

## CHAPTER FOUR

### HOME IN THE NATION

#### 4.1 The Child and the Nation

The reclamation of the child's space is integral for the development of the child into a full-fledged individual. But when the child tries to consume spaces outside home, it tries to conceptualize those spaces from a broader perspective also. The spaces outside home are interrogated to find out whether those spaces can be considered to be home and, if not, what makes them fall beyond the limits of home. The thorough examination of these spaces reveals that home cannot be seen only as a fixed structure which remains unchanged in time. Rather, the boundaries of home can be extended to a wide, encompassing area where the child finds itself comfortable and at the same time attains a level of expertise in negotiating the trickiness of meandering alleys. If home signifies a sense of rootedness and belonging, then this sense of attachment can be contextualized in a larger way in the nation too. Christopher Kelen and Bjorn Sundmark make an important point regarding this sense of belongingness:

the idea of childhood pervades the rhetoric of nation and citizenship. Etymologically, "nation" refers us to the idea of "being born" and thereby localizes and connects a prime term in identity to the personal origin of those individual subjects for whom the nation (their nation) is home. This hypostatization makes natural and fundamental a conceptual link on which the governance of modern nations relies—that national subjects will see themselves as belonging to, and as stake holders in, the national entity they see themselves as belonging to.(1)

Kelen and Sundmark make another interesting and important connection between children and the nation. They say that the conception of nation and nationhood depends on both the dead, who worked towards making the nation and those living, for whom the nation is conceptualized. When the nation is passed on to the next generation, not only is the concept of the nation taken forward but also the child realizes his/her own part in the nation and the roles that it needs to play in the future.

It also instills in the child an understanding of the sacrifices of those who died for the cause of the nation, for those deeds are instrumental in determining the meaning of the nation (2). Ghassan Hage relates home to nation and says that the “discourse of home, because it conveys a relation to the nation rather than some kind of objective definition of it, clearly implies not only an image of nation that is one’s own, but also of a self that occupies a privileged position vis-à-vis the nation, a privileged mode of inhabiting it” (41). When Benedict Anderson says, in his seminal work on nation and nationalism, that nation is “a political imagined community”(7), he of course means that the concept of nation does not have any fixed entity and it is an “imagined” notion that binds together various communities of people. This idea can be extended slightly farther to incorporate the concept of child and home too. When parents reproduce themselves and give “birth” to a child, they are in fact envisaging and imagining a future in the form of a child. This child, on the other hand, when it conceives of the idea of a home, also visualizes a place to belong and an identity of its own which is born out of the legacy of its own parents. The child therefore, in a sense, is also carrying forward the history of its parents and is a vision of the parents too. Both these ideas, when conjoined, bring forth the notion that the child is the future of the nation and the home that the child hopes can be found in the nation itself. But when we assume this notion, then we have also to accept the fact that the child itself is a construct carefully shaped and infused with ideas which are again based on another construct—that of the nation itself. Childhood becomes a fertile phase to inculcate beliefs and prejudices regarding one of the largest markers of cultural identity, the national identity, and is therefore so moulded that it can become the repository of cleverly crafted and designed conceptions that have taken years and probably centuries to be formulated.

In “Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood: An Interpretative Survey, 1800 to the present,” Harry Hendrick, though primarily discussing childhood in the context of nineteenth century Britain, makes a sociological analysis which can be applied to childhood in general. Hendrick says that eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain witnessed a cultural shift that changed the concept of childhood from a social and geographical construct to a singular and uniform construct. Hendrick names institutions like legislative authorities, the nuclear family, public schooling and similar institutions as the prime forces which shaped the concept of childhood. The

national construct of childhood took place through a carefully crafted political and cultural process and thus childhood came to be reproduced as a national product which was again considered to be universal in nature (34). Scourfield et al in *Children, Place and Identity* (2006), locate a person's identification with the nation in childhood itself and look at this period as the basis of identity formation where national consciousness is also developed. Referring to both Jenks and Gellner<sup>1</sup>, they identify childhood as a time period where the seeds of the characteristics of the adult world are sown, when the child is in a form-taking stage and various cultural signifiers become embedded within its identity. National consciousness is therefore cultivated, rather than being instinctive, and one of the primary factors which inculcate this feeling is the schooling system (1).

Nation and national identity therefore are formulated through the repeated use of certain specific markers which are representative of the society or nation at large. Miriam Verena Richter uses Jan Assmann's concept of "cultural memory", which mates the connection between history and identity. Assmann says:

The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals, specific to a given society in a given age, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity. (qtd. in Richter 8)

Richter elaborates through various references to arrive at the conclusion that a nation's memory or history comprises many things, some of which are remembered and some of which are forgotten, which again is a characteristic of literature too. Thereby literature also plays an important role in identity formation (9-10). Further, Richter says that literature formulates an identity or national identity and disseminates it for its readers to accept or reject as they wish to do so. But this formulation is again diffused with identifiable "signals and symbols" which readers of a particular nationality can easily identify with and react to, thereby making literature a medium for the perpetuation of a nation's culture (18). How children's literature uses these tactics and whether it is successful in doing so forms the basis of interrogation here.

## 4.2 Nation in Children's Literature

Children's literature serves as a potent tool through which the construct of the nation can be effectively portrayed and imbibed. As Peter Hunt in *Children's Literature: The Development of Criticism* (1990) says, literature for children works as an effective medium for the reflection of "society as it wishes to be, as it wishes to be seen, and as it unconsciously reveals itself to be" (2). Pat Pinsent says that, in examining children's literature, one important aspect to be noticed is that "no text can be written without the author's values being in some way significant in it" (*Politics of Equality* 23).<sup>2</sup> What are these values and how can they be translated in the context of imbibing values of the nation? In conceiving the idea of a nation, there are two facts that need to be considered—firstly, how does the nation belong to the child, and secondly, does the child have any role to play in the formation of the nation? Ghassan Hage thus differentiates between the two:

As the two formulations 'I belong to the nation' and 'This is my nation' (i.e 'The nation belongs to me') imply, there is at least a dual mode of belonging to the national home that we need to understand. The nationalist who believes him or herself to 'belong to a nation' in the sense of being part of it, means that he or she expects to have the right to benefit from the nation's resources, to 'fit into it' or 'feel at home' within it. This mode of belonging can be called *passive belonging*. The other mode of national belonging, the belief that one has a right over the nation, involves the belief in one's possession of the right to contribute (even if only by having a *legitimate* opinion with regard to the internal and external politics of the nation) to its management such that it remains 'one's home'. This is what I call *governmental belonging*. (original emphasis) (45)

Children's literature often tries to posit children in the position of *governmental belonging* where children are provided with agency through which they move from a passive position to one of dominance. This movement by itself helps in making the

child realize the potential of the nation and helps in carving out an identity for the child—an identity that is based on the nationalistic beliefs that the child has upheld through its endeavours. Children’s literature has therefore always been viewed as a medium of inculcating beliefs and values of the society into the malleable mind of the child and the concept of the nation is one of the most important beliefs that need to be inculcated. The pride and glory that is found in one’s national identity is an accumulation of the sense of pride felt at one’s home, society, community, race, or clan. It is perhaps difficult to assume that diverse cultures and societies can feel or exhibit pride and longing for the same national causes or values. The concept of national identity that takes shape out of a shared past is problematic because that shared past is again shared by very few people who make up the nation. At the same time, even if there is a presumed national identity, that identity is becoming increasingly blurred through the onslaught of globalization that tries to impose a collective world identity rather than discrete ones. And how will literature, when it tries to conceptualize a nation and national identity, be able to portray a unified concept of identity? If national consciousness is constructed through carefully selected nationalist discourses then how do we locate this consciousness in the globalized era where culture as a term has become too diffuse to point singularly to one particular aspect? In this world of easy access to globalized information and the invasion of the psyche by advertisements, children become easy targets of the consumerist culture. In the context of a third world, developing nation like India, the post globalization era has led to a mushrooming of fast food chains, shopping malls, multiplexes and so on leading to a stark demarcation between the have and the have-nots. In such a cultural milieu, it becomes increasingly difficult to attune children to a particular discourse of the nation. Is India represented only through its late twentieth and early twenty first century’s development or is there more to the country? In trying to answer this question we have to go backwards to the time of India’s independence when the newly formed nation struggled to find its identity and literature played an important role in shaping this identity.

