

## ABSTRACT

Nation and nationalism have been mainstays of the canvas of Subcontinental literature. However, existing scholarship reveals that in the absence of substantial theoretically informed discourses on non-western forms of nation and nationalism there is a proclivity towards a western modular form of nation. This thesis seeks to provide an intervention to this modular form by unveiling the ideological underpinnings and ambivalence underlying the concept of nation and national identity in South Asia. It engages in a comparative analysis of South Asian historical fiction to establish the complex interplay between historical specificity and nationalism characterising the politically volatile region. The study analyses the trajectories of nation formation that point towards the nuances embedded in axiomatic categorisation of homogeneous nation.

Thematic analysis of the texts is undertaken in order to bring out the commonalities and differences in historical novels dealing with the idea of nation. The methodology applied in this thesis is an eclectic one combining poststructuralism, new historicism and close textual analysis in order to provide alternate history of nation. Focusing on recurrent themes of religion, linguistic, class and gender distinctions the thesis delves into the fluid connotation of nation. It unveils the fragmentary narratives of nation in the form of subnationalism, predicament of migrants, corrupt practices and moral decadence of bureaucrats, intellectuals and politicians to unveil the disheartening realities of nationalism in post-independence era. The stylistic elements of polyphony, memory, national allegory and child narrator are analysed to augment our understanding of nation.

The study shows that historical novels emerge as powerful vehicles in visualising the ambivalent discourse of nation. The competing and contradictory versions on similar historical events render untenable imagined homogeneity of nation put forth by Benedict Anderson. The thesis advocates that rethinking of the rhetoric of South Asian nations as nuanced, fragmentary, diverse and dynamic might help to find an analytical framework that can do justice its heterogeneous manifestations.

**Key words:** Nation, Nationalism, Homogeneity, South Asia, Historical fiction