CHAPTER-3

NATION AND GENDER

In the preceding chapter the analysis of the historical fiction revealed how ideology emerges as a reinforcing element in nation formation. The study explored how Frederick Jameson's conceptualisation of Third World texts as national allegories applies to South Asian historical fiction where the dichotomy between national/political and personal/familial is blurred. What has been absent from the analysis so far is a direct engagement with family as a miniature nation where gender relations serve as a locus of male-centric discourse of nation. This chapter attempts to foreground the role of women as the raison d'etre in the nationalist project where gender inequity governs wider social and national concerns. Family life generally connotes safety and refuge and it entails privacy from the public sphere of life. But in this analysis of the select texts focus shall be thrown upon the malleability of public/private dichotomy in order unveil male-centric nationalism in South Asia. It shall also delve into the domestic context of nationalism in order to portray how mundane nature of everyday life conceals within itself the power struggles that go into the making of national life.

The chapter begins by highlighting the relationship among nation, family and women, with family serving as a synecdoche of national history and women as bedrock of national culture. It builds upon crucial insights on the domestic context of nationalism and gendered discourse of nation put forth by Homi K. Bhabha, Antoinette Burton, Nira Yuval Davis, Partha Chatterjee and a few other feminists. The chapter then moves on to elaborately discuss communalised bodies, gendered paradigm of zenana/mardana and embodiment of "new woman" as leitmotifs in narratives of nation. The subsection titled "Communalised Bodies" focuses on novels such as *Train to Pakistan*, *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, *Ice-Candy Man*, *Funny Boy* and *When Memory Dies* to show how discourses of nation and gender intersect with categories of religion and languages and thereby inscribe woman's body as a site for communal revenge within the framework of national imagination. The next subsection titled "Zenana/Mardana or Inner/Outer Domain" engages in an in-depth analysis of select texts such as *The Jam Fruit Tree*, *Moth Smoke*, *Funny Boy*, *Twilight in Delhi* to comment on the power politics of patriarchy implicit in this socio spatial segregation sanctioned by nationalist discourse. The last subsection titled "New Woman" explores unconventionality exhibited by some

of the women characters in *Reef*, *Moth Smoke*, *Ice-Candy Man*, *When Memory Dies* to dismantle the nexus of gender and nationalism.

Family, Women and Nation

Homi K. Bhabha in his essay "The World and the Home" highlights the importance of domestic sphere in his statement:

> In a feverish stillness, the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. (Bhabha141)

According to Bhabha, nation is a cultural determinant and nationalism is a cultural artifact. So, there is a performative aspect involved in the formation of a nation. Family does not remain the domain of domestic life nor does the nation simply become its social and historical counterpart. Instead they mutually reflect their influences on each other "the world-in-the home, the-home-in-the-world" (Bhabha 141). The public sphere and the private sphere are linked through an "in-between" temporality that is home which is a mirror image of the national history as represented in South Asian Anglophone historical fiction.

Gaston Bachelard in his book *The Poetics of Space* (1957) defines the systematic study of the sites of our intimate lives as "topoanalysis"(9). He considers home as the first universe for its inhabitants that shapes all subsequent knowledge of other spaces, of the nation and world as a whole. Through topoanalysis of houses in subjective terms the mental experience of its occupants can be drawn out. Theorist Veena Das points out the gaps in partition narratives where the everyday experience of women's lives in the domestic arena is subsumed into the male-centric narratives of nation. She suggests that a kind of therapeutic space can be created where the private experience of women's sufferings can be articulated in the public sphere. The South Asian historical fiction can be explored to see whether they can be regarded as therapeutic space which foregrounds the silence that surrounds the private sphere.

American historian Antoinette Burton's book *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (2003) constitutes an attempt on her part to study the domestic context of nationalism and thereby extend the parameters of "official history". Burton main purpose is to dismantle the binary opposition of public and private, of history and women and in particular, of history as a site of masculinist paradigm and family as a site of refuge and feminine desire. She considers "family history" as enduring site of historical evidence and home as an important partition archive. At the same time Burton throws light upon home as a repository of gendered politics. She seeks to examine home as ideologically charged space that spread across national boundaries.

Women form the centerpiece of Burton's exploration of family as the intersection of so called private histories with the national ones. The domestic genealogies of Indian nationalism have largely been obscured by grand narratives of nation. Burton analyses the writings of Janaki Majumdar, Cornelia Sorabji, and Attia Hosain to foreground the participation of women in national politics. Cornelia Sorabji, the Parsi Christian barrister, was known for her expertise on the zenana, a spatial location dominated by the social practices of purdahnashins. According to Sorabji, zenana was preeminently the domain of women. Zenana was one of the chief ideological sites through which power was sought, negotiated and contested by patriarchal society in the context of South Asian regions. What is striking is that unlike other feminists who made attempts to make political participation accessible to women, Sorabji sought to preserve the ideas of so called "dark, feminine, spiritual and sacred space" associated with zenana. She declared it as "an antinationalist model for the modern Indian woman" (Burton 67). Burton states that All Muslim Ladies Conference met "under strict purdah arrangements" (Burton 9) thus supporting the principle of seclusion of women even in public life.

Sarojini Naidu in her capacity as a President of Indian National Congress compared India itself to a "home" usurped by strangers. She emphasised upon the need to restore the integrity and orderliness of Indian history by the active efforts of the Indian woman as mother. She considered it as a modest domestic programme of the woman to imbibe the rich customs and traditions of India. This view of Naidu again links domesticity and women to nation and reconfigures it "as a new subject of public political discourse" (Burton 10).

Emeritus Professor Nira Yuval Davis' book *Gender and Nation* (1997) provides a feminist overview of the nation-state. She criticises the gender-blind and hegemonic theorisations of nation which regard issues of nationhood, citizenship and military as male provinces. She begins the first chapter titled "Theorizing Gender and Nation" with two quotations:

"If the Woman does not want to be a Mother, Nation is on its way to die".

"The mothers of the nation, the womenfolk as a whole, are the titans of our struggle". (Davis12)

The book offers a critique of how the envisioning of nation as a masculine entity results in differential treatment of women within it. Davis argues that constructions of nationhood usually involve specific notions of "manhood" and "womanhood" (Davis 12) which assign stereotypical roles to man and woman. In a way she conforms to Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir's view of gender as a "social construct". She insists on the idea that woman "reproduce nations biologically, symbolically and culturally" (Davis 13).

Davis challenges the naturalised locations of women in the private sphere. She illuminates the readers regarding the origin of public/ private domains by shedding light upon Carole Pateman and Rebecca Grant's analysis of the classical theories of "the social contract" which actually divided the civil society into public and private spheres. Women were consigned to the private sphere which was seen as politically irrelevant. Davis' book envisages how the Nature/ Civilisation divide actually lends impetus to the oppression of women by the patriarchal society. The identity of women with "nature" has been the cause for their exclusion from so called "civilised" and "cultured" political domain occupied by men. The paradox is that women are considered as the symbolic bearers of the collective identity of a nation but they are excluded from mainstream politics of a nation.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985) borrows the term "subaltern" from Antonio Gramsci to refer to marginalised and unrepresented group of people in the society which includes women too. Spivak argues that women are categorised as "other" in the society and these disempowered women and

their agencies in politics and history are obliterated by patriarchy. They are treated as marginal sections who do not contribute anything to the welfare of the society. The "othering" of women actually facilitates the male dominant society to subjugate them and utilise their servile existence whenever needed. Spivak seeks to expose the history of the "silenced subaltern" and emancipated "Oriental Woman", "The Third World Woman" from their monolithic archetypal representation as "the docile wife or the vengeful warrior"(Castaing 7).

Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's book, "Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition", attempts an alternative feminist reading of history by including the first hand experiences of women as victims of partition. Social theorists Julie Stephens in her essay, "Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category? Non- Western Woman' in Feminist Writings on India" questions the traditional representation of women as "a paragon of softness, passivity, and docility who submits to an immutable patriarchy" (Castaing 3).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty in the introduction to the book *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (1991) addresses the issue of Third World Women and their representation as archetypal victims of male dominated society in the writings of feminists. According to Mohanty the "common context of struggle" (Mohanty 7) of the Third World Women unites them into an "imagined community" irrespective of internal hierarchies and they engage in a kind of "horizontal comradeship"(Anderson 50) as referred to by Anderson in the context of nation. In her essay, "Under Western Eyes", she criticises the discursive parameters of knowledge which locate third world women in terms of underdevelopment, oppressive tradition, high illiteracy, poverty, religious fanaticism and other negative indicators.

The roots of gender dichotomy male/ female in the "family" can be traced back to its derivation from Spanish term "familia" meaning the paterfamilias (Roman meaning father of the family) and the totality of slaves belonging to that individual. Frederich Engels states in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) "In the family, he is the bourgeois, the woman represents the proletariat" (Engels 89). Man is perceived as a breadwinner and woman as a child bearer. Women have been historically marginalised in the family through different processes of socialisation for males and females.

Feminists have pondered upon the ideology of gender relation within the family. Adrienne Rich defines patriarchy as the power possessed by the fathers. She defines it as a familial, social, ideological and political system in which men use ritual, tradition, law, language, customs, etiquette, education as props to attach stereotypical roles to women and subsume them under male chauvinism. Feminist economist Heidi Hartmann is of the view that family emerges as the prime obstacle to women's self-development. The radical feminists share the same view that is the root of subordination of woman lies in the family where one sex (male) seeks to consolidate its power over the other sex (female).

The politicisation of public/private dichotomy was accentuated by the Revivalist nationalism (Seth 277). They identified women with the "inner core" of the Indian tradition and men with the outer social and economic life. Women represented the more spiritual and pure essence of the Indian Hindu culture. This idea of pure womanhood draws on Victorian ideals of purity, submissive, docile and home centric nature of women. Social thinkers such as Sherry Ortner, Michelle Rosaldo, Vandana Shiva, Chandra Talpade Mohanty attribute women's lack of agency in nationalist discourses to the widespread notion that women bear close resemblance to nature and likewise men to culture. So, the prevailing ideology is women are to bear and nurture children thus confining them to inner/private domain and men are to govern society equating them with outer/public domain. The overemphasis on woman's procreative activity renders them passive receptacles of male supremacy in political and social decisions.

According to Partha Chatterjee's own reading of history of nationalism the separation of the cultural domain into two spheres namely the material and the spiritual provided a resolution between the conflicting claims of nationalism and modernisation in postcolonial societies. These two domains were condensed by the nationalist project of nineteenth century into far more ideologically charged dichotomy of the outer and the inner. These domains were then interpreted in terms of separation of social space into ghar and bahir, the home and the world. Consequently social roles were assigned on the basis of gender distinction which corresponded with the social space of ghar and bahir. Home became the principal site or repository for expressing the spiritual essence of Indian tradition and culture. The nationalists accorded symbolic importance to women as chief embodiment of the spirituality of the national culture. At the same time, the

nationalist discourses insisted on emulating and cultivating the rational and superior forms of economy, statecraft, science and technology from the European countries in order to achieve modernisation as well as to overthrow the European powers. So, the nationalist paradigm was based on selective appropriation of West that is imitating them in the material sphere but not allowing them to encroach in the inner domain of the East. The nationalists argued that in the spiritual domain the East was far superior to the West. Gender division was induced as a shield against the induction of Westernisation on Indian values and tradition.

Hayden White in his book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973) lays down four paradigms of the form that a historical explanation may take: Formist, Organicist, Mechanistic and Contextualist. Hayden White's views on Organicist strategy applies to South Asian Anglophone Historical fiction. According to White unlike the "narrative historians" in general, the Organicist are not inclined to construct generalisations about historical events. On the contrary, they tend to engage in a more "integrative" (White 15) interpretation. They attempt to depict the particulars discerned in the historical events rather than universality. To quote Hayden White,"At the heart of the Organicist strategy is a metaphysical commitment to the paradigm of the microcosmic-macrocosmic relationship" (15). Most of the "nationalistic" historians tend to structure their narratives in such a mould so as to highlight the importance of some dispersed events and entities in the formation of a nation. The microcosmic-macrocosmic relationship applies to the South Asian Anglophone Historical fiction where family and nation exist in a microcosmic-macrocosmic relationship with family being a microcosm of nation and national history.