#### **4.3 Nation in Children’s Literature in the context of India**

Carol Fox in her definition of national identity emphasizes the characteristics or differences that distinguish between one particular group or nationality and others.<sup>3</sup>

This differentiating notion is critical in developing a distinct identity which will give shape to a nation. After India's independence there was a definite attempt to carve out an Indian identity for its future generation; that is the children, an identity which they can take pride in and strive to maintain that nationalistic pride. Michelle Superle in *Contemporary English Language Indian Children's Literature Representations of Nation, Culture, and the New Indian Girl* (2011), says that literature became an ideal ideological tool for promoting national pride and encouraging child readers to feel the glory of the nation. She says that children's fiction became a medium through which nuanced cultural aspects of the nation were presented to the child reader and also featured child characters who acted heroically for the cause of the nation. Superle refers to Maxim Gorky and Ajit Kumar Das to emphasize the importance of children's literature in creating a national identity or building of the nation. While Gorky believed that children's literature has the potential to act as a powerful political tool in the nation building process, Das related the social development of the nation with children's literature. This concept makes sense in the aftermath of India's independence, where the necessity to carve out a unique identity—especially a cultural one—was acutely felt. But Superle, speaking in the context of English language Indian children's fiction, finds this approach problematic as it tends to be structured around a specific group of children only, who seem to embody national culture and values. If the ability to shape the nation's future is vested in the hands of a select few then the identification with the nation of a large group is excluded from the grand narrative (86-88). Superle refers at length to both Nehru's vision of India and also Kalam's idea of nation building to emphasize that the values upheld by them actually reinforce "the hegemonic group's values" (89). The tasks that are given to children to perform in order to shape the nation's future are the same that children in the fiction perform, whereby they execute their abilities to shape the nation. At the same time, the question of language has an important role to play here as English children's fiction in India is a very recent phenomenon and, thereby, English children's fiction having an important role in nation building is also a recent activity. The majority of English children's fiction available in India was and still is imported from the west and, when the first attempts were made at creating indigenous texts written in English, the result was mere imitation rather than any originality in writing. But with the progress in writing and publishing, home-grown authors tried their hands in a neglected genre to

bring to the fore India's own, unique entity and thereby to Indianize the genre. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan aptly refers to this in "Fictions of Difference":

Though the majority of children's books in India are adaptations, retellings, and even comic-strip renderings of Hindu myths, classics, and folklore or are Indianized versions of children's genres popular in the West school stories and adventures and detective stories, for example, a small number are now specifically written from within a realistic, contemporary Indian context. (101)

Superle feels that the Indianization of texts took place through certain markers that infuse "the plot with tangible objects that are recognizably Indian, which child readers could conceivably imagine themselves touching or consuming, thus appealing to the perceived sensual nature of children" (111). This ploy helps in making the texts replete with Indianness and the western genre is therefore successfully transplanted into the Indian milieu. The more specific examples which fall under this purview are detective or mystery fiction, where attempts have been made not only to change the detecting techniques to ones suited to the Indian cultural landscape but also to make the contexts identifiable for the reader. Thus, children are not allowed the freedom to move about at will that the children in the likes of Blyton's world are allowed to do, but, at the same time, the mysteries that they investigate are presented in situations and locales where they can have the freedom to move about and investigate too.

We will look at three children's detective or mystery fictions to analyze how the concept of nation is upheld in these works and significantly how children work towards protecting the idea of nation. The three works that we take up for consideration here are Arup Kumar Dutta's *The Kaziranga Trail* and *Footprints in the Sand*, and Shashi Deshpande's *The Hidden Treasure*. These three novels use the same format of mystery or detection with children as the detectives to project a very clichéd property that needs protection. In *The Kaziranga Trail*, there could not be a better or bigger representative of the nation (or, more precisely, of Assam) than the famed one-horned rhinoceros. Kaziranga sanctuary is the home of these rhinos and they are often hunted for their horns. The problem has become almost a state problem in itself and every now and then there is a hue and cry over rhino hunting with the media and

public vociferously protesting against government apathy and the cruelty of the poachers. After some time the whole issue is forgotten, only to rise again when some more hunting takes place. Thus Kaziranga and rhinos become synonymous with the recurring problems of the state and Dutta adroitly centres on this problem, to situate his first children's fiction. The backdrop provides an ideal setting to Indianize the very western genre of children's detective fiction and to make the crime also seem realistic. In *Footprints in the Sand*, the concept of national pride is taken a step further, where children join together to save no less a person than the Prime Minister himself. The plot revolves round an attempt to assassinate the Prime Minister and the children are successful in foiling the plans of a foreign nation. Just as Kaziranga and rhinos are representative of the nation's pride and are national property, so also the treasure of the Maratha peshwas is national property, which needs to be retrieved from the depths of anonymity to be used for the benefit of the nation. Shashi Deshpande mixes adventure and local history together to put forward a nuanced representation of the bravery of children in the service of the nation. Arup Dutta takes this concept forward in his later works too and many of them, including *The Blind Witness* and *Smack*, are depictions of children braving it out in the face of adversity for the cause of the nation. Though both *The Blind Witness* and *Smack* have a fair amount of violence and threat to life, yet it is in *Footprints in the Sand* that we find violence and threat carried out to a large extent. The danger is also of a large magnitude and the fact that the nation is at stake could not be better portrayed. Within the context of Indian English children's literature, the plot could hardly have any larger importance. In Deshpande's limited children's fiction, we find the same impetus for solving crimes of national importance where children are found moving from petty neighbourhood crimes to larger ones, like kidnapping and bank robberies. The commonality in the works of both authors (particularly in the context of the three novels taken up for consideration here) is that the concept of nation and its property or heritage are equated in terms of one's own home or belongings, which need to be secured at any cost. For the three Kaziranga boys, the sanctuary is their home and the rhinos are like a family for them and any attack on the sanctuary is thereby an attack on their home. For Paloma, Arnab and Bompa not only has their literal home been attacked but also the fact that their home, that is their nation, is going to be thrown into a frenzy is the impetus behind their initiative. For the three brothers and sisters in *The Hidden Treasure*, the treasure is ancestral property and they need to protect it



from outsiders who want to acquire it for personal interests. It is imperative for them to save it from the wrong hands as it is their own ancestral property that is at stake.

#### **4.4 The Nation and Detective Fiction**

Why is detective fiction an important means through which both these authors portray the saving of the nation and that too by children? To answer this question we have to understand some of the vital aspects of this genre. First and foremost let us try to define mystery or detective fiction and for this we take two working definitions provided by Caroline Reitz and Chris McGee. Reitz uses the definition from *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, stating that there are many other available definitions but she uses it to define the “most basic characterization of detective fiction” (91). She defines the characteristics of the genre as “a mysterious event or crime . . . at first concealing the solution from the reader but finally revealing it through the successful investigations of the detective” (xvi). Chris McGee defines it from a narrative perspective as “structured around the distance between an event, most often a crime, and the revelation of secrets surrounding that event by the end of the story. Mysteries function by suspending knowledge, prolonging the uncertainty for pleasure” (44). Both these definitions emphasize the concealment of the solution at the beginning and later the knowledge acquired though the secret being revealed to the detective or those who seek it. The knowledge, once it is revealed, proves to the seekers of knowledge and also to the reader, that the enemy is most often from within rather than somebody from outside and this knowledge is useful in guarding and protecting a nation. If the members of a family revolt or conspire against their own then the family’s doom is inevitable. The outsider can always be treated with mistrust and held accountable for conspiring against the family but its own members are neither mistrusted nor necessarily held accountable always. The outsider when he arrives is always in the guise of a charmer who easily becomes part of the family and thereby resists detection. Though it would be wrong to generalize this pattern with relation to all detective fiction (hardboiled detective fiction hardly follows this pattern) yet this generalization helps in forming the basis of the two of the three texts analyzed here. The nation, like the home, needs not only to be protected from the outsiders but also from the insiders who conspire against it and therefore it is necessary to identify these insiders too. Both *The Kaziranga Trail* and *The Hidden*

*Treasure* emphasize this fact and thereby lay bare the problematic aspect of disloyalty and greed of the nation's own people and the children's initiative to save the nation. On the other hand, *Footprints in the Sand* emphasizes the problems of external aggression and the fact that the nation is always at stake. The development of the nation, which is so often emphasized becomes the reason for foreign elements to attack and cause mayhem and the home the site of such potential threats from outsiders.

