic the *Ramayana*.

brought them out in huge numbers into national politics. On the other hand, he always wanted them not to forget to perform the roles they had been playing for centuries. According to Suruchi Thapar-Björkert,

Gandhi insisted that women should come out only after fulfilling their duties at home and with the approval of their guardians and the support of their families. Hence, women would be able to carry over their domestic respectability when they participated in street demonstrations. Once women were on the streets, they were expected to maintain the non-violent, self-sacrificing benevolent image of the domesticated wife and mother.⁹³

By garlanding Richard, though accidentally, Mira makes it abundantly clear that she will herself choose (unlike Bharati) her life partner.⁹⁴ Markandaya ensures that she does so, by way of writing *Some Inner Fury*, in contrast to the novel by Narayan, as basically *her* love story that, in its turn, inverts the formal/structural priorities of the ‘classical historical novel’ fathered by Walter Scott by privileging romance over history.

⁹³ Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42* (New Delhi: Sage, 2006) 22.

⁹⁴ Markandaya seems to have chosen the name of her narrator-protagonist, Mirabai, with care. Mirabai was a sixteenth-century Rajasthani female saint in the *bhakti* (devotion) tradition. Although married into a royal house, she took Lord Krishna as her divine lover, which was seen as a violation of devotion to her husband, and remained uncompromising in the face of all odds. She has thus come to be seen in popular imagination as an icon of rebellion against forces of tradition, especially male domination and patriarchy. For a brilliant discussion of the cinematic appropriation/‘domestication’ of the figure of Mirabai, see Heidi Pauwels, ‘Who Is Afraid of Mīrābār? Gulzar’s Antidote for Mīrā’s Poison,’ in *Religion in Literature and Film in South Asia*, ed. Diana Dimitrova (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 45-67.

Gandhi chose his ideal women from the Hindu epic tradition. Of all the role models that the tradition provided him with, it was Sita, wife of Rama in the Indian epic *Ramayana*, who embodied for Gandhi all the female virtues he gladly approved of throughout his life: courage, determination, endurance, purity, steadiness, virtuousness, and so on.⁹⁵ Interestingly, Sita is also (at least partially) the role model for Mira, for the former chose Rama for her husband through the practice of *swayamvara*, arguably one of the earliest instances of the ritual in Indian cultural history. The image of Sita, as Gandhi constructs it, is an appropriated one, for it lacks two vital points of the original: her freedom of choice (before marriage) and her final resistance to comply with the demand of her husband to prove her chastity for the second time.

By contrast, the image of Sita that Markandaya chooses for Mira is specifically composed of those attributes that Gandhi tends to gloss over. Yet Markandaya too is selective, but to a radical end. Like Sita, Mira too has to prove her chastity/loyalty: which side of the colonial divide does she belong to? Contrary to her desire not to take sides, she decides in favour of the national as opposed to the colonial force. Even though Mira loses Richard in the conflict between colonial and national forces, she does not pray, as Sita did, to mother earth for self-annihilation. Against her will, she joins *her* people and thus saves

⁹⁵ It is interesting to note how Gandhi installed Rama and Sita in the imagining of the Indian nation. Prior to his arrival on the Indian political scene, the Indian nation was routinely imagined as a mother figure (hence Mother India), a legacy of the Bengali nationalist writer Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894). In its place, Gandhi brought in the image of the *Ramrajya* (the kingdom of Rama) and thus established the hold of the new patriarchy on the emergent nation. See Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (London: Hurst & Company, 2001) 268-290.

herself from becoming yet another victim of history, the nation and patriarchy. Her decision to carry on even in the face of trying adversity is what finally gives Mira the opportunity to narrate her history-crossed love story in her own words. In choosing self-annihilation over dishonour, Sita enacted a more ideal(ised) kind of resistance but also missed the opportunity to hand down a *Sitayana* (that could have served as a rejoinder to the *Ramayana*) to the millions of Sitas to come. If there had been a *Sitayana* around to tell the stories of Sita, Gandhi could not have been able to appropriate the image of Sita the way he did.⁹⁶ In the case of Mira, there is less possibility of appropriation to a conservative end, though nationalist critics have not been sitting idle. Her narrative tells in vivid detail the trauma she has gone through in the hands of history and in the name of the nation.

Markandaya boldly takes her intervention in the nationalist representation of the Indian woman a step further in the character of Premala, the woman Kit marries after his return from Oxford. In almost every respect, Kit and Premala are poles apart. Kit is English-educated, modern, out-going, westernised and has almost no regard for the Hindu cultural and religious traditions into which he is born. To him, for example, living in India is like ‘living in the wilds.’⁹⁷ In short, Kit is “‘more English than the English’”.⁹⁸ On the other hand, Premala is deeply religious, ‘home-loving,’ simple-minded, traditional in outlook and

⁹⁶ There does exist a *Sitayana*, a much-shortened verse translation of the *Ramayana* by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in which the translator attempts to tell the story of Sita, but ends up appropriating that story to nationalist-patriarchal ends. *Sitayana: Epic of the Earth-born*, rpt. (1987; Madras: Samata Books, 1989).

⁹⁷ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 14.

⁹⁸ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (1989; London and New York: Routledge, 2002) 4.

‘unassuming.’⁹⁹ In other words, she is as close to (the nationalist image of) Sita as a twentieth-century Indian woman could possibly aspire to be. Yet it is Premala who outdoes Kit as far as the question of socio-cultural adjustment is concerned, proving herself to be more amenable to change than Kit. She does not hesitate, for example, to go and live with Kit and his family so that he does not have ‘to marry a stranger.’¹⁰⁰

Although ‘deplorable’ to Mira, ‘this strange new pattern of courtship’ lends itself to two opposite interpretations: one, conservative; the other, radical.¹⁰¹ First, it is possible to argue that, in agreeing to let Kit, her would-be husband, have his way, Premala cheapens herself, heavily compromising her dignity both as a human being and as a woman. That is to say, it may appear that the compliant Premala, by her refusal to be vocal against the undervaluation of women in a male-dominated society, rather upsets what Markandaya attempts to achieve through inverting the nationalist image of Sita in the character(isation) of Mira. But it is also possible to read the decision to comply on the part of Premala from a different point of view, a point of view that clearly brings out its interventionist thrust. Given the kind of family she is brought up in, the kind of education she has received and the kind of socialisation she has been exposed to, what else could Premala have done? Her complete powerlessness in such important matters as marriage points to the overall helpless condition of women

⁹⁹ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 39, 58.

¹⁰⁰ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 36.

¹⁰¹ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 36. In his analysis of *Some Inner Fury*, Sarma notes ‘the unorthodox process of reverse courtship’ I am discussing here, but does not proceed to tease out its formal or ideological implications. 105.

in a society that functions in strict adherence to gender hierarchy that privileges the male over the female. In particular, it highlights the unequal position of women within the institution of marriage. In the marriage market regulated by patriarchal ideology and interests, men have always been buyers and women, commodities. With the advent of modernity in India in the form of history and national emergence, the only difference that Markandaya is able to see is that the commodity is now brought to the buyer (the so-called apostle of modernisation and nationalism) in the form of home delivery! This exposure of the worthlessness of women who are unable to break free due to adverse circumstances from the traditional female roles can serve to sensitise the (female) readers of *Some Inner Fury* to the kind of ‘deplorable’ life women are forced to live in a society in transition from the dominance of old feudal patriarchy to the hegemony of the new bourgeois elite, and thus politicise them. So what Markandaya is trying to achieve through the ‘docile and obliging’ Premala is not to entrench the oppression of women in the hands of men but to examine it closely and thus undermine it.¹⁰²

In terms of form/structure too, Markandaya uses Premala in the same way as Mira. The ‘strange new pattern of courtship’ I have been discussing above enacts another inversion. In the classical historical novel, as in nationalist history fiction too when it allows courtship at all, it is the male protagonist who initiates

¹⁰² Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 44.

the process of love-making.¹⁰³ Invariably, he is the active agent and the female partner is the recipient of his love. Even in love-making, the male is the forceful swan and the female, ‘the staggering girl,’ Leda, to borrow from W.B. Yeats.¹⁰⁴ By inverting this ‘pattern of courtship’—that is, by making not the male but the female lover the initiator of the love affair in her novel—Markandaya endows Premala with agency and thus frustrates the nationalist-patriarchal binary distinguishing male roles from the female ones. But the more radical implication of this inversion is that it lays bare the constructed character of gender and the roles based on it. To put it differently, the ideological/political function that this inversion serves for Markandaya is to foreground the feminist idea that gender is but a performance.¹⁰⁵ As such, women are capable of performing with competence, ease and grace the roles traditionally designated as ‘male.’ At least in one respect, then, the Oxford-returned modern Kit concedes defeat to the traditional Premala. It is not for nothing that Markandaya chooses the name Premala for the character through whom she inverts the traditional gender roles in love-making. The first part of the name ‘Prem’ means love, especially the kind of

¹⁰³ An Indian woman is supposed not to make advances in a relationship of love. She must remain ‘coy.’ If she does not, she is taken to be a shameless woman. On the other hand, nationalist history fiction in the Indian context relegates man-woman love to the margin. Its central agenda is to imagine the nation.

¹⁰⁴ W.B. Yeats, ‘Leda and the Swan,’ in *Poems of W. B. Yeats: A New Selection*, comp. A. Norman Jeffares, 2nd ed. (1984; Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1988) 247.

¹⁰⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; New York and London: Routledge, 1999) 140. Markandaya draws attention to the constructedness of gender (roles) rather early on in the novel. The narrator-protagonist Mira is trying to make sense why she has to go to the English club with her parents, even though she does not like it at all: ‘I went because I was taken, and to learn to mix with Europeans. This last was part of my training, for one day—soon—I would marry, a man of my class, who, like my brother, would have been educated abroad, and who would expect his wife to move as freely in European circles as he himself did. But though I knew how important this was, sometimes I could not help sighing and wondering why the lesson had to be learned so hardly.’ 19.

love that obtains between man and woman. To an Indian reader, its erotic/sexual undertones would be obvious.

In nationalist thought, no institution is of as much importance as marriage and no sphere as sacred as home. From the last quarter of the nineteenth century on, Indian nationalists increasingly invested them both with an aura of spirituality, mainly to set up the binary in which the spiritual East/India is aligned against the material West/Britain. Both were thus used to mark the *difference* of colonised from coloniser. The image of the caring, dutiful and virtuous Hindu wife was contrasted with the immoral, ultramodern and wayward European woman to underscore the moral superiority of the Hindu nation over the European power ruling India at the time. In her dense chapter on ‘religion, law and love in late nineteenth-century Bengal,’ Tanika Sarkar, a major social historian and cultural critic of India, writes:

Woman’s chastity had become a keyword in the political vocabulary of Hindu nationalism, which had begun to develop at about this time [the last quarter of the nineteenth century]. The Hindu woman’s unique steadfastness to the husband in the face of gross double standards, her unconditional, uncompromising monogamy, were celebrated as the sign that marked Hindus off from the rest of the world, and which constituted the Hindu claim to nationhood.¹⁰⁶

The ideological investment in the good wife continued to have a hold on the national intelligentsia. In his 1903 historical romance, *Padmini: An Indian*

¹⁰⁶ Sarkar 91.

Romance, discussed in chapter 3, T. Ramakrishna Pillai is all praise for the Hindu ideal of womanhood, ‘whose immutability is strange, and its imperviousness to time and influences of the highest kind astonishing.’¹⁰⁷ Pillai writes:

The Hindu ideal of womanhood is at once graceful and elevating. Conceived thousands of years ago by the sages of old, on the banks of rivers and in mountain caves, it is the one thing that has been handed down to us pure and unsullied. Its charm and beauty lies in its severity, and time or the altered circumstances of the country have in no wise modified it.¹⁰⁸

What Pillai is doing here is a phenomenon not uncommon to anti-colonial national formation across cultures and histories. In line with anti-colonial nationalists all over the world who came before and after him, Pillai tends to think that the tradition of Hindu/Indian womanhood he is praising so highly has been in existence for ‘thousands of years,’ whereas the fact is that he (along with the other members of the native intelligentsia) is actually ‘inventing’ it.¹⁰⁹ Pillai is one with Gandhi in making the past glory of Hindu/Indian civilisation/tradition flow into the impoverished colonial present so that it can rehabilitate the Indian/Hindu psyche devastated under the heartless colonial regime.

Indian nationalism, then, enacts one of its most complex and innovative ideological manoeuvres: the idealised image of the Hindu wife/womanhood is

¹⁰⁷ T. Ramakrishna [Pillai], *Padmini: An Indian Romance* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd., 1903) 47. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁰⁸ Pillai 47.

¹⁰⁹ On the invention of tradition and the ideological/political function it is meant to serve, see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1983).

enshrined in another idealised image, namely, that of home. In the process, the boundaries of Indian cultural nationalism are clearly demarcated from those of its political counterpart and its most powerful symbol forged. Home is thus a key palimpsest (because layered) of nationalist ideology and longing. In another insightful chapter on the relationship of ‘domesticity and nationalism in nineteenth-century Bengal,’ Tanika Sarkar cites ‘a tract on marriage,’ titled *Banga Vivaha* (Bengali Marriage) by one Chandra Kumar Bhattacharya, to draw attention to the centrality of the Hindu household (and the Hindu wife) in the nationalist project of self-determination: in simple but forceful language, the tract asserts, ‘That household is our motherland, that family is our India.’¹¹⁰ According to Partha Chatterjee, it is the home, the spiritual domain, the locus of national culture and tradition, where the Indian nation was born, culturally. The political birth of the nation took place in the public space, the arena of anti-colonial national struggle where the two adversaries—the rightful nation-in-the-making and the unlawful alien usurper—met. Just as ideology (in the sense of distortion) does, idealisation and myth-making have an in-built tendency to serve the interests of those who manufacture them rather than the interests of those who are objects of idealisation or myth-making.¹¹¹ In line with her feminist-interventionist agenda, Markandaya simply inverts the idealised/mythic images of both home and marriage in *Some Inner Fury*, by focusing on the quotidian experiences of women in both sites. For to get to the real (as opposed to the ideological) picture

¹¹⁰ Sarkar 36.

¹¹¹ As the term itself suggests, idealisation is one of the many processes of ideology-making.

of the day-to-day life of the Indian woman, these nationalist images need to be deconstructed.

For the female protagonists of Markandaya in *Some Inner Fury*, life both at home and in marriage is more often than not a trial, if not quite a trap. It is a sense of being tried or trapped at home/in marital life that brings them out of home/marriage, the so-called unsullied repository/embodiment of national culture and tradition. Early in the novel, Mira feels delighted, when Kit asks her to show Richard around:

I was content enough: for three years, since leaving childhood, I had not known the sweetness of walking alone. If I went to the temple, my mother accompanied me; it was no longer permissible to meander through the bazaars—I must go by car; or if I insisted on walking, an ayah or a peon trailed behind me, reluctant ball-and-chain, mumbling complaints if I went too far or too fast.¹¹²

Life being boring, closely and constantly monitored, claustrophobic, exacting and stifling at home and in marriage, these protagonists venture into activities and relationships that not only save them from becoming misfits in society but also open up newer possibilities for them to make sense of life. For example, Mira enjoys working as a journalist more than going to college from her parental home, for it gives her satisfaction that she is doing something worthwhile.¹¹³ Premala takes up social service and is drawn to Govind, the adoptive brother of Mira, to

¹¹² Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 24-25.

¹¹³ Markandaya herself worked as a journalist for some time after leaving university.

make life meaningful and thus worth living, for her life at home and with Kit is no more than two persons living under the same roof, with no meaningful relationship between them. The activities and relationships out of the bounds of home and marriage also help these protagonists to keep sane. Otherwise they might have lapsed into alcoholism, neurosis or paranoia, as Mira-masi does in *Clear Light of Day* (1980), a feminist history text by Anita Desai.¹¹⁴ In *Some Inner Fury*, to put it in plain terms, both home and marriage work to the disadvantage of women, in direct contrast to the way that they are figured in nationalist imagination.

By contrast, love and romance in the novel is presented as a space where all kinds of female desire from love of adventure to sexual pleasure can be fulfilled.¹¹⁵ For example, Mira feels comfortable, happy and secure in the company of her lover, Richard. Both lovers have a wonderful time during the long tour they undertake just before the political situation in India begins to deteriorate and finally tears them apart.

Markandaya is quite straightforward in her attitude to the institution of marriage. Since marriage is a man-made institution, it cannot but put women at a distinct disadvantage. For a marriage to be successful, it is therefore crucial that the two concerned should not only know but also love, respect and understand each other. Yet a marriage can break down. What should a woman do, if her life

¹¹⁴ Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980). Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹¹⁵ In nationalist discourse of all kinds, the only love that is unreservedly allowed free play is the love of the patriot for (usually) his/her motherland. If love/relationship of other kinds is at all allowed, they must be subordinated to the more ideal and safer kind(s).

in marriage turns out to be a joyless one rather than its opposite? Nationalists and patriarchs would advise that she should try to adjust and never think of a split. Even before Premala is married to Kit, both her parents-in-law ‘saw the signs’ of approaching disaster but ‘said nothing: to them it was wholly proper that Premala should wait upon their son’s pleasure.’¹¹⁶ It is here that Markandaya is at her most subversive: if life is miserable at home or in marriage, she seems to suggest, just leave it. But to be able to leave home/marriage behind, women must empower themselves through education and employment, as Markandaya herself did.¹¹⁷ Hence the most impressive and memorable female character in *Some Inner Fury* is neither Mira nor Premala but Roshan, an England-returned, self-employed, thoroughly-westernised Parsi divorcee who runs, paradoxically, a nationalist paper. It is through the character of Roshan that Markandaya demolishes the complex nationalist-patriarchal ideological edifice of home and marriage.

As with her other female protagonists in *Some Inner Fury*, Markandaya uses Roshan to execute her feminist-interventionist agenda on both ideological and structural levels. Ideologically, if the novel recommends one role model for the woman of modern India (with which she can replace Sita, the nationalist role model for the modern Indian woman), it is Roshan. It is important to take note of the Parsi identity of Roshan. Of all the Indian communities, it was the Parsi community who were the first (in the Hindi/Urdu speaking belt at least) to take to

¹¹⁶ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 39.

¹¹⁷ See below.

westernisation whole-heartedly and reap its mixed blessings.¹¹⁸ Initially, the leaders of the Indian National Congress were mostly Parsis.¹¹⁹ The implication of the Parsi identity of Roshan is that the woman of modern India does not have to turn to the West for role models that will work for her in the new socio-cultural milieu. That is to say, the modern Indian woman lives next door. But the use of a Parsi woman as a role model for the woman of modern India is also a cautious move. Roshan allows Markandaya not only to deconstruct the predominantly Hindu nationalist images of home and marriage but also to avoid unnecessary criticism that she would have invited had she chosen a Muslim woman to serve her purpose. Historically, the use of a modern Muslim woman would possibly have been anachronistic, for the Indian Muslims were the last to embrace the westernisation programme that had earnestly commenced under the East India Company in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

For another reason also, the choice of a Muslim woman would not have been a feasible one. *Some Inner Fury* came out within a decade of the partition of India. The wounds of the partition were still raw, with both the newly-born states engaged in disfiguring the national character/image of each other in full earnest. There was no reason to antagonise the Hindu nation further by idealising the Muslim woman, when a better alternative was already available. The critique of

¹¹⁸ Amitav Ghosh has a wonderful Parsi character in the second volume of the *Ibis* trilogy, *River of Smoke* (2011), called Bahram Modi.

¹¹⁹ On the contribution of the Parsis to the Indian nationalist movement, see Aloo J. Dastur, 'In the Service of their Nation: The Parsis and the Nationalist Movement,' in *They Too Fought for India's Freedom: The Role of Minorities*, ed. Asghar Ali Engineer (Gurugaon: Hope India, 2006) 180-187.

Indian/Hindu nationalist ideology that Markandaya engenders in *Some Inner Fury* was enough to earn her the displeasure of the post-independence national bourgeoisie. Roshan is Parsi but an Indian at the same time. She is thus both the Indian self and its Other. The self can recognise its limitations as well as depravities only when it cares to look into the mirror of the Other. The chances of self-correction increase if the mirror is that of an intimate Other, to adapt the title of a book by Ashis Nandy.¹²⁰

True to her objective, Markandaya invests Roshan with all the qualities that a modern Indian woman needs to equip herself with before venturing into the world beyond the threshold of home, a home that is more often than not, in the brilliant depiction of the Marathi poet Indira Sant:

A four-walled house. A house with four windows.

Two doors. But no way out.

If you walk to the door, the threshold rises

And rises

To fill the frame.

So what does one do? Scour this. Dust that.

Adorn this. Change that. Do this. Do that.

And when you're sick of this, flit—

From that window to this.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, 1st paperback ed. (1983; Delhi: Oxford UP, 1988).

¹²¹ Indira Sant, 'Spellbound,' trans. Shanta Gokhale, in *Women Writing in India: 600 B. C. to the Present*, eds. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, vol. 2 (New York: The Feminist Press, 1993) 125.