Though women are considered as emblems of nation there is a striking silence in the texts enshrined in nationalist canons regarding women's experience in the private sphere during the tumultuous period. As Susie Tharu and K. Lalita point out in their book Women Writing in India: The Twentieth Century: "Totally occluded, in fact delegitimated, in these moving… texts that address the upheavals of the time, and in different ways take on the task of re-establishing an order, is the history and politics of the Partition and indeed the politics of gender that bears on it" (Tharu and Lalita 69). A critical engagement with the South Asian historical fiction reveal that politics of gender and nationalism are implicated in power relations that govern the everyday experience of

women during the phase of nationalist movement and its aftermath. When the relationship between gender and nation is introduced into the discussion of politics and history of nation it becomes apparent that a kind of masculine, homogeneous citizen subject manifests itself in the garb of so-called secular, democratic, universal nature of citizenship in the Indian subcontinent. Women's experience and agency that deviate from the norms are obliterated to support the homogeneous nationalist discourse.

Alison Jill Didur cites an interesting anecdote in her thesis chapter titled "Making Men for the India of Tomorrow'? Gender and Nationalist Discourse in South Asia" which encapsulates the gender binary prevalent in conservative nationalist discourse. She recollects an advertisement for Parle's Gluco Biscuits she came across in 1947 edition of The Times of India while conducting extensive research on nationalism in South Asia. The advertisement contains a catchy phrase "Making Men for the India of Tomorrow" to generate publicity in the newly independent nation. Under the phrase appears a picture of a group of four young boys in an Indian classroom listening attentively to one of their companion's speech. Again the caption below the picture reads: "The boy who leads on the playground and in the classroom usually grows up to be a leader among men-a statesman. The proud mother sees that Parle's GLUCO Biscuits are included in the diet of the young aspirant" (Didur 27).

The advertisement offers critical insights on the national imaginary which is posited on gender differences. It resonates with Partha Chatterjee's theoretical distinction of the inner and the outer domain characterising postcolonial nations. The masculine subjects are responsible for matters in the civil sphere concerning the nation. On the contrary women are relegated to the domestic sphere by entrusting them with the responsibility of proper nourishment of their sons so that they can serve the nation physically and intellectually. The women are encouraged to value their sons' welfare and nourishment above their own. A deeper reflection on the advertisement reveals how the mothers contribute to the nationalist cause through their performance in the inner domain. This type of symbolic representation reinforces the gender distinctions and negates women's role in the nation building process.

Communalised Bodies

The entry of women into nationalist paradigm as cultural and biological reproducers of nation has turned them into vital targets of ethnic, national and racial differences. They are required to carry the burden of national essence but subsumed under patriarchal society in the domain of politics. Feminist theories of nationalism have drawn attention to the politics behind the conflation of nation as feminine and women as mothers of the nation. The feminine construction of nation renders it vulnerable and prone to attacks. Men assume center stage as protectors and defenders of women and nation. Women are burdened with the task of maintaining the nation's unique culture and integrity. Their bodies are dehumanised during partition and civil wars as victories against the enemies are "inscribed, marked and celebrated on their bodies" (Roy 72). A critical analysis of the historical events affecting the South Asian regions reveal that women are the worst victims of the atrocities perpetuated by man in the name of nationalism. The deployment of women in the construction of cultural nationalist narratives of nation froze them into archetypal victims of male centric nationalism. So, woman's bodies emerge as nationalist trope in South Asian historical narratives of nation.

A resounding silence prevails over the politicisation of gender by the patriarchy during Partition of India and Civil War in Sri Lanka. Traditional conservative South Asian society considers women as the bearers of their religious values and culture. They fetishise women as objects of possession and turn them into political apparatus of communication of retaliation between opposing religious groups of men. Critical analyses of the historical novels reflect that the battle was not only over land, religion, language but also over women's honour. The disquieting stories of trains carrying dismembered bodies, sacks of mutilated bodies and female sexual organs on both the sides of the border reflect the ingrained misogynistic attitudes of men towards women belonging to other religious community. To quote Bhalla's view in his book *Partition Dialogues* (2006): "Victories are celebrated on the bodies of women . . . when women are attacked; it is not they per se who are targets but the men to whom they belong" (Tripathi 82). Butalia also point out that" the idea of women as property-of families, communities, men" (xxvii) lends impetus to the violation of their rights in the name of protection, honour and purity. Even the gendered violence committed by the male

members of their own communities was “disguised as martyrdom or honour killings” (xxvii) in order to justify the actions of the menfolk.

In *Train to Pakistan*, women are not actively involved in politics but their bodies become sites for communal revenge. Hukum Chand, the magistrate and deputy commissioner of the district recollects the bestial tortures inflicted by the Muslims upon Sundari, the daughter of his orderly. Sundari, a newly married woman, was on her way to Gujranwala with her husband when their bus was attacked by Muslim goons. Hundreds of people surrounded the bus and ordered everyone to get down. Sikhs were killed indiscriminately. The circumcised men were forgiven and others were forcefully circumcised. The violent mob attacked her husband by the arms and legs and even castrated him and gave the penis to Sundari. The goons raped her. She was turned into a plaything as she laid on the road being smashed from one man to another.

The novel *Ice-Candy Man* also documents how the categories of gender and discourses of nation overlap, converge and thereby inscribe woman’s body within the framework of national imaginary. Women are objectified in the patriarchal struggle for national sovereignty between the warring communities. The translation of the signifier “nation” into metaphor of motherland in conservative masculine nationalist discourses turns Ayah, the maidservant into emblem of national imaginary as well as its victim. In the pre-partition days Ayah emerges as a symbol of multicultural undivided India. She works as a unifying force for her group of admirers belonging to different religious communities. She is assiduously wooed by her followers. Nevertheless, as the story progresses we find her world collapse when she is raped in order to take revenge for the trainload of dead Muslims and bags full of women’s breasts cut off by Hindu men. Ayah’s plight reminds of Menon and Bhasin argument that "women's sexuality symbolizes 'manhood'; its desecration is a matter of such shame and dishonour that it has to be avenge” (Daiya 235).

As the environment gets charged with religious rivalries Ayah’s vibrant self is codified on the basis of her religious identity. She finds it difficult to restrain the nationalist discourse that defines her body in terms of her Hindu religious identity. Lenny’s statement indicates the changes perceived in Ayah and her neighbours with the onslaught of partition. She says, “It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves —and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian. People shrink, dwindling into

symbols" (Sidhwa 93). The Ice-Candy Man questions Ayah whether she is a Punjabi and, if yes, then why she doesn't wear "shalwar-kamize" (Sidhwa 29) which is typically worn by Punjabi women. Ayah replies that nannies who wear saris are presumed to be more qualified for the job and earn more money. This indicates how the patriarchal society wants women to embody their religious traditions. Ayah's resistance to be subsumed by religious identity probably renders her incongruous in the scheme of patriarchal nation building and the result is her ultimate abduction and gang-rape by Muslim mob at Lenny's bunglow.

In *Train to Pakistan* Khushwant Singh depicts how gender disparity stems from societal sanctions and is reinforced by the patriarchal society by internalising those norms among the women. The dialogues between the dacoits in the novel suggest how women exchange their bodies in barter of small material possessions such as earrings, bangles assigned to them by the society. The spearman states that it is easy to please any village woman by giving them jewellery because they consider it as their prized possession. Man can exercise control over woman's body and their mobility by this simple act. These societal symbols associated with women are also employed to connote femininity and weakness when used in the context of man. For instance, when Juggut decides to take revenge upon Malli and his men for creating rift among the Sikhs and Muslims, the sub inspector says "Malli is not a woman with henna on his palms or bangles on his wrists" (Singh 171).

The novel delineates how the subjecthood of women in nationalist movement is constituted by commodification and communalisation of their bodies. Singh dramatises how female bodies are being appropriated for gratifying the sexual pleasures of men. Even during the political violence of Partition the menfolk pursue women's bodies as sexed and ethnic and engage in lascivious acts and violence. They indulge in vulgar discourse regarding women even in the lockup. Juggut discriminates women on the basis of skin colour and race. During his confinement he says to Iqbal that he must have enjoyed a lot while having sex with European memsahibs. Juggut draws a comparison between white women and Indian women "Wah, Babuji-great. You must have had lots of fun. The memsahibs are like *houris* from paradise- white and soft, like silk. All we have here are black buffaloes" (Singh 113). He further states that whenever he visits

Ferozepur for a hearing, he tries to save some money after paying to lawyers and their clerks, to enjoy and bargain for the whole night with some poor prostitutes.

Hukum Chand's ignoble nature emerges in his illicit relationship with a virgin girl Haseena, a dancing girl almost of his daughter's age. He indulges in sex with the teenage girl, drinks wine and dances instead of solving the communal rivalry spread around him. He pays a sum of money to the old woman for arranging the girl for his sexual pleasure. When the innocent face of Haseena reminds him of his own daughter he tries to dispel his thoughts by consuming liquor. The novelist portrays Chand's perversion in the lines: "Life was like that. You took it as it came, shorn of silly conventions and values which deserved only lip worship. She wanted his money, and he…well" (Singh 30). His promiscuity emerges in the way he uses a five rupee note to seduce Haseena and exploit her young body.

Juggut and his lover Nooran meet secretly in a field outside their village. While making love Nooran hears sound of gunshots and fears about some commotion. She is afraid that her absence in the house might be discovered by her father and neighbours and it might create furore among the villagers. Nooran fears that her father might punish her for her transgression. She demands to go back to her home. Juggu refuses passionately to end their romantic meeting. He continues to indulge in pleasure without bothering about the trouble the girl might face. Nooran's deep resentment against the sadistic pleasures derived by man even during the events leading up to the partition emerges in her statements: "That is all you want. And you get it. You are just a peasant. Always wanting to sow your seed. Even if the world were going to hell you would want to do that. Even when guns are being fired in the village. Wouldn't you?" (Singh 15).

Ayah's post-abduction story depicts how sexual exploitation in the garb of entertainment was a routine element during the Partition violence. She is coerced into the role of a dancing girl in the red light district of Lahore. She is converted into Muslim and renamed as Mumtaz to marry Ice-Candy Man. In the course of the conversation between Godmother and the Ice-Candy Man, the latter claims that they protect their own women and do not allow other man to lay a finger on them. He assures Godmother that no one has dared to touch Mumtaz since her "nikah". These instances position woman's bodies as an ideological terrain controlled by male sexual dominance.

The historical novels explore how nationalism is premised upon the sexual and moral purity of its womenfolk. Hukum Chand talks highly of the nobility of Hindu women in order to demonise Muslim men. He states that Hindu women are so pure that they are willing to commit suicide and accept death instead of letting a stranger touch their body. He refrains from providing evidence that Hindu men too subjected women from their own as well as other communities to sexual and other forms of violence. He says "We Hindus never raise our hands to strike women, but these Muslims have no respect for the weaker sex" (Singh 23). This hints at Hukum Chand's inclination towards upholding the morality of his own religion. It can be inferred that he indulges in an illicit affair with a Muslim girl to lend impetus to his views regarding the sanctity of Hindu women.

Singh engages in a voyeuristic representation of the atrocities committed by Sikh and Muslim males upon the women. The Muslims recollect rumours of their womenfolk being forced to take off their veils, stripped, marched down the crowded streets and raped in the marketplace by the Sikhs in Patiala, Ambala and Kapurthala. Many of them eluded their attackers by committing suicide. The Sikhs, on the otherhand, engage in a discussion regarding the revengeful nature of Muslims and purity of Sikh women. They claim that a Mussalman should never be trusted because they butcher infant children and women indiscriminately. They have no respect for the weaker sex. Many Sikh women refugees jumped into wells or burnt themselves or committed suicide. The rest were paraded naked in the streets and raped in public and later murdered. These instances reflect how the women embraced death in order to preserve their piety and honour their religious community as a whole.

Inspite of being a female novelist Sidhwa explicates how male body also played a significant role in articulation of nationalism. The voyeuristic staging of Hari's body by the Muslim men to see the visual proof of his conversion reminds us of Kavita Daiya's assessment in her article "Postcolonial Masculinity: 1947, Partition Violence and Nationalism in the Indian Public Sphere" (2006) that male bodies are also deployed and refashioned in the contestation of national identity. After his conversion, he adopts the Muslim traditional dress code to assimilate with them. The scene depicts Himat Ali wearing a shalwar but what draws our attention is his public humiliation by the Muslim men to verify whether he has undergone circumcision. A man yells, "Let's make

sure…Undo your shalwar Himat Ali. Let's see if you're a proper Muslim" (Sidhwa 180). Again the Masseur's murder by unknown people and the description of his body being thrown on the road in a gunny sack also validates Daiya's view.

