

## CHAPTER-4

### NATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The preceding chapter revealed how the gendered paradigm of nationalist discourses ensures subjugation of women characters in the inner as well as outer domain. Pursuing this line of thought, this chapter attempts to stimulate critical reflection on the discontentment of communities subjected to systematic marginalisation by nationalist ideology and their concerted efforts to redefine their position in relation to the nation. Critical engagement with the selected novels reveal that there is an inherent problem in the very idea of nation which marginalises ethnic, religious and other communities that do not fit into its framework. Discontentment itself is drawn into the idea of nation formation as it has turned out to be dogmatic, far removed from reality and thus incapable of representing the whole spectrum of disparate social groups in the Indian subcontinent. This chapter attempts to explore the subjective and collective perception of “nation” re-constituted by the discontented section through a study of select historical fiction. It undertakes a politically engaged reading of the select texts to foreground the idea of nation and its othering orchestrated by hegemonic discourse. The chosen texts focus on the diverse experiences of politically, socially, and culturally suppressed communities, their ideologies of resistance and their visions of alternative reality thereby problematising the idea of homogeneous nation.

The chapter begins by highlighting the importance of fragmentary narratives in resisting the homogeneous narratives of nation. Homi K. Bhabha, Gyanendra Pandey and Partha Chatterjee’s emphasis on holistic view of nation and crucial insights on subnationalism put forth by Sanjib Baruah, Sajal Nag and Ernest Gellner lent impetus to the analysis of the varied forms of discontentment perceptible in South Asian nations. The subsection titled “Subnationalism” focuses on texts such as *Ice-Candy Man*, *When Memory Dies*, *Funny Boy*, *The Point of Return*, *Shame* and “The Burgher Trilogy” to delineate impulses of secession, insurgency, discrimination, and violence generated by subnational aspirations. The next subsection titled “Political, ecological and moral decadence” analyses novels such as *Shame*, *Reef* and *When Memory Dies* to reflect on discontentment generated by rampant corrupt practices of politicians, bureaucrats and intellectuals. The penultimate subsection titled “The predicament of the migrants” delves into novels such as *Shame*, *Ice-Candy Man*, *The Jam Fruit Tree*, *The Point of Return* to

shed light upon the indeterminate position of the migrants arising out of the constructed rhetoric of national identity. The last subsection “Colonial hegemony” draws attention to the all permeating colonial influence on school syllabus, local economy and feudal culture in texts such as *When Memory Dies* and *Twilight in Delhi*.

In the introduction to his edited book *Nation and Narration*, Homi K. Bhabha acknowledges the attempts made by the nationalist rhetoric to propagate the idea of nation as a “continuous narrative of national progress”(1). At the same time, he emphasises the ambivalence characterising the idea of nation owing to its dependence on shared culture as a catalyst of nation formation. Bhabha questions the organic theories of holism of community which constructs the national unity through discourses of “*out of many one*” (294) [original emphasis]. Such discourses obscure the lives of people located at the margins. Bhabha advocates a holistic view of nation which includes the discourses of migrants, minorities and other marginalised communities. He calls their discourses as melancholic, alternate and hybrid which open up a void in the “unisonant” (315) narratives of nation.

Gyanendra Pandey asserts in his essay “In Defence of the Fragment” that the dominant nationalist historiography uses the categories such as “national” and “secular” to project a seamless variety of nationalism. In doing so it privileges the mainstream over the marginal and expects the minorities and other fragments of the society to fall in line with the mainstream. Pandey rightly asserts that “diversity is no longer the rallying cry of Indian nationalism” (559). He highlights the fact that the inordinate emphasis on the unity of the struggle characterising India’s independence has led to a reductionist view of the emerging nation state. A kind of “sanitised history” (566) has emerged as the biography of the nation. Perhaps that is why he lays emphasis on the importance of fragmentary narratives in order to resist homogenisation and develop potentially “richer definitions of the nation” (559).

Revisionist historians like Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin also share the view that there is a lacuna in nationalist historiography which elides the dreadful happenings and emotional dimension of history. They emphasise the need to recover marginal voices and survivor’s account that constitute important fragments of history. Professor Himadri Lahiri in his article titled “Nation, Nation-based Category and Indian English Literature: A Belated View” also highlights the need to review the

historiography of the nation in the light of works pouring in from peripheral zones like Kashmir and the Northeast by little-known authors. He draws attention to writers like Temsula Ao and Basharat Peer who have foregrounded the unprecedented violence and secessionist movements affecting their regions.

Partha Chatterjee in his book *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* emphasises on the need to decentre the epistemological subject which commands homogeneity by suppressing other fragmentary subjectivities to the periphery. He states that the elements of postcolonial nation's self-definition were drawn from the ideology of modern liberal democratic state but the nationalist project could hardly evade the overarching dominance of linguistic, religious, caste or class differences. Chatterjee argues that numerous fragmented narratives and resistances are essential in order to dismantle the "normalising project" (13) of nationalist historiography. He says that it is the very singularity of the idea of national history of India which creates divisiveness among the Indians. So, contentment is deliberately disturbed to promote the framework of ideal Indian nationhood.

Though Indian nationalism in its formative stage emerged as a potent unifying force of the nationalist movement, its trajectories underwent change in the years leading up to the independence. The colonial projection of segregated Hindu and Muslim community influenced the religious essentialists to polarise the two communities. The struggle between those trying to promote a syncretic brand of nationalism and those seeking to compartmentalise different communities was intense from early twentieth century onwards. Some of the thinkers realised that in a diverse country like India, it was important to promote a liberal and democratic view of nation. Parochialism might generate discontentment among unacknowledged communities. So, they chose to bypass cultural, religious and linguistic identities in order to build a secular nation. Thinkers such as Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad urged people to develop as morally and politically enlightened citizens rather than be guided by narrow religious, linguistic and cultural chauvinisms. However, it is seen that in the post-independence era certain fissures cropped up that threatened Indian nation formation and subnationalist uprisings happen to be one of them which endangered national integration.

Sanjib Baruah in his book *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (2001) explores this idea of subnational movements arising out of a disjuncture between supposedly mainstream nationalist politics and the peripheral communities of a nation. He defines subnationalism as another type of nationalism mobilised by “a small but vocal political faction” motivated by “the romance of independence” (Baruah xi). Just like national narratives, subnational narratives are also premised upon “imagined ties of shared origin and kinship” (Baruah 8). Subnational sentiments are directed towards those in power for their failure to accommodate the concerns of small communities within the paradigm of the nation. He states that there is an apparent amnesia about subnationalism in the borderland areas of Kashmir, Punjab and Northeast because they compete with official nationalism. This amnesia arises out of the nation states endeavours to create effective narratives of national unity. Other than Baruah, Ernest Gellner and Ernest Renan share the view that deliberate forgetting makes it possible to imagine unified national identity.

Baruah’s other books such as *Ethnonationalism in India: A Reader*, *Durable Disorder Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*, *Beyond Counter- Insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India* also explore the voices of dissent that contest the grand narratives of nation propounded by Indian nationalist projects. He argues that prolonged insurgency and counter insurgency operations in the north-eastern region reflect the glaring failure of nationalist history to represent the borderland areas and its cultures. Baruah argues that the growth of subnational imaginings expose the fragile sovereignty of postcolonial nations. Sajal Nag’s book *Contesting Marginality: Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North East India* is a meticulously researched book on the history of subnational uprisings in the states of Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. He describes the people of these areas as “aggrieved communities” (Nag 13) because what is considered as the nationalist movement and freedom struggle by the Nagas, Mizos or Meitheis is negatively explained away in terms of secessionism and insurgency by the Indian state.

Unlike India, Sri Lanka never developed a mass anti-colonial nationalist movement. National consciousness in Sri Lanka developed significantly only after independence and that too along communal lines. During the colonial era the Tamils enjoyed greater opportunities in the field of commerce as well as Government services

because of their educational qualifications. This privilege fuelled the rise of competing nationalism among the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils. Michael Robert in an article titled “Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Sinhalese Perspectives: Barriers to Accommodation” traces the roots of ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka to labels such as “national” and “communal” that have denied legitimacy to minority and hindered the fruitful accommodation of diverse communities within the island nation. Now, it remains to be analysed whether nationalism in South Asia has retained its emancipatory qualities or it has been fed by narrow exclusivism.

The following subsections mirror the limitations of national imagination in South Asian context which do not embrace the numerically weaker communities in order to sustain the legitimacy of majoritarian community in the name of homogeneous nation. The subsections reflect how the marginalised communities respond to the idea of nationhood: whether they assimilate with the dominant community or they maintain an ambiguous attitude or they destabilise the idea of nation through the assertion of their own subnational sentiments.

### **Subnationalism**

Most of the critical studies on Partition literature have focussed upon the Parsi minority and their neutrality in *Ice-Candy Man*. A point that emerges from the analysis is that there is a tendency to underplay the relentless pursuit of the Sikh minority engaged in redefining their religiously informed identity at the time of Partition. The decisive role played by Sikhs during the partition of Punjab Province remains relatively unexplored as compared to that of Parsi community. According to Ayesha Jalal, the unexamined myriad contestations of hegemonic nationalism thwart the possibilities of alternative visions of nationalism (Jalal 2183). Probably, the inclination of the readers to see connections between the writer’s Parsi identity and her work colours their interpretation to a certain extent.

