



**NATIONALISM AND IDENTITY IN THE EARLY INDIAN NOVELISTS’ NOVELS**

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*“Literature does not see the individual as something apart from society, but considers him as a social unit, because his existence is dependent on the society as a whole. Taken apart from society he is mere cipher and non-entity.”*

– (Premchand, qtd in Ahmed2)

Nationalism in India offered hope to a people where men, women, the rich and the poor come together to imagine a country of their own. During colonization the British viewed Indians as second-class citizens and denied them their independence. In response, Gandhi, the nationalist movement leader wanted to develop a nation that included everyone regardless of race, socio-economic class, caste or religion.

In the 1930s, nationalist Indian literature focused on shaping Indian identity. To recreate an Indian identity there had to be a separation from colonial power, culture and ideologies. This separation is fundamental because it allowed people to define themselves outside of British constructions of India.

The novels written during the period deals with almost Gandhian Literature with the idea of “one nation “and “one identity”. As a language, English in India achieves the first goal of erasing the internal differences which constitute regional identities within India. As a result of this plethora of regional, social inequalities and local multitude is neatly eliminated. Any construction of



identity is based on series of inclusions and exclusions in the Indian society.

Meenakshi Mukherjee writes in her “Anxiety of Indianness” that “any project of constructing a national identity is predicated upon two simultaneous imperatives: an erasure of differences within the border and accentuating the difference with what lies outside. As a language, English in India achieves the goal of erasing the internal differences, which constitute regional identities within India.

The Indian novelist in English was preoccupied with the representation of India in its identity, usually for a European readership; its most important practitioners were Anand, Narayan, and Rao, though Bhattacharya, Desani, and Singh.

We can witness in R.K. Narayan’s novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*, the character Gandhiji’s balanced nature in Communal fighting “Noakhali” the East

Bengal where Bharati accompanied him there, whole village have been burnt, thousands of killed bereaved, disposed, demented and crushed (p. 230). His impartial secular nature for communal fight at “Noakhali” in East Bengal was abused for.

R.K. Narayan’s character in the novel of *Waiting for the Mahatma* is the symbol of national freedom fighter, Jagadish worked as a nainal worker in different critical situations by seasons both for self and nation. Jagadish showed the work of his adventure and curiosity of national programs lead by Gandhi and some others national patriots in throughout India, The work of photography was shown to Sriram after his release from jail. He was the best informer of the news up to date in case of Bharati movements of jail and Gandhiji’s movements. As Photographer by profession, he depicted colourful India with before and after Independence India. (Literary vibes p.91)



Woman freedom fighter, Bharati enters in the novel as the volunteer of Mahatma Gandhi. Her facial and physical appearance was unforgettable for Sriram. “She was clad in a saree of Khadar, white home-spun, and he noticed how well it suited her. Before, he had felt that wearing Khadar was a fade that it was apparel fit only for cranks, but now he realised how lovely it could be. He paused for a moment to consider whether it was the wearer who was enriching the cloth or whether the material was good on itself” (Indian Diaspora 300-301)

By about 1930, all the major political protagonists, Gandhi included, were prepared to agree that Untouchables were both a distinctive and an oppressed segment of the Indian population. This agreement was the basis upon which a huge machinery of institutional privilege was erected so as to right the historic wrongs. But the consensus masked

powerful Still, Gandhi’s position fit nicely with Anand’s humanism in terms of its spirit, but the actual program for uplift would differ substantially from Gandhi’s. Perhaps, for this reason, the central character of Anand’s novel, Bakha, remains unimpressed with the strategy on offer from Gandhi.

We can witness *Bharati as an imprint of the soul of Gandhi: Satygraha, Sarvodaya and their annexes*, Bharati was an orphan girl who looked after or adopted by *local Sevak Sangh*. She was successful spinner of Khadi and also she was a top seller of Khadi garments, she was a good consecrated girl in the collection of contributions for the arrival of Gandhi. She was the preacher of Gandhiji’s formulae. She always insisted to speak truth in and out of the camp. She could even pulse the whereabouts of Soul of Gandhi. Bharati was arrested and was kept in slaughter’s house as a prisoner which was near at distance of one hour walk distance (p.171).



The characters Bharati, Sriram, Gorpad and Jagadish fought for the nation's nationalism through their attitudes.

Mulk Raj Anand, *The Bubble* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1984) "I have been in the study devouring the words of Gandhi in *Young India* ... As I turned the pages, casually reading here and there, I came across the story of Uka. In simple direct words, the Mahatma had written about how this sweeper boy had been brought to the Sabarmati Ashram, how he was despised by everyone, until he had a bath, washed his clothes and was allowed to sit in the kitchen-dining room among other members of the house, and how this untouchable rose to be the equal of all the other Ashramites, specially because Gandhiji insisted on everyone, including himself, taking a vow that, like Uka, everyone would clean latrines in turn.