The staging of Ayah's body in pain during her abduction probably satisfies the voyeuristic desires of Muslim men as they succeed in enacting collective violence upon Ayah who represents her Hindu community. The following lines reflect this:

> They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet…Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth like the dead child's screamless mouth. Her violent sari slips off her shoulder, and her breasts strain at her sari-blouse stretching the cloth so that the white stitching at the seams shows. A sleeve tears under her arm. (Sidhwa 183)

Instances such head injury of Asad during a mob assault, the death of an ardent nationalist Nita Chatterjee due to fatal injuries in a lathi charge, Zahid and other people being killed violently on their train journey to their dream country Pakistan reflect how religious fanaticism uses both men's and women's bodies as a battlefield in its struggle to assert national identity.

Sidhwa's novel commemorates the indomitable spirit of women who sacrificed their individual life to the greater interest of their religious community. Women were encouraged to commit suicide rather than being touched and raped by members of the rival community. For instance when the mullah and the *chaudhry* fear the impending danger of being attacked by the Sikhs they encourage their women and young girls to gather at *chaudhry's* house and burn themselves. They arrange canisters of kerosene for the women to embrace self-immolation. Ranna recollects the intolerable wails of women undergoing the process of burning: "You'll kill me! *Hai Allah*…Y'all will kill me! (Sidhwa 202).

Sexual predation as a pervasive presence in the South Asian region during the partition is represented through the characters of Ayah and Hamida. Their abduction can be viewed through a political lens, as an ideologically motivated event with communal overtones. Parallels may be drawn between Ayah's and Hamida's abduction, one being a

Hindu woman kidnapped by the Muslim mob and the other being a Muslim woman kidnapped by Sikh mob. In both the case aggressors are driven by their desire to take revenge upon their rival communities.

In the novel *Train to Pakistan*, Singh vividly portrays how woman abuse is used as a tool to ignite communal hatred and revenge against each other. Instances such as the dacoits throwing an open challenge to the villagers that they will rape their mothers and sisters if they dare to come out of their house; Juggut using mother, sister, daughter relations to beat and abuse Malli in the cell; the Sikh villagers assurance to Imam Baksh and Mullah that they will rape the aggressor's mother, sister and daughter if they dare to touch their Muslim brothers indicate how women are the medium for inflicting violence upon the opposing religious community. The army officers instigate the villagers to take revenge upon the Muslims by citing various instances of violence committed by their Muslim counterpart upon Sikh and Hindu women. One of them states, "For each woman they abduct or rape, abduct two…Had the women committed crimes for which they were ravished?"(Singh 157). Another officer equates property and women as man's possessions "One should never touch another's property; one should never look at another's woman. One should just let others take one's goods and sleep with one's sisters" (Singh 143). These instances narrate the ways in which the elevated status of women as the embodiment of their religious values ironically positioned them as targets of violent patriarchal assertions of community and nation.

In the Sri Lankan context, Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* also foreshadows how bodies intersect with categories of religion and language and emerge as core identity marker. Black Tie, the Tamil principal, subjects Shehan to severe disciplinary beatings and humiliates him publicly more than any other boys. His action can be interpreted as somewhat sadistic; probably Black Tie perceives Shehan as representative of Sinhalese national reorganisation under the vision of Lokubandara. Black Tie's hatred is generated against the backdrop of Sinhalese-Tamil conflict plaguing the Sri Lankan nation. Similar instances such as violent assault upon Radha Aunty by two men at Anuradhapura for being a Tamil, the murder of Daryl Uncle, a Sri Lankan Burgher and a correspondent of the Australian daily *Sydney Morning Star*, stones being hurled at Arjie and his mom during the course of their inspection of Daryl's mysterious death, mob setting the car on

fire with Ammachi and Appachi yelling inside it reveal the ways in the Civil War has shaped personal and public life in Sri Lanka.

Sivanandan's novel *When Memory Dies* exemplifies the tragedy generated upon human bodies by ethnically incited rape, murder and other social discriminations. The novelist seeks to show that the violence inflicted upon naive people is driven by the intention to annihilate the rival group's identity. The predominance of religion as a whole way of life and thinking is emphasised by S.W. He confesses to Sahadevan how they had to give up their own faith and embrace Christianity in order to avail education and other facilities. Prema's recollects that S.W.'s father changed his own name from Ananda to Sebastian and renamed his sons Joseph and Samuel to access education in Catholic schools. This hints at how communalisation made inroads into education system where human beings were perceived as communal bodies in a country dominated by colonial masters and riven by civil war.

The dehumanising behaviour of the Sinhalese majority towards the Tamil minority emerges in Lal's description to Fonny, a member of SLFB regarding the plight of ordinary Tamil people, "Yes, that's what we are all doing, putting the Tamils up for auction, the ordinary Tamil people, not Rajan and his English speaking lot" (Sivanandan 203). Vijay narrates a translated Tamil poem to Gamini which also conveys the same sentiment "He gave me eyes to see my country with, his country, he was born here, but by government definition he was not a citizen, just a number in the agreed quota of 'coolie Tamils' that India would take back" (Sivinandan 255).

Sivanandan's novel touches upon the discriminatory treatment of the Tamil coolies by the Sinhalese. Fonny narrates to Rajan and Lali how the army of Sinhala Patriots entered into a government sugarcane farm in Polannaruwa and drove the Tamil coolies out of their rooms into the cane-fields "…they set fire to the cane…and when they ran out, children, mothers with babies…when they ran out, they waited on the other side…like a game…and hacked them to death" (Sivanandan 226). The Sinhalese also waited in ambush to derail the Colombo train carrying Tamils to the convention. The Tamil refugees displayed a stoic resignation. One of them, a Cambridge scholar, even witnessed his wife and mother being stripped of their clothes and paraded naked, his daughter's ears being ripped of earrings and ultimately they were all killed by the Sinhalese thugs.

The target of ethnic cleansing leads to preferential treatment in hospitals and prisons. Perumal, an estate worker, is denied a hospital bed on the ground of his identity. Inspite of having empty beds at the hospital Perumal, an acute bronchial asthma patient, is denied admission. He spends days after days waiting in queue at the hospital gates waiting for his turn, but each time the authorities push his name back because his citizenship papers are not in order. A week or two of constant care in the hospital would have healed him but his religion acts as a barrier between him and his treatment. Meena, a Tamil lady, is registered under a Sinhalese name in order to avail treatment. Infact, Dr Lal suggests to her father Sanji not to visit her frequently to avoid being identified by the Sinhalese. Similarly in prison too Vijay notices how the Tamils prisoners are inhumanly beaten with sticks and staves and iron rods. Vijay himself receives a blow on his head when he pleads the other prisoners to stop beating the Tamils.

Sellamma's rape by masked Sinhalese men is an attempt to pollute the Tamils. She is pregnant as a result of the rape and loses her mental stability after the violence inflicted upon her. Her aggressive gesture towards Lal, the Sinhalese doctor, reflects her suppressed pain. She cowers in a corner of the room and shouts "Get that Sinhalese out of here, he's going to rape me" (Sivanandan 287). Subsequently she dies of childbirth leaving her racially mixed child with her husband Perumal. Later the Sinhalese thugs hack her husband Perumal to death and take away the infant boy and brutally murder him.

Vijay's Sinhalese identity is affirmed by endowing him with a Sinhalese name. He is named after a character from *Mahavamsa,* a prince to whom the Sinhalese trace their origins in Sri Lanka. Inspite of being an illegitimate offspring of Sena and Lali, the ethnicity of Sena, the rapist and not Rajan, the Tamil step father is attached to Vijay. The novelist probably hints at how the majority community accords him Sinhalese status to dishonour his step father's Tamil ancestry. However in due course of time Vijay develops close relationship with Rajan. He calls Rajan as "appa", the Tamil word for father. He develops sympathy for the Tamils. At the same time, his close bonding with Sena's parents results in his affinity with the Sinhalese too.

He emerges as a bicultural figure embracing both Sinhalese and Tamil identities. His liminality renders him as a marginal figure because he might be rejected by both the communities. Culturally hybrid characters such as Vijay, Para and Sellamma's son are

probably included to challenge homogeneous identity. They are symbols of fluidity and they blur the societal divisions. However towards the end of the novel Vijay is murdered by Ravi, the Tamil paramilitary commander who happens to be his cousin too. He dies while trying to save the life of Kugan, a Tamil toddy tapper accused of being a spy. Vijay's story offers two probable versions: it suggests that liminal figures can be agents of communal harmony and brotherhood at the time of social crisis; at the same time his death confirms that they are considered as a source of defilement of established structure and as a result they are killed by the society to continue the societal classifications.

The historical novels also delineate how the prospective life partners are perceived only in terms of ethnic differences. For instance, Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* depicts how family takes on the role of a patriarchal oppressor and does not allow inter-ethnic marital relationship to flourish. The love relationships between Anil and Radha Aunty, Arjie's mother and Daryl Uncle do not build up to the ultimate bond of marriage because the family members view their future prospective partners only in terms of rival communities rather than good human beings. Aunty Doris, a Burgher lady marries a Tamil man, Uncle Paskaran inspite of all the fuss created by the family members. Her parents and sisters do not forgive her and they emigrate to England terminating their relationship with her.

In the novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* also the love affair between Sita and Kemal could not be materialised owing to their religious background. The failure of their inter-ethnic cohesion shows how personal life is subsumed by the social happenings. Sita's peculiar approach towards to marriage emerges in the line "Our love is our own, inside us, but our marriage would have been outside ourselves, everyone else's" (Hosain 215). She visualises her love for Kemal as something personal whereas her marital relationship as a public one. Sita's fear of her love being exposed to the judgement of the society for its approval just like a criminals waiting for their verdict reiterates the control of society over personal relationships.

In *Train to Pakistan*, when Nooran, the daughter of the Muslim weaver Imam Baksh comes to know about her father's decision to leave Mano Majra during the escalation of communal violence she runs to her Sikh lover Juggut's house to reveal the clandestine affair to his mother. Nooran informs his mother how Juggut had impregnated her and had promised to marry her. Juggut's mother calls her a bitch and advises her to

marry a Sikh peasant and go away to Pakistan. She warns her that she would inform her father and spread the news in the village to spoil her reputation. Juggut's mother's initial reaction to the news hints at the way pregnant bodies are also marked on the basis of religion. Inspite of being a woman and a mother herself, she carries the communal mindset of the patriarchal society of mapping religious identity on woman's bodies. Societal conventions of traditional South Asian region make it difficult for her to accept Nooran with pre-marital pregnancy.

In the novel *When Memory Dies*, Mr. S.W., Tissa's uncle passionately believed in greater humanity rather than socially constructed ethnic divisions. During the rail strike of 1912 he united the workers irrespective of their communal differences to fight against their oppressive employers. But the paradox is that when it comes to inter-ethnic marriage in his own family he expresses his disapproval. For instance, when his beloved nephew Tissa wants to marry a Muslim girl he says, "An affair with a Muslim girl, though, was another matter, especially if she was poor and proud and her family opposed to it" (Sivanandan 45). Inter-ethnic marriages have repercussions on the future prospects of other unmarried women in the family. Rajan's father writes a letter affectionately to Lali explaining how the stigma attached to Rajan and Lali's marriage by the society would affect his daughter's future prospect of finding a good husband. So, women indirectly become the victim of such inter-ethnic union.

The gendered violence in the form of rape, abduction, mutilation of women during the colossal upheaval of partition and civil war in the subcontinent bolsters the argument that history was played out on women's bodies by mapping nation and its borders onto them. Read in conjunction, the South Asian Anglophone historical fiction present insights on the manifold ways in which history body dialectic is used to strengthen the abstract concept of the nation. The novels portray the unfortunate outcome of sectarian politics upon human relationships. Especially the female body is envisioned as an instrument of nationalism and retribution. They are just like puppets controlled and suppressed by the agents of power. Rape emerges as an officially sanctioned means of ethnic genocide. The analysis of the South Asian novels reveal that in the silent suffering of human bodies lay the hidden histories of the national event, the histories that hover at the edges of homogenised nation. The communal hatred reflects the darker side of

“political freedom” that is how it paradoxically encroaches upon the private life of the people of the subcontinent.