In the years preceding India’s independence Hindu, Muslim and Sikh community lived in harmony with each other in northwest Indian province of the Punjab. They tried to keep afloat the fabric of India’s secular nationalism by burying their differences. The rallying cry for *Swaraj* or Home Rule kept them united. That is why when Mr. Rogers, the Inspector General of Police calls Gandhi “old bugger” (Sidhwa 61), “wily

Banya”(62) and mocks at his fasting principle, Mr Singh retorts back in support of Gandhi and his policies. Mr Rogers attempts to incite animosity amongst the religious communities by stating that Nehru and the Congress and the Muslim League and Jinnah will never reconcile with each other. He states “If we quit India today, old chap, you’ll bloody fall at each other’s throats!” (62). So, Mr Roger in a way instigates the Sikhs to take a particular side in order to facilitate their policy of divide and rule. Mr Singh retorts: “Hindu, Muslim, Sikh: we all want the same thing! We want Independence... You always set one up against the other... You just give Home Rule and see. We will settle our differences and everything!” (62,63).

After the departure of the British, the synthesis of religion and politics in India turned out to be profoundly inimical to the self-reliant and prosperous Sikh community. Unlike the Parsis, the Sikhs failed to fraternise with the majority community in Lahore. So, they were uprooted from their homes and subjected to unimaginable atrocities by majority community. Sikh community expected some kind of autonomous status for themselves but the government failed to concede such autonomy for them which resulted in Sikh unrest. The grievances drove a section of this prosperous people to form a party known as Akali Dal. These discontented people ventilated their pent up grief by indulging in violence against their opponents and sometimes against Sikhs too who offended them. Fears of being exterminated by the Muslims compelled them to adopt a policy of intolerance against the majority community. This discontented section spearheaded the fight for autonomous Sikh territory “Khalistan”, a kind of subnational aspiration.

In the novel, Mr Rogers describes Akalis as a “bloody bunch of murdering fanatics!” (63). When Dost Mohammad questions Jagjeet Singh regarding the presence of blue turbaned strangers with staves and kirpans in Pir Pindo, the granthi’s face turns solemn. He reveals in a submissive tone that the Akalis have sinister designs. He too is annoyed at their presence because they have disrupted the communal harmony existing in the Indian society. They congregate around the Golden Temple at Amritsar to devise their strategy. Jagjeet Singh states that the Akalis are troublemakers: “They talk of a plan to drive the Muslims out of East Punjab... To divide the Punjab. They say they won’t live with the Mussulmans if there is to be a Pakistan” (107). Jagjeet Singh’s amiable relationship with the Muslims of Pir Pindo emerges in the way he and the Sikhs of Dera

Tek Singh escort Dost Mohammad and others to the safety of their homes. However, a few days later, the Akalis launch brutal attacks upon Muslims villagers near Amritsar and Jullunder. The villagers in Pir Pindo are also forced to evacuate the village without their belongings.

The Sikh soldier saint delivers an intense speech outside the Assembly Chambers. He ruthlessly attacks the Muslims “We will see how the Muslim swine get Pakistan! We will show them *who* will leave Lahore! *Raj karega Khalsa, aki rahi na koi!*”(134). The audience respond to his speech with thunderous applause clashing their swords, kirpans and hockey sticks: “Pakistan Murdabad! Death to Pakistan! Sat Sri Akaal! Bolay se nihaal!” (134). The Sikhs decide to join hands with the Hindus in order to drive away the Muslims. The speech aggravates the growing hostility between the two communities. Having overheard the Sikhs and their motives, the Muslims roar back that they will play holi with the blood of the Hindus and the Sikhs during the festival. From the roof of the tenement Ayah watches Delhi Gate, Lahori Ghat, Mochi Darwaza in flames. A mob of Muslim *goondas* also create terror in the entire area by shouting slogans “*Allah-o-Akbar! Yaaa Ali* and “*Pakistan Zindabad!*”(135). The Sikh fanatics attack at least five villages around Dehra Misri and commit atrocities upon the Muslims: “They are like swarms of locusts, moving in marauding bands of thirty and forty thousand. They are killing all Muslims. Setting fires, looting, parading the Muslim women naked through the streets- raping mutilating them in the centre of villages and in mosques” (197).

In Sivanandan’s *When Memory Dies*, the spread of concocted rumours and vicious assaults fuel the growth of a rebel organisation The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Initially these rebel youngsters are welcomed by the Tamil community for their social services as well as their determination to fight on behalf of the subjugated community. Even Uncle Para lauds their efforts to revive the lost history of the Tamils. They seek to establish an independent Tamil state, Eelam, in the north eastern Sri Lanka. But the growing resentment with their failure to achieve their dreams and mitigate the problems of the Tamils leads them to take up weapons. Sarath, a close comrade of Vijay reveals the frustrations of the youth militants: “They have nothing and they have grown up having nothing, a whole generation of them. And they see even the little they have to

make something of their lives with, like education, being taken away from them ... That is when they pick up the gun” (Sivanandan 305).

Uncle Para expresses his displeasure over the growing factionalism and terrorism unleashed by the youths of LTTE: “And then, they had begun to fight each other over who could serve the people better, which faction, which dogma, till the people mattered no more...” (394). Vijay points out the gaps in LTTE’s vision of socialism. He states that their top-down strategy and armed struggle are at odds with their goal of socialism. In a conversation with Yogi, a member of the militant organisation, Vijay says that it will not be possible for them to take power on behalf of the people and then hand over the same to them. That way socialism cannot be initiated in a society. Vijay denies Yogi claims that socialism must be preceded by liberation; instead he puts forth his own view that socialism is the path to liberation and not its ends.

On the otherhand, escalating anti-Tamil propaganda and the widespread savage attacks against the Tamils by the Sinhalese goons and the state machinery lead to growing discontentment among the Tamil intellectuals. Just like their Sinhalese counterpart, they decide to reshape their own history by asserting their stereotypical myths. They believe that they have been forcefully mixed up with the Sinhalese by the colonisers and in the process they have lost their “pristine separateness”(324). They develop a collective consciousness that “nothing less than their self-deliverance from Sinhalese subjugation could free their thinking again” (324).

A striking revelation in the novel is that the Sri Lankans be it the bourgeois or the working class or the rebels fail to develop a mass based secular movement for national liberation. They associate themselves with Gandhi, Nehru and Indian National Congress but fail to imbibe the nationalist spirit. Rajan foregrounds their failure:

Our leaders stood on the sidelines awaiting the outcome, offering up prayers and petitions to Her Majesty's Government the while. The Ceylon National Congress had sold out, my father said; all they were interested in was to hold on to their lands and privileges. They did not care about ordinary people, and the people in turn did not have a say in their country's independence: it was all being done somewhere above their heads. (Sivanandan146)



The novel *Funny Boy* also reveals how the anti-Tamil pogroms and an exasperated wish for freedom triggered some of the rebel Tamils to cleave a separate identity for their community in order to get rid of the discriminatory policies of the successive ruling parties. This led to the formation of the organisation The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and their subsequent demand to have their own exclusive homeland in north-eastern Sri Lanka. Their claim to selfhood can be regarded as a first symbolic gesture towards subnationalism in Sri Lanka. Arjie finds it difficult to accept that his Ammachi supports the subnationalist group and their demand for a separate territory. She declares that she would be the first to go and live in it. The memories of her father being killed ruthlessly by the Sinhalese stir the subnationalist sentiments in her.

Sanjib Baruah in his book *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (1999) explores the politics of subnationalism specially in context of Assam. He says that scholarly and public policy discourses in India do not take seriously voices that challenge the Indian national formation. Pan Indian ideas in the form of laws, the Constitution and public discourses have instigated subnational movement in North East. For instance, the Constitution of India endows “special status” to the North Eastern region in the form of provisions in specific sections of Article 371. This status of the eastern borderland as a “zone of exception” (Baishya 3) lends impetus to the subnational movements in the region. Similarly colonial as well as nationalist stereotypical discourses about the people of this region as “savage, uncivilised, jungles” render this region as peripheral zone in Indian national imaginary. And thus they are marginalised by mainstream India.

There is an apparent amnesia about identities that compete with official nationalism in order to project a homogeneous Indian identity. Baruah opines that this singularity of the official narrative of nation is not consistent with the slogan “unity in diversity” that celebrates the essence of India. Drawing on Baruah’s ideas we can presume that Siddhartha Deb attempts to trace the tension between refugees and Khasi subnationalism in the hilly state of Meghalaya to challenge and complicate homogeneous national identity.