While the crimes that are committed are very grave in nature, yet the mode of uncovering the criminals is followed through a very leisurely manner where children are the agents of perpetuating justice rather than the competent government authority. Hage's concept of *governmental belonging* comes into play here, where the children imagine and actively engage in an attempt to belong to the nation and make it their own. Two things need to be considered here if we have to answer the discrepancy between the graveness of crime and the nature of detecting the crime. The first is the explanation given by Caroline Reitz when she speaks in the context of Victorian detective fiction. She proposes that the detective story is a means through which the aggression of the police or other government authority is toned down. The police, as a force, faced vehement opposition in Victorian England because of its brutal methods in the context of crime detection and also of regulating social control. As reformers laid down rules to be followed by the government in terms of use of violence, the defensive use of violence necessitated a different means of policing. It is here that the "detective story transformed archaic aggression into a more modern, benevolent authority by offering detection as the way of avoiding despotic displays of government authority"(xv). The same idea can be applied with relation to the three texts here, too, albeit in a slightly different context. As explained earlier, government indifference remains a prime reason for the perpetuation of crime and therefore government authority is not trusted to do its work properly. On top of that, the rampant corruption and the attitude of the police to make a soft target the scapegoat is common knowledge and so the police is generally kept at arm's length if some other method could be adopted. The answer to the second question as to why children are used in detection is given by Christopher Routledge in "Crime and Detective Literature for Young Readers", where he says that children "have an advantage in that they are invisible to the adults at the centre of the plot"(325). He refers to Sherlock

Holmes' Baker Street Irregulars, and Holmes' comment about children is significant in this regard:

“There's more work to be got out of one of those little beggars than out of a dozen of the force . . . The mere sight of an official-looking person seals men's lips. These youngsters, however, go everywhere and hear everything. They are as sharp as needles too; all they want is organization.” (qtd. in Routledge 325)

This attitude is reiterated by Mr. Neog, the District Forest Officer in charge of wildlife, in *The Kaziranga Trail* where he asks the three children to become the eyes of the department and ask questions to the villagers regarding the poachers. He says that the poachers will be alerted if officials ask questions but children can easily do that without alerting the poachers.

The genre of detective fiction in India is largely a western import and even in adult literature progress has not been extensive. But there have been sustained efforts from time to time and Claire Chambers in “Postcolonial *Noir*: Vikram Chandra's ‘Kama’” argues that post-decolonization of a large number of European colonies after the Second World War, a body of postcolonial crime novels grew up. In India, writers like Jamyang Norbu and Satyajit Ray not only rewrote the stereotypical representation of formerly colonized nations in western detective fiction but also tried to create a fiction which was true to the Indian cultural moment and milieu (33). In addition, Claire feels that detective fiction as a genre was always popular in the subcontinent, especially in Tamil Nadu, and from 1940s onwards writers like Devan, Vaduvor Duraiswamy Iyenger, and Tamil Vanan produced a largely successful pulp culture along the lines of American magazines like *Black Mask*. The detectives created by them more or less conformed to the western stereotypes of detectives who were idiosyncratic and eccentric in their manners but with wonderful deductive powers combined with bravery. But they too tried to infuse a sense of Indianness into the genre and therefore Iyengar's detective Digambara Swamiyar is a sanyasi who is also a private detective (33). In the context of Indian English children's literature, which is itself suffering from a hangover from the west, it is necessary to understand the complexities that go into the making of an Indian English children's detective or

mystery novel. As discussed earlier, Superle feels that the plot has been Indianized to give it a local colour and feeling. Other than that, most detective fiction for children in Indian English remains what she terms an “Indian Blytonnade”. It is important therefore to also look at the three novels taken up here to analyze them from the perspective of Indianization also. Have Arup Kumar Dutta and Shashi Deshpande been successful in getting out of the mould and in creating a distinct identity in Indian English children’s detective fiction?

#### **4.5 Saving the Nation: Saving the Home**

The home needs to be secured against those who are on a rampage to destroy its stability and peace. It is important therefore to distinguish between what is home and what is not home and thus home is contrasted with that which is not home, that is “foreign”. Blunt and Dowling in their consideration of the relation between home and foreign refer to Rosemary Marangoly George’s statement that the definitions of homes and nations are constructed through the differences between home and what is ‘not home’, in other words what is foreign (143).<sup>4</sup> From this concept arises the notion of protection of home from foreign elements. If home is signified as not being foreign, then anything foreign which invades it has to be ousted for the security of home. William Walters, in “Secure Borders, Safe Haven, Domopolitics”, makes a strong statement regarding the security of home and differentiating between those who belong and those who do not. He says that home is a safe haven where the one who belongs should protect it from outsiders. Guests, when they come, are there by invitation and should not stay indefinitely, whereas those who are uninvited should be sent back to where they belong. Home needs to be secured because its contents are important for us and are a cause of envy for others (241). This notion of home being a cause of pride for its inhabitants and one of envy for others forms the root of many invasions of home and transgression of its sanctity. Children’s mystery and adventure fiction uses this very concept to interrogate the ways through which the narratives have tried to integrate the concept of nation into the mindset of the child. Has children’s literature been successful in giving the children enough freedom to become agents of change and able to secure home? These are the questions that need to be answered through an analysis of the texts taken up here.

#### 4.5.1 Saving the National Symbol

Peter Freese, in *The Ethnic Detective: Chester Himes, Harry Kemelman, Tony Hillerman* (1992), comments on the ethnic detective novels and says that “ethnic mysteries can fulfill the function of anthropological handbooks and provide their readers with exciting introduction to unknown cultures” (10). The same can be said of indigenous children’s detective fiction, particularly a work like *The Kaziranga Trail*, set in a very exotic locale which is the site of general curiosity and interest for others to know not only about the sanctuary but also about poaching. Arup Kumar Dutta in many ways tries to steer clear of making his work a tourist guidebook but at times he cannot escape the practice of presenting his child detectives in the fashion of their western counterparts, not only child detectives but adult ones too. Like many western children detectives, his detectives also move in groups. Though the three boys, Dhanai, Jonti and Bubul, do not exactly fall into the category of middle-class urban children that Superle criticizes, yet they are superior in their own surroundings. While Dhanai is the son of the mahout of the Kaziranga Forest Department and they own three elephants, Bubul and Jonti are the twin sons of the village headman and this, in a sense, places them above the other children of their village. Before the three protagonists are introduced into the narrative, the crime (the poaching of the rhinos) is described in all its grim and grisly details and the reader is not spared of the repugnance that comes with it. Dutta thus makes it clear from the very beginning that though the work is children’s fiction he is not going to make it childish by glossing over the actual crime and the way it is carried out. The gravity of the crime necessitates that its details should not be shrouded from readers and any attempt to do so would only make the whole situation seem farcical. In a sense, Dutta thus deviates from the earlier Anglo-American tradition where the description shies away from depiction of real violence and bloodshed. He thus describes the actual process of the cutting of the rhino’s horn:

The leader of the gang moved into action . . . He lifted the *dao* and began to hack away at the animal’s snout to remove the horn.

The rhino cringed in pain. Blood spouted from its snout like a fountain. The man went on hacking. After a while he stopped and

picked up the horn, covered with flesh and blood . . . His hands were bloody. On his face was a triumphant, fiendish smile.