Zenana/Mardana Culture or Inner/Outer Domain

What follows in this section is a critical engagement with the politics of gender and nationalism as they are implicated in the architectural style of traditional South Asian households as well as the everyday practices that inform the privileging of masculine subject. Zenana refers to inner part of a house in a Hindu or Muslim family in the Indian subcontinent which is reserved for the women in the family. In contrast, mardana refers to the outer part of a house directly accessible from the street and reserved for its male inhabitants. Spatial segregation in the form of zenana and social segregation in the form of purdah restricts women’s mobility and interaction in public places and helps the patriarchal society to enforce women’s subordination in the domain of family as well as political decision-making.

According to Michel Foucault, power operates on micro levels of everyday life. Power is implicitly embedded in a network of cultural practices, norms and interactions of everyday lives in a family. Foucault states power is “exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (qtd in Pylypa 23). He argues that power is strongest when it is able to hide its own mechanism. Similarly Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu also maintain that power operates in a subtle way in our everyday life. Their views may be applied to the analysis of South Asian Anglophone historical fiction to reveal the power politics played by the patriarchal society in day-to-day life to undermine the agency of women.

Carl Muller’s Burgher Trilogy offers a quasi-fictional account of the genealogy of the Burgher community in Sri Lanka. The three books in the trilogy namely *The Jam Fruit Tree, Yakada Yaka* and *Once upon a Tender Time* based on the Von Bloss family reads like an anthropological account of the Eurasian ethnic community which descended from the Dutch, the Portuguese, the British and other foreigners who arrived in the island nation. The novels foreground the lifestyle of the Burghers and their unique approach to sex, religion, food and family. Muller succinctly states in an interview to Sri Lankan journalist and poet Afdhel Aziz:

> I celebrated the Burghers. I celebrated their weddings, their funerals, their Christmas feasts, everything. I wanted to show the life that was not being publicly shown to anybody; the real way the Burghers lived. The way they fornicated, the way they died. I did everything possible to show […] them that they were a unique culture and people who could live together with everybody…(Muller).

In *The Jam Fruit Tree*, Muller portrays everyday life in the private space as a key source of oppression of women. Women are described primarily as objects of male sexual desire. Muller's work has elicited critical acclaim from Neluka Silva for overemphasising the sexuality of Burgher women. The patriarchal society confines women inside the house by impregnating them without considering the rigmarole that a woman has to go through during subsequent pregnancies. Cecilprins' principle as stated in the opening section of the book reflects the same "Keep the wife in the family way…Siring a string of children was, to the old reprobate, a child's play" (Muller 3). Cecilprins' wife Beryl conceives thirteen times to satisfy the pleasures of her husband. Most of the women characters in the novel such as Elsie Maudvon, Opel Sarah Ludwick, Iris Elizabeth Holdenbottle go on to have multiple babies.

Gender dichotomy emerges in the way men are shown to be either whiling away their time in the house or performing their duties in the railways or engaging in heated political discussions while the women are preoccupied with reading conduct and home science books such as "Advice to Cooks", Rules for Choosing Good Meat, Tusser's poem "The Praise of Huswifery", Taylor's lines on "What a good wife will always be" and others. The home as a feminised space is elaborately detailed in the novels. Muller portrays women engaged in household chores such as chopping, baking, roasting, boiling, grinding and other such culinary arts. Maudiegirl's character in the *The Jam Fruit Tree* represents how the domestic space constitutes the ideal of womanhood. Maudiegirl is described as a woman with extraordinary culinary skills. Her kitchen in Dehiwala home is portrayed as an ideal one which other Burgher women should try to emulate. Maudiegirl lays down the Golden Rules of kitchen in bullet point on a card hung on the kitchen wall. Apart from cooking and other household activities, Maudiegirl prepares home-made remedies for cold, worms, measles and other such diseases. She knows simple concoction for preparing shoe-polish, tonic to keep a bunch of cut flowers

fresh and longer and many other things. She trains her daughters how to manage their house. The narrator's statement on Maudiegirl reiterates the nationalist idea of women as embodiment of the community's cultural values: "Yes Maudiegirl, like all good Burgher women of the 1930s was a wonder when it came to anything and everything in and around the home" (Muller 42).

In *Moth Smoke*, Mumtaz's journalistic endeavour to escape from the constraints of family life turns out to be unthreatening to the nationalist discourse that confines women to domestic sphere. She recollects how she found it difficult to publish her initial pieces which centred on serious issues. People accepted her writings wholeheartedly only when she shifted to domestic themes. Her writings encompassed topics such as lullabies, herbal remedies for diaper rash, vegetable balms for baby skin and most importantly motherhood. This reflects how writings by women are presumed to be personal and more particular by nature unlike men who are free to comment upon issues that are relevant universally. Her writings also indicate how the nationalist ideologies entangle women and domesticity and thus preclude their role in the public sphere

The novel *Twilight in Delhi* depicts how the *zenana* culture is engrained in the lives of Muslim women to restrict their mobility as well as their intellectual development. Cultural impositions limit women's participation in public life and confine them to the domestic sphere and the associative household chores. The pervasive monotony and secluded life of the female inhabitants of the zenana is described in the lines:

> In the zenana things went on with the monotonous sameness of Indian life. No one went out anywhere. Only now and then some cousin or aunt or some other relation came to see them…Mostly life stayed like water in a pond…The world lived and died, things happened, events took place, but all this did not disturb the equanimity of the zenana…The day dawned, the evening came, and life passed them by. (Ali 39)

The patriarchal society asserts its power by erecting walls on all sides to inhibit women's freedom in the name of guarding their beauty and virtue. Women are depicted as whiling away their time in eating, peeling vegetables, sitting idle and cutting areca nuts and gossiping of marriage and other family matters. The standardised image of the

Muslim women as conceived by the patriarchy emerges in the lines uttered by the character Saeed Hasan:

> A wife should be of moderate stature, neither short nor very tall nor too fat. She should not be short because then she would give birth to many children. She should not be very tall as she would bend down soon after the birth of one child. She would not be too fat for then she will never have a child at all. That is why a man must give preference to one who combines all qualities harmoniously and proportionately… (Ali 57)

The irony is that man recognises woman only in terms of her procreative abilities. This type of stereotypical notion exhorts women to internalise the societal impositions upon them. The patriarchal society deems motherhood to be woman's foremost duty thus confining them to the inner domain. They create a discourse which enslaves women to their tradition, culture and patriarchs to the extent of effacing their individuality for the sake of the family. They consider women to be irrational, emotional and sentimental fools and restrain them from participating in the outside world.

The preservation of the community identity in the form of multiple childbearing is endowed upon the women. The book's title *The Jam Fruit Tree* symbolises the Von Bloss' Burgher community which kept branching out like the jam fruit trees to establish a lineage. A preference for male children among the community is also depicted in the novel. For instance, Cecilprins grumbles aloud when his daughters Leah, Elsie, fail to produce sons "With all these buggers married, nobody getting a son" (Muller 130). Sonnaboy makes a pilgrimage to Kataragama on the advice of a Tamil guard to pray to a Hindu god to bless him with a boy. Another neighbour of Sonnaboy takes advantage of Beryl's innocence when she turns to him to voice her sorrows. He advises her to take a decoction which adversely affects her foetus and she undergoes internal bleeding. The indifferent attitude of Sonnaboy emerges in the scene where he drags Beryl into the bedroom and rapes her. Later he burdens her with subsequent pregnancies. These instances reveal the misogynistic attitudes of Burgher men.

In *Shame*, Rushdie exposes the tale of three repressed Shakil sisters; Chhunni, Munnee and Bunny in the remote border town of Q. Their father Old Mr Shakil keeps them confined in the zenana wing of the "labyrinthine mansion" (Rushdie 13) in

Nishapur until his dying day. All of them are virtually uneducated and they amuse each other in the zenana wing by fantasising about sexual life. Their dream of a romantic life and freedom of sexuality is thwarted by tradition which creates a myth of sexuality based on the idea that any sexual urges on the part of women may deform her purity and invite dishonour upon the family values. Their only access to the outside world is a dumbwaiter constructed by Mistri Yakoob Balloch. The narrator reveals the socially-enforced cocooned existence of women in the following words "Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repression of other kinds as well" (Rushdie 173).

In *Sunlight on a Broken Column* the woman characters grow up in the sheltered world of the zenana where transgressing the boundary is considered as a sin. They submit themselves to their fate and patriarchal agenda in order to escape the wrath of the society. They are so entangled in their own struggle for freedom that they prefer to remain silent on political matters afflicting the outer world. So, when Uncle Hamid asks Laila to give her opinion about the agitation in her college she stiffly refuses to do so. She says that she does not have freedom of thought and action. In another instance, Aunt Majida's strange consolation to Laila and Zahra after the death of the patriarch Baba Jan reflects how they have internalised their relentless subjugation in the family. She says, "Learn to live with sorrow, my child, for it will be your constant companion" (Hosain 85). Aunt Abida echoes the same view when she advises Laila to learn to accept unhappiness as her only fate "You must learn that your 'self' is of little importance. It is only through service to others that you can fulfill your duty" (Hosain 252).

Laila's opening statement in the novel reveals how the feudal house was characterised by strict spatial divisions of mardana and zenana quarters created by the nationalist rhetoric. She says, "The day my aunt Abida moved from the *zenana* into the guest room off the corridor that led to the men's wing of the house, within call of her father's room, we knew Baba Jan had not much longer to live" (Hosain14). The line subtly hints at the power unleashed by patriarch Baba Jan which weighed heavily on those who lived in the house. Baba Jan's impending death and aunt Abida's moving out of the women quarters foretells the changes about to occur in the family as well as the nation during the upheavals of partition. Hosain's elaborate descriptions of women

engaged in preparation and serving of delicious meals, celebrating different festivals with pomp and splendour is foregrounded to highlight the seclusion of women from the outside world of political turmoil.

Laila and Zahra consider their girlhood as a heavy burden. Their minds are regulated by the feudal masters and they have no defense against anxiety. They are compelled to lead an uncertain and servile life. The orthodox Muslim society disdained empowerment of women through modern education. They believed in imparting religious education to women. They perceived religious education of women as an embellishment to fit in the patriarchal structure internalised by the society. Laila is reprimanded by Hakimun Bua for taking interest in English classics. Bua says, "Pull your head out of your books and look at the world, my child. Read the Holy Book, remember Allah and his Prophet, then women will fight to choose you for their sons" (Hosain 14).

Zahra's education and upbringing which are considered as exemplary reflect how the cocooned life of women are designed and internalised by the society to serve the patriarchal niche of a woman. Aunt Majida takes pride in Zahra's modesty and cultural upbringing "True I have done the best I could for Zahra, in the light of my own little knowledge. She has read the Quran; she knows her religious duties; she can sew and cook, and at the Muslim school she learned a little English, which is what young men want now" (Hosain 24). Zainab, another character brought up in a confined atmosphere shares similar perspectives on life. Her conformity to home bound life and her servility becomes apparent in her statement "Now I serve my mother, father and brothers, then I'll serve my husband, my father-in-law and my mother-in-law. But at least I'll be able to wear jewels and nice clothes" (Hosain 95).

Conduct books by Islamic scholars such as Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's *Bishishti Zewar* (translated as *Heavenly Ornament* and *Perfecting Women*) and *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* by Sheik Yusuf Al-Qaradawi are classic examples of attempts at regulating the behaviour of women. These books meticulously outline how a "good" Muslim woman should selflessly serve her husbands, in-laws and her own kith and kin and preserve the unique traits of Muslim culture in the domestic sphere. The books include practical instructions on everyday activities such as cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, preparing home concoction for various diseases, religious duties and others

thus confining them within the domestic sphere. “The unstated goal of these publications was to groom women for service to the new patriarchal class while constructing their identities as representative of the 'timeless traditions of Islam" (Amin quoted in Jill Didur 135).