Roshan is ‘ultramodern,’ but not aggressively so; “‘forward,” without being conscious of it.’¹²² Though she and her husband have parted company, she thinks nothing of it and displays no sense of regret. Instead, ‘there was something about her that was turbulent and unafraid which you sensed beneath the light, sparkling surface she presented.’¹²³ Most important of all is the fact that Roshan has, contrary to all nationalist/patriarchal expectations, a magnetic personality, a kind of personality that is usually the preserve of the male charismatic leader like Gandhi, Nehru and so on: ‘and always, wherever she was and in whatever company, Roshan was the one who arrested attention.’¹²⁴ Yet of all the characters (male or female) in the novel, Roshan is, paradoxically, the most Gandhian in nationalist politics.

The structural significance of Roshan lies in her capacity to draw attention from all around. In both classical historical and nationalist history fiction, it is the main protagonist who serves as the role model for both the other characters and the reader. For example, in Scott it is the middle-of-the-road Waverley. In the Indian context, it is Moorthy in *Kanthapura*, Bharati in *Waiting for the Mahatma* and Lalu in the Lalu trilogy. By contrast, Markandaya chooses one of the two secondary protagonists as her role model. The other one (Premala) is also a role model but from the nationalist point of view. *Some Inner Fury* has thus two role

¹²² Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 48. Just as Markandaya invests Roshan with all those virtues needed to construct a critique of nationalist-patriarchal ideology, Amitav Ghosh does the same with the character of Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* (which I examine in the next chapter) to generate his critique of parochial nationalism. Tridib embodies a ‘rooted’ kind of cosmopolitanism.

¹²³ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 49.

¹²⁴ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 48.

models: feminist-interventionist and nationalist-patriarchal represented by Roshan and Premala, respectively. Unlike Waverley, the main protagonist Mira is not a synthesis of the two extremes. Like the protagonists in nationalist history fiction, however, she is a partisan who rejects the values that Premala embodies but accepts those that Roshan stands for. It is possible to read Premala's tragic death by fire at the end of the novel as exemplifying her (and, by the same logic, Sita's) inadequacy as a role model for the woman of modern India.

There can be no doubt that Markandaya wants Premala to be read/seen as a victim, a victim of conflicting historical/ideological forces. The sophistication with which the process of her victimisation has been probed into and the artistry with which it is then dramatised warrants that both the author of *Some Inner Fury* and the novel be accorded more nuanced critical attention than they have so far received. Premala is right at the centre of a kind of (love) triangle: each of the three male characters she comes in close contact with tries to inscribe his ideology and interests on her. In other words, she is treated by each of them as an ideological project. Her husband, the Oxford-returned Kit, wants to modernise her, instead of accommodating himself to her way of life. Her brother-in-law, Govind, who develops a sort of forbidden love for her, sets out to engage her in the nationalist cause rather than the other way round. It is, however, Hickey, the missionary, who ultimately wins her over to his cause of social work and uplift. Interestingly, although Govind and Kit disagree on almost all issues, they both resent that Premala should have any kind of dealings with the missionary:

Kit was not alone in disliking Premala's frequent visits to the village and, incidentally, her meetings with Hickey, the missionary, there; Govind, so often at variance with him, for once fully shared his feeling.¹²⁵

As far as the possession/question of the Indian woman is concerned, the reformist-nationalist Kit and the revivalist-nationalist Govind are one against the missionary-colonial penetration. So Premala is a text to be written up(on). The contest is about who is going to author/father the text. Premala is thus an embodiment of the huge ideological investment of both colonialism and Indian nationalism in the Indian woman. It therefore comes as no surprise that Premala perishes in the fire that is originally meant to destroy the village school that she and Hickey have taken so much trouble to build up. It is supposed that the school is set on fire by Govind and his militant nationalist associates. In its fight against its political Other, Indian nationalism sacrifices, willingly or unwillingly, the Indian woman.

Markandaya adds a twist to the victimisation of the Hindu/Indian woman by re-working the practice of *sati* or self-immolation of the Hindu woman on the funeral pyre of her husband. The old Brahminic patriarchy wanted the Hindu woman to sacrifice/kill herself in the name of *shastras* (religious doctrines/principles/texts); the new secular patriarchy wants of her no less in the name of the new religion called nationalism. A final twist is that Sita was able to pass the fire ordeal and thus prove her chastity. The twentieth-century Premala/Sita fails not because of any intrinsic lack but because her way of life is

¹²⁵ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 112.

no more compatible with the radically transformed socio-cultural set-up of modern India, though nationalists of all hues would like her to remain so. Consequently, Sita/Premala is not the right role model for the twentieth-century Indian woman. In rejecting Premala, Mira is in effect saving herself from repeating the tragic fate of her sister-in-law.

I have so far dealt mainly with the ideological inversions in *Some Inner Fury* and how they intersect with the formal/structural appropriation of the genre of the historical novel in two disparate incarnations—those of Scott and Indian nationalism. Apart from the use of romance to intervene in the progressive view of history propounded by Hegel and Marx, dramatised by Scott and his Indian nationalist followers, and idealised by Lukács in his magisterial study of Scott, two more formal/structural inversions need to be pointed out. First, both the classical historical and nationalist history novel often use the narrative form called *bildungsroman*. There is however a crucial difference between the two uses. In the classical historical novel, the protagonist (for example, Waverley) moves from extremes to a conservative middle-of-the-road position. In the process, he learns to put social considerations over personal aspirations. The happy ending suggests that society approves of the outcome of his learning. The protagonist in the Indian nationalist history novel (Moorthy, Lalu and so on), by contrast, moves the other way round. (Usually) his/her progress is from an initial political indifference/naivety to a partisan/radical political stance. The Indian protagonist also devalues the personal for the sake of the national. But his/her

case is very different from that of the classical protagonist. With his people suffering under a cruel alien regime, s/he has no time to think of personal needs and desires. The nation must be liberated first. The nationalist cause is the number one cause. Although the nationalist history novel does not end happily, it ends on a truly optimistic note: the days are not far when the nation will be free.

Some Inner Fury is also a *bildungsroman* but one that does not follow the classical/nationalist formal/structural trajectory. Consistent with its notion of history as disruptive, it is, I would argue, a counter-*bildungsroman*. For to use the form of *bildungsroman* as the classical historical and nationalist history novel do, is both to accept history as progressive and invest historiography with moral authority which it uses to teach its lessons. In direct contrast to the classical/nationalist protagonist, Mira refuses to learn from her painful experience of loss and suffering caused by the forces of history:

For myself, if I had to choose anew, in full knowledge of what was to come, I still would not wish my course deflected, for though there was pain and sorrow and hatred, there was also love: and the experience of it was too sweet, too surpassing sweet, for me ever to want to choose differently.¹²⁶

History does not teach Mira any worthwhile lesson. In refusing to grow/mature/‘progress,’ Mira is not only inverting the formal/structural priorities of *bildungsroman* but also divesting history/historiography of its taken-for-granted moral authority. Even though (the romance of) Mira is defeated and devastated in

¹²⁶ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 57.

the hands of history, she will not bow before history. She remains the unrepentant champion of 'love'/romance in the midst of 'pain and sorrow and hatred' unleashed by the forces of colonial/national history.

As can be assumed from above, *Some Inner Fury* does not have a happy ending, the kind of ending with which the historical Romance deriving from Scott typically ends. A happy ending would have clashed with the notion of history with which the novel works. In Scott, history facilitates romance, hence the happy ending. In *Some Inner Fury*, history itself is the antagonist, working to destroy the world of romance/Romance: 'For us there was no other way, the forces that pulled us apart were too strong.'¹²⁷ In the struggle between history and romance, the former comes out victorious. When history is disruptive rather than progressive, when it conspires to overpower rather than empower romance in a historical Romance, the ending of the work concerned can be anything but happy. As with the form of *bildungsroman* discussed above, Markandaya must appropriate the form of the historical Romance to accommodate her disruptive view of history.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 192.

¹²⁸ It is, in fact, difficult to identify the exact note on which the novel ends. With everything over, Mira reflects: 'It is all one, I said to myself. In a hundred years it is all one; and still my heart wept, tearless, desolate, silently to itself. But what matter to the universe, I said to myself, if now and then a world is born or a star should die; or what matter to the world, if here and there a man should fall, or a head or a heart should break?' Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 192. It sounds like resignation. If it is, it is a forced one, for the heart goes on weeping, 'tearless, desolate, silently to itself.' It would have been much easier for Mira to reconcile herself to what happens to her love/romance, if she had been a traditional woman like Premala, one of the devotees of nationalist Sita. Since she is not, the consolation that one derives from the notion of fate/incarnation/*karma*/predestination is not for her.

Markandaya has received neither the amount nor the kind of critical attention she deserves.¹²⁹ One reason has to do with her personal life. Immediately after the independence of India, she married an English man, moved to England and set up home there. The fact of migration is consistently taken to have blunted her perception of Indian reality. In other words, she is said to have lost touch with the (Indian) way of life she recreates in novel after novel.¹³⁰ These charges are not new. They were particularly strong at the time when Markandaya began to publish. It was a time when to write in English was itself considered an act of betrayal. The new-born nation wanted all its citizens to offer in its service whatever they had. To tolerate criticism (and from an insider turned outsider at that) was too much to ask for. The nation was in no mood to appreciate if someone pointed out its drawbacks. Markandaya in particular had no right to criticise, since she was (thought to be) no more part of what she was criticising.

On the other hand, the critics who have considered Markandaya have in fact done her more damage than good by repeatedly focusing on the theme of East-West encounter in her work, with the late comers hardly offering any new insight, though leaving an unhealthy tendency in the offing. Instead of boldly engaging with the complex dynamics of the encounter and how it shapes the lives

¹²⁹ Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, ed., *A History of Indian Literature in English* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003) has a chapter (chapter 15, 219-231) on the 'Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s' by Shyamala Narayan and Jon Mee. Of the four Indian women novelists (including Ruth Praver Jhabvala) discussed in that chapter, Markandaya is given the least space and, surprisingly, there is no mention of *Some Inner Fury* in it.

¹³⁰ Ironically, the Europe-returned Indian barristers and lawyers who later became charismatic leaders of the national struggle were thought to have 'discovered' India while abroad. The charge is now more forcefully repeated in the case of the writers of the Indian diaspora in the West.

of her characters (especially the female ones), only those elements are highlighted that are supposed to form the essences of the East and the West. The essence of the East/India is then appropriated to the service of the nation. Let me give an example. To get to the essence of the East/India, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar first depoliticises *Some Inner Fury* by asserting that the novel ‘assert[s] the unconquerable spirit of humanity.’¹³¹ The second move is to identify the character who best represents the Indian way of life. Iyengar writes:

Of all the characters in *Some Inner Fury*, Premala is the sweetest, even the most heroic, whose mother sadness is as potent as her mother love or mother might, whose silence is stronger than all rhetoric, and whose seeming capacity for resignation is the true measure of her measureless strength. She more than the sophisticated Kit and Mira, more than the rebel Govind and the reckless Roshan, is symbolic of the Mother — Mother India who is compassion and sufferance, who must indeed suffer all hurts and survive all disasters.¹³²

Of the five major Indian characters in the novel, it is Premala who is identified as embodying the spirit of India, ‘symbolic of the Mother — Mother India,’ because only she has the superhuman capacity to ‘suffer all hurts and survive all disasters.’¹³³ But Premala does not survive. What Iyengar means here is that the Indian essence that Premala encapsulates survives, even though

¹³¹ K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, 4th ed. (1962; New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1984) 440.

¹³² Iyengar 440.

¹³³ The Gandhian intertext undergirding such line of reasoning hardly needs to be pointed out.

Premala, the flesh and blood woman, perishes. The politics of the third move now becomes clear. It is a continuation of the process of depoliticisation, for it takes Premala out of the matrix of material culture and practice and transplants her into a symbolic one. One could have been happy if Premala had been transformed into a symbol of female agency. But what she is made to stand for is ‘the Mother — Mother India,’ that is, the India of nationalist imagination. In plain terms, Srinivasa has superbly smuggled Premala into the service of the nation. The *(m)othering* of Premala—turning Premala into a symbol of ‘the Mother — Mother India’—also works to absolve Iyengar from any sense of guilt he might have felt at the ‘hurts’ and ‘disasters’ that she goes through.¹³⁴ For an Indian mother is mother only by virtue of her *inborn* capacity to suffer silently. Having successfully sublimated the pain and suffering of Premala into a ‘mother(ed)’ principle and thus set himself free from guilt, Iyengar can now romanticise her death:

Shortly before her tragic death, she looks transfigured through suffering and the new love that has seized and given new life to her. [. . .] And after she is dead, having apparently fought hard for her breath, for life, her face is as serene as ever, with no trace at all of the struggle or the pain.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Interestingly, even though Premala is only a surrogate mother in the novel (by way of adopting a nameless orphan), Iyengar subsumes her other identities—a woman on her own right, wife of Kit, sister-in-law of Govind and Mira, potential lover of Govind, disciple of Hickey, and, most importantly, a humanitarian and social worker—under that of ‘the Mother — Mother India.’

¹³⁵ Iyengar 440.

Iyengar does not pause to define ‘the new love’ that has given Premala a ‘new life.’ More to the point, the passage he cites to clinch his point is from a point in the novel when ‘it had even come to this, that they [Kit and Premala] agreed to go their separate ways, tacitly acknowledging thus the imperfect articulation of their marriage’ and when ‘the village had become her [Premala’s] home, and she a part of its life.’¹³⁶ That is to say, it is her humanitarian and social work in the village that is the source of ‘the new love’ that gives Premala a new meaning in her otherwise barren married life.

But Iyengar does pause to ask a series of questions:

What did happen exactly? Was it Govind who threw the knife and killed Kit? Did Hickey lie when he swore that he saw Govind do the deed, or did Mira lie when she swore that she had held Govind’s hands firmly, and hence he simply couldn’t have done it?¹³⁷

About half a century after Iyengar, I do not ask any of the above questions. I think Markandaya wrote *Some Inner Fury* not so much to answer the questions with which Iyengar concludes his depoliticised analysis of the novel as to come to grips with the historical forces responsible for the sad death of Premala.¹³⁸ If *Some Inner Fury* provides an explanation as to why Premala had to die the way she did, it lies in its critique of nationalist-patriarchal ideology in general and its

¹³⁶ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 151.

¹³⁷ Iyengar 440-441.

¹³⁸ In fact, it *is* a politicised reading in that it is geared to serving the purpose of Indian nationalism. I use the term ‘depoliticised’ in the sense that Iyengar diffuses the feminist-interventionist politics of the novel which I have endeavoured to foreground in my engagement with it.

construction of domesticity, home, family, marriage, nation, Indian womanhood in particular. Through the tragic end of Premala, Markandaya foregrounds the inadequacy of nationalist Sita as a role model for the modern Indian woman and thus exposes the duplicity of the nationalist project that wanted and still wants the Indian woman to be modern but at the same time to remain as subservient as its ideologically constructed (image of) Sita. Mira would have met with the same outcome, if she had chosen to take Premala/Sita as her role model instead of Roshan who has the rather extraordinary temerity to affirm: 'I choose my times, and I call my soul my own.'¹³⁹ The name 'Roshan' means enlightened. Roshan is the light for the modern Indian woman.¹⁴⁰ In *Some Inner Fury*, Markandaya points out what the woman of modern India must do to call her soul her own: she must learn to be wary of the nationalist-patriarchal image of Indian womanhood and the gendered roles it sanctions for her.

¹³⁹ Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* 65.

¹⁴⁰ Some other meanings of 'Roshan' are famous, illustrious etc. Incidentally, Markandaya chooses the name Rabi (the sun) after Rabindranath Tagore for the nationalist protagonist of her most ambitious work *The Golden Honeycomb*.

CHAPTER 8

Interventionist History Fiction: *The Shadow Lines* (1988)

The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.

Milan Kundera¹

The important point here is that when nation-states begin to decline in the era of globalization, they regress to a very defensive and highly dangerous form of national identity that is driven by a very aggressive form of racism.

Stuart Hall²

It seems obvious that the always precarious hyphen between nation and state is now rather more so; and that this hyphen is being inhabited by multifarious mobilizers of identity politics.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak³

This chapter examines one of the most powerful articulations of intervention in Indian English writing. The work in question is the second novel of the Indian-

¹ Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. Aaron Asher (1978; London: Faber and Faber, 1996) 4.

² Stuart Hall, 'The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity,' in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 178.

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Teaching for the Times,' in McClintock *et al.* 468.

born, US-based author Amitav Ghosh—*The Shadow Lines* (1988).⁴ Interventionist history fiction is so called because it attempts to intervene in the dominant nationalist discourse produced by the liberal bourgeoisie, with a view to drawing attention to its politics of representation which is clearly in evidence in its multiple excisions. Two distinct kinds of erasures are to be found in the stories that the bourgeois-patriarchal nation chooses to relate about itself. The first type of exclusions that the interventionist history novel deals with, has to do with what scholars (both male and female) of Indian nationalism have defined as its self-validating claim to inclusiveness (across caste, class, community, gender, linguistic, regional and religious divides), which is, they maintain, no more than a myth.⁵ Interventionist history fiction deconstructs the grand edifice of inclusiveness by representing, for example, ‘the many rebellions that found articulation in the anti-imperialist struggle’ but get hijacked ‘into the master narrative of the mainstream.’⁶ The critical agenda here is to examine the nationalist construction of the homogeneous nation vis-à-vis its ‘fragments,’ especially the ethnic-religious minorities.⁷ A particularly good example of the first variety of the interventionist history novel is Salman Rushdie’s Booker-of-

⁴ Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, educational ed. (1988; Delhi: Oxford UP, 1995). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁵ See, for example, chapter 4 in Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (1997; London: Penguin Book, 1998).

⁶ Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, eds., *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*, vol. 2 (New York: The Feminist Press, 1993) 55.

⁷ The term ‘fragments’ comes from Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993).

the-Bookers-winning *Midnight's Children* (1981).⁸ A trenchant critique of the autocratic regime of Indira Gandhi, the first female Prime Minister of India, the novel re-imagines the Indian nation in terms of its cultural diversity by rehabilitating one of its 'fragments,' the Indian Muslims, in the national imaginary. *The Shadow Lines*, however, does not concern itself with the essentialist, homogeneous, inclusive myth of the nation as *Midnight's Children* and its numerous successors do. Its focus is the second variety of evasions.

The second kind involves a different category of absences or erasures in the mainstream narratives of Indian nationalism. These omissions include those episodes in the history of the nation that embarrass the national leadership who in turn tend to characterise them as *aberrations* (communal riots, for example), for such moments might, if allowed entry, disturb the smooth flow of the kind of sanitised version of national narrative that the leadership approves of. For example, in February 1946, that is, just before the achievement of complete political independence, there occurred in Bombay (now called Mumbai) what has come to be known as 'the naval mutiny.'⁹ About twenty thousand soldiers took part in it. When M.K. Gandhi heard of it, he reacted by taking the mutineers to task for having set 'a bad and unbecoming example for India.'¹⁰ The historian Sumit Sarkar describes 'the naval mutiny in Bombay on 18-23 February 1946' as 'one of the most truly heroic, *if also largely forgotten*, episodes in our freedom

⁸ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981; London: Picador, 1982). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁹ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947*, 2nd ed. (1983; Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 1989) 423.

¹⁰ M.K. Gandhi, cited in Sarkar 425.

struggle.’¹¹ As with the incidents of communal violence, these episodes are at best appended as footnotes to the glorious and grand narratives of the nation, if only because they challenge the notion of absolute hegemony of the liberal-bourgeois national leadership over the masses.

Interventionist History Fiction in Historical Context

Critics and scholars of Indian literature in English take the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (the ‘big book’ in Makarand R. Paranjape’s eloquent phrase) in 1981 as marking the beginning of the interventionist approach to the bourgeois-liberal official history of Indian nationalism, insofar as the literature in question is concerned.¹² Of the many critics of Rushdie and his novel, Jon Mee reads the appearance of Rushdie’s novel from the other way round, that is, from the contextual rather than textual point of view: ‘If Rushdie ushered in a new era of Indian writing in English, it has to be acknowledged that he was more

¹¹ Sarkar 423. Emphasis added.

¹² Makarand R. Paranjape, ‘Inside and Outside the Whale: Politics and the New Indian English Novel,’ in *The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of the 1980s*, ed. Viney Kirpal (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Limited, 1990) 220.

a sign of the times than their creator.’¹³ A key factor that can be held responsible for generating the urge to re-examine the ‘foundational fictions’ of the nation was the Emergency of 1975-7.¹⁴ With the imposition of the Emergency, the legacy of the Nehruvian ideals of secularism and socialist democracy appeared to be threatened. The new leadership seemed to be betraying the high ideals of national leaders like Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru and working to secure personal and party interests rather than those of the nation. In other words, interventionist history fiction (supposed to have been fathered by Rushdie) gives expression to the anxieties, concerns and debates already in circulation at the time of its emergence, especially those pertaining to the life of English-educated, middle-class, upwardly mobile Indians. For (re)-imagining the nation, a common theme that binds the Indian English novels of the 1980s and 1990s together, is mostly a middle-class, bourgeois enterprise. Regarding the socio-economic background of the Indian writers in English, Mee writes:

No doubt social and economic privilege has been important, perhaps even necessary, to the creation of a cultural space in which to rewrite the language of the colonizer. [. . .] but compared to writers in other Indian languages the novelists writing in English do seem to come from a rather

¹³ Jon Mee, ‘After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and the 1990s,’ in *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (New York: Columbia UP, 2003) 319.