The Mahatma adopted him as his son, and appealed to everyone not to call the

outcastes' untouchables, but Harijans, sons of God."

*Mulk Raj Anand's autobiographical experienced character Mahatma Gandhi speaks on: Panchayat raj, true religion, modern world, god's love, Swaraj (Self government) (Untouchable. (p129, 140).*

This nationalist vision is furthered emphasized in the conclusion of the novel. The final scene can be read as a merging of uplifting Dalit identity with celebrating Gandhian ideas of nationalism. The narrator states, "There was everybody going to meet the Mahatma, to pay homage to Mohandas Karam chand Gandhi...They were just going; the act of going, of walking, running, hurrying, occupied them" (*Untouchable* 136).

The nationalist event becomes inspirational to Bakha because he is able to feel that he finally belongs to a society. Anand uses Bakha to show the consequences of colonization and the ways



that it can strip a person of his or her Indian identity. In his description of Bakha, Anand illustrates an India without an Indian identity to show his readers how detrimental such a lack can be. (Lodge thesis.)

Raja Rao shows how the freedom movement spread among the people of remote village in South India. A noble young man, Moorthy by name, spread Gandhiji's ideas regarding untouchability, charkha, Khadi, boycott, of toddy shop, non cooperation, religious beliefs and superstitions with foreign government and non payment of taxes among the people. (Indian Diaspora p.302)

And this authenticity is not merely cultural or linguistic, but extends to the political, religious, historical, geographical, psychological, literary, cultural, and perhaps even mythical heritage of village India.

But certainly the grandmother is really standing over what has to be a large

Ideological and narrative chasm if she is supposed to do the work of turning the secular world of the nationalist movement into the sacred world of Hindu mythology.

The first secularizing move is historical, though, and is recorded in the novel with the arrival of Jayaramachar, the *harikatha* man, into Kanthapura: Jayaramachar would be the Kannadigan incarnation of the Tilakite *harikatha* movement, yoking as he does nationalist ideas (“Self-purification, Hindu-Moslem unity, Khaddar” and “something about our country and something about Swaraj”) to the architecture of traditional Hindu stories.

We can view in Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura* Religion sets the stage for political activity. The people informed about Gandhiji through the Harikatha and enthused by Moorthy, Dore and other city boys, plunge into the movement, which at last becomes a broad based movement. They join hands and integrate themselves



into solid body. Moorthy's arrest is not a personal event, but a common concern of all the people. What brings Moorthy to tears is the fact that the two untouchable men (Pariah Rachanna and Lingayya) remain standing outside the temple and the scene outside remains entirely unaffected by the epiphanic structure of the political aspiration.

If the novel moves towards producing authentic representations of Indian forms and Indian life, then it has a kind of imagined, static, stable identity on which it can rely.

Gandhi's successes at mobilizing the peasantry were explained by his use of religious forms: his dress, his simple speech, his religious allegories, etc. And, as a result, it became something of a truism that religious allegories for nationalist arguments would result in a successful communication of political urgency to the peasant mind. (e  
Scholarship)

In *Kanthapura*, religion – an integral part of culture has been used for a secular and political purpose such as attaining Independence. Here religion has got a very significant role to play in defining the identity of people and also of the nation. (History colony)

In fact, the novel makes use of two kinds of appropriations: on the one hand, it appropriates the religious traditions of the country, such as Harikatha, to further the contemporary issues such as Swaraj and Nation. On the other hand, it also appropriates the contemporary history such as Indian National Movement and brings it to the fold of the religious traditions of India. Jayaramachar's Harikatha on the birth of Gandhi Mahatma is a consequence of such double appropriation of the novelist. (History colony)

Raja Rao justified equality in the election while transmitting from tradition to modernity as democratic values in the novel. Then Range Gowda said, "Moorthy



will be our president.” Everybody agreed, then Seenu said,” Range Gowda will be our super president and protector.” Everybody agreed. Seenu proposed that Rangamma should be third member. Moorthy said that it was very good because there should be a woman in the committee. Moorthy then wanted the Pariahs to propose someone from among them. They all quite. ... .. (p.107, 108) (Indian Diaspora p. 302)

What happens to their old identities that are defined by their castes and hierarchies in society when they begin identifying themselves with nation? Answers to the question, lead us to an interesting dialectics of identities in the novel. This is much similar to what happened to people, especially those belonging to the higher caste, during the Indian National Movement. People belonging to the Upper strata of society found new identity markers such as nation and nationalism very uncomfortable

because these new identities collided with their old identities of castes and unsettle their supremacy in society. (History colony)

The idea of identity as defined through *Sanathana dharma* and *Varnasram* (ancient religion and caste-system) is seriously threatened by the emergence of new identities. (History colony) First, it needs an ideological structure which it believes can move the peasantry to act.