The consciousness for female education was raised only in the later stage of the reform movement to fulfil the nationalist vision of the “new woman”. Even the women writers such as Radharani Lahiri, Kundamala Debi involved in reform movements in Bengal emphasised upon the need of the educated woman to inculcate feminine virtues of “chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, patience, and the labors of love” (Chatterjee 129). The “new woman” could venture out in public places outside the home as long as it did not threaten her spiritual purity. In the novel characters such as Zahra and Aunt Saira exhibit changes in their outward appearance, discussions and mannerisms because of their proximity with English ‘lady-companions’ but inwardly they still conform to patriarchal codes and are suppressed by patriarchal hegemony. Their newly acquired modernity is just a simulacrum of their Western counterpart to enhance the status of their English educated husbands. The orthodox middle class traditions are like cobwebs which entangle them even after giving up the purdah culture. Their conformist attitude emerges in Laila’s perception of Zahra’s changed demeanor:

> I knew she had not changed within herself. She was once playing the part of a dutiful purdah girl. Her present sophistication was as suited to the role as her past modesty had been. Just as she had once said her prayers five times a day, she now attended social functions morning, afternoon and evening…She was all her husband wished her to be as the wife of an ambitious Indian Civil Service officer. (Hosain 140)

Similarly, Aunty Saira displays the same orthodox ideas. Her outward appearance, that is smart saris coupled with waved hair, cigarette-holder and high-heeled shoes lack congruence with her inner submissive nature. She is an echo of her husband Uncle Hamid. She espouses the patriarchal vision that women should be educated to prepare them for service. Begum Waheed too asserts the same view when she states that in Surmai they educate girls to be good wives and mothers.

Various discourses within the context of a family ensure the enactment and perpetuation of gender differences. In Foucault's words "every established piece of knowledge permits and assures the exercise of power" (quoted in Miller 117). Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* explores how domestic space regulates and normalises the contours of nation. The novel subverts the idea of home as a space of comfort and shelter by foregrounding the problematic relationship between Arjie's emerging sexuality and its repression by heterosocial orthodoxy that underpins the South Asian society. Gayatri Gopinath, a queer theorist, claims in her analysis of *Funny Boy* that home infused with essentialist gendered identity makes Arjie a deviant subject. She argues that gendered configuration in Arjie's grandparents' Colombo home reminds of Chatterjee's nationalist framings of inner and outer domain where the inner domain is portrayed as a woman's space and the outer domain as a masculine space (Svensson 12).

In the first chapter of the novel titled "Pigs Can't Fly" Selvadurai portrays the zenana/mardana distinction prevalent in Sri Lankan society. During monthly "spend-the-days" (1), that is one Sunday of the month the parents take a break from their duties towards their progeny to enjoy their life. Arjie's parents too drop him and his siblings at his grandparents' spacious home to enjoy the day with his cousins in the absence of parental control. Arjie recollects how his grandparents' house was divided into two territories: one the front garden, the road and the field in front of the house for the boys and the second the back garden and the kitchen porch for the girls. Arjie states that two things, basically territoriality and leadership formed the framework of their system to avoid disputes. The features which underpin Arjie's grandparents' home reflect that home cannot be secluded from the ideas governing the nation.

The boys engage in a game of cricket which was considered as a typically masculine sport in South Asia in the erstwhile decades. Arjie and his female cousins play the fascinating game of "bride-bride" (Selvadurai 4) in the back garden and the kitchen porch thus confining themselves to the inner domain or the feminised space. The free play of fantasy lures him to the game of bride-bride and he is allowed by his companions to play the lead role of the bride because of his superior imaginative powers. Arjie feels that the game allows him the freedom to imagine a utopian world where he is adored by the world as a perfect being: "I was able to leave the constraints of myself and ascend

into another, more brilliant, more beautiful self, a self to whom this day was dedicated…" (Selvadurai 4).

Arjie's prohibition in the feminised space begins with the entry of Kanthi Aunty's daughter Tanuja. She states with conviction "A bride is a girl, not a boy… A boy cannot be a bride" (Selvadurai 11). Tanuja abuses Arjie by using offensive terms such as "pansy", "faggot" and "sissy" for transgressing the gender binary. Kanthi Aunty later reports to his parents and others regarding his so called "abnormal" desires with such laughter as if she had caught a criminal red-handed, "See what I found!" (Selvadurai 13). Arjie's father blames his mother for encouraging Arjie's unconventional sexual inclinations. He declares, "If he turns out funny like that Rankotwera boy, if he turns out to be the laughing-stock of Colombo, it'll be your fault" (Selvadurai 14). This instance reflects the irony of the patriarchal society, where women are relegated to the domestic sphere but at the same time they are entrusted with the responsibility of inculcating the stereotypical gender norms in their progeny to propagate the idea of heteronormative discourse of a nation.

"Bride-bride" is not a mere game in this novel, rather it reveals the sexual orientation of Arjie, his future self, his homosexual identity. The performative act of cross-dressing and acting like a new bride with elaborate make-ups reflects his sexual otherness. His mother dissuades him from playing "bride- bride" or other games with girls and also forbids him from entering into her bedroom to cure him of so called perceived "funniness" and to maintain the status quo of the society. Perhaps in this case the status-quo can be equated to the heterosexual matrix which Judith Butler defines as a hegemonic model of gender "that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine express male, feminine express female), that is oppositionally and hierarchically define through compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (quoted in Renold 493).

Arjie occupies a liminal space because the exile from the girl's territory has caught him between the boy's and the girl's world neither belonging nor wanted in either. When he questions regarding the normative codes of behaviour "Why do I have to play with the boys? Why can't I play with the girls?" (Selvadurai 19, 20).Arjie's mother reminds him that such behaviour is considered as aberrant. She fails to provide a substantial reply to his queries. She states, "Life is full of stupid things and sometimes

we just have to do them" (Selvadurai 20). Her analogy, "Because the sky is so high and pigs can't fly", argues Gayatri Gopinath, "attempts to grant to the fixity of gender roles the status of universally recognized natural law and to root it in common sense" (quoted in Svensson 12). In a way Arjie's mother influences him to internalise the gender stereotypes as part of universal law pervading the nation.

The novel convincingly depicts the strange hold of family and society upon the individual lives of people. For instance, when Amma moves out of the house to investigate the circumstances leading to her former lover Daryl's death, Neliya Aunty reminds her of the consequences that a woman might face for reporting a matter to the police. She says that the police might ask her awkward questions and the society might never forgive her for enquiring about other men even after having her own husband and three children. Similarly, Arjie's family casts him aside after he develops close relationship with his male partner Shehan: "I was no longer a part of my family in the same way. I now inhabited a world they didn't understand and into which they couldn't follow me" (Selvadurai 284).

Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame* portrays how a culturally sanctioned discourse of "shame" in the context of Indian subcontinent emerges as a pervasive paradigm that positions men and women in unequal ways. The novel sheds light on the patriarchal society which uses the idea of shame to reinforce humiliation of women in the name of honour, modesty and purity. Rushdie states that the word "shame" is an inadequate translation of the Urdu word *sharam* which is used as one of the parameters of conduct throughout the Indian subcontinent. In the essay titled, "The Limits of What is Possible: Reimagining *Sharam* in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*", Jenny Sharpe states how the ideas of *izzat* and *sharam* reinforce the gendered role of female passivity and relegate them to the private sphere. *Izzat* is the family honour and the patriarchal society puts the onus on women to uphold the honour by experiencing *sharam* if they deviate from the stereotypical norms assigned to them. *Sharam* is interpreted as the sign of women's purity. If the woman behaves shamelessly then the family honour is restored by enforcing severe punishment upon the transgressor. The narrator defines shame as "embarrassment, discomfiture, decency, modesty, shyness, the sense of having an ordained place in the world" (Rushdie 39) in which the women must indulge. Violence is sanctioned as a masculine response to shame in order to subjugate women.

In the chapter entitled “Blushing” the narrator recalls an incident in East End of London, where a Pakistani father murdered his only daughter for falling in love with a white boy in England. The narrator states that the incident seemed conceivable to him. Being an Asian he could easily realise that the dishonour brought forth by the girl upon her family compelled her father to murder her. He says, “The news did not seem alien to me. We who have grown up on a diet of honour and shame can still grasp what must seem unthinkable to people living in the aftermath of the death of God and of tragedy: that men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable altar of their pride” (Rushdie 115). Ironically, the society believed that this kind of honour killing will help to expiate the shame of the father “only her blood could wash away the stain” (Rushdie 115). This instance reflects how the discourse of shame represses women’s selfhood even in private matters and authorises shamelessness of man in the name of honour killing.

The repressed feelings of the Shakil sisters find an outlet in an indulgent gala night in the Angrez Cantonment after their father’s death. They give birth to Omar Shakil through adultery which is against the Islamic faith of purity and modesty. In Munnee’s words,“To him it would have seemed like a completely shameless going-on, an abhorrence, the proof of his failure to impose his will on us” (Rushdie 15). The act of shamelessness may be interpreted as a violent outburst of the idea of shame deposited on them from their childhood days. On a deeper reflection it emerges that the three sisters swear to keep it a secret and share the public humiliation of conceiving a child out of wedlock. The uncertainty surrounding Omar’s birth can be compared to the uncertain future of the newlyborn nation Pakistan.

According to the cultural concepts of *izzat* and *sharam*, Omar is a product of shame but he spends his entire life turning his back on that reality. For the first twelve years of his life his mothers confine him inside the reclusive mansion. On his twelfth birthday he demands only freedom as his birthday gift. So, the mothers grant him freedom from the Nishapur mansion after repeated requests. Before his foray into the outside world his mothers forbid him to experience the emotion of shame. His eldest mother instructs him “Come home without hitting anyone or we will know that they have lowered your pride and made you feel the forbidden emotion of shame” (Rushdie 38). Their thoughts reflect how the women have embraced the socially constructed categories “shame and femininity” and “shamelessness and masculinity”.

Sufiya Zinobia is presented from the very outset of the novel as the embodiment of “shame”. The birth of the heroine of the novel enrages her parents Raza Hyder, the future President of the country, and his wife Bilquis. She is deprived of any form of patronage in spite of her birth in a royal family. They expected a son who would probably carry on the legacy of the politically powerful Hyder family. So her birth is considered as a “wrong miracle” by her parents. Her father refuses to accept even the anatomical evidences of his daughter’s sex. He exclaims in anger “Babies do not come clean into this world! ‘Genitalia! Can! Be! Obscured!”’ (Rushdie 89). Sufiya blushes in shame for the first time when she is in her father’s arms. Jean Paul Sartre’s reading of shame generating out of “objectifying gaze of another subject” coheres with Sufiya’s realisation in her infancy that her presence in the male-dominated world is being judged by Others. Sartre states “shame of self, it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging” (quoted in Dolezal 427).

Rushdie portrays Sufiya as a permanently retarded girl after contracting brain fever. At the age of nineteen, she exhibits the characteristics of a six year old child. In the course of the novel Sufiya’s shame does not remain confined to her. She magically becomes “the conscience of a shameless world-a principle of honour, so to speak” (Ahmad 1467). Sufiya represents the unfelt shame of the political elite of a traumatised nation. The narrator states that the brain fever made her receptive to all sorts of things that floated around her including a host of unfelt feelings of the people. Shameful things such as telling lies, disrespecting the elders, extramarital affairs, ill treatment of women, smuggling and others are committed by people in their day-to-day life but they refrain from expressing their shame. Sufiya in a way embodies the unfelt shame of the people of her nation.

Bilquis’ father is named as Mahmoud the Woman by the street urchins because he acted as a mother to Bilquis after his wife’s death. When the children address him as Mahmoud the Woman they actually mean it in terms “Weakling, the Shameful, the Fool” (Rushdie 62) personified by women. Mahmaud’s dejected expression to his daughter reflects the societal burden that women have to endure in their everyday life. He says, “Woman,' 'what a term! Is there no end to the burdens this word is capable of bear- ing? Was there ever such a broad-backed and also such a dirty word?'"(Rushdie 62).

Attia Hosain's novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* delineates how the notions of "*izzat* and *sharam*" govern the life of the female occupants of the house and prove to be claustrophobic for them. The novel debunks the private and public realm by depicting the parallel between Laila's family history and national history. Hosain unfolds the partition experience of women behind the purdah and the secluded gendered space zenana. Ashiana, Laila's feudal household portrays the deeply ingrained purdah and zenana culture which confine women within the domestic sphere and demand purity, honour and etiquette from them. Amer's statement brings to light the tenacious hold of common denominators of conduct enforced upon Muslim women when he states to Laila, "You belonged to another world, guarded by a thousand taboos fiercer than the most fiery dragons" (Hosain 191).