¹⁴ The phrase has been taken from Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, 1st paperback printing (1991; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993).

uniform and narrow class band: academics, editors, and other inhabitants of the book trade abound.¹⁵

A number of crises at the national level were at work for the emergence of works both creative and scholarly (for instance, 'history from below' of the subaltern group of social historians) that questioned the achievements of the postcolonial nation-state in general and the taken-for-granted modalities of nationalist historiography in particular. In literary-cultural arena, the rise of postcolonial theory at about the same time should also be seen as a factor that significantly contributed to the emergence of the kind of subversive works that Rushdie and his many successors produced. In what follows, I attempt a brief overview of the national crises and how they impacted on the psyche of midnight's children and grandchildren and the kind of work they came to produce. It should, however, be granted that a number of issues raised now (that is, from the 1980s onward) had already been in the air because of the efforts of (the third wave) Indian feminism that can legitimately claim for itself the credit of having initiated the process of reappraisal through its critique of patriarchal-nationalist ideology vis-à-vis the Indian woman. The previous chapter on feminist history fiction throws light on some of the complex negotiations of nationalist-patriarchal history and ideology by Indian women novelists writing in English, in particular Kamala Markandaya.

¹⁵ Mee, 'After Midnight' 322. In addition, most of the well-known practitioners of Indian English writing are based in the West.

Compared to the high activism of the two decades culminating in the attainment of independence in August 1947, the first two decades after independence were a quieter time, with the postcolonial nation slowly but steadily recovering, on the one hand, from the trauma of the partition and working out, on the other, plans and policies that would, when implemented, bring it stability, progress and recognition, at both national and international level. Except for the two inter(-)national crises—the Chinese invasion in 1962 and the (first) war with Pakistan in 1965, the national life remained more or less undisturbed, if not exactly placid. But the next decade ushered in troubles, with the Bangladeshi War of Liberation beginning in March 1971. India intervened apparently to lend the Bangladeshi cause its moral (and military) support, but more to teach Pakistan a lesson and secure for itself the status of a superpower in South Asia by putting on show its military might.¹⁶ Internally, the stability of the Nehruvian decades began to show signs of wearing off. As Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, editors of the two-volume *Women Writing in India*, have observed: ‘Economic growth slackened. The government was not able to solve the problem of increasing urban unemployment, which left young people in the cities frustrated and insecure. Prices spiraled upward.’¹⁷ Life in rural areas was not faring any better. Even professionals were hard-pressed. In addition, there was the increasing pressure of

¹⁶ In his debut novel, *Such a Long Journey* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), Rohinton Mistry describes the Indian intervention in the Bangladeshi War of Liberation as a ‘secret’ war. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁷ Tharu and Lalita 47.

global capital to open up the Indian market for free play. Pankaj Mishra notes its advent in Benares, ‘the holiest city of the Hindus’¹⁸:

The house I lived in, the melancholy presence of Panditji and his wife, were part of the world of old Benares that was still intact in the late Eighties [. . .]. In less than two years, most of this solid-seeming world was to vanish into thin air. The old city was to be scarred by a rash of fast-food outlets, video-game parlors, and boutiques, the most garish symbols of the entrepreneurial energies unleashed by the liberalization of the Indian economy, which would transform Benares in the way they had transformed other sleepy small towns across India.¹⁹

In view of the troubles of the 1970s, the time was ripe for action. The government acted, however, not to solve the problems but to keep them out of sight as long as possible, in the name of maintaining peace and prosperity of the country. A state of emergency was declared in 1975.

In about three decades after independence, no political crisis stirred the Indian psyche so vehemently as the Emergency of 1975-7, ‘a twenty-two-month eclipse,’ in the rich metaphor of Sunil Khilnani.²⁰ A measure of its tremendous impact is to be found in the way Indian writers in English have repeatedly engaged with it in work after work. The Emergency is extensively represented in

¹⁸ Pankaj Mishra, ‘Edmund Wilson in Benares,’ in *India: A Mosaic*, eds. Robert B. Silvers and Barbara Epstein, intro. Arundhati Roy (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2000) 197.

¹⁹ Pankaj Mishra 198.

²⁰ Khilnani 9.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985), Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1996), to mention just a few of the best-known examples.²¹ The reason is not hard to understand. The Emergency embodied all that was the negation/opposite of what Khilnani calls 'Nehru's idea of India [that] sought to coordinate within the form of a modern state a variety of values: democracy, religious tolerance, economic development and cultural pluralism.'²² By postponing elections, suspending civil liberties, imposing censorship on the press, imprisoning activists and breaking down movements, the Emergency seemed to threaten all that was dear to the Indian citizen-subject.²³ According to Mee, 'The 1980s witnessed a second coming for the Indian novel in English. Its messiah seems to have been Salman Rushdie.'²⁴ To bring the metaphor of 'second coming' to its logical conclusion, one may well argue that 'the rough beast' was the Emergency. Mishra has given a brief list of its legacies:

It [student violence] erupted spontaneously, fueled only by the sense of despair and hopelessness that permanently hung over North Indian universities in the 1980s. It was part of a larger crisis caused by the collapse of many Indian institutions, the increasingly close alliance between crime and politics, and the growth of state-organized corruption—

²¹ Nayantara Sahgal, *Rich Like Us* (London: Heinemann, 1985). Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996). Subsequent references are to these editions.

²² Khilnani 12-13.

²³ Tharu and Lalita 48.

²⁴ Mee, 'After Midnight' 318.

processes that had been speeded up during Mrs. Gandhi's "Emergency" in the mid-Seventies.²⁵

No small wonder that the Nehruvian era, in retrospect, seemed to have been a golden one.

The Emergency was lifted in 1977. In the elections held the same year, the Congress Party, the only ruling party ever since India became independent, lost to the Janata party. Viney Kirpal views the electoral defeat of the Congress by the Janata party as a restoration of freedom lost during the Emergency:

The Janata party which replaced the Congress had been voted to power less on the merits of its own members than as an emblem of freedom. Its victory—and every Indian believed he had, by voting, played a decisive role in retrieving India's freedom—was an epiphanic phenomenon. It brought home to each Indian the need to jealously guard the factors of democracy. The average Indians' political consciousness had been inadvertently but dramatically awakened by the close brush with totalitarianism. The Emergency had served as a necessary warning to each slumbering Indian to be an effective watchdog lest the past repeat itself.²⁶

The awakening (engendered by the Emergency) that Kirpal speaks of led, on the one hand, to a nostalgic engagement with the Nehruvian era, as reflected in Vikram Seth's sprawling family saga *A Suitable Boy* (1993) and Rukun Advani's

²⁵ Pankaj Mishra 205.

²⁶ Viney Kirpal, Introduction, in Kirpal xx-xxi.

Beethoven Among the Cows (1994), and, on the other, to a critical examination of the oft-quoted Nehruvian image of India as ‘unity within diversity.’²⁷ The question being asked was: did the Nehruvian image really contain any substance at all or was it just ‘inclusive rhetoric’ masking ‘an exclusive reality’?²⁸ The latter tendency became the stronger one in the wake of what happened in the 1980s and the 1990s, decades that saw the rise of communal politics and violence on an unprecedented scale since independence.

Kirpal is perhaps a little too uncritical of the achievements of the Janata government. In order to get a balanced view, it needs to be judged not only in terms of what the new government replaced but also in terms of what it brought in. The fact that the Janata party formed a coalition (government) with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), frontline political parties that are openly committed to the ideology of Hindu communalism, explains the kind of national community it set out to imagine for the post-Emergency India. In his forceful study of *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India*, Vinay Lal traces the genealogy of what he calls ‘[t]he debate over textbooks since the advent to power of the BJP in 1998’ to ‘the textbook controversy of 1977-9.’²⁹ Morarji Desai, then Prime Minister of India, ‘was unhappy about certain history textbooks with

²⁷ Vikram Seth, *A Suitable Boy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993). Rukun Advani, *Beethoven Among the Cows* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994). Subsequent references are to these editions.

²⁸ Mee, ‘After Midnight’ 323.

²⁹ Vinay Lal, *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (2003; New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2007) 107.

“controversial and biased material”.³⁰ The textbooks in question were *Medieval India* (1957) by Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra’s *Modern India* (1970) and *Freedom Struggle* (1972) by Amales Tripathi, Barun De and Bipan Chandra.³¹ A fourth book that also ‘came under scrutiny’ was R. S. Sharma’s *Ancient India*.³² The allegations brought against these works were that they were ‘unacceptably soft on Islam’s bloody history in India,’ that they were ‘unnecessarily critical of nationalists such as [Bal Gangadhar] Tilak and Aurobindo [Ghosh],’ and that they were ‘not sufficiently appreciative of the unique tenor of Hindu civilization.’³³ Finally, a ‘left and aggressively secular orientation to Indian history’ was what bound these books together.³⁴ From the nature of the charges, it is possible to speculate the kind of history the Janata government would endorse and also the kind of national community it would allow to be imagined. By demonising Indian Islam, idolising such Hindu revivalist nationalists as Aurobindo and Tilak and chanting a hymn to the glorious Hindu civilization, Indian history would set in motion a counter ‘orientation’ that could be best described as communal. The construction of the nation in such a communal history could hardly be other than communal. Such direct official/state intervention in the (re)writing of Indian history and, by extension, in (re-)imagining the nation partly explains the critical agenda of interventionist fiction to re-imagine the nation by retrieving the lost/silenced voices of history.

³⁰ Lal 107.

³¹ Lal 107.

³² Lal 107.

³³ Lal 107.

³⁴ Lal 108.

Given the low rate of literacy in India, the communalisation of a discursive site such as history cannot be as visible as its counterpart in the political terrain. The post-Emergency India also witnessed a steady capture (as well as rupture) of its political institutions and leadership by communal politics.³⁵ The two most enduring elements of the political culture in India at the time came to be communal politics on the one hand and communal violence on the other. The growing communal trend reached one of its peaks in the assassination of the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, in November 1984. Ashish Banerjee considers the assassination of Mrs Gandhi ‘the most successful act of communalization.’³⁶ The ‘assassination unleashed a massive reprisal against the Sikh population in Delhi.’³⁷ In his moving prose piece, ‘The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi,’ written in 1995, Amitav Ghosh recalls how ‘the year 1984 [seemed] to fulfil its apocalyptic portents’ in India. Ghosh writes:

Of the year’s many catastrophes, the sectarian violence following Gandhi’s death had the greatest effect on my life. Looking back, I see that the experiences of that period were profoundly important to my development as a writer, so much so that I have never attempted to write about them until now.³⁸

³⁵ It was also a time when *Dalit* politics made itself felt at an all-India level. *Dalit* roughly means the downtrodden.

³⁶ Ashish Banerjee, ‘“Comparative Curfew’: Changing Dimensions of Communal Politics in India,’ in *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, ed. Veena Das (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1990) 49.

³⁷ Banerjee 49.

³⁸ Amitav Ghosh, *The Imam and the Indian* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal & Permanent Black, 2002) 46. Subsequent references are to this edition.

What Ghosh says about himself is true of the majority of Indian writers in English writing in the last two decades of the second millennium. The rupture was decisive:

Like many other members of my generation, I grew up believing that mass-slaughter of the kind that accompanied the Partition of India and Pakistan, in 1947, could never happen again. But that morning, in the city of Delhi, the violence had reached the same level of intensity.³⁹

How did Ghosh react to the communal violence he so powerfully captures in the piece I am discussing here? Ghosh joined a march of protest the next morning and for the next few weeks ‘worked with a team from Delhi University, distributing supplies in the slums and working-class neighbourhoods that had been worst hit by the rioting’ before ‘return[ing] to [his] desk.’⁴⁰ Ghosh contrasts his decision to join the ‘forlorn little group’ of marchers with that of V. S. Naipaul not ‘to join crowds.’⁴¹ The contrast speaks volumes for the kind of work that midnight’s children and grandchildren came to produce. A commitment to intervention is its hallmark, a commitment that refuses to work with what Ghosh calls, borrowing from the Bosnian writer Dzevad Karahasan, ‘the aesthetic of indifference.’⁴² Thus the aesthetic that goes into the making of interventionist history fiction is an

³⁹ Ghosh, *The Imam and the Indian* 52. Mark the comparison with the Partition.

⁴⁰ Ghosh, *The Imam and the Indian* 58. On the politics of indifference in a (post)colonial context, see Rukmini Bhaya Nair, *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: The Idea of Indifference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

⁴¹ Ghosh, *The Imam and the Indian* 57, 56.

⁴² Ghosh, *The Imam and the Indian* 62.

aesthetic of engagement, most clearly visible in its critical agenda of re-imagining the nation by way of re-visiting the history of the nation.

Interventionist History Fiction

Going back to the two kinds of interventionist history fiction I began with, the first type has far outshone the second one in both number and quality. In the wake of *Midnight's Children*, each (male) Indian novelist in English has (in the majority of cases) produced a work of fiction that attempts to recover and reinstate the voice(s) of the community/minority (s)he belongs to, voices that the flat monotone of the dominant discourse of Indian nationalism does not accommodate, and when it does, it is to appropriate them to its own ideological/political ends. In *Midnight's Children*, one of Rushdie's principal concerns is to inject the Indian Muslim into the national canvas—into the history, narrative and representation of the nation. Though not a Muslim, Mukul Kesavan

does exactly the same thing in his only novel, *Looking through Glass*.⁴³ As Jon Mee has pointed out,

Drawing on his own research into the relationship between the Muslim population and the nationalist movement, *Looking through Glass* (1995) looks at a community which is often erased from nationalist histories and in the process offers a different, less heroic perspective on the closing years of the struggle for independence.⁴⁴

Similarly, I. Allan Sealy tells the story of an Anglo-Indian family in his impressive 'chronicle,' *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988).⁴⁵ The *Nama* is thus about 'a community whose presence troubles the imagining of the nation in terms of the expression of some homogeneous cultural authenticity.'⁴⁶ In his works of fiction in general and in his first novel, *Such a Long Journey* (1991), in particular, Rohinton Mistry 'represents' the Parsi community/diaspora he belongs to as a community caught in an in-between socio-cultural space both in India and abroad (in North America in particular): the Parsi community in India is both 'a self-sufficient enclave community' and 'an integral part of the nation-state.'⁴⁷ Several other Parsi writers such as Boman Desai, Farrukh Dhondy and Firdaus

⁴³ Mukul Kesavan, *Looking through Glass* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁴⁴ Mee, 'After Midnight' 329.

⁴⁵ I. Allan Sealy, *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988; New Delhi: IndiaInk, 1999). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁴⁶ Mee, 'After Midnight' 327.

⁴⁷ Sudesh Mishra, 'From Sugar to Masala: Writing by the Indian Diaspora,' in Mehrotra 289.

Kanga have also tried to come to terms with the question of what it means to be a Parsi and an Indian at the same time. Works of fiction as diverse as *The Memory of Elephants* (1988) by Desai, Dhondy's *Bombay Duck* (1990), and Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (1990) are all structured by the inherent tension originating from the hyphenated existence of the Parsi community both at home and abroad.⁴⁸ In other words, these works derive both force and interest from the dialectic of ethnic (that is, Parsi) and national (that is, Indian) identity that undergirds the narrative trajectory in them.⁴⁹ Together they announce, as Nilufer E. Bharucha puts it in her fine essay, 'the "Parsi Connection" has truly arrived in Indian-English fiction.'⁵⁰

Of the two branches of interventionist history fiction, the second one has so far borne fewer and less remarkable fruits than the first briefly discussed above. In terms of critical attention too, it has not fared as well as the first kind. That is one of the reasons why I have chosen to analyse one of the examples of the second type of the interventionist history novel. Needless to say, if I had chosen to deal with the first type of exclusions (that is, of national minorities) from the mainstream narratives of the nation, any of the works mentioned above could have served my purpose to the best of my advantage. But I am interested here in the other variety of evasions such as the episodes/events of communal

⁴⁸ Boman Desai, *The Memory of Elephants* (1988). Farrukh Dhondy, *Bombay Duck* (London: Cape, 1990). Firdaus Kanga, *Trying to Grow* 1990). Subsequent references are to these editions.

⁴⁹ See Nilufer E. Bharucha, 'The Parsi Voice in Recent Indian English Fiction: An Assertion of Ethnic Identity,' in *Indian-English Fiction 1980-90: An Assessment*, eds. Nilufer E. Bharucha and Vilas Sarang (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1994) 73-88.

⁵⁰ Bharucha 87.

riot/violence whose inclusion can effectively undermine both the narrative and political authority of the postcolonial nation-state. Consequently, the second novel of Amitav Ghosh turns out to be an apt choice. A final reason is purely personal. Being myself a Bengali like Ghosh, I think I understand the meanings of the world that Ghosh recreates in his fiction (especially in *The Shadow Lines*) better than those of the other worlds I come across in the works of non-Bengali Indian English writers.

Of Lines and Shadows

One of the finest interventionist history novels to appear thus far is *The Shadow Lines* (1988), the second novel by the Indian-born, US-based Amitav Ghosh, ‘the first of the band of Stephanians to respond with gusto to the challenge of *Midnight’s Children*,’ as Mee puts it.⁵¹ From one perspective, the novel is a family saga, charting, however, not so much the ups and downs of two families—one, English (the Prices) and the other, Indian (the Datta-Chaudhuris)—as the

⁵¹ Mee, ‘After Midnight’ 324-25.

complex and evolving relationship between the two.⁵² Despite all manner of political changes, however, the relationship between the two families remains intact across (three) generations, spanning about eight decades from the late 1910s to the early 1980s, a fact that proves that *difference* is no barrier to the formation of healthy human relationship.⁵³ The lines dividing one nation-state from another are rather ‘shadow-like’ than solid because they can never totally negate the possibility of lasting human relationship beyond national/racial differences.⁵⁴ In celebrating the transcendence of ‘the artificial borders of nation and race,’ *The Shadow Lines* posts, according to Robert Dixon, ‘a fictional critique of classical anthropology’s model of discrete cultures and the associated ideology of nationalism.’⁵⁵

Including Dixon, most of the critics of *The Shadow Lines* have read the novel as a critique of (Indian) nationalism, which it undoubtedly is. In what follows, I engage with the text with a view first to providing an outline of the story (in fact, a series of stories) it tells (or attempts to tell), and then examining

⁵² According to Louis James, ‘Shadow Lines: Cross-Cultural Perspectives in the Fiction of Amitav Ghosh,’ in *The Novels of Amitav Ghosh*, ed. R.K. Dhawan (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1999) 56, ‘The novel brings together the forms of the autobiographical novel and the family chronicle, to subvert both.’

⁵³ Ironically, the main driving force behind the narrative in the novel is ‘the mystery of difference.’ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 31.

⁵⁴ In fact, the more these shadow lines try to thwart the possibility of connection, the stronger the urge to connect becomes. Robert Dixon rightly thinks that Ghosh subscribes to ‘a utopian humanism’ in believing that there is and has always been a space where human relationships can be forged, transcending man-made differences. “‘Travelling in the West’: The Writing of Amitav Ghosh,’ in *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*, ed. Tabish Khair (2003; Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005) 21.

⁵⁵ Dixon 20.

the epistemic and ideological grounds covered by the critics who read it as an interventionist text.

If from one point of view *The Shadow Lines* is a family saga, from another it can well be read as a *bildungsroman*, tracing the psychological-spiritual growth of its unnamed narrator-protagonist, both through the day-to-day experience of life lived across continents (first in imagination and then in reality) and under the friendly tutelage of his uncle-cum-mentor, Tridib.⁵⁶ The novel is divided into two parts, titled ‘Going Away’ and ‘Coming Home,’ respectively. Though neatly divided into two largely equal parts, the division is deceptive insofar as *The Shadow Lines* does not narrate its story in a straightforward linear mode, as does *The Shadow-Line*, the 1917 novella by Joseph Conrad.⁵⁷ In fact, the most radical aspect of the novel is its experimentation with the use of (narrative) time, most evident in what Mee calls its ‘temporal slippage.’⁵⁸ Grounded in the consciousness of a first-person (male) narrator, the narrative constantly moves backward and forward in time, juxtaposing events that took place far apart from one another both in time and space.⁵⁹ The only constant among these whirl of events, fragmentation of time and dissolution of space is the rich and highly

⁵⁶ Suvir Kaul reads the novel as a *bildungsroman* ‘framed by [. . .] larger public questions.’ ‘Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in *The Shadow Lines*,’ in Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 269, 270.

⁵⁷ Dixon sees *The Shadow Lines* as critiquing the novella insofar as the latter upholds the “classical” mapping of the world into East and West.’ 19. Joseph Conrad, *The Shadow-Line: A Confession* (1917; London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1950).

⁵⁸ Jon Mee, “‘The Burthen of the Mystery’: Imagination and Difference in *The Shadow Lines*,’ in Khair 92.

⁵⁹ Mee identifies ‘three basic time frames in the novel.’ ‘The Burthen of the Mystery’ 92. Meenakshi Mukherjee, ‘Maps and Mirrors: Co-ordinates of Meaning in *The Shadow Lines*,’ in Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 258, 255, links ‘the blurring of temporality’ with ‘a realignment of the sense of geography.’

rewarding relationship of the narrator with Tridib, a relationship that he uses as a yardstick to judge the worth of his other relationships with other people, including his own family members, especially his grandmother called Tha'mma, that is, grandmother in Bangla (Bengali).