But, after every interaction with the pariahs, when he wants to enter Rangamma’s house he asks her whether he could get into her house as he has come out of a pariah hut. Rangamma asks him to purify himself with Ganga water and then enter. Moorthy meekly follows her instructions and only after purifying with his sacred thread with Ganga water he enters her house. At this narrative juncture, Acchakka, the narrator of the



novel innocuously remarks: “After all, a Brahmin is a Brahmin, sister!” (p.105).

This is how a new identity is going to emerge out of a fixed relationship; an identity that recasts the binary relationship of the colonizer/colonized and puts it in a harmonious and mutually constructive mould, in the best spirit of universal religion. In sum, the novel demonstrates the possibility of how a creative writer can tap the deeply spiritual resources of his people living across a geographical locale to build the concept of nation with composite concepts such as culture, religion, place, etc., that coordinate to construct the nation. (History colony)

In Bhabani Bhattacharya’s novel *So Many Hungers!* The character Devata (Devesh Basu), whom the villagers of Baruni call ‘Devata’, inspires them to participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement. The Police arrest Devata and Kajoli’s father. The elder son Rahoul who follows the footsteps of his grandfather

Devesh looks at the war as a threat to democracy. “They are good people. Centuries of hardship and strain have not destroyed their faith in human values” (p.24)

By exposing the evils of society Battacharya arouses our social conscience. Battacharya’s novels integration does strictly mean the joining together reconciliation of opposites, of opposed values, for achieving the goal of common good. On one hand, in Battacharya’s novels. The reader comes to face- to- face with orthodoxy and obscurantism and a number of other cramping phenomena that are the necessary concomitance of a traditional-bound society. On the other hand, one also encounters in them various forces that operate against long – entrenched socio-political, economic, religious and cultural norms. (Literary Vibes p.12)

These patterns of reading Narayan’s, Anand’s, Rao’s and



Bhattacharya's fictions are descendants of the main school of historiography of Indian nationalism and of its identity.

This political education, though, requires certain kinds of educators, and a fairly affected pedagogy. Moorthy, in Gandhian fashion, calls off the political campaign in the village after the riot that ensues when the peasants rush to defend him from the police. After returning from jail, Moorthy fasts in order to rid himself of the hatred which he feels is the source of the violence in Kanthapura:

Raja Rao demonstrated his views as new entity in conversion of equality and of its identity for nationalism which will be fruitful and joyful forever. In the morning we saw Moorthy at the river. Why, sister, he was as ever- as ever. Why when one goes to prison one is as ever! (p.168) 'Mean while, brothers and sisters let get strong. The Congress men will have to swear again to speak Truth to spin their

daily one hundred yards, and put aside the idea of the holy Brahmin and the untouchable pariah. You know, brothers and sisters, we here in a temple, and temple is the temple of One, and we are on with everything that is in the One and who shall say is at the head of the One and another at foot? (P.169-170)

*Kanthapura* achieves its imagined national unity by reference to religious forms, but at the same time it corrupts and renders those forms more democratic. Or to put it differently, *Kanthapura repeats* the relationship of politics and religion that Gandhi had already inaugurated without reproducing Gandhian conclusions. (e scholarship.)

For Anand, literature played vital role in the reconstruction of the Indian identity. As he stated to the second AIPWA Conference: The task of building up a national culture out of the debris of the past, so that it takes root in the realities of the present, is the only way by which



we will take our place among those writers of the world who are facing with us the bitterest struggle in history, the struggle of the people of the world against Imperialism (Anand qtd in Ahmed). (Lodge thesis.)

I would like to further this idea and suggest that in Anand's attempt to rebuild Hinduism for the betterment of the nation, he loses the individuality of the Dalit figure. Gauri Viswanathan draws a similar conclusion in her book *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*. In her chapter "Conversion to Equality" Viswanathan criticizes Anand for his belief, evident in *Untouchable*, that the way to achieve Dalit liberation was through repairing discrimination within Hinduism.

In this manner, the effect of Indian sensibility observation purely in contemporary political event is absorbed into the mythic traditions of the land; a political movement such as Indian

nationalism assumes a religious denotation during Gandhian age. Thus signalling a new note in understanding an ideology called nationalism from an Indian perspective.

This is how a new identity is going to emerge out of a fixed relationship; an identity that recasts the binary relationship of the colonizer/colonized and puts it in a harmonious and mutually constructive mould, in the best spirit of universal religion. In sum, the novel demonstrates the possibility of how a creative writer can tap the deeply spiritual resources of his people living across a geographical locale to build the concept of nation with composite concepts such as culture, religion, place, etc., that coordinate to construct the nation.(History colony)

In the fiction of the novels, in R.K. Narayan's novel *Waiting for the Mahatma's* characters Jagadish's, Bharati's, Gorpada's and Sriram's, Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable's*



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character Bhaka's, Raja Rao's novel *Kanthapura* characters Moorthy's and Ratna's, and Bhabani Battacharya's novel *So Many Hungers!* character Devata's conversion to equality and nationalism comes through revelation of the Mahatma's political message by his virtue and deed.

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