Hosain satirises the election system where only a few privileged purdah women are rounded up to cast their voting rights. Educated girls are appointed to guide the purdah women to cast their votes. Women are just pawns in the entire process where they vote only on the basis of party loyalty. The statements made by one of the volunteer girls evoke the dominance of man in electoral process. She says, "I think I'll go home. Nothing is happening and it doesn't matter anyway. Everything will be decided by the men. I came only because I was asked to" (Hosain 257). Hosain compares Rani Sahiba's posture to a frightened animal in unfamiliar surroundings. She describes elaborately how Rani Sahiba's lack of education hinders her from exercising her own vote using her intellect. Mr Cowley reads out the eight names and she just nods at the ones she wants to select. Then Cowley states in a patronising tone "Now the Rani Sahib can go back to her village having exercised her democratic rights…" (Hosain 258).

Mohsin Hamid captures the izzat/honour culture which is endemic to South Asian society through the anecdote of Dilaram. The landlord of the area threatens Dilaram that he would kill her family members if she refuses to comply with his bodily desires. Later when she pays her visit to the house, the landlord, his sons and their friends rape her. One of the rapists agree to take her to the city of Lahore and marry her. The villagers assert that they would not accept her back in the society. The only way to recover her honour is to marry the rapist. Dilaram also recollects tales of other innocent girls who returned to their families after such encounters with rapists only to be killed by their fathers or their brothers in the name of honour killings. These instances reveal the

lopsided social conventions whereby the perpetrators escape unnoticed even after violating women's autonomy.

The novel Ice *Candy Man* also delineates how the idea of shame and gender inequality leads to self-effacement and subjugation of girl child and women in the society. They are compelled to carry the burden of shame without any fault of theirs. Lenny is teased for her physical disability without considering the fact that she contracted the infectious disease from others. An English gnome mocks at her when he sees her being dragged in a pram by her Ayah. He exclaims "Shame, shame! Such a big girl in a pram!" Similarly when she visits her Godmother's house, Slavesister and Godmother chants, "Lame Lenny! Three for a penny! Fluffy pants and fine fanny!"(Sidhwa 2, 3). Another girl Papoo, the sweeper's daughter also leads a life of deprivation common to Subcontinental girls during the Partition. Her mother Muccho abuses her routinely without any valid reason and calls Papoo their shame, "curse-of-a-daughter","loose charactered","the whore" (Sidhwa 47). Her family takes advantage of her docility and marries her off to a dwarf old man.

Papoo's story is ironic because her mother orchestrates her miserable plight. Her mother agrees to the match without considering the impending violence that Papoo will have to endure after her marriage. No voices are raised to protest against child marriage. This instance draws attention to the fact that the society gives consent to the systematic and pervasive disregard for women without thinking about the repercussions it might have in the longer run. Suppression of female consent enables the male to abduct women during the Partition which is represented through the characters of Ayah and Hamida in the novel.

When the Recovered Women's Camp is established near Lenny's neighbourhood, she assumes it as a women's jail. The enclosed courtyard and the sounds of wails and cries perturb her. She suspects that some mysterious development takes place inside the quarters and the women are guilty of some crimes. One night she is awakened by a hideous wail and she asks Hamida about the sound. Hamida explains to her that the women in the camp are "fate-smitten woman" and they are considered as "fallen women" by the society. Hamida refrains from furnishing any other details regarding these women. Later Godmother tells Lenny that Hamida was kidnapped by the Sikhs and taken away to Amritsar. Her family terminated their relationship because they

considered her as a fallen woman. Godmother states, "She was taken away to Amritsar. Once that happens, sometimes, the husband- or his family- won't take her back…Some folk feel that way- they can't stand their women being touched by other men'" (Sidhwa 215). Hamida is not allowed to see her children too. She curses her fate instead of her husband "He's a good man,...It's my kismet that's no good…We are *khut-putli*, puppets, in the hands of fate"' (Sidhwa 222).

Similarly Ayah is also ashamed to face Godmother and Lenny because of her abduction by Ice-Candy man and his other Muslim partners. Ayah's marriage to Ice-Candy Man makes her situation all the more ambiguous. She is inscribed in the patriarchal codes of Pakistan and her new religious affiliation disqualifies her from acquiring citizenship in her newly formed country. Lenny's naïve observation leads her to realise that their miserable plight has less to do with their fate than the will of man who indulge in sexual predation without their consent. The characterisation of Hamida and Ayah echoes the fate of South Asian women who are confined to the inner domain by men after violating their bodies. The abducted women are rendered as the Other in India and Pakistan and they are left with sorrow as their only companion.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice- Candy Man* attempts to fill the lacuna in partition narratives regarding the inner domain which remains locked into a masculine nationalist history. The novel shows how the two spheres and the issues of women's freedom are implicitly intertwined in the nationalist ideology. Sidhwa addresses the predicaments of women whose individuality is thwarted by restrictive societal codes permeated through its agents. In the opening sentence of the novel Lenny hints at an enclosed, claustrophobic life of a woman when she states that "My world is compressed" (Sidhwa 1). Lenny's world is doubly constricted first being a girl-child and second by her lameness. Her lameness is allied to her femaleness to lend impetus to the stereotypical gender notions. After inspecting her legs Col. Bharucha states that she will be quite normal by the time she grows up. When her father enquires about her schooling, Col. Bharucha replies "She's doing fine without school, isn't she?'…She doesn't need to become a professor.'…She'll marry – have children – lead a carefree, happy life." (Sidhwa 15). This instance reflects how the patriarchal society assigns typical gender roles to consolidate its power over women.

Mohsin Hamid's novel *Moth Smoke* does not deal explicitly with the zenana/mardana culture but the character of Mumtaz invites us to unravel the repressed societal fears beneath the outward demeanour of courage. Mumtaz's global exposure and Western education probably influence her to embark on a journey of independent identity. Her assertion, "I'm Mumtaz Kashmiri" (Hamid 147) reflects her desire to redefine the stereotypical identity of South Asian women as a wife of someone. However in the course of the same chapter she states how the she fails to defy the staunch belief of Pakistani society in the so-called religio-cuturally sacred institute of marriage and immediately accepts Ozi's proposal without even having much idea about marriage. Later she repents her decision and realises the power of the patriarchal propaganda to stifle her life even in a distant land of America.

> …I had no idea what marriage really meant, and I didn't know myself, yet. And because of all the other wrong reasons, because of what every mother, aunt, sister, cousin, friend, every woman from home I'd ever known had always told me: that an unspeakable future awaits girls who don't wind up marrying, and marrying well (well being short for "wealthy Pakistan bachelor") (Hamid 148)

Mumtaz's begins to deplore the choice of her life partner because of Aurangzeb's heedless attitude towards her after the birth of their son Muazzam. She says: "I'd never been ashamed of anything I'd done in my life. But this wasn't something I'd done. This was me. Not an act but an identity. I disappointed me, shamed me" (Hamid 154). Her statements reflect the fate of South Asian women who subjugate their free will and individualism in the face of inexorable realities of familial and societal expectations. They emerge as "abiding gendered self" (Butler 519) through enactments of various reified acts.

The Arabic word Mumtaz connotes "excellent", "distinguished" or "the best". So, in the novel *Moth Smoke* too her body becomes the space of contention between two warring figures Ozi, her husband and Daru, her lover. Mohsin Hamid himself in an interview compares her with the disputed land of Kashmir (Costin 38) and draws analogy between Ozi and Daru's fight for her love to India and Pakistan's fight for the historic and picturesque Kashmir. Probably that is why Hamid endows her with the name Kashmiri too. She is dressed as Mother Earth for Halloween night in New York to conform to the national masculinist propaganda of nation as "mother" figure. In the

course of the novel it emerges that these are ironic adulation and thus contributes to her subjugation by society.

Critical analyses of the novels reveal that men expect loyalty and devotion from their wives but they themselves engage in pleasure seeking activities. For instance, Ahmad Ali depicts how the courtesans reign important in the life of the feudal Nawabs. The frequent visits to the courtesans were considered part of the royal culture during the Mughal era. Mir Nihal, the protagonist of the novel indulges in extra marital love affair with a courtesan named Babban Jan. He even buys a house for her to live in. He considers her as a symbol of love, happiness and hope in his life. Mir Nihal keeps telling lies to his wife regarding his whereabouts in late hours of the night. His life collapses after Babban Jan's sudden death. Mir Nihal relinquishes his work after her death: "But something within him had died; and he did not go to the shop. She for whom he had worked was there no more. What did it matter now if he earned much or little?" (Ali 112). Mir Nihal also had a son from his illegitimate relationship with his maid Dilchain.

Mir Nihal's son Asghar also visits Mushtari Bai, a famous courtesan to satisfy his sexual pleasure. He even starts having romantic visions of dancing with her in the night. As a fickle-minded man he again falls in love with Bilqueece and marries her even after much reluctance from his family members. Later he expresses his disappointment when Bilqueece fails to deliver a son and leaves her alone because she lacks the capacity of alluring him through sensual ways. He vacillates from one woman to another. Even after Bilqueece's death he is fascinated by the beauty of her charming younger sister Zohra and wishes to marry her. On the contrary Begum Waheed remains unmarried throughout her life after losing her husband at such a young age. This reflects the "double standard of sexual freedom" (Millet 62) practised in the society where men belonging to refined, honourable families can gratify their pleasures by betraying their wives who are left with the only choice of remaining in the inner domain and cursing their fate.

The courtesans like Babban Jan, Mushtari Bai and others lead a pitiable life. Poverty compels them to take up this profession and entertain the Nawabs and the upper class but in the process their life is ruined. They live with a sense of shame and never disclose their lineage. A kind of social stigma is associated with them and so they are treated with hatred and contempt. The cursed fate of the courtesans emerges in the words of Mushtari Bai, "No one cares for me. I am like a caravan-serai where people come, rest

their bodies for a while and depart" (Ali 75). The indifferent attitude of the upper class reasonates in Asghar's consolation for Mushtari Bai that beauty and love are the best gifts bestowed upon women by God and so their main duty is to let their lovers enjoy their physical beauty. These types of typical womanly features of beauty, love and shame relegate them to inner domain in spite of taking up the role of courtesan as a profession.

Just like Ahmad Ali's *Twilight in Delhi,* Hosain also sheds light on the courtesan who are the unsung heroes of the national struggle. Their contribution to art and culture is pushed to the background by equating their profession with prostitution. They catered to the Muslim aristocrats who frequently visited them even during the political turmoil. They were regarded as preservers of Muslim etiquette and courtesy but the irony is that they were exploited by the elite males for their own pleasure and marginalised as morally loose characters. Hosain glorifies the performance of the courtesans who turned to God to expiate the so called "sins" of their life. They considered their hard-earned money as tainted and gave it as charity without caring about their old age needs. The Kotha culture in *Ice Candy Man* also reflect the the dominance of the patriarchs even in the inner domain. Lenny's cousin explains how the girls are taught to sing, dance, look pretty and talk elegantly to men. Male ayahs known as pimps look after the girls in the *Kotha* and reap benefits from the money the girls get after entertaining the customers. The irony is that women enjoy some sort of financial independence but only by confining themselves within the inner domain.

New Woman

Historians of the Indian subcontinent such as Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty and others have emphasised upon the need to represent the marginalised groups and their real connection with their nation. Perhaps their views lent impetus to reconfigure the dominant narrative of nation by recuperating the multiple feminine experiences which transcend the boundaries of conservative society and institutional history as a whole. Elleke Boehmer states in her book *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*: "The production of a unified, homogenous entity such as [the nation]…hinges, to a large degree, on the determinate subject position of "woman" for its articulation" (5). Authors such as Sangeeta Ray, Kumkum Sangari, Sudesh Vaid also echo the same view when they state there can be no gender neutral theory of nation.

Some of the historical novels seek to unravel the multifaceted and conflicted characters of South Asian women in that milieu. The contentious nature of women's position in late colonial Bengal is explored by Partha Chatterjee in the chapter titled, "The Nation and its Women". According to Chatterjee, the nationalist project in nineteenth century Bengal was predicated upon a selective appropriation of Western society for the emancipation of women. The nationalist created the icon of a "new woman" who would maintain the "spiritual" signs of femininity in the form of her dress, eating habits, social behaviour and religiosity and at the same time acquire cultural refinements through formal education. Apart from the household chores the new woman "need to have some idea of the world outside the home, into which she could venture as long as it did not threaten her femininity" (Chatterjee 130).