Unlike the protagonists of, say, nationalist history fiction, the narrator-protagonist of *The Shadow Lines* is not an action-type.⁶⁰ He is rather its opposite, though not exactly a daydreamer. So even if he can qualify as a protagonist, it will be next to impossible for him to qualify as a hero in the romantic sense of the term.⁶¹ Early on in the novel his cousin, Ila, whom he loves madly, calls him a 'coward' when he is visibly frightened in a 'cavernous' underground room the two have shut themselves in to play hide and seek, but play 'a game called Houses' instead.⁶² If one were to look for a precursor, it would be, with necessary modifications in place, the protagonists of high (European) modernism such as

⁶⁰ Nor is he an anti-hero in the picaresque tradition of Henry Fielding or G.V. Desani, the author of *All About H. Hatterr* (1948). Desani is now increasingly seen as having fathered an alternative fictional tradition in Indian English writing to which Rushdie and his successors properly belong. See chapter 1 in Paul Sharrad, *Postcolonial Literary History and Indian English Fiction* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2008). Critics note an unprecedented influence of the Bollywood cinema on the Rushdie-inspired Indian fiction in English. A sharper contrast to the hero of Bollywood action film can hardly be found in Indian English fiction of the post-independence period. In the creation of the unnamed narrator-protagonist of *The Shadow Lines* at least, if not in other respects, Amitav Ghosh is influenced by a radically different tradition of the Indian cinema—that of the Bengali realist cinema best represented by its most illustrious practitioner, the late Satyajit Ray. In his splendid piece on 'Satyajit Ray,' in Khair 1, Ghosh writes: '*The Shadow Lines* [. . .] is, of all my novels, the one that more clearly shows the influence of Satyajit Ray.'

⁶¹ Interestingly, A.N. Kaul, the only critic (as far as I know) who accuses Ghosh of romanticising 'political realities' by way of 'evading rather than exploring' them, himself goes on to use the romantic term 'hero' instead of protagonist in 'a reading' of the novel. 'A Reading of *The Shadow Lines*,' in Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 303.

⁶² Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 47, 49.

Stephen Dedalus, the wonderful creation of James Joyce.⁶³ In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen interacts with a number of mentor figures from whom he might choose. None satisfies the most radical vision he ultimately comes to form of himself, with the result that each role model is rejected in the end.⁶⁴ Joyce uses each rejection to mark a new stage in the development of his protagonist. Similarly, the first part of *The Shadow Lines* can be seen as offering the narrator-protagonist mentors he has to choose from to set up as his role model. Of the two contestants—his grandmother (Tha'mma) and his distant uncle (Tridib, who is his father's cousin on his mother's side), it is the latter who wins him over. At a symbolic level, the victory of Tridib over Tham'ma in becoming the mentor of the narrator-protagonist suggests with which of the two choices—cosmopolitanism and nationalism—Ghosh aligns himself.

The grandmother is typical of her generation, a generation that had fought for national independence and is still bound to (Ghosh would prefer 'locked in,' while Rushdie would 'handcuffed to') the ideology and politics of nationalism. Tridib, on the other hand, represents the emerging (postnational?) cosmopolitanism which is, however, 'rooted' rather than free-floating. In the character of Tridib, Ghosh has poured in all the positive qualities Rabindranath

⁶³ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. R.B. Kershner (Boston and New York: Bedford Books, 1993). Subsequent references are to this edition. The resemblance is most obvious at a later stage in the life of the narrator-protagonist. In Delhi, where he attends college, he visits prostitutes and is threatened by the dean of the college that if he does not mend his ways, he will be expelled from the institution. Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 92-93.

⁶⁴ But the difference between the two should also be noted. While Stephen moves towards alienation, the unnamed narrator-protagonist learns how to overcome 'the mystery of difference' by using 'imagination with precision.' Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 31, 24.

Tagore had envisioned for Indian modernity.⁶⁵ To measure the mental-spiritual growth of the narrator-protagonist of *The Shadow Lines*, a surer way, I would suggest, is to compare his more or less steady relationships with these two characters than to examine the rather bumpy one with his cousin, Ila, who Ghosh uses as embodying a cosmopolitanism he does not seem to approve of, a trendy kind of cosmopolitanism.⁶⁶

In terms of mood, the second part of the novel is lighter and at the same time more serious than the opening one. On the one hand, there is more irony in it (most of which is directed against the rejected mentor/role model, Tha'mma and the 'militant nationalism' that she represents) and, on the other, it has a greater share of tragedy, for it relates (in fact, wrestles to relate) how the accepted mentor/role model, Tridib, was eventually killed in a Hindu-Muslim riot in Dhaka, formerly the capital of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), in January 1964.⁶⁷ It is as if to check tragedy from overflowing the bounds of the narrative frame that Ghosh seems so careful to put up a bulwark/'fold' (after Gilles Deleuze) of irony around it.⁶⁸ The fact that the final impression left behind by *The Shadow Lines* is one of restfulness and sanity is largely due to the interaction in

⁶⁵ A recurrent trope in Tagore is the opening of windows/doors which he uses to suggest the opening of the mind to a reality existing beyond the familiar world. Depending on the context of its appearance, that reality would mean the enigma surrounding the figure of the female, the influence of the West, the absolute reality towards which every mortal soul aspires, and so on.

⁶⁶ For an insightful feminist critique of the novel, see Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, 'The Division of Experience in *The Shadow Lines*,' in Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 287-98.

⁶⁷ Suvir Kaul 278.

⁶⁸ See Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). For an illuminating discussion of the relevance of the baroque (concept of) 'fold' as a critical framework to the study of postcolonial literatures, see Sharrad, especially chapters 1 and 2.

its concluding part of the ironic and the tragic, two contrary pulls balancing each other, just as the madness of love, the narrator-protagonist reflects, is held in check by ‘the idea of justice.’⁶⁹ However, the second part is marked by some other tensions as well, namely, that between silence and speech and, by extension, that between what gets articulated in official records and what does not. As I read *The Shadow Lines* as an interventionist work of fiction, I pay more attention to the consequences deriving from the last than to the ones originating from the other two.

The Shadow Lines is doubly interventionist in that it points not to any (random) erasures in the mainstream nationalist discourse but to the (specific) ones that are most likely, if included, to deflate the apparently all-inclusive, high-blown and homogenising rhetoric of the nation. A related characteristic of these omissions is that more often than not they are truly heroic at the individual level (at least for the individuals concerned) but are officially deemed *unbecoming* of the Indian national character (hence aberrations). Strictly speaking, Tridib, who is ‘working on a Ph.D. in Archeology,’ is *not* a subaltern.⁷⁰ He is the second son of a shrewd diplomat who the grandmother of the narrator-protagonist sarcastically calls ‘the Shaheb’ because he is, according to his mother, ‘so Europeanised that his hat wouldn’t come off his head.’⁷¹ Yet Tridib attains or is reduced to the status of a subaltern by virtue of being killed in a Hindu-Muslim riot in 1964. If

⁶⁹ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 96. The narrator-protagonist celebrates ‘that indivisible sanity that binds people to each other independently of their governments.’ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 230.

⁷⁰ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 7.

⁷¹ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 34.

the subaltern is a discursive construction, then Tridib is, no doubt, a discursively constructed subaltern. In his now classic study of ‘the origin and spread of nationalism,’ Benedict Anderson emphasises the role of print culture (especially realist fiction and the newspaper) in imagining the nation.⁷² But the irony is that the newspapers of the time pay only a perfunctory attention to the series of riots one of which kills Tridib, his grandfather (his mother’s and Mayadebi’s father’s elder brother, relationally called, Jethamoshai, in Bangla/Bengali) and a rickshaw puller called Khalil, without doubt a *real* subaltern. Ghosh articulates his critique of nationalism in terms of the logic of exclusion that works to push, if not totally disarticulate, incidents of communal violence to the margin of the grand narratives of nationalism.

Obviously, not all critics of *The Shadow Lines* read it as a critique of nationalism in terms of the exclusions that I put centre stage in my discussion of the novel. In his brilliant essay, “‘The Burthen of the Mystery’”: Imagination and Difference in *The Shadow Lines*,’ for example, Mee notes ‘the silence of the newspapers and official histories’ surrounding ‘the riots that killed Tridib.’⁷³ The conclusion that Mee seems to draw from ‘this silence’ is that ‘public record’ excludes ‘[t]he clashes between Hindu and Muslim’ because, in being ‘conflicts between ordinary people, not the organized confrontations of war,’ they flout, in the words of the narrator-protagonist of *The Shadow Lines*, ‘the logic of states’

⁷² The idea that the nation is an imagined construct is from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1983).

⁷³ Mee, ‘The Burthen of the Mystery’ 104.

which dictates ‘that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relationships between peoples.’⁷⁴ At a higher level of reasoning, Mee sees the incidents of communal violence as likely to undermine (if included) the very project of ‘imagining the nation’ which is invariably predicated on imagining as much the (national) self as its multiple Other(s). The twin process of homogenisation (the process that constructs *us*) and differentiation (the process that creates *them*) involved in ‘imagining the nation’ is supremely disturbed, Mee argues, because ‘[t]he riots are as much a subversion of difference, the difference between India and Pakistan, as they are the product of difference, the difference between Hindu and Muslim.’⁷⁵ According to Mee, *The Shadow Lines* shows the way that difference can be positively overcome without resorting to (the negative acts of violence):

[. . .] difference continually structures the world but imagination struggles to negotiate forms of translation with a precision that resists collapsing difference into any kind of master code.⁷⁶

In her discussion of the novel, Anjali Gera points to the epistemological limits of ‘European historiographical methods’ that undergird the ‘master narratives of imperialism and nationalism.’⁷⁷ An obvious outcome of these limits is that ‘the little stories of small places’ get ‘erased and overwritten.’⁷⁸ One way

⁷⁴ Mee, ‘The Burthen of the Mystery’ 104; Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 230.

⁷⁵ Mee, ‘The Burthen of the Mystery’ 105.

⁷⁶ Mee, ‘The Burthen of the Mystery’ 108.

⁷⁷ Anjali Gera, ‘Des Kothay? Amitav Ghosh Tells Old Wives Tales,’ in *Khair* 110.

⁷⁸ Gera 110.

of retrieving the ‘histories buried and forgotten under the national edifice,’ Gera contends, is to practice what Carlo Ginzberg has called *microstoria*, that is, microhistory.⁷⁹ In *The Shadow Lines*, Gera finds Ghosh using the ‘methods of microhistory’ ‘to fill the gaps in nationalist histories.’⁸⁰

These critics not only draw attention to the ‘absences and fissures that mark the sites of personal and national trauma’ but also take the trouble of pointing to the source(s) of repressed truth, that is, the potential archive to be probed into in order to retrieve ‘alternate revisionist stories suppressed or elided by nationalism’s dominant discourse.’⁸¹ The most reliable source that the novel suggests, they maintain, is ‘individual memories that do not necessarily tally with the received version of history.’⁸² Although foregrounding ‘Ghosh’s revisionist historiographic project’ is an important critical agenda, these critics tend to forget to ask an even more important question: are all ‘individual memories’ equally relevant and trustworthy? Most importantly, are they equally eloquent irrespective of when and where they are stored up and retrieved?⁸³ *The Shadow Lines* leaves one in no doubt that the answer to these questions is an emphatic no.

There are four eyewitnesses (excluding the two subalterns—the car driver and the security guard) to the tragic death of Tridib in Dhaka—Tha’mma (Tridib’s aunt), Mayadebi (his mother), May (his ‘woman-across-the-seas’) and

⁷⁹ Gera 110, 113n14.

⁸⁰ Gera 111, 127.

⁸¹ Suvir Kaul 269; Gera 111.

⁸² Mukherjee 255.

⁸³ Gera 120.

Robi (his younger brother).⁸⁴ In terms of relationship and daily contact, the one closest to the narrator-protagonist is Tha'mma; yet it is she who remains absolutely silent 'about what happened.'⁸⁵ In addition, the narrator-protagonist is strictly advised by his father not to 'ma[k]e her talk about it.'⁸⁶ As far as Tham'ma is concerned, Ghosh inflects her silence with an element of irony in that, in contrast to her silence regarding the communal killing of Tridib in Dhaka, she is most eloquent about her terrorist-nationalist classmate who was 'to assassinate an English magistrate in Khulna district.'⁸⁷ In a 'voice slow, and dreamy with the effort of recollection,' she narrates in vivid detail the whole episode of his arrest before he was to leave for Khulna to carry out his 'first mission.'⁸⁸ Nor do the parents of the narrator-protagonist who must have learnt of the details of how Tridib got himself killed from those who had witnessed it firsthand say anything about it. In fact, the family keeps it a 'secret.'⁸⁹ Is family any different from the nation then, if both try to disarticulate the death of Tridib, a victim of communal violence?

Yet critics tend to emphasise the importance of family rather than nation in discussing *The Shadow Lines*, as if the two form a neat binary, having nothing to do with each other. In fact, Ghosh himself is responsible for the novel to be read

⁸⁴ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 186. That (re-)imagining the nation is a bourgeois project is nowhere so vividly captured as in the fact that the narrator-protagonist does not consider the two *subaltern* eyewitnesses, the driver and the security guard, as worthy of contact and interrogation.

⁸⁵ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 239.

⁸⁶ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 239.

⁸⁷ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 38.

⁸⁸ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 36, 38. There can be no doubt that if Tham'ma were to rewrite the history of Indian nationalism, she would in all probability include the heroic episode of her terrorist-nationalist classmate, but not the tragic one concerning Tridib.

⁸⁹ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 239.

as privileging the former over the latter. In December 2000, Ghosh and Dipesh Chakrabarty, the famous author of *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Discourse and Historical Difference*, embarked on a long correspondence through ‘a series of e-mail messages.’⁹⁰ In his very first e-mail, Ghosh writes:

Two of my novels (*The Shadow Lines*, and my most recent, *The Glass Palace*) are centred on families. I know that for myself this is a way of *displacing* the ‘nation’ [. . .]. In other words, I’d like to suggest that writing about families is one way of *not* writing about the nation (or other restrictively imagined collectivities).⁹¹

After a close reading of *The Shadow Lines*, one is bound to wonder if Ghosh has really been able to displace the nation in it by writing about families. For the truth is that family is both coextensive and emblematic of nation in the novel. A few examples of the use of family and its principal location—that is, home—will suffice.

The narrator-protagonist grows up in a family where Tham’ma reigns supreme. It is she not his parents who decides how he should be brought up. The values he is scrupulously taught to live by are the ones most conducive to the formation of an identity based on a more or less essentialist national culture. Above everything else, he is expected to be successful in life (the key to which is

⁹⁰ Amitav Ghosh, foreword, ‘A Correspondence on *Provincializing Europe*,’ by Amitav Ghosh and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Radical History Review* 83 (Spring 2002): 146.

⁹¹ Amitav Ghosh and Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘A Correspondence on *Provincializing Europe*,’ *Radical History Review* 83 (Spring 2002): 147. Emphasis in original.

‘proving [oneself] in the examination hall’) and contribute to nation-building.⁹² In order to be able to translate these bourgeois-nationalist visions into reality, the narrator-protagonist must learn that ‘[t]ime is not for wasting, time is for work’: he is even slapped once by Tham’ma for wasting time.⁹³ Second in importance is the lesson that ‘build[ing] a strong country’ requires ‘building a strong body.’⁹⁴ Hence the fact that Tham’ma never objects to his playing cricket even though the modest flat the family lives in is kept absolutely free of everything (such as a chessboard or a pack of cards) that might encourage the wasting of time.⁹⁵ In making Tham’ma the unchallenged arbiter of how the narrator-protagonist would ideally grow up in the family/home, Ghosh is, on the one hand, true to historical reality and, on the other, contradicts his own claim that writing about the families is his way of displacing the nation.⁹⁶ The family/home in *The Shadow Lines* remains what Partha Chatterjee calls the spiritual domain, containing ‘the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence.’⁹⁷ That is to say, family/home in the novel is where (national) difference is asserted rather than disarticulated. In finally rejecting Tham’ma, the narrator-protagonist is in fact rejecting family/home and what they stand for in nationalist imagination.

⁹² Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 23.

⁹³ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 13.

⁹⁴ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 8.

⁹⁵ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 4.

⁹⁶ On the increasingly important role that domesticity, female education, home, and woman came to play in nationalist thought towards the end of the nineteenth century, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British India,’ in *Subaltern Studies VIII*, eds. David Arnold and David Hardiman (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1994) 50-88.

⁹⁷ Chatterjee 121.

That Ghosh has failed to wrest family/home from its nationalist underpinnings is further evident in the symbolic way he uses the trope of house in the novel. Architectural details of house serve to differentiate cultures from one another. The narrator-protagonist and his cousin Ila play the game of houses in an underground room. Under a huge table imported from England, Ila draws a house in the dust gathered on the floor. The narrator-protagonist cannot accept it as ‘a real house [. . .] because it doesn’t have a veranda.’⁹⁸ Born and brought up in a culture in which veranda is an integral part of a (middle-class) house, the narrator-protagonist is unable to think of a house without a veranda: ‘To me the necessity of verandas was no more accountable than the need for doors and walls.’⁹⁹ In a similar way, the sloping roofs of the houses in the capital city of Sri Lanka stand out as a marker of its distinct culture. As in nationalist discourse, in *The Shadow Lines* too, family/home embodies (national) culture, the way of life of a people. Going a step further, Ghosh uses the vivisection of the ancestral house in old Dhaka as emblematic of the partition of India, though the same trope—‘the family feud between two brothers over a trivial matter’—enables him to challenge ‘the traditional conception of family as the domain of disinterested love and solidarity.’¹⁰⁰

So the individual memories that critics draw attention to as the potential source of the stories that have failed to register themselves in the official records

⁹⁸ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 70.

⁹⁹ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 71.

¹⁰⁰ Gera 116.

of the nation, are (found to be) neither formed within the confines of family/home nor retrieved there. Most of the time, these memories are memories of the impact of public events on personal lives, the chief structural coordinate of the historical novel.¹⁰¹ They are thus formed at the public-personal interface. But they are mostly retrieved at public places, places public in nature though privately owned, such as bars, coffee houses, tea stalls and so on. There are, however, telling exceptions. The memory of at least one event is entirely retrieved in family/home. Tham'ma recalls the heroic episode of her terrorist-nationalist classmate in the flat at Gole Park, 'leaning back in her chair, with her hands folded in her lap.'¹⁰² Interestingly, both Tridib and the narrator-protagonist are present as witnesses at the time of recall. By allowing Tham'ma the space of family/home to tell 'her story,' a story whose nationalist thrust is patently obvious, Ghosh gets himself caught up in the nationalist division of social space: culture/femaleness/home/nation versus politics/maleness/world/empire.

Even though Ghosh seems to have failed in *The Shadow Lines* in getting family/home dissociated from the set of cultural values nationalism invests them with, he has at least succeeded in pointing to a 'Third Space' that can be effectively used to re-imagine the nation, a re-imagining that pays as much attention to the dynamics of difference as to that of homogeneity, without prioritising one over the other, without privileging, for example, flat roofs over

¹⁰¹ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (1937; London: Merlin Press, 1962) 23, relates the emergence of the historical novel to historical consciousness becoming 'a *mass experience*' in Europe at the turn of the eighteenth century. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰² Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 36.

sloping ones.¹⁰³ That space is those favourite haunts of Tridib: ‘coffee houses, bars, street-corner addas—the sort of place where people come, talk and go away without expecting to know each other any further’: Tridib is ‘happiest in [these] neutral, impersonal places.’¹⁰⁴ Since the narrator-protagonist accepts Tridib as his mentor, it follows that the kind of identity that these spaces help to form will come to be seen as the identity he and his creator approve of. Given the fact that Tridib is meant to be an anti-thesis to all Tham’ma stands for, it is not difficult to imagine what that identity could possibly be. Gera writes: ‘Tridib hints at possibilities of community formation, which might be more aptly termed post-nationalist.’¹⁰⁵ The term ‘post-nationalist’ is perhaps *too* ‘apt,’ given its implied association with the hegemony of global capitalism that is ever so bent on collapsing all differences to perpetuate its supremacy.

There can be no doubt that *The Shadow Lines* promotes cosmopolitanism in opposition to parochial nationalism. In his discussion of the novel, Shameem Black goes even so far as to call Ghosh ‘a literary theorist of cosmopolitanism.’¹⁰⁶ At the same time, it is also true that the novel does not endorse all kinds of cosmopolitanism, especially the kind associated with Ila of whom Tridib says: ‘the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although

¹⁰³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (1994; London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 53-56.

¹⁰⁴ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 9.

¹⁰⁵ Gera 119.

¹⁰⁶ Shameem Black, ‘Cosmopolitanism at Home: Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*,’ *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 41.3 (2006): 50.

she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all.’¹⁰⁷ In other words, a true cosmopolitan moves between cultures but remains rooted in his or her own culture at the same time. The right kind of (diasporic) cosmopolitanism combines roots with routes. Tridib is its best illustration. His doctoral study is on the ‘sites associated with the Sena dynasty of Bengal.’¹⁰⁸ But he can ‘hold forth on all kinds of subjects— Mesopotamian stellae, East European jazz, the habits of arboreal apes, the plays of Garcia Lorca, there seemed to be no end to the things he could talk about.’¹⁰⁹ There are obvious reasons why Ghosh prefers Tridib’s kind of cosmopolitanism to Ila’s type. One of the dangers of rootless cosmopolitanism is that it can trap one into ‘other people’s inventions,’ just as Ila is deceived into believing that she is ‘free’ in England, despite being subject(ed) to racial bullying.¹¹⁰ Tham’ma is another example of one trapped into the narratives of essentialist nationalism.