In the novel *The Point of Return*, Dr Dam’s insecurity arises out of his consciousness of being an “outsider” in Shillong forever. The deepening polarisation

between the Bengali Hindu migrants and the tribals reverberates throughout the hilly state. Dr Dam's Indianness is challenged time and again in the novel. There is an episode where Dam and his son Babu face humiliation behind the pension office while they are having tea. A lame man doubting their identity growls: "Bengali. No use for Bengalis, always coming over the border...Always coming across the border, with hordes of squealing children, coming across like locusts, like rain" (Deb 22, 23). In addition to the verbal abuses of "dhkar, Foreigner", "Go back, foreign dogs. Go back, Bangladeshis" (Deb 178) hurled at migrants, the novel also throws light upon the physical subjugation of innocent migrants by the local tribal people. Babu recalls an incident when he and his father Dr Dam were brutally beaten by the people in the market for coming out of their house during curfew hours:

...half a dozen blobs that magically doubled into a dozen hands enclosing us, jabbing at my father, the air turning solid with their curses and blows, a series of curiously flat sounds produced by their open hands as they struck him in the face, chest and stomach... We stood there brushing the dirt off our clothes. My father looked more embarrassed than scared or angry and the arrival of three policemen did not help. (Deb 227)

The police enquired if they had not seen the posters put up by the student's union in the morning announcing the curfew as a protest against the presence of foreigners. Instead of taking any action against the miscreants, the policemen supported the locals. This instance highlights the unruly behaviour of the tribal men to assert their subnationalist claim over the state and at the same time the passivity and fatalistic nature of the migrants in the face of ethnic violence that dominates their life in the hilly state.

The novel delineates how the widespread killings, assaults, strikes by the tribal people are governed by their fear of outsiders. On the journey to their new hometown seven passengers are pulled out of the bus coming in from Guwahati and they are knifed to death outside the veterinary compound. The migrants are not allowed to admit their children in tribal schools. In another episode the local people pour kerosene and set fire on a Bengali Muslim boy who is given seat at a government school in Mawkhar during his board exams. Babu recalls how he and his companions had to vacate the playing area without any protests whenever the local boys entered the field "It didn't do to leave straight away, without having applauded politely at a few preliminary deliveries or

strokes or fielding stops. That could be construed as a deliberate insult and had been known to result in immediate reprisals” (Deb 240).

In another instance the simple act of taking two Professors from Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University of Denmark around a dairy farm in Shillong results in unnecessary inquiry against Dr Dam. Indian Intelligence officials doubt them to be “spies” without proper evidences against them. They warn Dr Dam to be more vigilant and careful in the future “The security of the country cannot be compromised for the sake of milk and eggs. National pride is more important than food” (Deb 133). However the problematisation of the nation space by the people in the form of marginalisation of the migrants evokes doubt regarding their idea of national pride and national allegiance.

The rules of existence for the migrants laid down by the apparatus of the state as well as the local people reminds one of Michel Foucault’s idea of power as an everyday, socialised and embodied phenomenon. Babu describes an incident when he was not allowed to visit the National Archives on Janpath owing to his “outsider” status. The officials did not allow him to visit the place without the permission of the secretariat. A lady clerk acquainted him with the idea that after partition the circumstances have changed and restrictions have been imposed upon the movement of outsiders. So, the outsiders should bear it humbly and accept their subordinate status “Tell them when you get back home to Bangladesh that change is good. People who cannot adjust to change are no good” (Deb 271). Rules such as increase in taxes for nontribal businessman, the demand that Bengalis carry their identity cards at all times to prove their Indian citizenship, nontribal boys not being allowed to talk with tribal girls, visit the public library and other institutions reflect the “us” vs “them” distinction created by the citizens to perpetuate their parochial subnationalism.

An interesting comparison may be drawn between the brands of subnationalism depicted in *The Point of Return* and *Funny Boy*. In case of Tamil subnationalism there are two factions- the rebel group LTTE and its supporters seeking autonomy through secessionism and another faction including characters such as Black Tie, Arjie and Radha Aunty advocating secularism. However in case of Khasi subnationalism such divisive trend is not perceived. A striking commonality that emerges is that the younger generation belonging to the minority community want to embrace a more composite variety of nationalism.

Rushdie's *Shame* portrays the secessionist impulses generated by the grievances of the East Wing against the West Wing. The continuous economic and political exploitation of the East by the West generates discontentment among the linguistic minorities in East Pakistan. They find it difficult to identify themselves with the ruling elite's project of religious fundamentalism by subsuming the multiple identities in the nation. President Shaggy dispatches an enormous Army to gain some sort of control over the East but their motives fail to suppress the self-determination movement launched by Sheikh Bismallah's regional party, the People's League. The rebel group of Sheik Bismallah comprising of the bourgeoisie malcontents gains overwhelming victory in East.

The defeat of the western forces in the armed conflict leads to the reconstitution of the East Wing as a separate nation Bangladesh. Later Chairman Iskander Harrappa engineers the violent murder of the architect of the division, Sheik Bismallah and his family in the latter's palace itself. The narrator believes that even the Sindhis, Baluchis, Punjabis and Pathans would have buried their difference for the sake of their common faith had it not been coloured by religious extremism of the autocratic rulers. John R. Wood rightly observes in his article "Secession: A Comparative Analytical Framework" that "secessionist alienation springs from cultural heterogeneity, which produces intense consciousness of ethnicity, a peculiar bond among persons that causes them to consider themselves a group distinguishable from others" (114).

In Muller's "Burgher Trilogy" the main driving force of the Burgher subnationalism springs from their shared desire to preserve their distinct and unique culture, which, in a way justifies their right to claim Sri Lanka as their land. Minoli Salgado in her book *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, Resistance and the Politics of Place* adopts a nuanced approach to interrogate "insider"/ "outsider" or "resident/migrant" assumptions and thereby reconfigure the prevailing discourses of nation. Salgado attempts to reclaim marginalised voices by revealing the cultural and political dynamics embedded in literary texts. According to Salgado, Carl Muller's "Burgher Trilogy" attempts to "deconstruct models of a unitary, homogenous nation and do so by re-locating national space as exilic space through mobile structuration of home and belonging"(19). The gap between alienation and accommodation of the Burgher community in the island nation helps them to articulate alternative narratives of nation.

Their narratives reveal that displaced people or those occupying cultural borderlands are “creative agents in the construction of the nation” ( Salgado 27).

Dr Rosita Henry’s article titled “A Tulip in Lotus Land: History and Agency in Colonial Sri Lanka” reflects upon the historical processes and human agency involved in the creation of Dutch Burgher identity. Taking a cue from Karl Marx’s proposition that “People make their own histories, but not just as they please” (quoted in Henry 216), Henry states that Burgher was not an ethnic category but it was initially a civic title given to the European settlers during the Dutch period. Later, the British used it as an all-encompassing category for people of Eurasian descent. The British reinforced the racist discourse by granting privileges to the Burghers in administrative positions and using them as mediators between the government and local people.

The Burghers try to preserve their own identity in Sri Lanka by taking pride upon their European heritage and maintaining their unique flair for music, dancing, late night parties and bright costumes among many others. Dennis B. Mc Gilvray in his paper titled “The Portuguese Burghers of Eastern Sri Lanka in the Wake of Civil War and Tsunami” also mentions about the nostalgia of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Dutch Burghers “for those Saturday night *strom-strom* parties, where guests danced the *kafferina* and the *chikotti* to the accompaniment of *viaule*, *bandarinha*, *violin* and tambourine and became saturated with a local arrack punch called “the Gloria” (335).

Carl Muller’s “Burgher Trilogy” can be considered as “description and defense, a celebration and a valediction” (Sarvan 527) of the Burgher community and their determination to keep intact their group consciousness through their varied cultural and social performativity. The Von Bloss family at Boteju Lane in Dehiwala is presented as repository of Burgher culture and identity. Their house offers scope to explore the household dynamics of Burgher family. The title *The Jam Fruit Tree* aptly indicates the procreative spree of the Burgher community. The main role of their womenfolk is to bear children for their hardy and lusty men. The tree represents “the ever-bearing” (Muller *JFT* 20) tendency of Burghers and their “never-dying” (20) spirited nature and rich culture.

It is not surprising that being Christians in a predominantly Buddhist nation, the Burghers were favoured by the British nabobs. The Burghers too displayed their

religious adherence by attending Masses dressed in their religious costumes throughout the year. Most of the Burghers married within the community. When Anna decided to marry a Buddhist fellow Mr Colon, her family had to go through the rigmarole of securing permission from Father Romiel in order to escape torture from the imps of hell. Colontota allowed Anna to practice her own religion and have an altar at home after their marriage. He even offered his consent to exchange marriage vows in Catholic Church. Anna's father assured Father Romiel that her children will be baptised and will go to Catholic schools in future. When the two families met to celebrate the wedding there was much embarrassment as the two families made fun of each other's food culture. The Burghers made fun of Colontotas for not accepting wine and meat. The two communities behaved in such a way as if they were foreigners to each other rather than people who lived within the same geographical boundaries. So, the Burghers perpetuated their religiosity even in their dealings with the majority community.

The Burghers occupied the white-collar jobs- the posts of police inspectors, the fire chiefs, managers, executives, administrators thus forming the upper stratum of the society. The subject position of the Sinhalese in their own land enraged them. That is why they derisively refer to the Burghers as "cockroach" and mock at their philosophy of "eat, drink and be merry". Old saying such as "Burghers buggers became beggars by buying brandy bottles" (Muller *JFT* 28) reverberate around the country. Even a Sinhalese doggeral echoes the same:

Kaapalla, beepala, jollikarapalla,

Hetamarunothhithatasapai

Ada jollikaralla

which in Sinhalese means: "Eat, drink and be merry and even if we must die tomorrow, don't let it worry you because you're having a good time today" (28).