This study's argument is that the nationalist icon of "new woman" itself is somewhat paradoxical. On one hand, they emphasise upon self-emancipation of women through education and on the other hand, they consider education as a means to inculcate virtues of orderliness, cleanliness, chastity, self-sacrifice and others, along with a few practical skills of literacy. Their primary aim is to deny autonomy to women. Herein lies the inherent contradictions of the nationalist movement which was committed to civil liberty for all its citizens but in reality it stalled the development of women.

Salman Rushdie's novel *Shame* attempts to subvert the normative gendered paradigm of nation. The novel encapsulates the struggle for selfhood of women characters by articulating the multiple ways in which they try to assert their subjectivity. Rushdie delineates women's miserable plight as well as their defiant nature to challenge the myth of femininity as well as to dismantle the gender biased social structure. The narrator, a counterpart of Rushdie seems to confess that a masculine tale of nationalism embedded with sexual rivalry, ambition, power subsume the nexus between womanhood and national history. Only a few characters such as Sufiya Zinobia, Rani Harappa, Shakil sisters and others gather courage to defy feminine code or raise silent protest against "phallocentric confidence in the nation" (Dayal 46). Perhaps that is why the narrator pointedly justifies their inclusion to present a seamless narrative of nation. He even considers Pakistani women more impressive than their male counterparts: "But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me to

couch my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities, to see my 'male' plot refracted, so as to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and 'female' side" (Rushdie 173).

Rushdie depicts the duality of Sufiya's character by conjoining the beauty and beast binary, the two models of femininity constructed by patriarchy to conceal their dread of Sufiya's retaliation against them. Initially she embodies the unperceived shame of her family members and later she unleashes the pent up frustration and humiliation against the oppressive patriarchal society in a beastly form. Her character reminds us of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's reflection upon the fictional images of angelic and demonic women in their book, *The Madwoman in the Attic*: "for every glowing portrait of submissive women enshrined in domesticity, there exists an equally important negative image that embodies the sacrilegious fiendishness […] the cunning of the serpent*"*(quoted in Descz 36). According to Bakhtin such type of transformations "serves as the basis for a method of portraying the whole of an individual's life in its more important moments of crisis: for showing how an individual becomes other than what he was" (Booker 980). In the light of the novel *Shame*, the transformation undergone by Sufiya may be interpreted as a counter attack and resistance against the oppressive society.

Sufiya's subversive potentiality arouses from her constant repression by the society. For instance, on Sufiya's wedding day, Bilquis draws an analogy between man as a sea creature and women as the ocean to impart her lessons on conformity to the whims of her husband. The latent anger in her erupts obstinately and she says, "I hate fish" (Rushdie 199). When Sufiya is twelve years old she realises her mother's stress generated by her father's proximity to Pinkie Aurangzeb. Bilquis urges Raza to do something against the eternally noisy turkeys raised by Pinkie. Raza does not pay heed to her appeal. Sufiya realises that the turkeys represent the victory of Pinkie Aurangzeb over other men's wives and she finds it difficult to accept Raza's calmness in the face of shrieking Bilquis. One afternoon she sleepwalks over Pinkie's patch of earth and kills two hundred and eighteen turkeys by tearing off their heads with her hands. Pinkie, Bilquis and Raza remain awestruck by the carnage committed by such tiny hands.

The marriage atmosphere of sister Good News Hyder is turned into bizarre and horrific one by the monstrous act of Sufiya. In the midst of the gathering she twists of the

neck of her sister's would be husband Capt. Talvar Ulhaq and almost rips off his head. Her demonic act is reflected in the line, "Talvar was squealing like a pig, and when they finally dragged Sufiya Zinobia off him she had a morsel of his skin and flesh in her teeth" (Rushdie 171). Having embodied the shame of Naveed's love marriage instead of arranged marriage, Sufiya's beastly nature emerges to kill Talvar. Similarly, on learning that her own husband Omar Khayyam with whom she never had any sexual relations had impregnated her Ayah, Shahbanou, she unleashes her monstrous power. Sufiya indulges in sexual intercourse with four young men before tearing off their heads just like she did with the turkeys. Through "masculinization of the female subject" (Dayal 45) Rushdie subverts the gender hierarchies and questions men as to how it feels to be subjected to physical and sexual violence by women.

Omar's marriage to Sufiya can be read as an effort to assert control over her violent nature. Being a doctor he is well versed in the theory of hypnotic trances experienced by Sufiya. He realises that during such transformations Sufiya probably "remakes herself and her world as she chooses" (Rushdie 244). Omar injects her with knock-out drugs twice daily for almost two years to suppress her beastly nature. Gradually he becomes aware that her animality is actually her freedom. Her violent nature helps her to become the victimiser rather than the victimised. It helps her to break the restraining chains of the society. Omar, himself being a peripheral figure sympathises with her that for the first time in life the girl is at least free:

> He imagined her proud; proud of her strength, proud of the violence that was making her a legend, that prohibited anyone from telling her what to do, or whom to be, or what she should have been and was not; yes she had risen above everything she did not wish to hear. Can it be possible that human beings are capable of discovering their nobility in their savagery? (Rushdie 254)

After some days the monster in her takes complete charge and she escapes on the night of Iskander's hanging, plotted by her father Raza Hyder. She unleashes a reign of terror all over the country by murdering animals and men and plundering villages after villages. Some even mythologise her as a white panther that can fly and vanish into the air. On the political front, Raza is usurped by a military coup. When he hears of Sufiya's escape and plunders he flees to Omar's childhood house Nishapur where he meets his

end in the hands of Shakil sisters for killing their second son Babar. The demon in Sufiya reaches Nishapur and manages to kill her husband Omar with her hypnotic powers.

Another character Rani Harappa, the wife of Iskander Harappa rebels against patriarchy by taking recourse to the art of embroidery. Even during house arrest she manages to trace the atrocities, betrayals and crimes committed by her husband and despotic leader Iskander Harappa. She expresses her individual way of revolt by weaving "eighteen shawls of memory" (Rushdie 191). She places the shawls in a black metal trunk to be gifted to her daughter Arjumand, to dismantle the image of saint like figure she had of her father. Rani courageously titles the shawls as "The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great" (Rushdie 191). The shawls "said unspeakable things which nobody wanted to hear" (Rushdie 191). In a way, her embroidery works provide an alternative narrative of nation that was silenced by oppressive regimes of power in Pakistan.

Arjumand Harappa earns a striking name 'virgin Ironpants' as she downplays her sexuality to participate in the public domain as well as to disappoint her suitors. Her lineage as well as her beauty attracts her suitors but Arjumand rejects the flood of proposals to establish her individuality. She loathes her sex and disguises her looks shattering the myth of femininity: "She cut her hair short, wore no cosmetics or perfume, dressed in her father's old shirts and the baggiest trousers she could find, developed a stooped and slouching walk" (Rushdie 156). She even learns the art of self-defence and accompanies her father on his diplomatic tours. Arjumand qualifies in law and participates actively in the green revolution. She takes action against the profit oriented and oppressive zamindars. Apart from that she prosecutes the enemies of the state and raids the homes of film stars to seize their black money. She openly criticises the policy of polygamy supported by the people in power. She retorts "Polygamist, 'what an old-fashioned backward type at heart! It's just marriages and concubines you want. Modern man, my foot" (Rushdie 183). In these ways she rebels against the entrenched masculine power of the nation.

In *Moth Smoke* the unconventionality and impudence exhibited by urban woman Mumtaz can be analysed against the backdrop of globalisation and her exposure to Western liberal culture. Her Western education helps her to embark on a journey of self-identity by refuting the ideologically charged discourse of patriarchy regarding sex and gender in South Asian nations. Her character reveals how urban women in Pakistan are

reconfiguring their sexuality by defying the religio-cultural status accorded to wifehood and motherhood. Mumtaz's liberal ideologies and its articulation in the form of her dialogues and actions affirms Homi K Bhabha's view in his book *The Location of Culture* that increasing globalisation has helped the peripheral voices to move to the center and blur the fixed boundaries constructed by society.

Mumtaz emerges as an unconventionally bold character who does not conform to the stereotypical gender norms. For instance, when Daru offers cigarettes to Ozi, he rejects it stating that he has stopped smoking because he feels that being a father he ought to be responsible. Mumtaz, on the contrary, readily agrees to smoke with her husband's friend. She says "Well, I haven't quit…And I've been dying for a smoke…Pleasure, yaar" (Hamid 14, 15). She evades her responsibility as a mother. While going out for a party, Ozi enquires if Muazzam is in his bed, she replies that she has already handled him all night, so Ozi can take care and check whether he is asleep or not. She feels neglected by her husband after childbirth and considers motherhood a burden. The Western notions of self-dependence and individualism infuse her mind so she decides to work full-time and keep a nanny to take care of her child. She even suggests Ozi to take paternity leave if he does not want to leave his son alone at home. Here one can see a striking distance between the mother and a son generally not evidenced in South Asian society.

Mumtaz finds solace by taking up the role of a journalist and writing about prostitution and corrupt administrators who provide safe haven to the criminals. She wants to fight for the rights of the minority and unveil the spiral of silence surrounding the pitiable life of the prostitutes. Her journalistic endeavours and her travels around Lahore with Daru, fuels an elicit relationship between them. She indulges in sexual pleasures with Daru, walks with him fearlessly in Heera Mandi, wears his clothes, learns boxing from him, smokes cigarettes and hash thus defying all the traditional notions of womanhood. She states:

> When I met Darashikoh Shezad, I didn't know whether I was going to sleep with him, but I knew I wanted to. He seemed the perfect partner for my first extramarital affair…It was fantastic. We had a delicious courtship, slow and exquisite, because we both felt so guilty. Sex was a revelation: being touched by

> another man, declaring my independence from the united state of marriage, remembering myself by being felt for the first time. (Hamid 158)

Her statements reflect how she desires a life completely independent of normative codes of conduct of a married woman. Her continuous punches upon the heavy bags during her work out sessions can be symbolically read as her violent attempt to attack the oppressive society. Finally the hard punch which she lands on Ozi's mouth during the boxing class actually subverts the physically weak and effeminate nature traditionally attached to a woman.

Just like any other South Asian women she finds it difficult to escape from the manoeuvres of patriarchal society. Ozi questions her whether she actually loves her son or not and her mother too agrees with Ozi's view that she should stay at home and nourish her baby. She gradually finds it difficult to strive for self-identity. The society calls her a monster. The anxiety of not performing her role as a wife and mother engulfs her and she considers herself as a bad mother and a bad wife. Being a strong willed woman lady she ultimately decides to abandon her family to save her own self.

Sidhwa's novel *Ice Candy Man* portrays earnest efforts by some of the women characters to bring back some semblance of humanity in Lahore. Their efforts are laudable as they actively participate in the public domain to rescue their abducted and raped fellow sisters and provide rehabilitation to them. They alternate between public service and domestic subjugation. The great spirit exhibited by Lenny's Godmother, mother and her aunt is representative of thousands of other women who responded courageously to the colossal event of Partition. Their stories remain locked into a masculine history of nation. Sidhwa attempts to depict their agency in nation formation.

Sidhwa portrays Godmother as a reservoir of knowledge with an authoritative presence in a male dominated society. She commands great respect from people because of her ability to cure their illnesses as well as resolve their day-to-day problems with her herbal remedies. Her strong network of espionage helps her to keep track of everyday happenings in her vicinity. She arranges for Ranna's free education in Convent of Jesus and Mary after the child's harrowing experience of Partition. Ayah's union with her family at Amritsar would not have been possible without Godmother's intervention in Heera Mandi. Godmother's assertive nature against the Ice-candy man can be read as a

counter attack against machismo displayed during Partition. For instance, when Ice-candy man says that he is Ayah's slave and he worships her, Godmother retorts back, "You permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks, and *goondas* and say she has come to no harm?" (Sidhwa 248). She abuses him as pimp, son of pigs, shameless badmash. Finally, she succeeds in shifting her to the rehabilitation Camp near Lenny's house and later arranges for her journey homeward without paying any heed to Ice-candy man's protestations.