The rhino stood in the pit, life ebbing out of its body. By morning it would be dead. Vultures would swoop down to feed upon its carcass.

(8)

The very stark narrative at the beginning itself therefore makes the reader aware that this is neither going to be a glorification of the natural beauty of the sanctuary nor an easy adventure for enjoyment. As the three boys are introduced into the narrative, we find that Dutta's portrayal swerves back from the grimness of reality to the easy-going nature of three boys out for adventure in their summer holidays. But it also emphasizes that the boys are at one with the landscape and are aware and alert for any change in it, small or large. This sense of merging with the land becomes a crucial element in their resolve to fight against the poachers, for it is their land and their home that is being encroached upon. But the narrative also employs the usual tactics of detective fiction and thus, when the boys find the dead rhino, Bubul suggests that it would be better to hunt for some clues first before reporting the matter to the forest authorities, as suggested by Dhanai. There is a storm brewing and if they are not quick the rain would not leave any clues for the forest authorities to come and search for. The observant power of Jonti is also stressed upon in the very beginning and, in their search for clues, it is Jonti who discovers the impression of the footprint with the big toe missing and this proves an important tool in their later detection process.

The matter is ultimately reported to Mr. Neog, the District Forest Officer in charge of wildlife, and in between their discussion, Phukan, the head forest ranger, also enters. Unlike Mr. Neog, whose features are not described when he is first introduced into the narrative, Phukan's entry is marked with a narratorial description of a tall, thin man with narrow eyes. This description can act in a double way. Traditionally, at least in literature, thin people are always looked upon with a suspicious eye and are more often than not bound to be the evil-doers. Dutta could have used this description either to fool the reader into doubting the wrong person, as so often happens in detective fiction, or he could have used it as a clue to identify the evil one from the beginning. What his authorial intentions are, becomes clear a little later, and, on reflecting back,

the reader can understand the description better. Phukan is indignant that it is the boys who have discovered the dead rhino and the fact that they have entered a protected area. Mr. Neog's response in support of the boys succinctly summarizes the premise of nation and national property being home. He replies to Phukan's tart comments: "These boys are not tourists coming for a visit. Their village was here long before this became a sanctuary. *Kaziranga and its animals are a part of their lives*" (emphasis added) (15-16).

The boys accompany the forest officials to the site of the poaching and here, too, Jonti displays his keen observational powers by not only discovering the make-shift hut of the poachers but also surmising how many men were there from the available clues. He has also deduced, from the leftover food, that the people involved were locals and not outsiders. The boys are therefore appointed as honorary game-watchers and become privy to some of the doubts and theories regarding the poachers that Mr. Neog harbours. When the boys return home after their very eventful morning, they find their parents anxiously waiting for them. After the whole incident is narrated, the parents are proud of their activities and advise them to be careful. The narrative very soon reveals that the boys are not up against any small-time poachers but are pitting themselves against some organized group who can kill wantonly to defend themselves. Dhanai and the twins are warned that very night to stay away from further investigations or the consequences will not be pleasant for them. But instead of deterring them in their plans, it only strengthens their resolve. At the same time, they try to figure out how the poachers have come to know about their involvement and Jonti again, by logical deduction, comes to the conclusion that the traitor within them is none other than Phukan. With this piece of information they decide to trail Phukan and find out what he is up to. This decision helps them in uncovering the secret of the whole poaching episode and they come to know that the outsider involved is somebody called Mr. Bose, who has come there to do a deal for six rhino horns and is staying in the tourist lodge, posing as a tourist. The snooping job that the boys undertake makes them knowledgeable about Phukan's habit of gambling and consequently the loss of money that has compelled him to become involved in poaching. At the same time, Phukan is threatened by Mr. Bose that, if he fails to provide the six horns as decided earlier, then he must face dire consequences. They also come to know that the next meeting of the poachers will be held in an abandoned

bungalow. The boys' attempt to contact Mr. Neog proves futile as he has left for Guwahati. Left in a lurch, it is now up to the boys to use all their resources to get hold of the poachers and save Kaziranga.

It is again Jonti who devises a plan to detain Mr. Bose for some time, so that the police can later round him up. Arup Dutta makes use of local knowledge and beliefs to give an interesting twist to the tale. The boys get hold of some locally available berries which upset the stomach and use the juice of these berries to add to Mr. Bose's food. They have a clever plan to fool the waiter who takes food for Mr. Bose and, in execution of the plan, both Babul and Jonti take advantage of the fact that they are identical twins. When the waiter is taking the food and also the bills for Mr. Bose, he first meets Babul, who says that the accountant has called him back. The waiter hands the tray of food to Babul so that he will not have to carry it back all the way and returns to the main building of the tourist lodge only to find Jonti walking out of the building. Thinking that Jonti is the same person as Babul, he is surprised and frightened too. Arup Dutta uses local beliefs and thus the waiter spreads the news that a *birra* (a local term for ghost) has come and confronted him. This piece of news is spread quickly and as, all ghost stories go, it changes in proportion soon and Jonti and Babul take the form of evil ghosts with long nails and hair. The boys are successful in detaining Mr. Bose and Dutta's interweaving of local customs and beliefs within the narrative lends added flavour to it. At the same time, because of Mr. Neog's absence, the three boys decide to do some detective work and so they go to the abandoned bungalow all by themselves. But before that, they ask Neog *mami*, Mr. Neog's wife, to contact him at any cost and ask him to come over immediately. Unfortunately, Neog *mami* unwittingly and in the goodwill of her heart, betrays the secret of the boys to Phukan, which puts them in grave danger. The events then follow quickly, with Jonti and Babul being taken as prisoners by the poachers while Dhanai manages to escape. He gives them the slip riding on the back of Makhoni and uses his knowledge of the meandering ways of the sanctuary to arrive at Mr. Neog's house. Jonti and Babul also manage to break free of the bonds, using the very knives that were flung at them earlier, and in between, Mr. Neog also arrives to save the boys. But poetic justice comes in the shape of Phukan being murdered by the same people with whom he was an accomplice. The threat given to him by Mr. Bose earlier comes true and Phukan senses his guilt in his last few breaths of life. He therefore tries to undo the



wrong by divulging the hideout where Jonti and Babul have been taken. And in the end Muniya, the poacher, is actually stopped by a rhino itself when he is trying to escape from the place.

#### **4.5.2 Saving the National Representative**

*Footprints in the Sand* takes the danger involved in children's detective work to a different level as the children are put at stake and directly face the danger. Arup Dutta situates his narrative in the exotic locale of Goa and also invests the plot with children on a holiday where they find a mystery to solve. Paloma and Arnab belong to an upper middle-class family and Bompa, whom they meet later on, is from the fringes of their society and thereby readily fulfills the role of the sidekick. Superle is critical of this type of character and of the fact that a large percentage of fictional figures are from the "urban and/or middle-class, upper-caste characters" (86). At the same time, Superle criticizes the fact that:

these middle-class characters act to shape their communities—and thus the nation in microcosm. Indian children from other backgrounds lack agency and are excluded from the central narratives, which are always focalised from the point of view of the protagonists. Characters from rural areas and from lower castes and classes, when they are present in the novels, are generally restricted to appearing as secondary characters or as part of a collective protagonist. They rarely play a central role, and usually these characters are stereotyped token inclusions. (86)

But Dutta does not merely allow Bompa to become part of the narrative to fill in the writing space but makes him an integral part of the narrative. He is incorporated into the plot structure and in fact enjoys a more central role than Paloma herself, who does not go inside the villa in the nightly prowl. Moreover, when the children are placed under threat because of their involvement in the imbroglio, Bompa is not left out to fend for himself but is taken away along with the other two. This proves that Dutta has not been trying to prioritize the characters on the basis of their class or caste but

rather integrates the fringes into the mainstream. It is mainly the children's intelligence that is put into interrogation in the novel and Dutta does not try to represent Bompa's intelligence any lower than the other two.