Muller devotes several pages to delineate the enduring legacies of Burgher culture. In fact he capitalises the word Burgher in his statement "A burgher wedding can only be described as a BURGHER wedding" (50) to highlight the enormous spectacle of food, clothes and music characterising their wedding. The luring aspect of their wedding

is the selection of delectable dishes and celebration of their kinship bonds in the form of their drinking culture. The journey begins right from the wedding invitations to be printed at Cave and Company. There are elaborate floral decorations, arrangement of crackers and fireworks apart from huge investments in the clothing department. Their community bonding emerges in the way their Burgher neighbours in Boteju lane involve themselves in all sorts of culinary arts. Maudiegirl herself refers to the preparation as “monumental business of the wedding lunch” (52) which involves quite a few days of cooking. Among the dishes are entire side of the beef “curried, broiled, a fricassee, an aromatic stew, a ragout, roast ribs...head and shoulders of seer garnished with finely-minced devilled pork and lettuce and tomato slices...” (61) along with bakery items, soups and different pickles. Their rich music and dance also form inevitable part of the wedding celebration.

In an article titled, “Those ‘Burgher Buggers’: Revisiting Carl Muller’s *The Jam Fruit Tree*”, the researcher refers to a Burgher wedding as “an homage to gluttony” and Burgher Christmas as “an homage to sloth”. The book ends with a Burgher Christmas which also involves laborious preparation of Christmas cake stuffed with brandy, arrack, seedless raisins, mixed glace fruit and various ingredients. The entire family of Cecilprins participate actively in the kitchen during the occasion. Grounded and potted mustard, salt beef, the rich Dutch yeast cake (*breudher*) and Dutch Lampries form a part of the enduring legacies of Burgher food.

Making a real Dutch *breudher* is another art Maudiegirl excelled in and passed on to her daughters (who were also shown how to make excellent love cake and that intrinsically Portuguese sweet- the many layered cake which was a Burgher speciality: *the bola folhado*...when Maudiegirl had a mind to, she would produce such marvellous things as the true Dutch Lampries... (Muller *JFT* 186)

Muller also confirms the fact that all Burghers were not reckless, unambitious, incestuous and perennial drunkards. A good proportion of them took advantage of British education and excelled in other fields too. So, there were classified as “Burgher bowl of cherries and Burgher pits” (Muller *JFT* 99) in Sri Lanka. The former category comprised of eminent historians, physicians, engineers, educators, anthropologists, antiquarians and the later included steam locomotives engine drivers, the mechanics, the cobblers etc. The Von Blosses and many more of their ilk had no aspirations with regard to climbing up a

sort of Burgher social ladder. They were satisfied as long as they had money to feed and clothe their family and throw a regular party for their neighbours.

The unusual title of the book *Yakada Yaka* captures the attention of the reader. The novelist rightly uses the title to describe the scepticism generated among the rustic villagers after the introduction of first railway steam-driven locomotives in Sri Lanka by the British. The villagers initially declared it as an Iron Demon- a yakada yaka owing to hissing sound like the cobras. The title also subtly hints at the Burgher engine drivers penchant for courting trouble: “This, as promised is the continuing saga of Burgher life... Burgher railway life, to be exact, where the iron demons who worked on the railway life were as good or bad as the Iron Demons they rode. Sometimes, it was hard to know what was better...or worse!” (Introduction).

The novel artistically weaves the life of the Burgher Railway men, their bitter relationship with the Sinhalese at the advent of independence, their short tempered nature and their firm belief in committing offence in order to survive in Railway service. The Burghers had come to Sri Lanka “to colonize, proselytize and fraternize” (Muller YY 11). Sonnaboy, the principal character claims that it is their God-given right to be engine drivers. The social hierarchy with the British at the top, the Burghers and Tamils in the middle and Sinhalese in the lower ranks results in acrimonious dispute about national identity between them. It is through Sonnaboy’s journey in his steam engines that we come to know about the corruption prevalent in the railways: how the sleepers are siphoned, how the drivers complain about lack of fuel and stop their train at will to consume arrack, how they disrupt the time table and neglect their duties to enjoy delicacies at Railway bungalows. Sonnaboy is suspended for a week and transferred to Trincomalee for being involved in firewood related corruption. The narrator exposes the immoral nature of the Burghers in the statement:

He belonged to that celebrated Burgher clan who were quick with their fists, quick with their drinks and woefully lacking in any penchant for patient legal debate. The easiest way to drive home a point or win an argument was to poleaxe the opposition. There were, in the Railway, many of his stamp and calling. (20)

Another drunk driver Tucker smashes into a goods train in Trincomalee ignoring the warning lights and linesmen waving red flags to him. Some of the Burgher drivers



even conjure up corpses on their cow catchers and escape punishment by lying to the magistrates. Dickie Byrd demolishes The Pentacostal Mission in Galle but surprisingly his name appears in letters of gold in the annals of the Railway. Besides these the railway guards, as custodians of goods indulge in all sorts of corruption. They stake claim on the goods which are consigned for carriage from one station to another. Even an oversized ox-heart sent by Dr Kramer in Diyatalawa to the Colombo University as an important specimen fails to reach its destination. The drivers and the guards consume it with thick gravy and chilly powder at Nawalapitiya. The news spreads throughout the Railways and is received with shock and incredulity but it does not affect the position of the Guard Van der Smaght. These instances reveal the indisciplined nature of the Burgher railway community and their amazing talent of deceiving their authorities. What emerges from the analyses of the Trilogy is that the Burghers appeal to a kind of cultural subnationalism in the form of their eccentric ways to assert their own identity in the island nation.

### **Political, Ecological and Moral Decadence**

Salman Rushdie's *Shame* focuses upon discontentment induced by failure of the politicians to meet their humanistic objectives. The novel portrays struggle of democrats in the face of the formidable challenge posed by the fundamentalists as well as prolonged stints of military regimes. The narrative traces the rise, collapse and strange execution to death of democratic leader Iskander Harappa. His assassination resembles that of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who was also arrested, imprisoned and put to death. His fictionalised title "Harappa" reminds one of the famous Harappan civilisations known for its organised structure and growth of trade and commerce. But Iskander's reign offers a contrasting sight full of corruption and violence.

Iskander Harappa rose to prominence in the political scene by virtue of his active involvement in nation's foreign policy without even being a member of President A's cabinet. His oratorical capabilities and his argumentative powers drew the attention of the President and he was invited to join the government. However, within a short span of time, Harappa sensed the losing popularity of President A's government and resigned from his position. He formed his own political party the Popular Front and became its chairman. He promised to restore democracy in Pakistan by any means. He toured around the villages and promised new acre of lands and water wells to peasant and also

acquainted common men regarding the corruption perpetuated by rich landlords. The election which brought Iskander to power for the first time witnessed a lot of anomalies. People found it difficult to exercise their votes in ballot boxes while some others cast their preferences twelve or thirteen times. Isky's Popular Front won absolute majority in the West Wing's seat but failed to win a single seat in the East Wing. He proudly asserted: "I am making this country...making it as a man would build a marriage. With strength as well as caring"... "Nobody can topple me...not the fat cats, not the Americans, not even you. Who am I? I am the incarnation of the people's love" (Rushdie 183,184).

Fostering strong international relationship is one of the prominent features of democracy. Iskander failed to maintain such diplomatic relationships because of his sadistic nature. He would test the patience of new Ambassadors by making them wait for weeks for audiences, then interrupt their sentences and deny them hunting licences. He would address them in incomprehensibly "obscure regional dialects" (185) and their embassies would be subjected to frequent power cuts. He would even add outrageous remarks to the Ambassadors reports in order to subject them to harassment by their native heads. He engaged in all sorts of corrupt activities such as phone tapping, expelled cultural and religious attaches at his will, screamed at them and accused them of conspiring with the religious fanatics and textile tycoons. He would proclaim, "If I last long enough ...maybe I can destroy the whole international diplomatic network. They'll run out of Ambassadors before I run out of steam" (186).

Rani Harappa's embroidered shawls of memory intricately unveil the corrupt practices of Iskander which brought his downfall and consequently the death of democracy in Pakistan. Rani's chosen title for her collection of shawls "The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great," (191) indicates the same. The shawls expose her husband's obscenities with the concubines, election fraud, his physical attack upon the ministers, ambassadors, holy men and servants at his will and unimaginable violence inflicted upon the prisoners. A shawl titled, "Iskander and the Death of Democracy" (194), reflects the death of a nation once it is dominated by tyrants like him. In the novel Sufiya incarnates democracy where she strives to break free from the shackles of repressive political systems. Rani's seventeenth shawl exposes his murderous

deployment of military forces to suppress separatist movement in North West of Pakistan.

Iskander Harappa's detestable acts lead to his equally tragic end. He is accused of being involved in the murder of his cousin Mir Harappa and sentenced to death after two years of imprisonment. Out of frustration he splattered betel-juice all over the prison walls and ruined the curtains of the cell. During the phase of his solitary confinement he also suffered from malaria, infections of colon and severe influenza. The guards in the cell subjected him to all sorts of inhuman punishments. Iskander's reign reflects the unsatisfactory and conflictual nature of democracy in Pakistan. Though democracy is generally glorified it is often fed by corrupt practices of the rulers. This is a lacuna which postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha, Anderson and others have not addressed.