If rootedness saves cosmopolitanism from being an ally to global capitalism, routes provide an antidote to divisive and parochial nationalism. To qualify as a citizen of the world, one must open oneself to the world at large, going beyond home/national interests. Although born and brought up in a culture where middle-class houses have flat roofs, Tridib is able to appreciate the sloping roofs of the houses in Colombo because he is not predisposed to judging (like a parochial nationalist) difference as aberration. Instead of repelling, difference

¹⁰⁷ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 21.

¹⁰⁸ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 7.

¹⁰⁹ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 8-9.

¹¹⁰ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 31, 32.

always rouses his curiosity and thus draws him closer to whatever is different. In contrast to what Tham'ma teaches the narrator-protagonist and wants him to be, Tridib teaches him 'to use [his] imagination with precision.'¹¹¹ The phrase neatly captures the interdependence of routes and roots, that is, cosmopolitanism and nationalism, if one may put it so. Imagination enables one to cross borders, while precision keeps it from becoming free-floating, rootless. Possibly the best way to express the idea of cosmopolitanism Ghosh advocates in *The Shadow Lines* is to invoke the metaphor of kite-flying: a kite has the whole sky to roam about even when it is firmly in the hands of the kite-flyer. In the same way, a cosmopolitan belongs to the whole world and is at the same time rooted in his/her own culture.

Interestingly, the spaces associated with Tridib are also the spaces where his (own) story (now owned by others) is finally retrieved (from personal memory) and given a voice. *The Shadow Lines* has two eyewitness accounts of his tragic death—one by May and the other by Robi. The recounting of both begins (or is at least triggered off) in a public place but ends (in fact, is brought to an end) in a private one. Of the two narrations, however, the one by Robi is an *involuntary* one, a point worth taking note of, for it is an obvious pointer to its traumatic nature. As Susan J. Brison has forcefully argued: 'Memories of traumatic events can be themselves traumatic: uncontrollable, intrusive, and frequently somatic. They are experienced by the survivor as inflicted, not chosen

¹¹¹ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 24.

– as flashbacks to the events themselves.’¹¹² One tested way of recovering the loss of selfhood caused by what Brison calls ‘(human-inflicted) trauma’ is to transform the traumatic memory into or replace it by ‘narrative memory.’¹¹³ In other words, it has to be turned into, as Jonathan Shay puts it, ‘a fully realized narrative.’¹¹⁴

The three—Ila, the narrator-protagonist and Robi—have just finished dinner at ‘a small Bangladeshi place called the Maharaja, in Clapham.’¹¹⁵ The owner of the restaurant (Robi takes him to be a waiter), one called Rehman-shaheb, comes over to sit with them for a while. After being informed by Ila that Robi had once lived in Dhaka, Rehman-shaheb asks him if he had ever been to what is known as the older part of the city. It is this apparently innocent query (or ‘a chance remark,’ as Robi puts it) that triggers off the recall of the chain of traumatic memories associated with the killing of Tridib in Dhaka.¹¹⁶ Unable to control himself, Robi walks out of the restaurant, followed by the other two. He then finds ‘a derelict white church, with a short flight of steps in front,’ surrounded by ‘an overgrown garden.’¹¹⁷ ‘Clearing a space for himself among the leaves on the stairs,’ Robi sits down, lights a cigarette and begins his narration.¹¹⁸

These small details of the setting suggest that the act of recall takes place in a

¹¹² Susan J. Brison, ‘Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self,’ in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, eds. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crew, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1999) 40.

¹¹³ Brison 41.

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Shay, cited in Brison 48.

¹¹⁵ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 240.

¹¹⁶ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 247.

¹¹⁷ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 243.

¹¹⁸ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 243.

kind of 'liminal space,' lying in between the private and the public.¹¹⁹ The setting is apt, for what Robi is telling is not so much what had happened in reality but how it frequently appears in his dream. Robi is in fact narrativising a nightmare and is thus opening up for himself a (narrative) space where it will be possible for him to come to terms with the trauma associated with that nightmare, to be 'able to rid [himself] of that dream,' 'to be free of that memory.'¹²⁰ The final narrative destiny of the traumatic event through the double filter of nightmare and narration can be taken as proof of the fact that Robi is on the road to self-recovery. His act of recall is all the more effective insofar as there are two 'empathic other[s]' to listen to his trauma narrative.¹²¹

The second recounting by May has a great deal in common with the first one by Robi. The time is precisely the same: after dinner. The physical setting is the bed sitting-room of May at Islington. Although May is narrating 'how Tridib died' *now* in her room, the narration had in effect commenced in 'a sandwich bar' that May had found for the narrator-protagonist during a coffee break the two took at the time of collecting money for famine relief in Africa.¹²² There are, however, two crucial differences between the two acts of recall. First, unlike Robi's, May's is a deliberate one. The narrator-protagonist is perceptive enough to take in the small detail. Seeing her 'sitting bolt upright, her hands on the table, one upon the other,' he 'could tell that she had been preparing herself for that

¹¹⁹ Renée Green, cited in Bhabha 5.

¹²⁰ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 246. Brison notes a correspondence between nightmare and trauma in terms of the suspension of will (power) they both produce. 43.

¹²¹ Brison 46.

¹²² Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 250, 165.

moment.’¹²³ Second, being voluntary, May’s narration is more a confession than a painful tussle to give narrative form to a traumatic memory which it undoubtedly is (or at least has been till now) for Robi. May herself confessed at the sandwich bar, when the narrator-protagonist had asked her if she had been in love with Tridib:

What do you think I’ve been asking myself these last seventeen years? I don’t know whether any of it was real, whether I was in love with him, or merely fascinated by the sense of defeat that surrounded him. I don’t know whether everything else that happened was my fault; whether I’d have behaved otherwise if I’d really loved him. What do you think I’ve been doing ever since, but trying to cope with that guilt?¹²⁴

It is these two differences (confession and deliberation) that basically structure May’s recounting of Tridib’s death.¹²⁵ The presence of these two elements in her narrative also suggests that what May narrates is already a well-formed story (that is why she does not mind omitting details in her recall, excusing herself, ‘I’m sure you know that.’¹²⁶). The repeated questions in the quotation above are a clear indication that what May has been trying to come to terms with is not so much the (traumatic) memory surrounding the death of Tridib as the sense of guilt she has felt ever since its occurrence. Yet May’s narration does more than Robi’s, which is essentially therapeutic in effect. It absolves her

¹²³ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 250.

¹²⁴ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 175.

¹²⁵ Confession is always deliberate/self-willed, unless under systematic torture.

¹²⁶ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 250.

from her sense of guilt on the one hand and gives the narrator-protagonist ‘the glimpse [. . .] of a final redemptive mystery’ on the other.¹²⁷

There can be no doubt that both narrations bring relief to the narrators concerned. But they have been possible only because there have been listeners who cared to listen to them in the first instance. Brison cites Shay to argue her point that ‘one cannot recover in isolation’: ‘narrative heals personality changes only if the survivor finds or creates a trustworthy community of listeners for it.’¹²⁸ There is thus an ethical dimension to witnessing those episodes discarded by the nation and putting them back into the official record. *The Shadow Lines* shows the way it can be done.

The first step is to select the right site. Since home and the nation intersect each other in multiple ways, only a liminal space can be chosen for the project to get under way. The spaces associated with Tribid are all spaces lying in between the personal and the public. No wonder the two acts of recall by May and Robi begin in a sandwich bar and a restaurant, respectively. But by moving (or withdrawing?) into more intimate and sequestered locations such as an abandoned church, ‘a room of one’s own,’ they suggest that it is home which has to be made to house these untold stories before bringing them out in the public. If home is where nationalist ideology reigns supreme, it is to be home where its hegemony has to be challenged first. Home will have to bear witness not only to the glorious achievements of the nation but also to the ones it hesitates to own publicly. It

¹²⁷ Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* 252.

¹²⁸ Brison 48; Shay, cited in Brison 48.

must be as accommodating and responsive to Tridib and his story as it is to Tham'ma, her nationalist-terrorist classmate and his story. Only then a re-imagining of the nation will also be possible. The same movement from outside to inside, from routes to roots should go into the re-making of the community that is the nation. Instead of imagining the nation in terms of 'filiations' and roots, it has to be imagined in terms of 'affiliations' and routes so that it can accommodate cosmopolitanism rather than parochialism and move towards embracing (real not rhetorical) inclusivity instead of exclusivity.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ The terms 'filiations' and 'affiliations' are used here in the sense in which Edward W. Said, uses them in his introductory chapter in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1983) 1-30. Said defines 'filial relationship' as one 'held together by natural bonds and natural forms of authority—involving obedience, fear, love, respect, and instinctual conflict.' On the other hand, 'the new affiliative relationship changes these bonds into what seem to be transpersonal forms—such as guild consciousness, consensus, collegiality, professional respect, class, and the hegemony of a dominant culture.' But the 'affiliative order' can also 'reproduce the skeleton of family authority supposedly left behind when the family was left behind.' 20, 21, 22. The movement of the novel from 'Going Away,' the title of its first part, to 'Coming Home,' the title of the second part, seems to suggest the same trajectory in the re-imagining of the nation. See also Sujala Singh, 'The Routes of National Identity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*,' in Peter Morey and Alex Tickell, eds. *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005) 161-80.

CHAPTER 9

Revisionist Historical Fiction: *The Devil's Wind* (1972)

This is nothing new. The British have been mangling Indian history for centuries.

Salman Rushdie¹

Postcoloniality is a condition requiring a cure, and the passage to that cure involves a return to buried memories of colonial trauma.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair²

In a sense, this study comes full circle in this chapter. It began with a consideration of the historical fiction written by the Indians at the turn of the nineteenth century. India at that time was under British rule. In most cases, the historical period chosen for representation was one dating back to a time before the British came to India. For historical reasons engagement with the colonial period was conspicuously absent. A glorious Hindu past was invoked to repair the damaged Indian psyche. In such cases, the imagined nation tended to be one of

¹ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991) 102.

² Rukmini Bhaya Nair, *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: The Idea of Indifference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) xi.

Hindus, not of Indians, as in *Padmini: An Indian Romance* by T. Ramakrishna Pillai, discussed in chapter 3.³ At the same time, often a more pluralistic past was also chosen to construct a truly secular Indian cultural identity, as in *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen*, which has been examined in chapter 4.⁴

Writers of nationalist history fiction, written mainly in the 1930s and 1940s and investigated in chapters 5 and 6, focused on near rather than distant past. This shift of focus is indicative of the mood of contemporary nationalist struggle for freedom. There was no need to project present concerns onto the historical screen of the past. The nation-in-the-making could confront its imperial adversary head-on. As the anti-colonial nationalist movement gathered momentum from the 1920s onward, it also tended to become more parochial. Indian nationalism was now either Hindu nationalism or Muslim separatism. In the post-independence period, as the nation-state failed to live up to the high ideals and commitments it had made during the independence struggle, disillusionment and disappointment set in, especially after the Emergency imposed in 1975 by the first female Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi. The grand narratives of the nation came under close scrutiny. Feminists led the way. History-based fiction produced by the first generation of post-independence women writers engages with the politics of representation so patently obvious in

³ T. Ramakrishna [Pillai], *Padmini: An Indian Romance* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd., 1903). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁴ Sirdar Jogendra Singh, *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (London: James Nisbet & Co., [sic] Limited, 1909). Subsequent references are to this edition.

the dominant male-centred nationalist discourse. Chapter 7 examines *Some Inner Fury* by Kamala Markandaya to see how one of the major women writers uses history in her novel to critique nationalist-patriarchal ideology.⁵

Then came the generation of midnight's children and grandchildren ably led by Salman Rushdie who set out to demolish the myths of the nation in work after work, one of which—*The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh—I have analysed in the previous chapter.⁶ Was there then no interest in the colonial period itself? Did the postcolonial nation just forget the 'memories of colonial trauma'? Was there no urge to revisit the colonial archive to restore the blackened figures of Indian history to the dignity to which they were entitled? There was. But in the clamour of the Rushdie affair this low-key historical project was all but lost from critical focus. Revisionist historical fiction, the phrase I have chosen to designate the branch of the Indian historical novel that has 'writing back' to colonial discourse as its main critical agenda, is an important, if not impressive, category of that novel. Its exclusion from any study dealing with Indian historical fiction would leave that study open to the charges of incompleteness and partiality. Focused as it is on an analysis of a revisionist historical text (*The Devil's Wind* [1972] by Manohar Malgonkar), this penultimate chapter can thus be seen as

⁵ Kamala Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* (1955; New York: Signet Books, 1956). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁶ Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, educational ed. (1988; Delhi: Oxford UP, 1995). Subsequent references are to this edition.

rounding off the discussion of the Indian historical novel by injecting into it the missing historical link/period, that is, India under the colonial regime.⁷

The huge literary sensation that Rushdie created by the publication of his second novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) did not taper off quietly, at least not in India.⁸ Rather, its dazzling brilliance was recharged and thus sustained by the regular appearance one after another of what critics have called Rushdie-inspired or post-Rushdie novels.⁹ Following the example set by the 'irreverent' guru, these works of fiction set out mostly to re-imagine the Indian nation, bringing in the 'fragments' of the nation left out of its official account produced by bourgeois-nationalist as well as liberal-Marxist intelligentsia/leadership.¹⁰ In the majority of cases, the historical period covered was the decades immediately preceding and succeeding the political birth of the nation in 1947, though the Nehruvian era proved to be a special favourite. In *Looking through Glass* (1995), for example, Mukul Kesavan revisits (in fact, looks through a non-communal glass at) the Quit India Movement of 1942 to re-examine the relationship that had historically obtained between the Indian Muslim community and the anti-colonial national

⁷ Manohar Malgonkar, *The Devil's Wind* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1972). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁸ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981; London: Picador, 1982). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁹ An excellent chapter on post-Rushdie Indian fiction in English is by Jon Mee, 'After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and 1990s,' in *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (New York: Columbia UP, 2003) 318-336. I have extensively drawn on Mee in the preceding chapter on *The Shadow Lines*.

¹⁰ Paul Sharrad rightly notes: 'Of Salman Rushdie, one might expect anything, especially the irreverent.' *Postcolonial Literary History and Indian English Fiction* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2008) 97. The term 'fragments' comes from Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993).

struggle for independence.¹¹ In the process, one of the many ‘fragments’ of the nation (the Muslims of India) becomes visible (is, in fact, zoomed in) on the national canvas painted by history.

The appearance of Rushdie on the Indian (English) literary scene and the kind of fiction he fathered and inspired others to beget has come to be seen to have been on the whole beneficial to the Indian English fiction. Of the ‘messianic’ role of Rushdie and his novel, Josna E. Rege writes:

By 1980, nation and novel had reached a state of impasse: both the unitary model of the modern nation-state and the narrative of the modern Indian English novel needed rethinking. At this particular historical moment the pressing problem of action for the English-educated classes, so long self-defined in relation to the Indian nation, was how to reformulate that relationship creatively. This was the problem addressed by Salman Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children* (MC). It broke both deadlocks simultaneously [. . .].¹²

To a large extent, what Rege says is true. Yet alongside the invigorating effect of the Rushdie phenomenon she speaks of so positively, there was perhaps

¹¹ Mukul Kesavan, *Looking through Glass* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995). Subsequent references are to this edition. On the trope of ‘looking through glass’ in the works of Amitav Ghosh, Kesavan, and Rushdie, see chapter 10 in Sharrad.

¹² Mee calls Rushdie the ‘messiah’ of the Indian novel in English that witnessed ‘a second coming’ in the 1980s. The irony should be noted. While Mee compares Rushdie with Christ, the Saviour, with the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1989 Rushdie earned for himself the status of Satan. 318. Josna E. Rege, *Colonial Karma: Self, Action, and Nation in the Indian English Novel* (Hampshire and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 107.

an unintended negative impact too, an impact that went unnoticed in the hullabaloo of the day. The almost absolute preoccupation of midnight's children and grandchildren with the theme of re-imagining the nation discouraged the emergence of other kinds of fiction on the one hand, and stifled the growth of those that had already begun to appear on the other.¹³ One of the latter kind of fiction was the lean body of works whose central concern was *not* the re-imagining of the Indian nation but the re-examining of the colonial archive to deconstruct its politics of representation, especially its construction of the Indian/native character. For the authors of these works, the project of imagining the nation was still not over.

Of Calibans and Magwitches: The Politics of Colonial Representation

Necessarily, of all colonial archives, it was English history that held the most attraction for writers who chose to 'write back.' Indians (in fact, all natives) are, for reasons too obvious now to bear repetition, mostly absent from the history of

¹³ It is important to connect the emergence of Indian historical metafiction in English in the 1980s with the postmodernist distrust of the 'grand narratives' in general and of nationalist ideology in particular at about the same time. Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* appeared in 1979, preceding Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* just by two years.

the colonial masters.¹⁴ When they are to be found at all, they are invariably no more than projections of colonial anxiety and desire, anxiety in the case of male natives and desire in that of female ones.¹⁵ In other words, they are stereotypes.¹⁶ These stock (male) characters in the drama of ‘the white man’s burden’ neatly fall into two distinct but interrelated categories: they are either degenerate brutes—that is, Calibans—or dangerous rogues, the Magwitches.¹⁷ Both (stereo)types are worked into justifying the benevolent presence of white rule. The Calibans are to be civilised and won over by Prospero to ‘sweetness and light,’ and the colonial masters (the Prosperos) are there to ensure it, if not in reality, at least in rhetoric.¹⁸ They cannot risk the rhetoric of civilising mission falling apart and thus lay bare the real business of the colonial venture: ruthless exploitation of the colonised in all the ways possible. As long as the rhetoric holds ground, they can go on ‘pos[ing] as gods.’¹⁹

¹⁴ The exclusion of the natives from the historical narratives of the colonial masters is a strategic move; for to allow them entry into history as subjects is to admit that they are ‘modern.’ If so, what justification would there be for the colonial rule to be there at all?

¹⁵ See Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁶ *Orientalism* by Edward W. Said (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) is still the most comprehensive discussion of the stereotyping of the Others by the West. For a historically nuanced account of the ways the Indians were seen in British colonial discourse, see chapter 3 in Francis G. Hutchins, *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1967). On Muslim stereotypes in colonial context, see Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India’s Muslims since Independence* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997) 25-36; in Anglo-Indian fiction, Benazir Durdana, *Muslim India in Anglo-Indian Fiction* (Dhaka: writers.ink, 2008), particularly chapter 4: Dehumanization of Muslim Characters.

¹⁷ Rudyard Kipling, ‘The White Man’s Burden,’ in *A Choice of Kipling’s Verse Made by T.S. Eliot*, comp. T.S. Eliot, 11th impression (1941; London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1967) 136-37.

¹⁸ ‘Sweetness and Light’ is the title of chapter 1 in Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. J. Dover Wilson, rpt. (1932; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1961).

¹⁹ E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, rpt. (1924; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 49.

But the Magwitches are too dangerous either to be left to themselves or to be given a chance to mend themselves. They are a threat to the law-and-order situation. After centuries of darkness, despotism and disorder, the colonial state has finally been able, it claims, to establish peace and order, putting India on its way to progress and prosperity. The Magwitches are not going to spoil all this. They are to be contained at any cost. Otherwise civil rights, democracy, decency, modernity, progress and so on—in short, the whole Enlightenment heritage—will come to naught. In proportion to the threat they pose to the smooth working of liberalism and utilitarianism—the two *isms* that can be identified as being driven by a third, that is, capitalism—Magwitches are dealt with in several different ways: brought to law and then deported or executed. Sometimes law is done with, and Magwitches are just hunted down, the justification being that there is no need for invoking law when law itself is threatened (by the Magwitches).²⁰

²⁰ To compare the so-called Indian criminals to Magwitch may appear a little too far-fetched. But the comparison (ignoring the class issue for the moment) holds in the context of the rapidly expanding British Empire in South Asia from the early nineteenth century onwards. In 1885, for example, Burma (now Myanmar) became a province of British Raj. The colonial state was thus able to punish the trouble-makers by sending them into exile from one corner of British India to another. Both Bahadur Shah Zafar II, the last Mughal Emperor, and the deposed Burmese King Thebaw died in exile, in Rangoon and Ratnagiri, respectively. It is believed that Nana Saheb, the protagonist of *The Devil's Wind*, perished in Terai jungles in Nepal, far away from his hometown of Bithoor in North India. The firebrand Indian nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak served his six-year term (from 1908 to 1914) in Mandalay prison. Interestingly, Tilak was born where King Thebaw died in exile, that is, Ratnagiri.

1857 in History and Literature

The year 1857—the famous year of the Great Rebellion from the Indian perspective and the notorious one of the Indian/Sepoy Mutiny from the British point of view—yielded a rich crop of Indian Magwitches who planned, the British tend(ed) to hold, to bring about the fall of the Company Bahadur/Raj by instigating the Indian sepoys (both Hindus and Muslims) to take arms against the white sahibs on the pretext that the latter had caused the former to be polluted by compelling them to use greased cartridges.²¹ The grease in question was (believed to have been) made from cow and pig fat: both were taboo—the former to the Hindus and the latter to the Muslims. According to contemporary British historians, the small discontent of the sepoys was blown up into a full-fledged mutiny against the East India Company by the immoral Maratha and Mughal princes who were supposed to have been in mortal fear of Governor-General Lord Dalhousie who by his ‘Doctrine of Lapse’ went on confiscating one princely state after another. In simple terms, what the doctrine meant is that in the case of death of a ruler leaving behind no son, his domain was ‘annexed’ to the territory already under the direct rule of the Company.