Paloma and Arnab's father has work at Danadona and he invites his family over to Goa during the summer vacation so that they will not be left alone. The children, along with their mother, arrive at a resort at Goa which is very near to Danadona where their father is working. Dutta, at the very beginning, makes a distinction between the two children, depicting Arnab as the more adventurous of the two and there is a distinct streak in him which seeks adventure. The days spent at the resort are good enough for him but there is disappointment also as he seeks for something more. The narrator pokes gentle fun at this trait of his and says that it comes from his reading too many adventure books. Both the children meet Bompa, the grandson of the old fisherman, Murrugali, and this meeting in fact enhances Arnab's desire for mystery as Bompa also shares the same desire. Grandpa Murrugali also told Arnab many adventure stories from his own youthful exploits and it keeps Arnab engrossed for hours. But the thirst for something new is sated through Paloma's efforts to find sea shells and thus a mystery unfolds for the children. Three mysterious sets of footprints in the sand set Arnab and Paloma off to make some clever deductions and arrive at the conclusion that, after the storm of the previous night, someone arrived carrying something heavy. When they follow the footprints, they find a lonely villa near the seashore. Paloma, for some unknown reason, feels a sense of uneasiness and this, in a way forewarns the readers about the hurdles that will impede them soon.

The threat that looms large is revealed in the very next chapter when the children meet their father's friend, Mr. Vohra. He explains to the children about the impending visit of the Prime Minister to lay the foundation stone of the project on which their father is working. The security measures being taken for his visit make Arnab ask Mr. Vohra about the enemies of the Prime Minister, to which he replies, "Not personal enemies, Arnab . . . But enemies of our nation, both within and without. There're forces inside our nation trying to breed anarchy. The P.M., obviously, becomes a target for such elements" (26).

Unlike *The Kaziranga Trail*, where the threat to the nation remains implicit, Dutta spells it out in so many words at the very beginning. The threat to the Prime

Minister's life is not only from within but also from outside and, thereby, it increases the threat to the nation. The narrative also lays stress on the functioning of democracy in India and the rising stature of India in South-East Asia, all of which pose a threat from forces which want to destabilize the nation through chaos and anarchy. Targetting the Prime Minister will give rise to instability and violence, which will ultimately lead to the failure of democracy. These are grave issues to be discussed in children's fiction but Dutta does not shrink from doing this and therefore imbues his text with the possibility of future violence and danger. The security officer, though, assures them that there is no call for undue worry because everything is under control. Even when Arnab mentions the mysterious footprints in the beach it is not taken seriously by the adults. It is this complacency that is put into question through the efforts of the children, who uncover the plot to assassinate the Prime Minister. The children, despite the assurance by the adults, are unwilling to accept the explanation and therefore embark on their investigations.

The children meet Bompa, who shares their enthusiasm regarding the footprints and therefore they decide to ask Grandpa Murrugali regarding the villa. They then decide to investigate, which leads them on to many new facts and facets of the mystery that surrounds the solitary villa. They learn that the villa is indeed inhabited by some persons who are unwilling to reveal themselves to the rest of the villagers. However, when they, with the help of Grandpa Murrugali, convey this information to Menezes, the officer-in-charge of the local police station, he is skeptical about the whole episode. Dutta very overtly reflects on the complacent attitude of most policemen in mysteries who are at first unwilling to believe the children's tale and are later on proved wrong. Paloma, Arnab and Bompa then plan to do some snooping of their own in the villa, which will tell them more about the place and its inhabitants. The only adult ally they have for now is Grandpa Murrugali, who is almost like a child in his remembrance of yester-years' exploits. What they learn on their night adventure in the villa sweeps them off their feet. They realize that a foreign assassin has been hired by somebody to kill no less a person than the Prime Minister himself. Though Arnab and Bompa try their best not to be discovered, they are seen by one of the men and a hue and cry ensues in the midst of which both of them manage to run away from the villa. But their nightly prowling has brought imminent danger to their lives, as is proved by the attack on their resort by armed men, later on. It is only through sheer

luck and the timely intervention of the villagers that they are able to survive the attack from the men. Though the villagers rush to the villa in search of the men, they have already left and there are no leads to follow. But this attack has in fact proved the children right in front of the adults and has brought to light the heinous plot being hatched by the assassins. When Menezes later on apologizes to the children for not having paid heed to them, Grandpa Murrugali echoes the very sentiment of detective children's fiction: "This must be a lesson to all of us. Young folks are sharper with their eyes than us grownups. We should never deny them a hearing when they need it" (83).

The children, including Bompá, are whisked off to Danadona and it is there that Mr. Vohra reveals his plans to the children. The villagers have not been privy to the fact that the men in the villa wanted to assassinate the Prime Minister and here, at Danadona also, nobody knows that the Prime Minister's visit has been cancelled. The plan is to let the assassin walk into the trap set by the security officers and so they are waiting for one false move on his part. In the meantime, the children move about freely, enjoying the sights and keeping an eye open for the crooks. This leads to a rounding up of a few of the less important people but the real assassin is able to escape. It is Paloma again who uses her wits to decode the riddle that the assassin has earlier told his accomplice and thus finds out that he is going to return in the same way that he arrived. The security officers lay a trap for him and he literally walks into it, along with his two accomplices who have come to pick him up from the seaside. The mission thus accomplished, the children realize how big a disaster they have been able to avert through their alert nature and the use of their wits along with their thirst for adventure.

Dutta adds a new dimension to his writing by going inside the mind of the assassin and presenting his viewpoint too. Though in *The Kaziranga Trail*, he gives the reader an outlook into the last thoughts of Phukan, who dies thinking about his past life and how he has swerved off the right path, it is more about repentance than the actual ideas involved in committing the crime. But *Footprints in the Sand* takes us literally into the mind of the assassin, whereby the reader gets an insight into what the assassin is thinking once his plan is foiled. Dutta does not waste words in demonizing him but rather presents him as a person who takes his job very professionally and plans

meticulously each and every move. It is only the intelligence of the children pitted against that of the assassin that Dutta portrays and the children are not shown to be engaging in something very daring, away from adult supervision except for the one nightly prowl. In fact, throughout the novel they are seen much of the time in compliance with the adults.

#### **4.5.3 Saving the National Treasure**

In Shashi Deshpande's *The Hidden Treasure*, home is constructed as a microcosm of India and the concept of unity in diversity is played out to reinforce the nation mainly through the agency of children. Like the children in the other two novels who join forces for respective missions, thereby displaying a strong nationalistic fervour, the three brothers and sisters—Dinu, Minu and Polly, and their cousin Ravi, along with Satish, pool their strength and intelligence to work for the collective good of the community. Deshpande has transformed an often-used motif of the treasure hunt to incorporate social ideals and community building ideas. In a nation divided by caste, religion and poverty, a consensual platform needs to be built where everybody can unite to take the nation forward. Co-operation among fellow beings forms the basis on which a nation can be built and this ideal is also reflected in the goals put forward by both Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. Both these leaders emphasized the twin goals of freedom from the British and the building of a new India where everyone has equal rights. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam too outlines the same goals for the nation, especially for the youth of the nation, in his *Mission India: A Vision for Indian Youth*, where he envisages India as a developed nation and not any longer a developing one (Superle 63).

Dinu, Minu and Polly, along with their cousin Ravi, are representative of the middle-class ideals that shape the nation. Though Ravi is slightly higher in the social hierarchy as he stays in a big city, Bombay, unlike the rest of them who belong to small-town India, yet he is suitably mellowed down to be incorporated into the same ideals as his cousins. Surprisingly, Satish, their aunt's distant relative, is not brought into the same fold and he can come into their group only when he purges himself of the secret he has known all along. The treasure being the ancestral property of the three children, an outsider like Satish cannot be allowed to be part of it. On the other hand, Ravi, despite being an outsider too, is allowed to be privy to their actions

because they have sanctioned his activity. Thus, the upholders of the ideals of the nation will decide who will perform what function and how they will be allowed to be part of the grand narrative of shaping the nation. And, in this process, children are not the only agents who will function to bring about change; even adults are allowed to do their bit. Deshpande therefore stresses that the co-operation which benefits the community should not be restricted to children alone though they are the perpetrators of co-operation but should permeate the whole society to build a stronger nation.