Romesh Gunsekera's *Reef* embarks upon an ecocritical reading of Sri Lankan nation in order to reveal the paradox underlying the grand vision of nation where ecological conservation and political tensions run parallel to generate national discontentment. The novel subtly takes a dig at Mr Salgado's project of ecological preservation which is marked by politics of capitalism and consumerism. The onslaught of anthropocentric activities in the form of Western sciences, commercialisation and military violence changes the picturesque beauty of the tropical island rendering it into a site of perennial human/nature conflict zone.

Malcolm Sen's article titled, "Bones of corals made: ecology and war in Gunsekera's *Reef*", advocates on the need to engage in an ecocritical reading of the text which is attuned to the "correlation between environmental degradation and political violence" (481). Rob Nixon uses an oxymoron "slow violence" to emphasise on the need to explore the gradual and invisible environmental degradation wrought by human beings "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (481). Through the house boy Triton's nostalgic recollections, the novel laments the decline of the marine ecosystem beset by raging civil war in Sri Lanka.

Triton's employment as a house boy in Colombo at the house of marine biologist Mr Salgado brings him into close proximity with life surrounding the coral reefs of Sri Lanka. Triton is lured to the island life by his master's descriptions of the beauty of the

delicate coral reefs and how it saves the shores from being eroded by the ocean water. He wonders at Salgado's knowledge regarding the ebb and flow of ocean water, planktons, sea corals, limestone and other transformations that takes place in the ecological formation. In his childhood in the countryside, he had never witnessed people being killed out of ethnic rivalry and their dead bodies being left to rot where it had been slaughtered. It is his master who acquaints him with the fragility of the coral reefs and how it is susceptible to human interferences. His journey with Mr Salgado brings him face to face with the bitter realities of the island in the post war period with disfigured dead bodies "rolling in the surf" (Gunsekera 166-67), "skull-heaps of petrified coral" ( Gunsekera 59) and fishermen in the villages burning heaps of dead bodies in bigger mounds than the fishes they caught. Triton views the coral island as a "frontier zone ...littered with the detritus of war" (Sen 483).

Coral reefs are known for their rich biodiversity as they are home to innumerable species of fishes, sea anemones, algae, corals and other organisms. They are of high economic value as they provide livelihood to the coastal population in the form of variety of fishes and lime for the local building industries. The sublime beauty of the coral reefs attracts tourists from all around the world. However, in *Reef*, Gunsekera draws our attention to the degradation of the coral reefs precipitated by the profit-oriented economy of the Sri Lankan nation. The images of "smoky kilns", "cement fodder" (59), small corals marking the Municipal parking area and new restaurants namely Blue Lagoon and the Pink Barracuda with their continental dishes signal the decline of traditional rural economy as well as the impact of western food culture upon the Sri Lankans.

*Reef* evokes the corrupt practices of the politicians even in matters related to the conservation of the coral reefs. For instance, when Mr Dias states that the government needs Mr Salgado and he should participate in conservation project, Mister Salgado acquaints him with the real scenario "But you know, if this thing becomes anything, some political bigwigs will want his fat hands on it. Then every day I'll be asking for favours and doing favours. I will spend my whole life cajoling and coddling" (48). Sri Lankan government even initiates the Mahaweli Development programme without taking into account the adverse impact it might have upon the biodiversity of the region.

Mr Salgado warns Triton that the escalating environmental destructions and short-sightedness of human beings will not go unnoticed by nature. He conjures up the historical past in order to predict an environmental apocalypse if man continues to rule nature:

You could say Africa, the whole of the rest of the world, was part of us. It was all once one place: Gondwanaland. The great landmass in the age of innocence. But the earth was corrupted and the sea flooded in. The land was divided. Bits broke and drifted away and we were left with this spoiled paradise of yakkhas – demons – and the history of mankind spoken on stone. (84)

These lines reveal that the landmass of the earth was reconfigured by tectonic shifts in the seabed. There is a hint that the change in geography was a kind of nature's response to unprecedented corruption perpetuated by human beings inhabiting the earth. Salgado's envisioning of the past as idyllic "age of innocence" (84) subtly hints at the nuances of modern nation-states and their policy of ethnic nationalism in order to fulfil their vision of homogeneous national identity. The cartographic changes brought about by nature in the pre-historic past reflect the fluidity of the natural world and the fallacy of conceiving nation-states as stable representation of one's identity. In another instance, when Triton is awestruck by the beauty of a bungalow in Yala surrounded by flourishing nature, Salgado apprises him of the perilous nature of the sea which might devour the entire area "No wonder Mister Salgado said the sea would be the end of us all" (60).

As an ecologically sensible man, Mister Salgado does little to mitigate the anthropocentric activities that threaten the very existence of coral reefs. He fails to comprehend that these activities are so intricately woven into the socio, cultural and economic fabric of the coastal population that it will require collective intervention from environmentalists to forestall the depletion of reefs. Salgado is well aware of the devastating impacts of bombing, netting and dynamiting and so call developmental projects such as tourist resorts, irrigation projects, dam-building on the coral reef. What is striking is that he does not make any attempt to create awareness or generate public opinion about the same in spite of possessing the scholarship regarding marine life. This reflects the hypocrisy of educated upper class people who indulge in brainstorming discussions but do little to save the natural world.

As a marine biologist sponsored by the government Salgado falls victim to the political machinations of narrow centric nationalist politicians. The government embarks on a project of constructing multiple dams on the river without taking into account the adverse impact it might have upon the local labours and peasants. The Mahaveli development project creates rift among the Sinhalese and Tamil labour force as the Tamils feels neglected by the government in terms of employment as well as allocation of resources. The crisis generated by the project does not seem to bother Salgado because he attends the inaugural party of the project organised by the politicians. This signifies his support for government project of environment destruction. It is Triton who realises his master's negligence of traditional values and culture "At the kade on the main road the talk was on the need for revolution or for a return to traditional values ... but in our house none of that mattered" (83).

In *When Memory Dies* Sivanandan also draws attention to the post-independence situation where the rampant corrupt practices of those in power undermine the democratic rights of the citizens and lead to moral decadence of the society as a whole. The corrupt officials engage in favouritism and bribery in order to assert their authority in the administration of a nation. Rajan finds it difficult to secure any job even after possessing the minimum qualifications and undergoing all the formalities. The repeated process of acknowledgements and rejections of his applications take a toll on him and he realises that it would not be possible for him to obtain any job without connections. His father will have to approach some of his wife's rich relatives or somehow arrange an appointment with some MP's and earnestly request them to take his son into consideration for the post. Rajan resignedly states that "applications by themselves were valueless, you had to use influence, go and see people who would see people who gave jobs to people...you needed connections, to show that you were from a good family, and trustworthy, socially" (Sivanandan 173).

The novel digs into the questionable role played by the democrats and socialists at the time of election. The fear of electoral defeat leads them to lure their voters with all sorts of false promises. The socialists try to maintain a flawless façade of social justice to win the election. The narrator apprehends that the deceptive nature of the mock socialists would soon meet its doom "One moment it looked as though the mock-socialist policies of the Patriots would carry the day, the next that their years of elaborate masquerade

were at last at an end” (274). Dickie Perera, a representative of democracy and a contender for post of prime minister seeks to bring in discernible changes to the economy in the form of free trade zones. He assures the voters that there will be no import and export restrictions and that free market economy will generate employment for everyone. He proudly asserts that Mahaweli River would be dammed and the water would be used for irrigation purpose and the large scale productions would attract the tycoons of international industry. Dickie states his party will provide poverty coupons for poor people and make foreign goods readily available to all. His vision of public welfare seems to be coloured by capitalism. Dickie’s imagination of himself as a reincarnation of the great Buddhist leader, Parakrama, and his intention to build a mythic city of Dickieपुरa reflects his self-idolatry.

A local Sinhala newspaper *The Citizen* exposes the insignificant role of the electorate who are just pawns in game of power politics. Unlike the citizens of the democratic nations they do not take pride upon their voting rights instead they consider it as an opportunity to be noticed by the competing parties. Their votes are described as “floating votes” (276) as they keep on shifting their allegiance based on rewards and promises: “Our convictions are based on gossip, our actions on greed, and we swing from one party to another like monkeys, as a matter of survival” (276). The paper launches a scathing attack upon the socialists for compromising their principles for the sake of power. The political parties have been successful only to the extent of developing unity and exclusivity of different races which in turn lead to racial confrontation throughout the nation.

The novel succeeds in depicting the resistance initiated by the working class against their employers for ignoring their demands of minimum wages, job security and reasonable amount of rest. The tram drivers go on strike and stage demonstration against their boss Cedric Boustead to show their antipathy for the bureaucrats. Goonesinha, the Chief of the Labour Union, urges common public to boycott trams in to show their solidarity with the workers. Boustead refuses to come to an agreement with the union. His decision to drive a tram car backfires as he experiences the wrath of crowds who hurl stones at the trams when they notice him. Goonesinha is ultimately beaten up by the police and his confidant Sultan collapses in a burst of gunfire by the police. Similarly, in another instance the estate workers set up their own council and compel their white

superintendent to take permission from them before moving anywhere. They even disarm a gang of policemen and warn them not to be a party to the evil motives of the whites in the future.