Like the histories of other nations, the history of modern India also has its crescendos and flats. Of the former, the so-called Sepoy Mutiny is one that clearly stands out in the nineteenth century. Both British and Indian historians,

²¹ This study uses both terms—the Great Rebellion and the Indian/Sepoy Mutiny—along with the Uprising interchangeably.

scholars working in other fields such as economics, sociology, political science, postcolonial studies and so on as well as creative writers continue to visit and re-visit the site to understand the underlying dynamics that could unleash such barbarity, cruelty, fury, hatred and violence in both the parties concerned. As is expected, a fair account of what really happened and why is hard, if not impossible, to come across, though ‘the basic facts remain above controversy.’²² What one gets instead are narratives meant to justify one position or the other, that is, either British or Indian. As the *Indian* compiler of an anthology of English-language historical writings on the Mutiny puts it in his Introduction, ‘A very plausible contention about a book on the Rising of 1857 is that it may evince a racial spirit which characterised the writings on the Indian Mutiny in general.’²³ The British attitude is more or less the same. ‘The events of 1857,’ writes Thomas R. Metcalf, ‘have long been the subject of bitter controversy, and have provoked more impassioned [*sic*] literature than any other single event in Indian history.’²⁴ Even more than a century (and a half) later, the trend ‘persists.’²⁵

In literary-cultural terrain, a somewhat analogous situation obtains. In an extensive study of the *Novels on the Indian Mutiny*, Shailendra Dhari Singh observes:

²² Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1964) 46.

²³ Sashi Bhusan Chaudhuri, *English Historical Writings on the Indian Mutiny 1857-1859* (Calcutta: The World Press Private Ltd., 1979) 1.

²⁴ Metcalf 46.

²⁵ Metcalf 56.

The British history books, then, play up the different episodes and massacres of the mutiny from their point of view. It was necessary to disparage the Indian leaders and throw a sort of a blanket over the Indian scenes and activities. The same playing up of British valour and heroism is to be found in the English novels written by British authors on the Indian Mutiny, and they became, towards the end of the nineteenth century, even more purposive.²⁶

Singh discusses a total of fifty ‘Mutiny novels,’ the latest (*The Sound of Fury* by Richard Collier) dated 1964. Interestingly, the long list of Mutiny novels contains not a single one written by an Indian. Another remarkable point is that the first centenary of the Mutiny (that is, the year 1957) marks a flurry of Indian scholarly (mostly historical) publications dealing with the subject. Of the fifteen historical works on the Great Rebellion, the year of publication for ten is 1957. Only one, *The Indian War of Independence* by V.D. Savarkar (1883-1966), is a pre-independence publication.²⁷ Why does the Uprising seem to have drawn almost no attention from the Indian artists and authors? Is there something in it that repels rather than attracts Indian artistic/literary imagination?

²⁶ Shailendra Dhari Singh, *Novels on the Indian Mutiny* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann India, 1973) 26.

²⁷ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence 1857*, 8th ed. (1909; New Delhi: Rajdhani Granthagar, 1970). Incidentally, it was Savarkar who in his 1923 book—*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*—propounded the now-famous concept of *Hindutva* (roughly Hinduness). He later joined the All-India Hindu Mahasabha in 1937 and served as its president from 1937 to 1944.

There is a clue to an answer in the extract I have cited from Singh above. The Mutiny became a site for the British where they could construct themselves as ‘heroic,’ relieving the besieged, rescuing children, saving women, taking care of the elderly and the wounded, restoring law and order, and so on. In addition, it showed up the resilience of the British code of behaviour in times of crisis: cool headedness, courage, efficacy, endurance, fraternity, patriotism, sacrifice and solidarity were not just some hollow English words; they seemed to contain an indestructible essence of the things/qualities they stood for.²⁸ In other words, the Great Rebellion turned out to be a fertile ground for the empowerment of the British both militarily and discursively, by demonstrating the superiority of British military might to its Indian counterpart, a superiority that in turn gave them narrative power. As Francis G. Hutchins puts it, ‘Englishmen constructed a myth of their own omniscience, and a further myth which presumed to describe the “real India”.’²⁹ In short, the Uprising became for the British, to borrow from Michel Foucault, an extraordinary nexus of knowledge and power.³⁰

By contrast, the Indian side of the picture was one of betrayal, cowardice, defection, disorder, disunity, lack of leadership and foresightedness, and so on. That is to say, the Mutiny was not a site that an Indian would fondly visit. Its memory pained rather than enlivened the Indian psyche. Even amid the first

²⁸ Or did it work the other way round, with myths of British character retrospectively generated to hide its drawbacks from view, as Hutchins argues? See chapter 4 in Hutchins.

²⁹ Hutchins 156.

³⁰ See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1980).

centenary celebrations of the great historical event, R.C. Majumdar, an otherwise staunch Hindu nationalist historian, could write about Nana Saheb, one of the so-called villains of the Mutiny: ‘There is nothing in the annals of the long drawn out siege [of Cawnpur/Kanpur], nor in the subsequent events, which may, by the remotest stretch of imagination entitle him to respect either as a general or as a man.’³¹

Two points stand out from what Majumdar says about Nana Saheb: either, in comparison to British historians of the Mutiny, Indian historians are less biased and more objective, or they have so thoroughly internalised the British reconstruction of the Rebellion that Nana Saheb, a debased villain of the Uprising from British perspective, also appears to be so from the Indian point of view. Small wonder in his Author’s Note to *The Devil’s Wind*, the text I have chosen to analyse in this chapter in order to delineate how revisionist historical fiction deconstructs the representation of the so-called Indian villains in colonial discourse/history, Manohar Malgongkar claims: ‘I discovered that the stories of Nana and the revolt have never been told from the Indian point of view.’³² That is to say, even when Indians have told the story, they have done so, looking through the British lens.³³

³¹ R.C. Majumdar, cited in G.S. Amur, *Manohar Malgongkar* (London and New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann India, 1973) 124.

³² Malgongkar 6.

³³ Chinua Achebe draws attention to how colonial/imperial rhetoric can make the colonised hate themselves. That is to say, it can make them feel strangers to themselves by alienating them from the culture and tradition they are born into. Interview with Achebe by Bill Moyers, cited in

The Devil's Wind *Writes Back*

Malgonkar (1913-2010) is a near contemporary of the famous trio of Indian fiction in English, namely Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004), R.K. Narayan (1906-2001), and Raja Rao (1908-2006). Interestingly, some element or other from each of the three founding fathers of Indian English fiction can be found both in his life and works. For example, like Rao, Malgonkar is a Brahmin; but unlike Rao and Anand, he was educated only in India, as was Narayan. In terms of artistic sensibility and creative temperament, Malgonkar is closer to Narayan and Anand than Rao. Malgonkar admires Narayan because the latter knows how to tell a story well.³⁴ Like the fictional world of Anand, however, that of Malgonkar is also an expansive one, teeming with characters and incidents. His fictional canvas is much larger than the one Narayan feels comfortable to work with. There are at least two areas where Malgonkar and Rao have a good deal in common: use of English and philosophy of life. Of the Indian writers in English, Malgonkar considers Rao 'a very good writer' in that he 'can use English perhaps better than most other Indian writers.'³⁵ Ideologically, he is as great a lover of Sanskrit and Indian tradition as Rao.³⁶ No wonder, then, in imagining the nation Malgonkar is closer to Rao than the other two.

Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe* (London: James Currey; Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1991) 6.

³⁴ James Y. Dayananda, *Manohar Malgonkar* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1974) 31.

³⁵ Dayananda 32.

³⁶ Amur 23.

Malgonkar began his writing career with a book called *Kanhoji Angrey* in 1959 at the age of forty-six. It was followed by his first novel *Distant Drum* in 1960. *The Devil's Wind* is his fifth work of fiction, published in 1972.³⁷ It tells, as Malgonkar puts it in his Author's Note, 'Nana's story, as I believe he might have written it himself.'³⁸ Recounted in retrospect, the tale as told by Nana follows a clear linear trajectory, beginning in his childhood and ending in the aftermath of the Great Rebellion. The novel has the classic three-part structure, with each part bearing a title of its own: the first one is called 'Bithoor'; the second, 'Kanpur'; and the third, 'Gone Away.' In the first part, the circumstances in which Nana was born, how he came to be known as Nana rather than Dhondu Pant (the name he was actually given by his natural father), the courtly environment in which he grew up, attained manhood and married a couple of times, are sketched. A wider historical frame encases the close-up personal picture and thus lends it the specifics of space and time. The historical developments in 'Bithoor' prepare the reader for what comes in 'Kanpur.'

The year is 1818. The British depose Bajirao II, the Peshwa at Poona, and banish him to Bithoor, twelve miles from Kanpur.³⁹ In return of a few concessions, he is made to abandon 'all claims to his heritage [. . .] for himself as well as for his successors, and to undertake that he would never return to his

³⁷ The other three are *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princes* (1963) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964).

³⁸ Malgonkar 6.

³⁹ The Europeans routinely mispronounce(ed) Kanpur as Cawnpore.

homeland.’⁴⁰ About a decade later, Bajirao adopts the three-year-old Dhondu Pant as his heir and decrees that the latter be called Nana Saheb after one of his Peshwa ancestors. Nana grows up learning fencing, riding, and swimming along with Mani, who later becomes the Rani of Jhansi. He is taught Sanskrit by a Benares priest and English by the Eurasian Todd.⁴¹

Complications begin to arise with the death of Bajirao in 1851. The British decide to give Nana nothing, not even the pension they had conceded to his father. Rather they make difficulties for him. For example, the new Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, who succeeds Lord Hardinge, curtly turns down his appeal to call himself a *Maharaja*. In addition, Dalhousie withdraws ‘a special privilege that [. . .] members of Bajirao’s family as well as the retainers, ha[ve] enjoyed for the past thirty-three years: the exemption from the jurisdiction of the Company’s law courts.’⁴² As these apparently small personal deprivations and insults accumulate for Nana, Dalhousie annexes the Kingdom of Oudh ‘on a pretext so unsubstantial as to be nonexistent.’⁴³ Nana sees the annexation of Oudh as triggering off the chain of events culminating in the Uprising:

The seizure of Oudh brought us face to face with the reality of the Company’s rule. It made us lift our eyes from our little fishpond world and

⁴⁰ Malgonkar 18.

⁴¹ The use of James Todd, the famous author of *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (published in two volumes in 1829 and 1831), adds historicity to the novel. On the influence of *Annals* on Bengali militant nationalist imagination, see chapter 11 in Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Elusive Terrain: Culture and Literary Memory* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2008).

⁴² Malgonkar 56.

⁴³ Malgonkar 64.

look around. And suddenly, like some complex mathematical equation that only in its final step yields a simple, uncomplicated answer, the solution emerged in one word: revolt. The forces were already at work.⁴⁴

Fresh grievances keep appearing on a daily basis. Dalhousie conspires to abolish the monarchy with the death of Bahadur Shah Zafar II, ‘a shrunken old man in his eighties and only half alive.’⁴⁵ One way or another, the conspiracy leaks out and a counter scheme is initiated by one of the many Mughal queens, Zeenat Mahal. Ahmadulla Shah, the Moulvi of Fyzabad, ‘the firebrand patriot who has become familiar to the world as the Mad Mullah,’ embraces her cause.⁴⁶ Instead of ‘preaching religion,’ he urges his followers to “‘kill the *firanghis* [the foreigners] as though they were cobras and mad dogs—to exterminate their race.’”⁴⁷

The year 1857 opens rather inauspiciously. The Company introduces a new rifle and a new cartridge. The cartridge in question is smothered in grease rumoured to be made from the fat of pigs and cows. The first lightning of the storm of revolt strikes soon afterwards, for the greased cartridge comes to be seen ‘as an instrument of conversion’: ‘The hat men, having conquered the country, are now making the people Christians. Soon we’ll all be Issahies!’⁴⁸ The sepoy in the barracks at Dum Dum (near Calcutta/Kolkata) are the first to rise in protest.

⁴⁴ Malgonkar 65.

⁴⁵ Malgonkar 65.

⁴⁶ Malgonkar 67.

⁴⁷ Malgonkar 68.

⁴⁸ Malgonkar 105.

The short-lived uprising is quelled with a strong hand. The revolt proper takes off on 10 May 1857, when the sepoys in Meerut pre-empt a British plan to disband the Indian troops there: ‘Some went to the jail and unfettered their comrades, others rushed to their officers’ bungalows to wreak their vengeance, and many began to loot the bazaar shops.’⁴⁹ The fury ebbs only after sunset. The sepoys then march to Delhi (the seat of the dying Mughal power), merge with the Delhi garrison there, and go to the Red fort ‘in search of a leader.’⁵⁰

‘A kingdom awaits you, O Lord of the Universe!’ they were yelling.

The Emperor, they say, trembled like a leaf about to fall, realizing that this was an ultimatum as well as an invitation, and bowed to the inevitable. That same evening the city’s town criers proclaimed the restoration of Mogul rule: ‘The land has returned to Allah, the government to Bahadur Shah!’⁵¹

While Meerut, Delhi and Lucknow are burning, both the British and the Indians in Kanpur—Charles Hillersdon, the Collector, Sir Hugh Wheeler, the District Commander, and Nana—work hard to keep it from blowing up. But a “single injudicious step” upsets all that has so far been achieved in terms of racial amity.⁵² In a state of drunkenness, a cashiered officer of the Company, named Cox, shoots at the nightly patrol of the 2nd Cavalry going on its rounds and

⁴⁹ Malgonkar 122.

⁵⁰ Malgonkar 123.

⁵¹ Malgonkar 123.

⁵² Malgonkar 149.

kills the horse of the patrol commander, Nizam Ali. A farce of a trial by court martial is held, but the court finds Cox “not guilty.”⁵³ Instantly Kanpur turns into a battlefield. Wheeler orders all the white families into the Entrenchment. On the other hand, the Indian sepoy led by Tika Singh loot the treasury, storm the jail, and release the prisoners. Afterwards they march to Bithoor and proclaim Nana the Peshwa: ‘Victory to our King, to Nana Saheb, the Peshwa!’⁵⁴

The warfare begins in earnest after the sepoy return to Kanpur, with Nana at the head of the procession. Each side is now bent on destroying the other. In a few days, however, it becomes clear that the conditions in the Entrenchment are fast deteriorating. Food and water become ‘so scarce that children [are] given pieces of old water bags to suck, and bits of leather to chew to stave off their hunger.’⁵⁵ Moved by the death of George Wheeler, son of his friend, General Hugh Wheeler, Nana sends old Mrs Greenway to the British camp with a letter that says:

To the subjects of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria:

All those who are in no way connected with the acts of Lord Dalhousie and are willing to lay down arms shall receive a safe passage to Allahabad.⁵⁶

⁵³ Malgonkar 151.

⁵⁴ Malgonkar 153.

⁵⁵ Malgonkar 158.

⁵⁶ Malgonkar 184.

Wheeler accepts the offer. The British are embarking at Satichaura ghat. So far there has been no trouble. Then it all begins with the swiftness of lightning. Someone fires a shot. There follows total confusion: ‘Scattered shots, screams, frenzied yells, smoke, and then the crackle of fire.’⁵⁷ Nana intervenes and saves the lives of about a hundred and seventy white men, women and children. The men (nearly sixty) are handed over to the sepoy regiments of Allahabad and Benares, as agreed, while the women and children are taken prisoners and kept in a building called the Bibighar.

Meanwhile reports arrive that a British column led by Neill and Renaud is ‘only a few days away’ from Kanpur.⁵⁸ Nana sends off Brigadier Jwala Prasad with two cavalry regiments and three infantry battalions to intercept the column. The two armies meet a few miles beyond a village called Fatehpur. The Indian side suffers a humiliating defeat and withdraws. Fatehpur pays the price for ‘being in the vicinity of the place where [Indian] troops had offered battle.’⁵⁹ It is ‘cordoned off and set on fire. Those who tried to escape, even women and children, were thrown back into the fire or shot while escaping.’⁶⁰ The retreating Indian sepoy regiments swear vengeance. The Bibighar becomes ‘the house of massacre.’⁶¹ Every single white woman and child in the place is done to death.

⁵⁷ Malgonkar 195.

⁵⁸ Malgonkar 203.

⁵⁹ Malgonkar 207.

⁶⁰ Malgonkar 207.

⁶¹ Malgonkar 211.

As can be inferred from the title of the concluding part of the novel, Nana ‘goes away’ from the scene of struggle, but not before giving the British a hard time. Having lost Kanpur to Havelock and Neill, the defeated Nana returns to Bithoor; arranges a mock *jal-samadhi* (death by drowning himself in the Ganges) to dupe the victors and thus gain time on his pursuers; accidentally rescues Eliza Wheeler (daughter of Hugh Wheeler), held captive and raped by a Muslim ‘religious fanatic,’ Nizam Ali; engages in guerrilla warfare for a while; and finally goes over to Nepal to avoid capture by the British troops.⁶² Fourteen years later, Nana comes back to India and, on his way to Gwalior, visits Kanpur and Bithoor. *The Devil’s Wind* ends with Nana working as an agent of the Shareef of Mecca to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire in Constantinople.

Like Kamala Markandaya, Malgonkar is one of those Indian English writers who have not received consistent critical attention. But the critics who do turn to him rarely fail to discuss all his fictions together, if only because they are a small number (five in total, excluding a large number of short stories that Malgonkar wrote both before and after the publication of his first novel, *Distant Drum*).⁶³ Any comprehensive critical evaluation of Malgonkar and his novels therefore ends with a discussion of *The Devil’s Wind*, the work being his last. Although the approach to the novel remains more or less the same, the conclusions drawn vary widely. Two prominent examples will suffice.

⁶² Malgonkar 224.

⁶³ According to Amur, Malgonkar has ‘more than fifty stories’ to his credit. 25.

The author of the first monograph dealing with Malgonkar and his work, G.S. Amur, reads *The Devil's Wind* as a historical novel which it certainly is. Given the year of publication (1973) of the study in question, it is not at all surprising that the (implied) criteria against which the novel is judged are all derived from George Lukács, the classic theorist of the genre of the classical historical novel. According to Amur, *The Devil's Wind* meets one of the basic requirements of the historical novel in that it does not invent any 'new facts.'⁶⁴ That is to say, the novel does not depart from historical data: its historical veracity therefore begs no question. What intrigues one is the final verdict that Amur passes on the work: 'In the last analysis, *The Devil's Wind* is more history than "novel."⁶⁵ In asking a historical novel to be more *novel* than *history*, Amur is in fact asking the novel in particular and the historical novel in general to be what it cannot possibly be: to transcend its cultural-historical determinants and thus become an image of universal human characteristics.⁶⁶ In being less novel than history, *The Devil's Wind* fails, Amur argues, to be of any relevance to postcolonial India, an intriguing conclusion, to say the least:

It will be conceded, I suppose, that Malgonkar has succeeded in restoring to the image of Nana Saheb its basic humanity and in setting the record

⁶⁴ Amur 124.

⁶⁵ Amur 135.

⁶⁶ James Dayananda, another critic of *The Devil's Wind*, sees the novel as deriving its 'sense of history' not only from 'the gallery of historical figures' but also, more importantly, from 'the close relationship of characters to their social and political background so that the reader feels that they could not have existed at any other moment or place of history.' 139. In the introductory chapter, I have briefly discussed the particular-universal debate in the historical novel in the light of theories offered by Sir Walter Scott, Georg Lukács, and Avrom Fleishman.

straight. But in the case of historical novels like *The Devil's Wind* one has necessarily to ask and answer the kind of question which George Lukacs [sic] raised in relation to Flaubert's *Salammbô*. The question was: 'What can a world thus reawakened mean to us? Granted that Flaubert successfully solved all the problems which he raised artistically—has a world so represented any real living significance for us?' Granted, similarly, that Malgonkar has successfully recreated the past, but has this past 'any real living significance for us?' The Indo-British encounter of which Nana's story is a part, is no longer a matter of vital concern for Indians and Nana has hardly the kind of meaningful symbolism in the context of contemporary life as Camus' Caligula for example has.⁶⁷

In short, Amur does not consider *The Devil's Wind* a pioneering work in the tradition of postcolonial counter-discourse, even though its author clearly intends it to be so regarded, as is amply evident from what he says in the Author's Note. The decolonisation of the Indian critical mind is yet to begin.

James Dayananda, author of another monograph, both agrees and disagrees with Amur. He is one with Amur insofar as the question of the consistency of fictional reconstruction with historical fact is concerned: 'The important point is that Malgonkar does not depart from the factuality of history.'⁶⁸ On the question

⁶⁷ Amur 134-35.