Dinu, Minu and Polly are the three children of a college teacher staying in a small unnamed town. When their father decides that he will take their mother along with him to Delhi where he is to attend a course, the children along with their cousin Ravi are sent to their Kaka's (uncle's) place in the village, which is also their ancestral village. The narrative from the very beginning is striving hard to isolate the children from adult supervision so that they can carry out their activities without much adult interference. Dinu overhears his parents arguing about something and when he asks his Amma (mother) about it, he comes to know about his father's plans to go to Delhi. While Dinu is sad that his parents want to go without them because of the expense involved in taking all three of them, he is determined that his parents should go and leave them alone. Minu also insists that they should go and only Polly feels that she could not stay alone. The mother is unwilling to leave them alone but at the same time she very much wishes that she could do so. When Kaka comes and solves the problem by taking them away to his village, Polly asks the question about Shanta, the young girl they have rescued in an earlier adventure. All the while that Amma was worrying about her children and Ravi too, she has not spared a thought for Shanta, the servant girl. And the problem is solved rather too easily by disposing her away from the narrative itself. She is already meant to be sent to the colonel's house because his family is coming over for Diwali and "he needs more help at home" (103). The high flown values that were displayed through the rescuing of the girl in an earlier novel are replaced by more pragmatic ones where the girl never becomes an equal with the other children. But the narrative in fact upholds this action as a positive one where the girl moves up in social status: "Since Shanta had no parents or family of her own, Amma had taken her into her house. Now she had become their friend, pupil (Minu was teaching her to read and write), admirer, and Amma's devoted helper" (103).

Shanta has no one of her own and so, when the children rescued by taking her home, it is seen as a positive step towards her survival. However, the narrative does not incorporate her thoughts and feelings at all to give a voice to her marginalized status (Superle 42). The middle-class values that portray the children as the architects of a new nation, irrespective of caste, creed, religion or economic disparity, are in fact found to be deficient since they portray a very lopsided picture of development. Only those values and ideals are upheld which conform to the three children's (or more importantly Dinu's and Minu's) sense of right and wrong and everyone else, including Ravi and Satish, will be incorporated only when they are suitably chastized and are willing to be allied to the same values.

The children, when left alone, can thus function to make the nation progressive. But for this to happen, adult control over them should be relinquished and this, in a way, works as a ploy through which the children are given more space and agency to perform. David Rudd in "Digging up the Family Plot: Secrets, Mystery, and the Blytonesque", speaking in the context of Enid Blyton's mysteries, says that there are "many fractures in home life and the adults that constitute it" (84). But unlike the children in Blyton's fiction who are often physically or mentally abused by their parents or guardians, the children here are not abused but most often left alone to do their own thing. The adults more often than not want to find a ruse so that they can dispose the children. Abandonment occurs more on a metaphorical level and this theme runs throughout the three novels that feature the three children and their cousin—in *A Summer Adventure* not only do Ravi's parents leave him to go abroad but also the three children's parents leave them alone for a while to attend to a sick grandmother; in *The Hidden Treasure* the parents leave them to go to Delhi, Ravi travels from Bombay alone to come to his cousin's place, and Satish's parents also send him to live with his relative; and in *The Only Witness*, when the three travel to Ravi's place in Bombay, they are often left alone by the working parents of Ravi. Though the parents are not the wicked stepmother of Hansel and Gretel, yet, like their counterparts in the fairy tale, the children have to find their way out of the problems that come up when left alone. But seen from a larger perspective, this narratorial technique in fact empowers the children in finding their place in an adult world through the use of their intellect and courage. The mysterious and hidden are demystified and revealed through the children's efforts. Thus, Adrienne E. Gavin and

Christopher Routledge say in “Mystery in Children's Literature from the Rational to the Supernatural: An Introduction”, that “because adulthood is a mystery to children and childhood has become a mystery to adults and neither can ever ‘solve’ the other state . . .” (2), children can only strive to enter the adult world by behaving as adults.

When children attempt to enter this adult world, the means through which they can achieve any significance is in the uncovering of adult secrets. John Stahl says that the process through which children create, find, and solve secrets is also the process of growing up and therefore it is a means through which children both state and nurture their “individuality and independence” (“Imaginative Uses” 39). From the very young child who is prohibited from going outside alone, to the older child who is allowed restricted entry to the adult world, the external world, or more precisely, the world of the adults generally presents itself as a secret or mystery which needs to be solved and understood so that they can become a part of it. The three children, when they move to their Kaka’s place, become inadvertently privy to a family legend through Roopa’s casual mentioning of the treasure. This knowledge not only gives them entry into an adult world but also provides them with opportunities to establish themselves as capable of doing what the adults cannot do through their industry, bravery and intellect. But at the same time, adult secrets are disapproved of and to be a part of them is to be engaged in activities which will invite doom and danger too. The adult lures the child into its secrets for its own benefits and will willingly abandon the child when the necessity of the child is over. Satish, who is at first delighted because he has been introduced to the secret of the adult, realizes his mistake only later on. As Satish rues, “I should have guessed then it was something wicked. But I didn’t. I was pleased to have a secret with a grown-up” (247). Therefore, it is more important to solve the secrets rather than to be part of them because being a part actually leads the child away from innocence to the complicated and often wicked ways of the adult world. It is thus important to perform in the adult world and to establish oneself through hard work and this necessity can be translated into the larger context of the nation and nationalism also. The ideals and visions of the pioneers of the nation, like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and recently A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, conceptualized India as a nation on its first steps towards progress, which should be taken forward by the children of the nation. Compared with the developed nations of the world, especially just after independence, India as a nation was in a fledgling stage. In order to be a



full-fledged, developed nation, to compete with the “adult” nations of the world, the citizens should strive hard to make the nation a progressive one along with mutual co-operation and brotherhood. The children therefore not only perform in a literal adult world but also in a metaphorical one.

Once in Kaka’s village, the old story of their ancestor having hidden some treasure somewhere comes up again and the children are determined to find it. But all is not going to be easy as there are a lot of other people involved in this search including their aunt’s distant relative, Satish. From the village master Sadashiv to Shukla, the stranger they meet, everyone is in the fray for the treasure and the children are in the middle of a dangerous game where the greed for easy money makes everyone involved put at stake everything that they possess. Satish, who seems like an antagonist to the children, is kidnapped for the treasure and the children, along with the adults, ultimately rescue him. But the treasure is not found and it is Govind Kaka, the village priest, who actually deciphers the coded letter sent by the ancestor about the place where the treasure is hidden. The treasure is found and, as a bonus, the village gods are also retrieved, which adds to the joy of the villagers. The treasure of course goes to the government but money is given to rebuild the broken-down village school and thus the village also gets something in the process. The children remain satisfied that they have solved the mystery of their ancestral treasure and Satish is happy that he has acted his part in restoring the village school, though earlier he wanted much more than that.

#### **4.6 Finding Home in the Nation**

The initiatives taken up by all the children in the three texts analyzed here bring forth the realization that more than the adventurous traits, it is the children’s intelligence that is put at stake. Have children been successful in their attempt to secure their home and nation and thereby proving their worth? Let us go through the three novels to understand the positions taken up by the children.