Sivanandan decries the state machinery for suppressing the voices of dissent in a democratic country. For instance, a group of young revolutionaries organise themselves in the name of Peoples Liberation Front to relieve the hardships of the people. As their movement gains momentum, the government arrest their main leader and some other members on the charge of conspiring against the government. The youngsters retort that “it was the government that had conspired against the people... its mandate had long expired and it was using army to stay in power in what was a burgeoning dictatorship” (249). Their leaders realise that violent means in the form of armed struggle is the only option left with them to dethrone the autocratic reign of the elected democracy.

In *Funny Boy*, the majoritarian Sinhalese community engage in a kind of narrow nationalism by deliberately obscuring the histories of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Schools act as one of the primary site where history is appropriated to ensure the “othering” of the potential minority community. For instance, on the day of prize-giving ceremony only the Sinhala Dramatic Society is allowed to enact a tale of Vijaya, the first king of the Sinhalese nation, as mentioned in the Pali chronicles. The Tamil version of their origin in Sri Lanka is not represented by the group. Again, the school segregates the Sinhalese and Tamil class to ensure the continuation of the rivalry among the younger generations too. The fear of being ostracised by the majority community leads Arjie’s father to admit him in a Sinhalese class. He says Sinhalese is “the real language of the future” (Selvadurai 61). Soyza reveals the real purpose behind Lokubandara, the Principal’s desire to turn it into a Buddhist school “Since all Buddhist are Sinhalese, that means the school would be a Sinhala school, and there would be no place for Tamils in it” (Selvadurai 220). These instances reflect how history is used as a vehicle to stir up Sinhalese nationalism.

The Sri Lankan Government curtails the freedom of press and even indulges in phone tapping to keep surveillance on the Tamils. Daryl Uncle questions the credibility of the newspapers which do not mention the atrocities committed by the Sinhalese. He apprises Amma regarding the propaganda behind the Prevention of Terrorism Act which is disproportionately used against Tamil youths without any kind of accountability. He



calls it a “tool for state terrorism” (Selvadurai 110) which allows the army to suspect and arrest anybody at ease without a warrant. The Government calls for a referendum and refrains from conducting elections in order to stay in power for another six years. Even on the day of referendum Arjie’s parents never get a chance to cast their vote in the polling booth. A member of parliament arrives with his goons and holds the election officials at gunpoint and then forcibly stuffs the ballot boxes with false ballots. So, democracy degenerates into autocracy in the hands of the ruling party.

### **The Predicament of the Migrants and their Political Dilemma**

Sidhwa’s *Ice-Candy Man* contests the essential notion of nation by portraying the position of the Parsi community of Lahore as a “conjunctional site of indetermination” (Sangari quoted in Didur 46) where their subjectivity is mediated by the rhetoric of national identity. The novel is highly sensitive to the fluid state of the Parsi community as their survival, establishment and acceptance of their community identity is shaped by political dynamics of the nation. The micro narratives offer the readers a peek into the hidden scars of Parsi community who lived through the horrors of partition. The novel reveals Parsi community’s somewhat ambivalent attitude towards independence struggle. Initially their liminal position provides them the detachment necessary to engage in critical reflection during the transition phase of the country. The fear of being swamped by dominant community compels them to maintain a tone of neutrality in the face of impending political changes.

The debate at the temple hall at Warris Road provides crucial insights on Parsi consciousness and their collective strategy to overcome the lurking fear of alienation by the majority community. The Zoroastrian community received patronage and prospered under the British. Lenny’s family even participates in a Jashan prayer to celebrate the victory of the British. Gradually in the face of impending political changes they realise that being a minority diasporic community it would not be possible for them to enjoy the same after the departure of the British. They think that loyalty to British might court trouble for the community. So, there is a perceptible decline in their unstinted loyalty to British. Being the President of Parsi community in Lahore Colonel Bharucha emerges as a kind of orator warning the people regarding the cons of their limited numerical strength. He urges them to be circumspect and maintain a politically naïve profile:

We must tread carefully... We have served the English faithfully, and earned their trust... So, we have prospered! But we are the smallest minority in India... Only one hundred and twenty thousand in the whole world. We have to be extra wary, or we'll be neither here nor there... We must hunt with the hounds and run with the hare! (Sidhwa 16)

The Parsees of Lahore exchange their views freely on the political developments taking place in the country. Col. Bharucha acquaints them with the mass civil disobedience movement initiated by Gandhi to resist British salt policies. Gandhi urges everyone to defy British by eating salt manufactured from the Indian Ocean. He is even ready to face imprisonment for this point. Dr. Manek Mody, Godmother's brother-in-law questions Gandhi's appeal because he feels that A-class people use jail as a trajectory to achieve political glory. He states that Parsis should not be left out of this privilege. Colonel Bharucha on the other hand cautions them against active participation in anti-colonial movement and struggle for Home Rule. He states "Hindus, Muslims and even the Sikhs are going to jockey for power: and if you jokers jump into the middle you'll be mangled into chutney!" (36)

Dr Manek Mody and Mr Bankwalla however find it difficult to remain uninvolved in mainstream political matters. Dr Mody feels that they might upset their neighbours by adopting a neutral attitude. He says that Parsees should take their position depending upon the winning party "Don't forget, we are to run with the hounds and hunt with the hare" (37). Another impatient Parsi declares that if Hindus win they will not allow the Parsis to continue their business and if Muslims win they will forcibly convert the Parsis. Colonel Bharucha reminds them about the traditional anecdote involving the Grand Vazir and their forefathers. The Parsi community has always kept its promise of absorbing themselves in the country. Neither they have engaged actively in political matters nor did they present threat to any other community. So, Colonel Bharucha in a way lays down the code of conduct to be adopted by the Parsis in order to avoid any confrontation in the future:

'Let whoever wishes rule! Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian! We will abide by the rules of their land!'... 'As long as we do not interfere we have nothing to fear! As long as we respect the customs of our rulers – as we always have – we'll be all right!...' 'We will cast our lot with whoever rules Lahore!'... 'As long as we

conduct our lives quietly, as long as we present no threat to anybody, we will prosper right here.’ (39, 40)

The above instances reveal that when freedom movement gathers momentum the Parsis find it difficult to remain totally aloof from political matters. Their vulnerable position compels them to adopt a moderate view about any party or community. They decide to remain amiably with the warring communities. Characters such as Lenny’s mother, Godmother and Slavesister emerge as agents of a healing process. They help the victims of Partition without differentiating them on the basis of their religious affiliations. Young generation also acquire the neutral position from their elders. When processions become part and parcel of the street scene Adi and Lenny too shout ‘*Jai Hind! Jai Hind! Or Pakistan Zindabad!*’(127) depending on the allegiance of the principal announcer. The Parsis also exhibit indomitable will to preserve their own identity by observing their festivals with gaiety, evoking the names of the angels Mushkail Asan and Behram Yazd and Ahura Mazda, the highest deity of Zoroastrianism.

The Burghers were essentially apolitical community inhabiting the island nation: “The Burghers were too engrossed with their madcap, merry lifestyles to worry about who, for instance, steered the ship of the State” (Muller *YY* 114). The defeat of Nazism, the atomic strike upon Japan, the rise of the Cold War and even the first air raid upon Ceylon and bullets being embedded in the front door of Sonnaboy’s house remained marginal to their interests. Their “overabiding sense of living together” (Muller *JFT* 137) and their amazing tolerance helped them to merge with the fabric of the island nation. The chronicler rightly stated “One could well say that the Sri Lankan Burgher is as native as the most strident Sinhala native” (Muller *JFT* 137). Their main motto remained the same “eat, drink and be merry” but they learned Sinhalese and even intermarried to survive in Sri Lanka. With the spread of British education in Sri Lanka, the Burghers no longer remained the preferred lot. The Sinhalese, Tamils and Malays too competed for various ranks along with the Burghers. The Burghers tried to fit in the new setup of the island nation. They exemplified how a tiny minority could be accepted and live together with majority community in absolute freedom and security without indulging in ethnic rivalry. The Burghers expressed their resentment towards perpetrators of violence and other ethnic minorities who demanded separate states. Muller depicts the Burgher as unique race:

They knew how to fit in, to belong. They accepted, centuries ago, that Sri Lanka was their land. There was never any thought that they could, if things got bad, pack and hie back to Holland or to wherever they could trace back to. They were at home, and where else could they ‘put a party’ and enjoy life as much as at home? (Muller *JFT* 137)

The independence of Sri Lanka and the departure of British generated discontentment among the Burghers. Sinhalese was declared as the official language of the Republic of Sri Lanka and even engine drivers were required to qualify in Sinhala. Many of the Burghers who claimed Sri Lanka as their own land and never imagined to be rendered as outcasts in the island nation fled to England, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and USA in order to start afresh their life. Even Sonnaboy emigrated to England rather than qualifying Sinhala exam.