Lenny's mother and her aunt help Hindu and Sikh families to cross the border safely to India. Disharmony in the family and suspicion regarding their whereabouts do not deter them from helping the victimised women during the Partition. Their secret missions in the evening in their car full of petrol cans lead to the speculation that they are the arsonists setting fire to Lahore. Still they continue their efforts to recover the abducted women and rehabilitate them in the Recovery Camp. In fact, after Ayah's abduction, they bring Hamida, another abducted women, to take care of Lenny. Women who are abducted are considered untouchables and they are shunned by their family members. Lenny's mother in a way gives Hamida a chance to start her life afresh by engaging in household works and staying amidst the children. It's only after repeated conviction that Lenny's mother reveals to her about their activities that they smuggle the rationed petrol to help their Hindu and Sikh friends to run away and they also rescue kidnapped women and bring them to the Recovered Women's Camps. Apart from them Ayah also emerges as strong character. She does not embrace defeat after her abduction by Ice-candy man and the gang. She remains resolute in her decision to go back to Amritsar in search of a new life even after repeated pestering by Ice-candy man.

In *Sunlight on a Broken Column* Laila's developing sense of self can be studied against the backdrop of the rising wave of nation formation. She emerges as an adept observer of the religious hatred pervading the subcontinent in the years leading up to the partition and thereafter. She launches a scathing attack on religious fundamentalists and hypocritical leaders who incite hatred among the people in the name of nationalism. Her western education probably instils in her the values of freedom and individualism and helps her to formulate her own ideas on political matters. Gandhi's Satyagraha Movement unleashes a desire in her to fight against imperialism. Laila along with other girls refuse to sing the alien National Anthems at school concerts and cinema halls.

Laila's inclination towards democratic ideals is evident in her responses to nationalism and the nationalist struggle. Through her interaction with her politically engaged family members and her community of friends she measures the competing agendas of nationalism. She interrogates the communal and separatist mindset fostered by people. The conflicting views on nationalism and Partition maintained by her family members enables her to realise that even among the Muslims there are divisions with some being averse to the idea of self-definition of Indian nationalism while others supporting it. Her Muslim identity compels her to choose either of the ways. Finally, she decides to support the nationalists cause but she does not deride those who wish to leave for Pakistan in search of new dreams. Her attitudes lay bare her openness of mind and her philosophy of inclusive or syncretic nationalism.

Laila's assertion of self-opinion against gender biased society is mapped through her transgression of societal codes. For instance, she screams at her Uncle Mohsin when he accuses Nandi, of being a slut and a wanton. Again when Begum Waheed and others criticise a Muslim girl in the neighbourhood for running away with a Hindu boy and thus defying the religious codes, Laila intervenes and wonders at her bravery: "How had she crossed walls of stone and fences of barbed wire, and the even stronger barriers of tradition and fear? Why in seventeen years had I not learned the answer?" (Hosain 135). She feels that the girl must have suffered terribly because she ultimately committed suicide. Later Laila herself triumphs over the constricting forces of family by marrying Ameer, a working class man against the wishes of her feudal class family.

Another character, Nita Chatterjee, participates actively in the freedom movement. She emphasises upon the need to be organised and disciplined to fight British imperialism. She states that she is ready to go to prison and even embrace death for the sake of her country. Laila's utopian vision of an egalitarian nation infuriates her. She lashes out at Laila and her feudal class "I'm afraid I cannot afford such abstract ideals…you have money to wrap you like cotton wool against life…everything in your background tends to manufacture hypocrites" (Hosain 125). Nita's Hindu nationalism emerges in the way she suggests that if the Muslims feel alienated by the new self-definition of Indian nationalism they can go back to where they came from. Nita also expresses her disapproval at the Principal's advice to keep the spirit of learning in the college intact by keeping it away from political passions and partition politics. She

believes that education should recognise the freedom of expression and allow the youths to be involved in active discussion of politics.

Laila's friend Nadira's political beliefs are also structured by her religious fervour. She glorifies the greatness of the Islamic world and supports the creation of a separate land for the Muslims but at the same time she voices her opinion that marriages have moved away from Islamic ideals and were like prison sentences without any benefit of a trial. After the abolishment of feudalism Sita, the daughter of Agarwal takes up the charge of modernisation of the town. With the help an architect she starts constructing flats and factories which will generate more employment for working class and also increase her father's fortunes. She allures people with her charm and vehemently attacks conventions which restrict individual freedom.

Prominent Sri Lankan academics such as Neluka Silva, Minoli Salgado have critiqued Carl Muller for overemphasising the promiscuous nature of Burgher women instead of giving due to recognition to their active involvement in proto-feminist movements in Sri Lanka as well as their varied professional engagements (McNamara 64-65). However, one can still see traces of unconventionality exhibited by some of Burgher women characters in the trilogy as well. In *Yakada Yaka* characters such as Beryl and Marlene seek to assert their individuality. Marlene takes up the job of a journalist and writer. Her books are widely read in the island nation. Similarly Beryl desires for a life beyond domesticity. Sonnaboy's, unrefined nature and his lack of aspirations frustrates her. So, she has an extramarital affair with her neighbour Kinno Mottau who seem to be more successful than Sonnaboy. She later takes pills to get rid of the pregnancy developed out of the illicit relationship with Kinno.

Women characters such as Elsie and Balapitiya women shatter the myth of femininity to rebel against men. For example, it is Elsie who trains her husband regarding the procedure of procreation. She derives great pleasure in ill-treating him. Elsie whacks him severely with a cane when he fails to bring beef from the market: "Elsie would take the long rattan cane…Eric would give an alarmed squeak and run to the bedroom where Elsie would seize him and push his face into the bed and stripe him across the buttocks" (Muller 165 *JFT*). Similarly, Balapitiya women such as Mary Akka and Jossie Akka appear first on the scene in any kind of disputes. They choose the foulest of language and wield sharp kitchen knives in order to gain attention. They thwart

any attempt by man to dominate or outshout them. For instance, they scream "You are coming to fuck with me! Go and fuck your mother!" (Muller 81 *YY*) and later they advance on them with deadly intent.

In Gunesekera's *Reef,* Miss Nili emerges as a modern Sri Lankan woman. The entry of Miss Nili into the home of marine biologist Mr Salgado's ushers in new changes for Triton and his master. Salgado and Nili enjoy a live in relationship against the backdrop of escalating political discontent in Sri Lanka. Triton explains how she reconfigures the house according to her choice "Miss Nili became the lady- our nona- of the house…Not only did the bedrooms change hands but furniture was moved in every room, plants were imported into bare corners, new batik-style curtains ordered, old chairs reupholstered; walls, woodwork, tats repainted" (Gunesekera 108). This type of live in relationship fashions itself as a disjuncture in the South Asian narratives of marriage.

The romantic relationship dissipates into social function as Nili accompanies Salgado in his research trips to the reefs of the coastal region. She encourages his grand vision of conservation of the coral reef. At the same time, it is Nili who hinders his scholarly project by bringing out the "urban socialite in him" (Gunesekera 119). She takes him to her nightclubs, restaurant and friends place which leads him to procrastinate his analysis and writings. Her bold nature emerges in the way she seduces Salgado to make love to her: "Come on, you said you wanted to make love, no?" (Gunesekera 125). Nili tries to draw out the latent potential of culinary art in Triton by gifting him a book titled *One Hundred Recipes from Around the World* on Christmas eve. She acquaints Triton regarding the social imbrication of self which diminishes our subjectivity. She states, "We've all been put in the wrong place. We will never produce anything here…Only our grotesque selves" (Gunesekera 158). Perhaps she imparts this lesson on self to encourage Triton to develop his own identity instead of remaining eternal servant of Mr Salgado.

In the novel *When Memory Dies,* Sivanandan portrays several instances of women's active engagement in national politics with some of the characters like Prema and Damayanti participating in political discussions and expressing their critical perspectives, Lali being involved in rebuilding the civil society and Padma embracing death for the sake of nation. For instance, when the Board of Inquiry deliberately misinterprets S.W.'s views on the strike and opines that the senior unionists have realised

their mistakes and want to work alongside the government in future, Tissa questions his uncle's loyalty and accuses him of disowning the strike and the Chief. Prema rouses to defend her husband. She states that the workers have a better chance of getting their jobs back if his uncle manages to convince the Board that they are not the ringleaders of the strike. She states, "To support something you do not quite believe in, and then go along with it because you supported it,'…what is that if not loyalty? To your own truth?" (Sivanandan 72). This instance reflects Prema's capacity for logic and argument in matters of politics.

Vijay's wife Damayanti expresses her desire to be the head of the school. She supports Vijay and Dhana's effort to get the Teacher's Union to accept a non-communal curriculum. She is delighted when Sarath shows her some elementary Tamil books which contain the Sinhala words alongside. She states, "it's bilingual. Isn't that amazing? This is what we should be producing for our schools" (Sivanandan 304). Damayanti's progressive and inclusive idea of nation emerges from her viewpoint. Lali also reiterates this inclusive idea of nation in the way she helps the Sinhalese and the Tamils affected by the flood. She announces in triumph to Rajan "You see, Rajan…People can live toghther" (Sivanandan 220). Lali organises weekend excursions for her students to little-known places of historical importance such as Retigola, Kantalai and Padaviya to show them how the Hindus and Buddhists, Sinhalese and Tamils had together built a common civilisation which is under threat because of the Civil War plaguing the entire island nation.

Another character Padma, joined the People's Liberation Front as a section commander in the 1971 insurrection. She was caught and tortured by the army before being shot death. The main principle of the party was to relieve the hardships of the poor people even to the extent of stealing from the rich and giving the same to the poor. Vijay discovered a secret diary which contained details regarding Padma's military training and her revolt against the "burgeoning dictatorship" who ruled the country under the guise of "a democratically elected government" (Sivanandan 249). Later when Vijay met Padma she explained to him the movement initiated by the Front to counter the patriots and socialists who fed them with false promises. She believed that it was a grassroot movement comprising of an army of youngsters ready to fight for the grievances of their fathers perpetuated by the political parties. Her expertise in political analysis emerged in

her statements “One lot feeds us on American flour,..the other lot on patriotism. And the socialists feed us every five years with revolution to get elected”…the patriots and the socialists are getting together to feed us patriotic socialism” (Sivanandan 250).

Critical reflections on the women characters reveal that some of them do not submit to the masculinist paradigm, rather they reconfigure the gender discourse through their performances. They are active agents of social change. They are “new woman” but not in a way as defined by Chatterjee. They want to assert their self-identity rather than limiting themselves to the fulfilment of patriarchal expectations. Another point of departure from Chatterjee is that considering nineteenth century “new women” predicated upon women from Bengal as a model for “new woman” might be misleading because the political and cultural landscape varies across the Indian subcontinent.

Conclusion

From a critical analysis of the historical fiction it is found that family serves as a microcosm of nation as it mirrors the nexus of patriarchy and nationalism pervading the outside world. A comparative analysis of the select texts reveal that women are lynchpin of national identity as their bodies serve as a site of contentious politics between the warring communities. One of the recurrent observations articulated by these South Asian writers is the violation of women’s sexuality in the form of rape, abduction and mutilation of their bodies during upheavals of Partition and Civil War in the subcontinent. The violation of their bodies by rival community ignites communal riots among the menfolk.

The conflation of nation as feminine and the envisioning of the domestic space as ideal of womanhood ensure subjugation of women in the domain of politics. The irony is that women are the custodians of national culture but subsumed under patriarchy in the public domain. The ideological state apparatuses such as family, school, conduct books, the media, religious institutions, etc. rationalise their confinement within the spatial configuration of zenana or inner domain. It may be inferred that zenana/mardana or inner/outer domains emerge as ideologically charged sites which premise nationalism upon sexual and moral purity of womenfolk by secluding them from the outside world of political turmoil. The stereotypical gender dichotomy constructed by these domains emerges in the way men are shown to be engaged in heated political debates or

performing their professional duties while the womenfolk being preoccupied with household chores and spiritual responsibilities.

The texts discussed in the subsections reveal that constant repression and manipulation of women's identity generate growing resentment and resistance against normative codes set by patriarchal society. It is noteworthy that most of the characters who seek autonomy occupy a liminal space. They transgress the normative codes of conduct and patriarchal expectations of women but at the same time they rigorously observe the norms to escape punishment. In a way their ambivalent status can be attributed to the overpowering patriarchs who glorify them if they conform to the stereotypical roles and demonise them if they try to establish their autonomy. So we find that in the novels, assertion of female subjectivity is continually juxtaposed with the looming presence of a potent repressive society. The constant vacillation between personal subjectivity and societal recognition exhibited by some of the defiant women characters contests the homogenising discourses of nation. Through their performances, they contest the transcendent histories of nation. In a way they their "performative interventions" (Boehmer 8) validates Bhabha's idea that the ambivalent or liminal figures fracture the prescriptive national master discourse.