In the process of an understanding of *The Kaziranga Trail*, two things come to light. One is the authorial emphasis on Jonti’s logical reasoning and deductive powers, which have helped the boys considerably, along with the courage that they display even in the face of grave danger. The second is the role of governmental authority in

the capturing of the criminals. For the narrative to progress, Mr. Neog is safely removed from the scene of action and thus narratorial freedom is given to children to take the investigation as they wish to do so. But their freedom is curbed at the end where the authority is brought back into the scene to neatly tie up the loose ends. Adult-like powers rest on young shoulders only to be removed later on to relegate children to their state of powerlessness. The same can be said about *Footprints in the Sand* too, where Paloma's intellectual reasoning comes in handy in knowing the hide-out of the assassin and where the authorities later on lay a trap for him. The complete lack of police interest earlier on is replaced by an overt interest in their activities and the narrative, in fact, emphasizes that the children have been used as bait to lure the criminals. The power and freedom that the children enjoyed at the resort is withdrawn to place them in a subject position where they are acted upon by the adults. Maria Nikolajeva in *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers* (2010), says that, be it the fictional world of children's literature or the real world, adults will always retain their superior position. In circumstances where the child is allowed to be triumphant, it happens only through the support of at least one adult. The empowerment of children takes place in the carnivalesque space where power is handed down for a temporary phase to be taken back at will. Thus children's writers portray child characters in an empowered state but only on certain conditions and for a limited time period (203-204). Children's literature, especially the genre of mystery and detective fiction, therefore is a transient means for empowerment of children where they play out adult roles and even enjoy those roles which take them away from the innocence of childhood. The danger that is involved in this role play is neither childish in nature nor child-like in its execution. And therefore other important questions crop up which need to be answered.

In *The Kaziranga Trail*, when all is resolved and the poachers receive their dues, the question that looms up is the necessity of the boys' association in this imbroglio and the danger to their lives that has come as a consequence of this. Though the whole episode justifies the thirst for adventure on the part of the boys and the thrill that has come out of facing danger, yet the danger is not on a small scale and is directed at their lives itself. On the face of it, does mere thirst for adventure justify their actions? What is it at stake for which the children are willing to put even their lives at risk? If serving one's nation is the logical answer then is patriotism and a sense of nationhood

such a strong sentiment that it can mobilize even simple village boys to risk everything? Paloma, Arnab and Bompaa face the same danger too when they are attacked by armed men in the resort. The restlessness of Arnab, which gave way to the adventure, does not justify the danger that all three of the children get involved in. What propels the children towards imminent danger? To answer these questions we have to understand how nation or nationality is performed in the everyday life of people and how nation is connected to home. Does the concept of pride in nation and nationality arise from mere belonging itself or is it a conscious process constructed through various nationalist discourses? At the same time, what happens when one's sense of belongingness and the means through which this belonging takes place are questioned and threatened?

Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss in "Everyday Nationhood" explore the idea of nation as constituted in daily life and try to find out how nation and nationalism are performed through the mundane activities of routine life. Using Hobsbawm's idea that though nationalism is constructed from above yet is necessary to analyze it from the standpoint of the hopes and aspirations of the common people, they look at the construction of nation from the perspective of everyday people's lives and examine how various studies ranging from Herzfeld and Billig to Edensor describe people's associations with the nation (537). Researchers have shifted the focus from elitist discourse on nationalism to the commonsensical understanding of nation by the ordinary person and the necessity of approaching nationalism from this perspective of seeing people as "active producers" and not "passive consumers" of national discourse. The question that arises is how, and more importantly, when the common man can be called upon to display his understanding of and solidarity with the nation? Very often, the man in the street is not called upon either to enact or to express his association with a heavily theoretical concept of nation. Some of the ways identified by Fox and Miller-Idriss are national calamities, wars and sporting events which make the common man at one with the nation (540). At the same time, they say that some of the choices made by people regarding their national sentiments can become markers of nationhood. When faced with "national menus of options", Fox and Miller-Idriss say that nationhood acts as a deciding factor in choosing between options. And if these people have already internalized nationally defined institutions, then nationhood structures or shapes the choices taken up by them (545). They also recognize certain

symbols of nation which define people's association with the nation and attract and display the public conception of national pride and honour. One of the most visible of symbols is the national flag which, when unfurled on any day of national importance, evokes nationalistic sentiments immediately on the part of the onlooker. But such symbols, when displayed for an extended period of time, lose their significance and also their visual impact. Over time they merge with the surroundings and become an everyday or mundane thing which does not remind people of their nationality but are actually inconspicuous upholders of nationality. Nationhood thus gets submerged into the realm of the ordinary and becomes a commonplace activity (548-549). When a figure of national importance becomes part of the banality of the daily media invasion of homes, the importance attached to it becomes transformed into a commonplace existence. It is from these perspectives that we analyze *The Kaziranga Trail* and *Footprints in the Sand*, to locate the nationalistic fervour of the children.

The nation when constructed from the common man's perspective, is the everyday association with the mundane and very commonplace landmarks that surround him. If these common markers are dislodged or attacked then the nationalistic fervour rises in the ordinary man. The exploits on the border, though arise national sentiments, hardly provokes the people to rise up in action. But if one's own property or belongings, or for that matter anything within the parameters of one's neighbourhood are encroached upon by some outsider, this immediately gives rise to action. For the Kaziranga boys, the idea of nation does not necessarily imply India or for that matter even Assam. Their nation is a much more localized concept encompassing the surroundings where they spend most of their lives and which in return nourishes and cares for them. The nation is visualized in an ecological sense with the necessity of showing their solidarity to it arising only when this balance between their life and nature is threatened by some external element. But the threat comes not in the shape of any direct encroaching or from a literal attack on the inhabitants. The threat is more to a symbol of nationhood, the rhino. Like the other cultural markers of Assam such as the bihu, Brahmaputra, the handloom products, the rhino is very much symbolic of Assam and, more importantly, of Kaziranga. But these markers are relegated to the background in the daily existence of the people and only come to the fore when any celebration of these markers takes place or when they are attacked. For instance, the bihu or the bihu dance in Assam is a routine activity which hardly attracts attention.

But when this same bihu is celebrated somewhere outside Assam or the bihu dance is performed on some national platform, it makes the people stand up and look at it from a very sentimental standpoint. And if it comes under attack from any quarters then the people become united as one to defend its status. The same is true of the rhino too. The rhinos by themselves are part of the natural makeup of Assam and except for the purpose of tourism they attract little interest from the people at any given time. Many people are neither interested in, nor knowledgeable about the food habits or other details of the rhino's existence except for a vague idea that Kaziranga is the homeland of the rhinos. But if any news of poaching or rhino deaths are reported then the media and the people protest violently against the disrespect shown to such an important signifier of the state's existence. It would be wrong to compartmentalize the three boys, Dhani, Babul and Jonti, with the general public in their understanding of the rhinos or their emotional attachment to them since their association is on a much deeper level. But what remains unquestioned is that the mundane existence of common people like these boys is challenged through external threats that attack the cultural and national signifiers. And this challenge acts as an incentive to stand up to the occasion to defend and save what is considered to be the symbolic representative of one's national existence.

Paloma, Arnab and Bompa are quite similar to the Kaziranga boys in the fact that their daily existence is hardly marked by any meeting with the Prime Minister. Paloma and Arnab, living in Delhi, probably might have glimpses of the Prime Minister but for Bompa anything like this hardly matters in his life near the resort. The question of nationalistic fervour is problematized here because any attempt on the life of the head of state would of course not be taken lightly by anybody—be it security forces or children. How do we then explain the assassination attempt and nationalistic feelings of the children? What is that compels the children to put at stake their security and freedom—is it just the necessity to indulge in dare-devil acts or there is more to it? One important aspect to be considered in the context of the nation is the concept of the self and the other. David McCrone in the context of the nation and nationalism says that, “nationalism has particularism built into it; hence every ‘us’ has to have a ‘them’” (qtd. in Scourfield et al 105). If the “us” has a sense of belonging to the nation then any attack by the “other” immediately leads to the upsurge of nationalistic feelings and the urge to perform. The assassin is the “other” from some

unnamed foreign country who has come slur the very basis of our national identity—our national representative. The Prime Minister is a symbol of national identity who upholds the intrinsic values of the nation and any attack on this symbol is seen as a direct onslaught on the nation itself.<sup>5</sup> For Arnab and Paloma, this attack has some family value also as the Prime Minister is coming to open the desalination plant where their father works and therefore the attack is also an attempt to destabilize the family. These factors combine in the understanding of an important fact that national figures are symbolic and representative of the nation and there is a collective or common heritage or lineage which differentiates them from other people (Barrett 260).