The Burghers even had the audacity to show contempt towards the Sinhalese. For instance, Sonnaboy yells at a simple minded bus conductor in Bambalapitiya for charging bus fare “These are the buggers who are getting independence” (Muller *YY* 212). Another Burgher police officer Jackieboy Vansanden deliberately blocks a religious procession of the Sinhalese. According to him Buddhist processions are nothing but “a cacophony of manic horns and head-jarring drums” (*YY* 141) which disturbs the tranquillity of the town. He states “One day it was a Pahan Pooja (a ritual of lights), the next day a Shabda Pooja ( a ritual of excruciating noise) and the next day another pooja of sorts where children were made to carry flags and dance and make rude noises” (*YY* 141). He obstructs the procession by drinking arrack in the middle of the road along with his companion and playing popular Western songs from his gramophone so as to suppress the high pitched chants and the drum beats.

Under British rule there was no scope for widespread political participation, so the Burghers kept out of political arena in the island nation. After independence, with the surge of a new nationalism, the Sinhalese came together and tried to oust the Burghers with their policies favouring only the Sinhalese speakers “It took just eight years after Independence, for the cosy world of Sri Lanka’s Burghers to collapse. Once again the choice: adapt or leave...and most left.” (Muller *OUTT* 219). It was not possible for them to form their own political parties and contest elections owing to their small numerical strength. Their only alternative was to appease the majority community by joining them

and learning their language. This would require the Burghers to forego their merry lifestyles and give up their distinctive identity. So, the Burghers fell victims to a nationalist movement which was largely religious by nature.

Initially the condescending attitude of the Burghers generated displeasure and anxieties among the Sinhalese. The scheming Sinhalese gravitated towards the Burghers in schools and colleges to 'use' the Burghers who had a better command of the English language. They were schooled never to get too close to the Burghers. They looked down upon the Burghers "What were these Burghers after all? The after- drops of a passing of foreign urine? They took life easy and never troubled themselves with high intent or purpose" (114 YY). The hard working Tamils too abhorred the Burgher enginemen and guards and regarded them as a vastly inferior race. The barriers began to grow between the Tamils and Burghers too. Another Sinhalese character Gonpala made sure that he would use his English education to subjugate the Burghers. He would say "I went to England and took everything they had to offer...Damn fools! Now I'm going to get rid of one of them and take his post" (190 YY). Sonnabay could be his first victim in order to show the Burghers that this was the Age of the Sinhalese Administrator. Later it was made necessary to pass qualifying exam in Sinhala in order to drive an engine also.

The Burghers realised that in the long run they could survive in Sri Lanka only through assimilation. So, towards the end of the third book titled *Once Upon a Tender Time*, the narrator confirms that in 1970 there was a Burgher exodus. Some of the Burghers immigrated to economically developed and peaceful countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand to start afresh their life and some others decided to adapt themselves in Sri Lanka. A few of them made sure to "cling to a vanished past" (Muller *OUTT* 217). Thus Muller provides insights into how the island nation failed to keep intact its multiculturalism after independence. He draws attention to the predicament of a minority group, at once made estranged by the historical changes characterising the nation:

They lost a home, but never their identity, and even those who did stay back remained Burgher and will be so to the last drop of their blood...The Burghers will never be outcast in this, their country, or in any country they adopt. They have always been the ultimate survivors. They were and still are, the most unique in this island or wherever. (YY 229)

In *Shame*, Rushdie exposes the inadequacy of the constructed vision of pure nation which is founded upon the binaries like local population/mohajirs, male/female and democracy/fundamentalism. The novel reflects how fundamentalist politics dismantle the formerly hybrid nation and engender discontentment among the mohajirs, East wing region and democrats. A kind of “structural tyranny” (Dutta 78) dominates the political scenario and rules out the possibility of pluralistic imagination of nation. Rushdie exposes the pitfalls of nationalism in Pakistan where the authoritarian regimes refuse to embrace the mohajirs thus dividing the people into two antagonistic factions: the local population and the mohajirs/emigrants. The migrants who poured in from India after partition find it difficult to reconcile with the burden of history. They leave behind their pasts and carry with them their baggage of treasured memories only to be eventually destroyed by the vision of a homogenised nation. These migrants are appalled by the hostility of the local populace and they have no choice but to engulf in the fetishised discourse of the nation. Rushdie’s novel reflects the ambivalence that characterise the migrants due to their physical uprooting and cultural estrangement. The ruptured identity of the mohajirs emerges in the way “elements of the immigrant, exile and refugee merge to create a distinct symbol of displaced, split subjectivity” (Raza 12).

Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* states that people who vacillate between the past and present, inclusion and exclusion and live “border lives” actually subvert the idea of essentialised nation. Bhabha and Rushdie argue migrants occupy an advantageous position in the hostland as their vantage position of being insider and outsider at the same time empowers them to articulate their selfhood. However critical reflections on the novels reveal the gaps or inconsistencies in the theoretical stance and idealistic view of Rushdie and Bhabha. Probably Rushdie’s privileged position helps him to eloquently articulate and market his marginality. A striking paradox is that his novel *Shame* itself and Siddhartha Deb’s *Point of Return* reflect how the position of migrants is context specific. A mohajir in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and an immigrant from Bangladesh in India’s north-eastern state might have miserable existence in their new homeland owing to their original identity.

The narrator who might be presumed as Rushdie’s alter ego dramatises with precision the fragmented selfhood of migrants. The narrator is demonised by the natives as an outsider and trespasser and his credentials regarding the depiction of Pakistan is

being questioned “Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject! ...Poacher! Pirate! We reject your authority. We know you, with your foreign language wrapped around you like a flag: speaking about us in your forked tongue, what can you tell but lies?” (Rushdie 28). The migrant narrator argues that history should not be considered as the sole property of the participants and no courts and boundary commissions can chart out the territories of a writer. He also confesses that as a postcolonial migrant his subjectivity is enigmatic and his limitation is that he is forced to reflect the world in broken mirrors.

The image of Bilquis captures the vulnerable position of mohajirs at the time of partition. The explosion of a bomb planted in her father’s Empire leaves her homeless and fatherless. She is compelled by circumstances to flee her native country in search of a future in the land of Islamic faith. The process of her displacement is connoted through all sorts of negative images. The image of wind which transports her from one land to another renders her naked “that wind like the cough of a stick burned away her eyebrows (which never grew again), and tore the clothes off her body until she stood infant-naked in the street...” (Rushdie 63). The all-pervasive ideology of *sharam* again operates and aligns itself with the petrified mohajir Bilquis and she clutches on to her dupatta of modesty in order to avoid being ostracised by the society.

Bilquis’ inability to conceive invites the wrath of Bariamma and other members of the zenana chamber. She is criticised as an unnatural female capable of producing nothing but dead babies. The barrenness of Bilquis hurts the procreative spree of the family. A cousin named Duniyazad Begum insults her for not being able to repay the favour done by her husband’s family in accepting her “See what you’re doing to your husband’s people, how you repay the ones who took you in when you came penniless and a fugitive from that godless country over there”(84). Bilquis refusal to stay under matriarch Bariamma’s roof enrages her and she instantly commands Raza to take her away. At the same time she roars at Bilquis “Come on, mohajir! Immigrant! Pack up double-quick and be off to what gutter you choose” (85).

Being a migrant himself, it is easy for the narratorial voice to empathise with Bilquis’ plight. The narrator observes “It is the fate of the migrants to be stripped of history, to stand naked amidst the scorn of the strangers upon whom they see the rich clothing, the brocades of continuity and the eyebrows of belonging at any rate” (63, 64).

People envy the migrants because of their ability to conquer “the force of gravity” (86). Here gravity is equated with “belongingness” to suggest that the migrants have attained a position of “un-belongingness” through their flight. But it seems that a kind of ambivalence marks their position in the new land. Though they straddle between several cultural and historical dimension, their experience is far from liberating. They struggle to free themselves from the “pathologies of power” (Ahmad quoted in Raza 1) characterising their newly adopted nation. It is only their hopefulness which keeps them alive amidst the fear of identity crisis and rootlessness which plague them.

Rushdie draws attention to the fact that a group of Muslim intellectuals in England conceived of an acronym Pakistan- “P for the Punjabis, A for the Afghans, K for the Kashmiris, S for Sind and the ‘tan’ they say for Baluchistan” (87) that would best represent a nation intended to be a safe homeland for Muslims across the North-West Frontier. He draws a parallel between the imagined idea of Pakistan by expatriate Muslim intellectuals in England and the one imposed by the migrant writers like him. He observes that far from embracing and accommodating its cultural realities, the main intention of the intellectuals was to suppress the Indian history that “lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani Standard Time” (87). Similarly, as an emigrant writer Rushdie too is a fantasist, fabricating his own imaginary country and imposing it upon the one that already exist. So, Pakistan emerges as “the failure of the dreaming mind... the peeling, fragmenting palimpsest, increasingly at war with itself” (87). Perhaps that is why the Islam fails as a unifying force in conjoining the irreconcilable elements of Pakistani politics and eliminating the resentment generated among the minority communities.