⁶⁸ Dayananda 141. Margaret Atwood also argues for adherence to historical fact. However, a historical novelist is 'free to invent' only if there are lacunae in historical records. 'In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction,' *The American Historical Review* 103. 5 (Dec. 1998): 1515.

of artistic/literary merit of the novel, however, Dayananda is at the opposite end of the spectrum. In other words, he finds *The Devil's Wind* more novel than history:

The book bears witness to the range and depth of his historical reading, to his sharp eye for vivid or significant detail. But he lets practically nothing of this research show in the novel. This is the secret of his success.⁶⁹

For Dayananda, more importantly, the relevance of the novel to postcolonial India is patently obvious. There are two periods in Indian history that provide Malgonkar with 'usable past,' according to Dayananda: the first period is the so-called Sepoy Mutiny (in *The Devil's Wind*) and the second one is the last decade of the national movement under the leadership of M.K. Gandhi (in *The Princes* and *A Bend in the Ganges*).⁷⁰ These pasts have powerful appeal to Malgonkar because they 'help us to understand our present world in all its complexity — political, economic, social, intellectual.'⁷¹

Although Amur and Dayananda differ as regards the bearing of *The Devil's Wind* on postcolonial India, none of them *really* sees the novel as *writing back* to the massive body of British/European literature on the Great Rebellion, though its author explicitly wants it to be so treated. There is not the least doubt as to the critical agenda *The Devil's Wind* is meant to address: it proposes to tell

⁶⁹ Dayananda 141.

⁷⁰ Dayananda 137. It is important to note here that Malgonkar wrote a monograph on Gandhi.

⁷¹ Dayananda 137.

‘the stories of Nana and the revolt’ from ‘the Indian point of view.’⁷² Consequently, what these critics are finally able to offer is a vague idea of the revisionist project with which Malgonkar is primarily concerned in the novel. One cannot possibly take them to task for reading *The Devil’s Wind* the way in which they did, for they were reading/writing at a time when the long shadow of formalism was receding, it is true, but by no means was a thing of the past.⁷³ Its hold on Indian English criticism at the time was far from diminishing.

If Malgonkar has received only a little critical attention in India, he has not fared any better abroad. One notable exception, though, is Ralph J. Crane who devotes about a third of a chapter in his book *Inventing India: A History of India in English-Language Fiction to The Devil’s Wind*.⁷⁴ Crane discusses the novel in a comparative framework along with *Nightrunners of Bengal* (1951) by John Masters and *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) by J.G. Farrell, and is thus able to dwell on its differences from the latter as well as its departures from earlier fictional and non-fictional works on the Uprising.⁷⁵ Basically, there are two major strands in what Crane says about *The Devil’s Wind*: the first—the aesthetic/literary one—focuses on the issue of how Malgonkar achieves

⁷² Malgonkar 6.

⁷³ Even from a cursory glance at the full title of one of the most impressive critical works on Indian English fiction by Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Novel: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English* (New Delhi and London: Heinemann, 1971), it is possible to sense the hold of formalist critical practice on criticisms of the fiction concerned.

⁷⁴ Ralph J. Crane, *Inventing India: A History of India in English-Language Fiction* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1992) 44-54.

⁷⁵ John Masters, *Nightrunners of Bengal*, rpt. (1951; London: Sphere, 1977). J.G. Farrell, *The Siege of Krishnapur*, rpt. (1973; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979). Subsequent references are to these editions.

historicity in his novel, while the second—the ideological/political one—is concerned with the question of how he is able ‘to destroy the myths which have so long surrounded the British view of the Mutiny.’⁷⁶

Crane identifies two particular myths demolished by Malgonkar. The British perspective on the Rebellion constructs British brutality as heroism and Indian cruelty as barbarism. Malgonkar shows that they are in fact the two sides of the same coin. It is point of view that determines what is seen as what. That is to say, with the change of perspective, heroism may as well appear to be barbarism and *vice versa*. In *The Devil’s Wind*, like *Masters in Nightrunners of Bengal*, Malgonkar often juxtaposes British and Indian atrocities during the Uprising, to call attention to the fact that violence begets violence, that hostility is never a one-way traffic. Thus Malgonkar begins chapter 19 with what Neill and Renaud, two British heroes of the Mutiny, did to the so-called ““guilty men”” and ““guilty villages””:

They selected at random what they termed ‘guilty villages,’ to be cordoned off and set on fire—anyone who tried to escape was shot down. They organized volunteer hanging parties to hunt for ‘guilty men,’ which term included anyone whose behaviour seemed even remotely suspicious to any member of the party; men were speared like hogs merely because they

⁷⁶ Crane 51.

happened to be looking the other way, or for attempting to run away, or merely for looking agitated.⁷⁷

A little before the chapter ends, the Bibighar massacre is briefly recounted:

On the night of July 15 Bibighar, the love nest, became the house of massacre: the hundred and seventy white women and children held prisoners there were slaughtered. The horrifying details of the manner of their death, of how they were hacked to death by professional butchers because no one else could be persuaded to do the killing, and how the dead and wounded were all flung into the same well may or may not be true. But, of course, even granting that the details have been exaggerated, the fact remains that every single woman and child in the place was killed.⁷⁸

Put side by side, the two brutalities seem to cancel each other out, leaving one suspended as to who is to blame. Since Malgonkar sees the Rebellion from the perspective of Nana, the balance seems to tip to the Indian side:

Satichaura and Bibighar are monuments to our brutality [. . .]. And yet the point must be made that both were a form of primitive retaliation against the savagery of the advancing column and have to be viewed in the same frame, as composite pictures. If Daryaganj and the other villages had not been burned down as guilty villages, Satichaura might never have happened; and if Fattepur had not been destroyed merely as a

⁷⁷ Malgonkar 205.

⁷⁸ Malgonkar 211.

followthrough to a victorious military action, Bibighar might never have happened.⁷⁹

By showing the Indians acting savagely after (in both senses of the term) the British, Malgonkar puts them just a little above the latter in the moral hierarchy. But the overall picture of the Mutiny as Malgonkar paints it in his novel remains a 'composite' one, effectively deconstructing the myth of one-sided barbarism/heroism.

The other myth that Malgonkar destroys in *The Devil's Wind*, according to Crane, is that of the friendly relationship assumed to have existed between the British officers and the Indian sepoys in the British Indian army. Malgonkar is quite unequivocal as to how it was. Wheeler gets a brief and blunt answer from Nana to his query whether or not the native sepoys will remain loyal to the white masters in the event of a mutiny: 'A sepoy's loyalty to his salt is to be measured exactly against the quantity of salt. No more, no less.'⁸⁰ In other words, the sepoys will serve the East India Company to the extent that they are paid for. Beyond that, there is no guarantee as to how they will behave if a mutiny does break out. What Nana says is amply borne out during the course of the Rebellion.

In view of the considerable attention that he pays to the deconstruction of two specific Mutiny myths in *The Devil's Wind*, it might appear that Crane is reading the novel from a postcolonial critical perspective such as the counter-

⁷⁹ Malgonkar 212.

⁸⁰ Malgonkar 110.

discursive framework theorised by Helen Tiffin and others.⁸¹ To some extent, such an assumption is not altogether wrong. There are, however, multiple ways in which the framework in question can be applied to texts produced in postcolonial societies, from the simplest to the most complex, depending on how a particular postcolonial writer has chosen to use the counter-discursive strategy in the first instance.⁸² At its simplest, the critical agenda is to retrieve the other side of the story, as Jean Rhys has famously done in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, telling the story of Bertha Mason, the mad woman in *Jane Eyre*, who becomes Antoinette Cosway, the Creole protagonist in the postcolonial novel.⁸³ On the other hand, a ‘con-text,’ as John Thieme calls it, can enact a much more sophisticated response to the pre-text(s) it sets out to engage with.⁸⁴ In such cases, the primary focus is not on *what* is being narrated to fill up the gaps in the earlier narratives, but on *how* what is being narrated is narrated. In other words, form gets an upper hand over content here. More generally, a metafictional consciousness informs the more complex postcolonial negotiation of the cultural hegemony of the erstwhile imperial Britain/Europe. In the Australian context, for example, it is exactly what Peter

⁸¹ Of the many critical-theoretical works arguing for applying a postcolonial critical framework to the study of cultural productions from postcolonial societies, the two most relevant to my argument here are: Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin, *Decolonising Fictions* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1993); John Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts: Writing back to the Canon* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001).

⁸² See chapter 1 in Thieme.

⁸³ For insightful postcolonial discussions of how *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) engages with its pre-text *Jane Eyre* (ed. Richard J. Dunn, 2nd ed. [1971; New York and London: Norton, 1987]), see chapters 6 in Brydon and Tiffin, 4 in Thieme and 2 in Judie Newman, *The Ballistic Bard: Postcolonial Fictions* (London and New York: Arnold, 1995).

⁸⁴ Thieme defines a ‘con-text’ as a work that takes a canonical text ‘as a departure point, supposedly as a strategy for contesting [its] authority.’ 1.

Carey has so masterfully done in his 1997 novel *Jack Maggs*.⁸⁵ Carey does not just want to tell the tale of Magwitch; a much more important concern is to show the intense struggle Magwitch must engage in to save his story from being appropriated.⁸⁶

In my view, Crane operates at the simpler level in his appraisal of *The Devil's Wind*. The reasons why he fails to engage with the novel in a complex way are two-fold. First, he appears to take what Malgonkar says in the Author's Note at its face value—'This, then, is Nana's story as I believe he might have written it himself'—which (mis)leads him to read the novel exclusively in the context of the Great Rebellion.⁸⁷ Secondly, the comparative framework in which Crane examines the novel together with *Nightrunners of Bengal* and *The Siege of Krishnapur* seems to predispose him to the 'greater universality' of 'the postmodernist historical novel.'⁸⁸ Since *The Siege of Krishnapur* has been able to achieve 'greater universality' (by virtue of its postmodernism!) than both *Nightrunners of Bengal* and *The Devil's Wind*, it is adjudged by Crane 'the best

⁸⁵ Peter Carey, *Jack Maggs* (London: Faber, 1997).

⁸⁶ See chapter 5 in Thieme. For a slightly different approach to the relevance of counter-discourse theory to the study of postcolonial literatures, especially fictions in the antipodean context, see Janet Wilson, 'Antipodean Rewritings of *Great Expectations*: Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) and Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip* (2007),' in *The Shadow of the Precursor*, eds. Diana Glenn, Md Rezaul Haque, Ben Kooyman, and Nena Bierbaum (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) 220-35.

⁸⁷ Malgonkar 6. Crane, however, does not accept Malgonkar at his word when the latter says his work is 'fiction.' 6.

⁸⁸ Crane 54. The irony is that it should have facilitated an awareness of the contingency of values.

novel of the Mutiny to have yet been written.’⁸⁹ Considering the attribute (‘greater universality’) in terms of which *The Siege of Krishnapur* comes to be pronounced the best Mutiny novel, it is possible to argue that Crane is, in fact, not reading *The Devil’s Wind* as a postcolonial text, for the hallmark of such a text is not its conformity to but difference from what goes by the name of ‘the great tradition,’ flowing like the Thames from the imperial centre, with the smaller emergent traditions considered its tributaries. In other words, by failing ‘to see the universal as another imperial fiction to be decolonised,’ Crane fails to attend to the postcolonialism of *The Devil’s Wind*.⁹⁰

To read *The Devil’s Wind* as a ‘con-text,’ therefore, it is important to examine it not only in the context of the Great Rebellion and its reconstruction in colonial discourse (as Crane does) but also in the wider context of British colonialism in India itself and the way it is represented in the same discourse. A familiar line of colonial argument is that British presence is beneficial to India. The long series of Muslim invasions, it is argued, has left her crippled. She has fallen from the height of her ancient glory into the pit of medieval darkness. The British are her saviour. By ridding Indian society of long-held prejudices, superstitions and false values, they will set her on the cherished road to enlightenment, progress and prosperity. Since the Indian men themselves are fallen, they cannot be entrusted with the noble task of reforming the society in

⁸⁹ Crane 54. If the concept of universality is ‘a grand narrative,’ it is hardly likely that postmodernism will ever valorise it.

⁹⁰ Brydon and Tiffin 16.

question until they have proved that they have redeemed themselves. One solid proof mobilised to establish that the Indian men are no better than brutes is the way they treat Indian women. Can Indians be called a civilised people at all when they are ever so ready to sacrifice women as *sati*, which is no other than cold-blooded murder in the name of religion?⁹¹ Thus one of the many excuses mobilised to justify the British rule in India is the (mis)treatment of Indian women by Indian men. As Uma Chakravarti notes:

The ‘higher’ morality of the imperial masters could be effectively established by highlighting the low status of women among the subject population as it was an issue by which the moral ‘inferiority’ of the subject population could simultaneously be demonstrated.⁹²

The British are a morally superior race because they treat women with decency and deference. English women are angels at home. To protect Indian women from being victimised in the name of religion, the Company Raj intervenes, equipped with necessary legal apparatus. In 1829, Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of India from 1828 to 1835, outlaws *sati*, though not a single would-be victim is consulted as to how she feels about it. A point that needs stressing here is that the segment of Indian society singled out for reform is

⁹¹ *Sati* is the Hindu practice of widow-burning.

⁹² Uma Chakravarti, ‘Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past,’ in *Recasting Women in India: Essays in Colonial History*, eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989) 34.

that of the emerging middle-class Hindus who appear to be much more *interested* in *sati* than other segments.

Perhaps the most radical intervention of *The Devil's Wind* in the representational politics of colonial discourse is its deconstruction of the image of the Hindu/Indian man treating his women folk in the most abominable way. A number of women come into the life of Nana as lovers, mistresses and wives. All except two of these women are Hindus. One of the exceptional two is an Anglo-Indian, while the other is a Muslim. None is, however, treated in a manner for which Nana can be taken to task. On the contrary, he is ever so kind to each of them. The first woman to come into his life is the concubine called Champa who remains loyal to her master until the very end. Champa is, in fact, more a wife than a mistress to Nana and bears him a daughter named Gangmala who is publicly adopted as such. More to the point, Nana never regrets fathering a daughter, even though a son is what he needs most to settle the question of succession.

In the case of his second concubine Azijan, a Muslim, Nana is no less charitable, though she is not as faithful to her master as Champa. One night Nana and Champa discover her with an army officer, a Lieutenant Delafosse, 'lying on a carpet spread on the floor of the minute, bed-sized balcony. They were naked [. . .].'⁹³ Champa admonishes Nana: 'She's been here too long, the bitch! Ten years!

⁹³ Malgonkar 99.

You should have kicked her out long ago.’⁹⁴ Nana does not get rid of Azijan the way Champa had wanted him to. He gives her ‘ten thousand rupees as a parting gift’ which she uses to open a dancing school in Kanpur.⁹⁵

Because of a curse, the first two wives of Nana die prematurely. Interestingly, the curse is on consummation, not on marriage. After the untimely death of the second from cholera, Nana decides not to marry again, but finally yields to the pressure of his father. To save Kashi, the new wife, from becoming yet another victim of the curse, the marriage is never consummated. Nana shows utmost generosity to Kashi when in Nepal she wants him to release her from ‘the prospect of lifelong abstinence,’ so that she can live like ‘a woman, not merely a repressed freak.’⁹⁶ Nana sets Kashi free, realising that he ‘could not keep [her] girded in an imaginary chastity belt all her life.’⁹⁷

These relationships of Nana with his mistresses and wives are exactly the opposite of what one finds of the treatment of Indian women by Indian men in colonial discourse. An important point about the portrayal of these relationships is that, though they enable Malgonkar to deconstruct the colonial image of the barbarous Indian man mistreating his women folk, the representation itself does not require any kind of formal appropriation of the genre of the adventure novel, a genre to which the majority of the Mutiny novels belong. A possible

⁹⁴ Malgonkar 100.

⁹⁵ Malgonkar 101.

⁹⁶ Malgonkar 263, 262.

⁹⁷ Malgonkar 263.

explanation can be that none of these relationships entails any kind of crossing of racial boundaries. But when it comes to the depiction of the relationship of Nana with Eliza, an Anglo-Indian, who graduates from lover to wife, Malgonkar is left with no other choice but to appropriate the genre in question to his revisionist end.

In a typical Mutiny novel, a young English army officer rescues the young lady of his dreams from a life-and-death situation, along with a number of white men, women and children who are in most cases held captives by the Indian mutineers. The story typically ends with his winning a Victoria Cross as well as the desired woman.⁹⁸ In *The Devil's Wind*, Malgonkar reverses not so much the trope of rescue as the figure of the rescuer. Here it is the Indian Nana who rescues the Anglo-Indian Eliza from the clutches of the Muslim sergeant Nizam Ali who has abducted her in the utter confusion prevailing in the wake of the Satichaura massacre.⁹⁹ The reversal allows Malgonkar to assign Nana a role that the British have traditionally monopolised, though the villain remains the same, an Indian sepoy and, most importantly, a Muslim one at that. In addition, Malgonkar uses Eliza to comment on the Anglo-Indian community. A few weeks after she has been rescued, Nana suggests that it will be good for her to go back to the people she (half) belongs to:

⁹⁸ For a typical plot of a Mutiny novel, see Singh 183.

⁹⁹ In her captivity, Eliza is forcibly converted to Islam and then raped repeatedly.

She was silent for a long time and then shook her head. ‘There is no one—not one single person that I care for. What am I to go back for? To be jeered at because I am going to be a mother, carrying a child implanted by numerous acts of rape, knowing that I couldn’t even say for certain who the father was?’

‘It might have happened to anyone,’ I said soothingly.

‘It happened to me. And that is not how I would ever go back—cringing, an object of pity.’

‘This sort of thing is soon forgotten.’

‘The women never forget. They never forgot who my mother was. She was a general’s wife, but she remained a robber’s mistress. How often did she tell me that she wished she had stayed on in the Pindari camp! Am I to go before the same women, showing a big stomach and begging to be accepted?’¹⁰⁰

The white society in India is no less caste-ridden than the Indian (read Hindu) society which the former found so despicable for its rigid caste-system. Janaki, mother of Eliza, is an Indian who Wheeler married when he was a major. But the Anglo-Indian community never accepted Janaki. Its members, especially the mem sahibs, ‘looked the other way whenever she passed and never, except in the

¹⁰⁰ Malgonkar 225.

General's hearing, spoke of her as "Lady" Wheeler.'¹⁰¹ Janaki remained an outcaste to the society of her husband. In declining to go back to her people, Eliza is trying to save herself from the humiliation, if not hurt, her mother had already suffered in the hands of those who tend(ed) to consider themselves a nation/race superior to the Indians on the grounds that they treated women humanely, or at least better than the Indians! It is partly because of his marriage with an Indian woman that General Wheeler, despite the fact that '[h]e was the seniormost [*sic*] general in the entire army and his war record read like the battle honours on some regimental banner,' is repeatedly deprived of the office of the Commander-in-Chief, losing it to men one of whom joined the army when he was a captain, commanding a squadron.¹⁰²

Revisionist history does not simply revisit a certain past from a perspective repudiated in the authorised reconstruction of that past. One of its more complex objectives is to undermine the set of values that makes that reconstruction possible in the first instance. In the British representations of the Mutiny, for example, heroism is associated with the display of manly prowess, military might and muscle power. Courage, dedication to the cause, determination, efficiency, ferocity, manliness, perseverance, quick wittedness, resistance, solidarity, and so on are considered heroic qualities, qualities needed to vanquish the enemy. In *The Devil's Wind*, Malgonkar constructs a different kind of heroism whose hallmark is not conquering the other (the world outside) but conquering the self (the world

¹⁰¹ Malgonkar 78.

¹⁰² Malgonkar 72.

within). This (Indian) heroism is superior to its British counterpart in that it is geared to mitigating the miseries of others rather than perpetuating them. It is true that Nana is entitled to the first kind of heroism by virtue of rescuing Eliza from her tormentor. But Eliza decides to stay on and finally marry him not because he had once saved her from savagery but because he continues to treat her in the most decent and humane way possible, though she has apparently lost all that an (Indian) woman must possess to remain charming. In accepting Eliza as his wife, Nana displays the second kind of heroism, a heroism that works not to bolster up the ego but to efface it. There can be no doubt that such a conception of heroism owes its currency to Gandhi who taught the Indian nation in the days of the national movement how to use what he called 'soul force' against the 'brute force' of the colonial power. The second kind of heroism can thus be called Gandhian heroism.

If Malgonkar presents the Indian character with qualities that deserve admiration, he is not blind to its shortcomings. There is hardly anything in the portrayal of Bajirao II, for example, that can strike sympathetic chord with the reader. The same holds good in his characterisation of the British. Men like Hillersdon and Wheeler can mix with Indians with an openness of heart because they are not predisposed to judging a person in terms of colour, nationality or race, as are most Anglo-Indians in the novel. Characters belonging to the latter category include Neill, Renaud and Havelock who avenge themselves on the Indians as if the whole nation were criminals, irrespective of age and gender.

Moreover, even an individual character, whether brown or white, is depicted as neither absolutely good nor thoroughly wicked. With all his positive qualities, for instance, Nana is far from perfect. When in Nepal Kashi asks him to set her free so that she can enjoy a fuller life with Jung Bahadur, the Maharaja of Nepal, his initial reaction is to burst out: ‘You Bitch!’, though he later relents and gives her what she has asked for.¹⁰³ In populating his novel with characters who possess both admirable and detestable qualities, with the British and Indians both humane and savage, Malgonkar breaks down the basic principle that goes into the structuring of colonial discourse, namely binarism. In marked contrast to the dynamics of colonial discursive/representational practice, the discursive/fictive world in *The Devil’s Wind* is not constructed in terms of binaries, assigning the Indians all virtues and the British all vices. The morally (as well as culturally/racially) impure/mixed world that Malgonkar constructs in his novel is thus a sophisticated critique of the pure (in fact, sanitised version of the) world one comes across in colonial discourse where the European Self is an embodiment of light and its Other, that of darkness, with no grey/‘liminal space’, whether cultural, moral or racial, lying in between.¹⁰⁴

It is often asked why Malgonkar adopted the first-person limited perspective to tell the story of Nana. The autobiographical format of the novel is seen as limiting narrative possibilities Malgonkar could easily have exploited, had

¹⁰³ Malgonkar 262.