Martyn Barrett in “Children's Understanding of, and Feelings about, Countries and National Groups” refers to Helwig and Prencipe’s study of six, eight and ten year old Canadian children to examine their understanding of flags and the act of flag-burning. The study showed that children of all ages understood flags as “social conventions that could be altered by consensus or shared agreement” (261). But it is older children who understood the significance of an act like flag burning as a show of disrespect while younger children were more concerned about the flag’s loss of practical utility, despite understanding flag burning to be an offensive act (261). The children, therefore, could in their own way understand the significance or importance of a national symbol or emblem and could act accordingly for its preservation. At the same time, the children could recognize any act which desecrates its significance though that understanding is more prevalent among older than younger children. In the case of Dhani, Babul and Jonti, they are older than the children of this study (Dhani is fourteen and the twins are thirteen) and therefore their understanding of any act which attacks any national symbol is more acute. They can recognize a crime, especially one where they can see the outcome (the dead rhino and the vultures hovering over it) and thereby act fast to undo the wrong and catch the culprits. Paloma, Arnab and Bompa are also older than the children interviewed and therefore understand the chaos and disaster that it might bring to not only their locality but also to the whole nation. Barrett, in the same essay, also refers to Moodie’s study of six to thirteen year old children in South Africa in the late 1970s, where it was found that Afrikaans-speaking children had a stronger liking for the South African flag and the national anthem than their English-speaking counterparts. Thus, even within the same country, the attachment to certain national emblems will differ according to the difference in the

language or culture of the group under study (261). The same findings can be applied in the context of India, where it can be said that the emotional attachment that the three boys have for the rhinos may not be displayed by children of same age group from another part of India, for example, from Karnataka or Haryana. Everyday identification with the nation is right in its own context, but because the same signifiers do not evoke the same sentiments then there must be something more attached to these signifiers. This brings into the discussion the question of home and belonging.

J. D. Porteous and S. E. Smith in *Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home* (2001), while trying to conceptualize the different definitions of home, look at home both as a place and as a symbol. Home as a place can be connected to several areas, like a “series of concentric zones ranging from one’s own room, to one’s dwelling, neighbourhood, village, town, city; region, nation or country; and finally the whole world” (32). Home as a symbol can be a memory or sense of nostalgia, involving an idealized version of home, it can also evoke the grave or God, and, more importantly in the context of present discussion, home carries an ideological identification with homeland or private property (37). Porteous and Smith say that in visualizing home from an ideological perspective, home becomes a right, a private or personal property whose sanctity is to be preserved and also as a homeland which involves patriotic feelings from its inhabitants. He also refers to Berger’s statement that the moralistic view of home understands it from two standpoints: one that defends property and morality, mainly from a domestic viewpoint, and the other that defends the concept of homeland (42). The constituents of people and landscape are the same, constructed from the same clay or soil and thus it binds them together in a primal cultural sense, making people and their land merge into each other (44). Therefore, any attack on land or landscape is directly an attack on the people themselves. This understanding of home reinforces Walter’s argument that home is to be defended as home is a private property where outsiders cannot be allowed to desecrate it.

The sanctuary though not the personal or private property of the boys or of the villagers is home to them because this is the place where is their abode. The problem arises when the naturalized inhabitants conspire against their homeland. Mr. Neog, by virtue of being appointed there, is responsible for the safe keeping of the animals but

his association with the place is mainly on an official level. Despite that, he tries to save the place and the animals. But the poachers from the different villages scattered around the sanctuary are home-grown and belong to the place itself. Yet they are willing to help an outsider like Mr. Bose to destroy their own homeland just for a few thousand rupees. Phukan, on the other hand, is not only connected officially but also has a deep-seated love for animals. But he has betrayed both for the sake of money. Thus, both the poachers and Phukan are the traitors within, who have conspired against their own home and thus their association with the soil of the land is negated. The sacred has become the profane because of the acts of these men and thus they remain outside the ambit of home. Home rejects their existence and thus Phukan pays with his life while the poachers are sent to jail.

Paloma and Arnab, having come to Goa are not exactly in their native place but for Bompa it is his place which is being attacked. The failure in officially opening the desalination plant will mean a loss for his native land and he is as enthusiastic as the other two in saving it. The inspector, Menezes, in not paying attention to the children is actually not paying heed to the call of the nation and therefore he has lost the chance to prove himself. The foreign assassin works along with other Indians and this again brings to the fore the problem of the nation being eroded from within. The nation has been betrayed for mercenary reasons and it is the children who take action not only to rid the nation of the “other” but also of the “self” which aligns it with the “other”.

Mercenary aspects, when associated with one’s homeland, often lead to disaster because emotional attachments, once exchanged for money can only result in banishment from home. A physical or tangible object like a house can be exchanged for money when the owners sell it to somebody else but, when we put this concept of home in a larger context, like homeland, then any idea of selling it or any other form of transaction is actually a crime and not merely a mistake. In *The Hidden Treasure*, the treasure has a nationalistic connection too since the children’s ancestor had hidden it because he had gone to serve the Peshwa against the British. The ancestral property has also come as a reward because one of the children’s ancestors has helped a Peshwa in a war and thus it is stressed that nationalistic fervour and loyalty bring rewards. The treasure, by itself, escaped from the British rampage and has remained



hidden through the years. Others have earlier tried to find it out but have been unsuccessful and, later on, the children's grandfather has decided that he will not aspire for that which he has not earned by his own hard work. This mentality is echoed by Kaka, too, who tries to deter the children from giving credence to a legend which may after all prove to be false. As Kaka says, time and again, "That treasure was our ancestor's hard-earned wealth. We have no right to it. We should work for our own" (245). Despite Kaka's deterrent speeches, the children are determined to find the treasure and Dinu, from the very beginning, wants to demarcate those to whom the treasure belongs from those whom it does not. He repeatedly reminds Satish that he is an outsider and has no right to the treasure as it is not his ancestral property. While Satish's aims are very consumerist ones once he gets the treasure (he will own three cars), the children's aims are not very clear except for the fact that they too want the treasure for themselves. Thus, despite the difference in attitude that the narrative displays between the children and Satish, their aims are the same—acquiring the treasure.

How does performing for the nation then take place? One of the important aspects of the novel is that the children do not find out where the treasure is; rather, it is the nondescript Govind Kaka who actually finds where the treasure is hidden. The secret, which they desperately wanted to unravel, is in fact revealed by an adult and the children are relegated to a secondary position. But the children's roles cannot be negated because they have been instrumental in ruling out where the treasure is not hidden and also in catching the criminals who have been trying to rob them of their ancestral property. What this means is that, because of them, the treasure fell into the right hands; namely the government, instead of the wrong-doers like Sadashiv master and Shukla. The children therefore have done their bit for the nation and, because of them, the village acquires a new school. Along with it, the long lost family gods and the village deities have been restored, which is another joy for the villagers. Thereby, in one neat stroke, both the secular and the religious are appeased and the microcosm of India presented by the village is restored to its normalcy, devoid of the bad characters. But as the role of Govind Kaka amply justifies, this task could not be performed by the children alone; rather it is done through the co-operation of everyone, including the Lambani tribes. Thus, people of diverse status combine together for one cause—the treasure which belonged to a landlord of the village and

which some crooks are trying to acquire for their own. This mentality has been achieved only through the agency of the children and therefore the children serve as a unifying force which brings the nation together along with a fervour to protect the it in the future. The feast given by Kaki at the end to reward the children for their efforts is in reality a celebration of the diversity of India and a means of unifying the nation too.

The children having performed their responsibilities towards the nation have reclaimed the nation and therefore the home too. In a sense, the cycle has turned full circle with the children regaining the home in fiction, which they have left earlier on. But it is necessary also to examine whether the authors who have strived to establish a genre of Indian English children's literature, particularly fiction, have found a home in their writings. More importantly, has Indian English children's literature as a genre found a home for itself in the midst of children's writing that has proliferated over the years, particularly in the context of western children's literature? This forms the basis of the next chapter, where three children's authors and their writings will be examined to locate their search for home in writing for themselves and for the genre.