¹⁰⁴ Renée Green, cited in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (1994; London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 5.

he chosen to work with the third-person omniscient point of view. There are indeed points in the novel when the problems of first-person narration are clearly felt. For instance, every time Nana talks about a happening of which he does not have first-hand knowledge he has to point out at the outset who he has heard it from, thus opening himself up to such questions as: how reliable are those persons in the first instance who provide him with details without which there will have been no coherence at all in the story he is telling? How reliable a narrator is Nana himself? Is he reporting exactly what he has come to know from others? Indeed, none of these problems could possibly have arisen, if Malgonkar had decided to tell the story of Nana and the Rebellion from a third-person omniscient perspective. But the critical unease from which these problems/questions arise is not an unfamiliar one. It can legitimately be seen as one of the age-old fictions of European/Western criticism, namely the assumption that a third-person narration is more objective than a first-person one. In assessing a postcolonial text that aims at challenging the so-called 'truths' of colonial fictional and historical narratives, the application of 'objectivity' as a criterion seems rather inappropriate, if not downright questionable, insofar as 'claims to objectivity and universality come down to the same thing—the valorisation of one culture's epistemology and ontology as axiomatic.'¹⁰⁵ It is therefore more

¹⁰⁵ Brydon and Tiffin 80.

appropriate to sidestep the question of objectivity and consider instead the things the text does with first-person narration.¹⁰⁶

The first-person focalisation in *The Devil's Wind* is in my view a deliberate choice on the part of its author. The format allows Malgonkar to combine three roles in Nana: protagonist, narrator and focaliser. Nana is telling *his* story from *his* point of view in *his own* words. In that sense, it is not a historical reconstruction at all, as all historical novels are, but suggests an eye-witness account of what had happened in Kanpur during the Mutiny. And for that very reason, even if one applies the problematic criterion of 'objectivity,' the story qualifies as representing more 'truth' than the ones historically reconstructed. Secondly, although the novel does not point to its own fictionality to the extent that a postmodernist text usually does, it is not altogether lacking in metafictional consciousness.¹⁰⁷ Nana is well aware of the discursive context of his storytelling:

[. . .] I was able to work out the answer. It was that my being blown up into a 'monster of ferocity' was a deliberate act. Our revolt had thrown up a surfeit of British heroes but no villains to balance them against, and they needed villainy of the requisite magnitude to serve as a backdrop for

¹⁰⁶ In direct contrast to the kind of progress represented in the classic historical/realist novel, the protagonist in a postcolonial novel moves more and more towards a partisan position.

¹⁰⁷ 'A degree of metafictionality,' according to Mariadele Boccardi, 'is inherent in the historical novel *qua* historical novel.' *The Contemporary British Historical Novel: Representation, Nation, Empire* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 9.

heroism. How hollow would Havelock's victories have seemed if I, Nana Saheb, had not been their principal objective!

So they magnified the horrors that were already there and invented some, and a hundred zealous servants of the Company were ready to testify that I was responsible for everything that had happened in Kanpur.¹⁰⁸

The hidden agenda of colonial discourse is superbly laid bare here, along with the way it is organised. The colonising Self defines itself against the colonised Other(s). A Prospero needs a Caliban. Relatedly, the criminality of Magwitch is needed to show up the civility of Victorian England. It comes as no surprise then that the British/European narratives of the Mutiny would choose to posit Nana as the arch villain against whom to appreciate the heroism of the imperial crusaders. Given the fact that all discourses/narratives are more or less interested, it is absolutely apposite that Nana should decide to tell his story in his own way. And finally, since self-narration is an empowering act, why should Nana always remain a victim of *othered* representations? If not to set a record right, for what else should one attempt a revisionist history at all?

One last question needs to be asked: how does Malgonkar imagine the nation in *The Devil's Wind*? What is its ethnic/racial character? Who are the local Others the nation is imagined against? There are two mutually exclusive answers.

¹⁰⁸ Malgonkar 244.

Apparently, the nation in the novel is an inclusive one, with all castes, classes and communities of India having (though not identical levels of) representation in it. The inclusive make-up of the nation is best exemplified in the kind of resistance offered to British dominance during the Rebellion. Despite occasional misunderstandings, both the Hindu and Muslim communities join forces, as do the feudal lords and the subaltern sepoys, to demolish the fast-rising British power in India. In that sense, the national self is imagined against the colonising Other. At a deeper level, however, the national project does not appear to be so unproblematic. Subtler calculations seem to be at work.

It is worth recalling that Eliza is an Anglo-Indian, biologically, just as most, if not all, of the Indian nationalists have been Anglo-Indians, intellectually/metaphorically.¹⁰⁹ In the chaos of the Satichaura massacre, Eliza is abducted by a *Muslim*, forced to convert to Islam, and then raped repeatedly. Nana rescues Eliza, killing the wife of the Muslim sepoy who Eliza had already killed. Allowing for a few adjustments, it is possible to read the fate of Eliza as reflecting that of India—raped by the Muslims, left behind by the British. Who else then deserves Eliza/India, if not Nana, who rescues her and does all he can to restore her to dignity?¹¹⁰ The implication of Nana winning over Eliza/India by virtue of selfless service for imagining the nation in the novel is that the nation

¹⁰⁹ English-educated Indians are Anglo-Indians in the sense that they are what Thomas B. Macaulay had wanted them to be: ‘a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.’ *Macaulay: Prose and Poetry*, comp. G.M. Young (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1952) 729.

¹¹⁰ There is a clear parallel between what Nana does to Eliza and what Malgonkar does to Nana. Both restore those abused in the hands of the aliens to dignity.

here is imagined not against just one Other but against multiple Others. Along with the arch other, that is, the British, there appears an Indian one, the Indian Muslims. Eliza/India is mistreated by both. The difference is one of degree, not of kind. The comparison often surfaces to the fore. For example, in an aside Nana wonders if it can be true that the advancing British column led by Neill and Renaud has committed ‘such savagery [as] has never been seen’: ‘In a land that had seen the invasions of Mohamad Gazni, Nadir Shah, and Allauddin Khilchi, such a statement could only be an exaggeration.’¹¹¹ Exaggeration or otherwise, the comparison is there, and the project of imagining the nation cannot be free from all that it implies. On an allegorical level, then, the nation in *The Devil’s Wind* is not as inclusive as it may appear on a superficial level. The imagined community debars not only its present oppressors but also those who had once preceded them.

So far as I am aware of, *The Devil’s Wind* is the only creative work in English to date by an Indian that has sought to engage critically with the British/European representation of the Mutiny. Like the discursive fate of the historical event that it aims at re(-)constructing from an Indian point of view, the critical fate of the novel has also been far from satisfactory. Its Indian critics spend more time in analysing its conformity to historical fact than in examining its success or otherwise in executing the revisionist agenda at its heart, while the non-Indian critics tend to evaluate it within a critical framework whose

¹¹¹ Malgonkar 175.

Eurocentric assumptions such as the criteria of ‘objectivity’ and ‘universality’ work to its disadvantage and find it in the process unsatisfactory. In my view, a more appropriate way to deal with the text is to read its revisionist programme using a postcolonial critical framework such as the writing back paradigm. In other words, the novel is best read as a postcolonial ‘con-text.’¹¹² Such an approach not only considers how Malgongkar revises and thus deconstructs the colonial (re)construction of the Rebellion but also sees the dialogue in the wider context of colonial discourse production and dissemination.

From the postcolonial analysis I have attempted above, it can be safely argued that Malgongkar has been able to provide a truly Indian perspective on the Mutiny in his novel by virtue of which one of the fictions/myths of the Rebellion—the so-called villainy of Nana Saheb—is effectively dismantled. One cannot, however, be so sure about the other fiction/myth that Malgongkar himself sets out to construct in the novel: that of an inclusive imagined community. The seeming inclusiveness of the nation, in effect, works to hide its own exclusionary agenda. Why else should it be needed to imagine the nation not only against the British but also against the Muslims of India? Interventionist history fiction which I have discussed in the previous chapter has the deconstruction of the fiction/myth of an essentialist-homogeneous nation as its most pronounced critical agenda.

¹¹² See note 84 above.

CONCLUSION

Indian historical fiction in English is a rich and diverse cultural archive, comprising a range of texts from *Padmini: An Indian Romance* (1903) and the Lalu trilogy (1939-42) to *The Shadow Lines* (1988).¹ It is certainly *not* the case that these works are all artistically satisfactory to the same extent. But to read this fiction in terms of literary merit only would mean not to take into account the important role it has played as a cultural factor in imagining and re-imagining the Indian nation. It is only when the Indian historical novel is read in its various historico-cultural contexts that one is able to appreciate its complex negotiations of Indian history/past in both pre- and post-independence periods.

As I think I have been able to demonstrate, Indian fiction in English uses history/past in two ways in the pre-independence period. The revivalist use, as has been shown through analyses of two examples of the revivalist historical novel—namely, *Padmini* and *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (1909)—aims at regenerating the Indian psyche ravaged under an oppressive colonial regime, while the other kind of pre-independence use by nationalists

¹ T. Ramakrishna [Pillai], *Padmini: An Indian Romance* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd., 1903). The Lalu trilogy by Mulk Raj Anand comprises *The Village*, 2nd Indian ed. (1939; Bombay: Kutub-Popular, 1960); *Across the Black Waters*, 1st Indian ed. (1940; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955); *The Sword and the Sickle*, 1st Indian ed. (1942; Bombay: Kutub Publishers Ltd., 1955). Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, educational ed. (1988; Delhi: Oxford UP, 1995). Subsequent references are to these editions.

such as Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao marks the entry of the nation into history.² That is why history in nationalist history fiction is such a powerful presence, ‘a *mass experience*,’ lived by its writers, in contrast to the pre-colonial pasts usually represented in the earlier revivalist historical fiction.³

Chapters 3 and 4 in which I have examined *Padmini* and *Nur Jahan* provide an important insight: the early Indian historical novel imagines the Indian nation variously. While *Padmini* equates Indian nationalism with Hindu nationalism, *Nur Jahan* aims to project a liberal-pluralist, if not exactly secular, Indian cultural identity. This finding challenges, on the one hand, the sweeping claim made by Alex Tickell that the early Indian fiction in English subscribes to ‘primordial Hinduism’ in the form of ‘Vedic Aryanism,’ with a view to forming a communal-Hindu national identity, an identity from which post-Gandhi generation of nationalists like Jawaharlal Nehru sought to, but could not entirely, distance themselves.⁴ On the other hand, it also contradicts Neelam Srivastava who takes the novel as a genre to be ‘dialogic and secular,’ irrespective of context.⁵ The novel can indeed be dialogic, but that does not mean, insofar as (re-)imagining the nation in early Indian English fiction is concerned, that it would

² Sirdar Jogendra Singh, *Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen* (London: James Nisbet & Co., [sic] Limited, 1909). Subsequent references are to this edition.

³ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (1937; London: Merlin Press, 1962) 23.

⁴ See Alex Tickell, ‘The Discovery of Aryavarta: Hindu Nationalism and Early Indian Fiction in English,’ in *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism*, eds. Peter Morey and Alex Tickell (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005) 25-52.

⁵ Neelam Srivastava, *Secularism in the Postcolonial Indian Novel: National and Cosmopolitan Narratives in English* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) 1.

invariably narrate the story of the nation in pluralist and secular terms. The equation is not so straightforward.

From the next two chapters – that is, chapters 5 and 6 on nationalist history fiction, I am able to draw two new conclusions. One, the realism of nationalist texts such as *Kanthapura* and the Lalu trilogy indicates the optimism that characterised India's struggle for independence at the time when these texts came to be produced and published.⁶ From the 1920s onward Indian nationalism slowly but steadily became a morally superior force than its counterpart, British colonialism. As such, its literary-cultural representations needed no formal/narrative camouflage or improvisation to escape the wrath of the colonial state, as revivalist historical fiction in the early decades of the twentieth century had. As has been shown in chapters 3 and 4, the revivalist historical novel combined allegory with R/romance to encode its call for national regeneration.

But to imagine a nation into being is to blur the manifold discriminations and divisions that exist in a given society at any given time. As in other anti-colonial contexts of national formation, in India too the national movement was led mostly by a small group of English-educated, middle-class, upper-caste, Hindu, male nationalists. As such, narratives of the nation tend to tell what these charismatic individuals did to liberate the nation from the shackles of colonial bondage. Experiences of other(ed) groups such as the national minorities, women, and working classes rarely feature in the dominant national discourses. These

⁶ Raja Rao, *Kanthapura* (New York: New Directions, 1963). Subsequent references are to this edition.

multiple exclusions are what the Indian historical novel engages with in the post-independence period.

I have examined two notable instances of interrogation of the mainstream stories of the nation in the post-independence period: one, feminist; the other, interventionist. In *Some Inner Fury* (1955), one of the finest examples of what I have called feminist history fiction, Kamala Markandaya revisits one of the most remarkable decades in the history of the anti-colonial national movement in India: the furious 1940s—the decade of the Quit India Movement, launched in 1942.⁷ In tune with her feminist-interventionist agenda, what Markandaya aims at achieving in her novel is not so much to celebrate the decade as marking the entry of the nation into history, as Anand, Rao, and a host of Indian English (male) writers tend to do, as to explore how the history of that very decade works to frustrate the small ambitions of Indian women. By drawing attention to the collusion of nationalism and patriarchy in the programme of imagining the nation—which tends to overpower the women of India, instead of empowering them—Markandaya also participates in the project of re-imagining the nation, a nation that is expected to treat its women on equal terms.

The strength of chapter 7 on Markandaya lies in the fact that it challenges the critical neglect with which she has undeservedly met in recent times. While some critics at least consider her worth a brief mention, others are even more

⁷ Kamala Markandaya, *Some Inner Fury* (1955; New York: Signet Books, 1956). Subsequent references are to this edition.

hesitant. The reasons are two-fold. First, works by Markandaya have consistently been read as dramatising the East-West encounter, with western standards supposedly privileged over eastern ones. The conclusion drawn from such a reading is that the author of these works belongs to a small group of Indian writers in English who cater to western tastes. Her very Indianness has thus come to be seen as suspect, whereas the truth is that Markandaya juxtaposes two sets of norms championed by the East and the West to emphasise how the set of standards belonging to the former work to the disadvantage of postcolonial Indian women.

The other reason has to do with the advent of Salman Rushdie and his many successors on the Indian literary-cultural scene. With the arrival of *Midnight's Children* and grandchildren on the scene, history once again becomes a major thematic concern in Indian English fiction. Following the example set by Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* (1981), the 1980s and 1990s saw a revival of interest in historical fiction in which history/past is once more represented predominantly in terms of constructing Indian cultural identity afresh.⁸ The critical-cultural agenda of reimagining the nation by way of negotiating history/past has worked to marginalise the first generation of post-independence Indian women writers in English such as Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, and Nayantara Sahgal whose works embody (in fact, have come to be seen as

⁸ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981; London: Picador, 1982). Subsequent references are to this edition.

embodying) what one critic calls the ‘turn inward.’⁹ While there can possibly be no denial that Rushdie and his numerous successors show a clearer and stronger sense of engagement with history and the past than writers of the previous generation so far as reimagining the national community is concerned, it will be far from truth to charge the pre-Emergency generation of writers with absolutely disregarding issues made central in the works of post-Rushdie generation of writers.

In works of both fiction and non-fiction, Desai, Markandaya and Sahgal deal (sometimes obliquely, at other times openly) with the predicament of (middle-class) Indian women in relation to the postcolonial nation. These works consistently draw attention to the fact that the political birth of the Indian nation(-state) does not mean the same thing to Indian men and women. In fact, forgotten by history, ignored by the nation, and trapped by patriarchy, the Indian woman begins anew her search for self-identity *after* the nation is born politically. Significantly, the new identity is forged along non-religious, if not exactly secular, lines, thus questioning the viability of roles prescribed for the women of postcolonial India by age-old customs and traditions. For initiating an interrogation and deconstruction of the male-centred history of the nation, tradition-bound female identity, and patriarchy-oriented nation, a critical-cultural project that comes to assume a central position in the works of Rushdie and his

⁹ Josna E. Rege, *Colonial Karma: Self, Action, and Nation in the Indian English Novel* (Hampshire and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 81.

generation, post-independence Indian women writers in English merit commendation. In that respect, my chapter on feminist history fiction in the present study in which I have examined *Some Inner Fury* to show how Markandaya enacts a number of interventions in the patriarchy-nation ideological nexus, with a view to creating a viable role model for the modern Indian woman, can thus be seen as constituting a significant addition to an otherwise commendable work by Neelam Srivastava on secularism in the postcolonial Indian novel.¹⁰

Amitav Ghosh enacts a different kind of intervention in his second novel, *The Shadow Lines*. National narratives are full of heroic achievements, with the episodes that are likely to put a question mark on those laudable achievements carefully and systematically excised. In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh chooses to represent one of the *unheroic* events in the history of the nation, the 1964 Hindu-Muslim riot in Dhaka, the capital of East Pakistan at the time. The point is to emphasise the need for the nation to come to terms with the unsavoury episodes in its history/past. For midnight's children and grandchildren to cope with the trauma of communal and other kinds of state-sponsored violence and thus to move on, it is no less than an ethical imperative. The nation needs to re-imagine itself for its own sake.

For at least a small minority of Indian writers in English, however, the work of imagining the nation was still pressing, especially in the post-

¹⁰ See note 5 above.

independence period. Instead of taking stock of the failures and successes of the postcolonial nation, they sought to set the colonial record right. In *The Devil's Wind* (1972), Manohar Malgonkar revisits one of the most contentious episodes in the history of colonial India, the so-called Indian Mutiny of 1857, with a view to 'writing back' (after Salman Rushdie) to the massive body of European discourse on the Great Rebellion/Uprising from an Indian point of view.¹¹ In the process, one of the most hated Indian figures ever represented in the narratives of the colonial encounter, Nana Saheb, is restored to the dignity and humanity he is entitled to. Additionally, in engaging with India under British rule as history rather than memory (as nationalist and feminist history fiction does) and thus providing the missing historical link/period, revisionist historical fiction brings the present discussion of the Indian historical novel to a satisfactory conclusion.¹²

Possibly the most original contribution of the present study is the penultimate chapter on *The Devil's Wind*. In engaging with the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 from an Indian perspective, Malgonkar not only deconstructs the colonial representation of the historical event but also (re-)imagines the nation. Significantly, his construction of the Indian cultural identity has little in common with other such attempts in the post-independence period. Unlike Ghosh, Rushdie or Sealy, Malgonkar does not set himself to figuring the community of nation in

¹¹ Manohar Malgonkar, *The Devil's Wind* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1972). Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹² If the first two volumes of what has come to be known as the *Ibis* trilogy by Amitav Ghosh—*Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2011)—suggest anything, it is that more and more Indian English writers would turn to the colonial archive, as Tabish Khair does in *The Thing about Thugs* (New Delhi: Fourth Estate, 2010).

pluralist and secular terms; the Indian national self that one comes across in his otherwise praiseworthy novel is rather exclusive, constructed along communal lines, though it needs to be acknowledged that the ‘imagined community’ of the nation in *The Devil’s Wind* is far more inclusive than the one in *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao or the *Lalu* trilogy by Mulk Raj Anand.¹³ But to be fair to revisionist historical fiction it should be mentioned here that its project of imagining the nation has ideological affinities more with the revivalist than with the nationalist history fiction of the pre-independence phase in that other revisionist historical novelists choose other (pre-)colonial periods of Indian history such as the fag-end of the Mughal regime in *The Last Mughal* by G.D. Khosla or the rule of Tipu Sultan in *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* by Bhagwan S. Gidwani.¹⁴ I read the choice of both Hindu and non-Hindu pasts as indicative of the diversity that the revisionist historical novel evinces in constructing the Indian nation.

It is possible to study Indian historical fiction in a number of ways, each distinct by virtue of its analytical framework, critical focus, methodological assumptions, research questions, and so on. Some might come to it, for example, with a view to examining how it appropriates the European-derived form of the historical novel to embody an Indian ethos. Another equally valid way of engaging with it might be to investigate the kind of man-woman relationship it

¹³ The term is from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1983).

¹⁴ G.D. Khosla, *The Last Mughal*, Orient Paperbacks (Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1969); Bhagwan S. Gidwani, *The Sword of Tipu Sultan: (A historical novel about the life and legend of Tipu Sultan of India)*, rpt. (1976; New Delhi: Allied Publishers Limited, 1990). Subsequent references are to these editions.

tends to represent. A third approach might read the Indian historical novel in terms of the historical periods it often chooses to reconstruct. In this present study, I have engaged with Indian historical fiction in terms of its negotiations and representations of Indian history/past in imagining and re-imagining the nation. The reason for my doing so was my initial feeling: that the construction and deconstruction of Indian cultural identity/self is an abiding concern of the Indian novel that represents history. I hope I have been able to establish through a close contextual reading of seven history-based Indian English novels that such is indeed the case.

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