It is striking that in *Reef*, the struggle for individual identity coupled by the political unrest forces the two characters belonging to the majority Sinhalese community to migrate to England in search of a better future. Salgado’s failure to protect the coral reefs from encroachment leads him to relinquish his project and migrate to England along with his confidant servant boy Triton. Salgado’s utopian vision of opening a marine park and a floating restaurant in the bay and farming and at the same time nurturing rare breeds for the wild animals is questionable. His grand vision of conservation and consumption at the same time reminds us of Minoli Salgado’s views: “the representation of this sanctuary is contained within a utilitarian model of that is, in its own way, exploitative of nature, prompted by an individual work ethic that shows



how capitalism can be made more ecological, rather than by the more radical desire to respect nature's laws” ( Salgado 159).

Mr Salgado initially imagines a fusion of his passion for marine ecology and Triton’s passion for gastronomy by opening a marine park with a floating restaurant. But Triton’s lack of consent to this plan and Salgado’s desire to unite with Nili forces him to leave England forever. Triton’s clairvoyance helps him to break free from the shackles of his subservient past. He realises that his master’s departure from England is a blessing in disguise for him to start afresh his new vocation as a restaurateur. He decides to utilise his art of creative cooking in order to establish his own identity as well as to maintain a link with his indigenous culture. His past experience of blending western dishes with Asian spices and flavours gives him the confidence to prepare delectable dishes for his cosmopolitan customers. He believes that his pure organic and unadulterated cuisines will be the medium of his self-expression and self-knowledge too. He states, “The nights would be long at the Earls Court snack shop with its line of bedraggled, cosmopolitan itinerants. But they were the people I had to attend to: my future” (Gunsekera 180).

Triton’s constant need to anchor and rebuild his life in accordance with the world around him also leads him to a conclusion that we are all refugees whether we reside or migrate or return, we all seek for refuge from the anxieties around us. He recollects an encounter with a woman in London who doubts his identity and questions him whether he is a refugee from Africa. Triton replies “No, I am an explorer on a voyage of discovery” (174). His reply hints at his desire for a kind of cosmopolitan identity without any defined sense of belonging. His vantage position as a migrant makes him realise that “human history is always a story of somebody’s diaspora: a struggle between those who expel, repel or curtail - possess, divide and rule...” (174)

Siddhartha Deb’s *The Point of Return* (2002) reflects the trauma of Bengali Hindu migrants in postcolonial Indian nation state. The novel portrays how the cartographic reconfigurations of political boundaries along ethnic lines have rendered them refugees in North-east India. These refugees are a ubiquitous part of everyday life in India’s eastern borderland but they lead an exilic life and carry the stigma of being an “outsider” forever. The problematic identity of the migrants owing to the lack of their link between nativity and nationality is concretised in the chapter “Maps”:

You will understand these elisions, or what appear to be evasions, when you have become the complete citizen, when as taxpayer and consumer, husband and father, you have been mapped demographically onto the system. No one will tell you what you yourself do not seem to know at times, that your forefathers came from elsewhere. From where? It cannot be found in the map of India, which with its confident peaks and curves and wholeness, eliminates any speculation that in this representation of the subcontinent there are places that do not belong, people who do not belong. (Deb 210)

The migrants materialise the borders within the body of the nation state. It is Babu who realises the fluidity of the boundaries of a nation state when he states that new battle lines are from time to time defining fresh groups of people as outsiders. He says that the political boundaries of India as depicted in the maps are neither accurate nor up to date. It is created merely out a need for immediate representation and for utilitarian purpose.

In Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* also Thamma finds it difficult to reconcile the difference between her "home" and "nationality". In order to meet her uncle in Dhaka she is required to obtain all the official documents in the form of passport and visas. As she flies over the border she realises that the differences between nations are basically political and imaginary in nature. The idea of border becomes complicated as Thamma does not find any trenches or demarcation lines at the Indo Bangladesh border. Her startled expression emerges in the lines:

But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean where's the difference then? And if there's no difference, both sides will be the same: it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then – partition and all the killing and everything – if there i't something in between? (Ghosh 151)

The man made boundaries and its arbitrariness is also questioned by another character Jethamoshai when he says: "I don't believe in this India - Shindia. Its all very well. You're going away now, but suppose when you get there, they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here and I'll die here" (Ghosh 215).

In *The Point of Return* the repressive state apparatuses such as the police, the judiciary, and the bureaucrats impinge upon the autonomy and integrity of the migrants and render them helpless. The consciousness of always being an “outsider” arouses in them the desire to build a house of their own in order to assert their stable identity. So, Dr Dam buys a plot of land in the suburbs of Guwahati near Narengi oil refineries in order to get rid of the stigma of being an outsider. However his dream is shattered by arbitrary action of bureaucracy. He could not buy land or a house in the hill town because new state laws prohibited outsiders from acquiring land in the hill town. Under such a circumstance the land he purchased in Aizawl Road in Silchar was his last ray of hope to find a resting place and a fixed identity.

Towards the end of the novel Babu attempts to transcend the cartographic division by recollecting an experience of his father in a forest. Dr Dam enters a deep forest in order to tend the sick elephants in the logging camps. Babu is not sure whether the story was actually narrated to him by his father but his musings lead him to imagine a favourite image of his father being swallowed up completely by the forest. Babu states that his father is happy because “this forest rising around him is a country without boundaries, whose borders cannot be mapped,” (Deb 302). The cinematic image of Dr Dam being one with the forest probably hints at the dream of the migrants to move beyond the narrow confines of modern nation states in order to lead a free and happy life. Home turns out to be a kind of fantasy and deferred reality for the migrants.

### **Colonial Hegemony**

Sivanandan’s *When Memory Dies* captures the social and political volatility of the region owing to differential treatment meted out by the colonisers. At the very outset of the novel Rajan bemoans the strong imprint of history and culture left behind by the colonisers in Sri Lanka. He likens the colonial history to a stigma which has been internalised by the people against their own will. The steadfast determination of the imperial powers to make inroads into the educational set up emerges in the way the school history books glorify the English history obliterating the local history. For instance, Mr SW is deeply saddened by the fact that the history books do not acquaint the students with the famous Panadura debate, which stirred the entire world along with Sri Lanka and emerged as a kind of revivalist movement for Buddhism. SW expresses his fearful apprehension to Saha “Soon no one will know the true history of our

country...No history, no heroes. I wonder what your children and Tissa's will do. Invent their own histories, I suppose, to suit their own purposes" ( Sivanandan 40).

Sahadevan finds it quite astonishing that the school syllabus does not include the intriguing period of Ceylon History comprising of anti-imperial movements such as the Swadeshi Movement initiated by the Youth League People, the *Suriya Mal* Movement and *Swabasha* Movement. When he questions his son's paucity of knowledge regarding their nation's history, Rajan informs him that they are taught only British history: Magna Carta, Waterloo and such other historical events. Even his school sacked Mr Corea, a government teacher for imparting information to the students on socialist movement in Sri Lanka. This instance reminds Saha of his own bitter experience of being sacked from his first job in the Treasury for trying to sell a *suriya mal*, a local flower, to his boss, Mr Jones. Both the incidents reflect that any unflinching effort by the natives to promote their own history and products met with strong opposition from the colonial forces.

The commercial interest of the colonisers is reflected in the way Seagram's dry fish business is being swallowed up by the Anglo Fish Corporation. They even employ Sahadevan into their firm to win over the local customers. Mr SW provides crucial insights to Saha regarding the exploitation unleashed by white men even in the agricultural sector. He states "Once we were the granary of the East, now all we have to eat is tea and rubber" (38). The farmers toil in the fields all day to produce the crops but the colonisers reap the benefits of the money obtained after selling the products by paying a meagre amount to the farmers and retaining the maximum portion with themselves. SW believes that the British developed roads and railway networks in the name of civilisation only to transport the wealth out of the country. The development process was too hasty "Like a *namban* mango, they had got ripe before time. The rhythm was all wrong; they were no longer in tune with themselves" (38).

Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* attends to the paradox characterising the urban city Delhi where it is simultaneously represented as a site of all permeating colonial modernity as well as degenerative Mughal culture. Ali expresses concern and resentment over the gradual decay of the well-preserved Muslim culture through the protagonist Mir Nihal and his family. The city of Delhi, which he represents in this novel serves as a repository of the glory and splendour of the feudal aristocracy in pre-Independence India. Bonamy Dobree states that:

Mr. Ahmed Ali writes delicately, with here and there perhaps too nostalgic a sigh; but he makes us hear and smell Delhi-hear in the flutter of pigeons' wings, the cries of itinerant vendors, the calls to prayer, the howls of mourners, the chants of qawwals [religious singers]; smell in jasmine and sewage, frying ghee and burning wood. And amid the smells and sounds a family has its domestic being sustained by religion and superstition, a being faintly clouded with the memory of Mogul glories, and the sense of being a conquered people. (Askari and Coppola 254)

Ali offers a panoramic view of the historic city in order to reveal how the incursion of British brought profound transformation to the pervasive architecture as well as cultural purity of Old Delhi. In the opening section the narrator retreats into the past in order to lament the diminishing heritage of the Muslims. The city which basked in the glory of its famous kings and monarchs, historical monuments, poets and story tellers is shrouded into darkness with the onset of colonialism:

It was the city of kings and monarchs, of poets and story tellers, courtiers and nobles. But no king lives there today and the poets are feeling the lack of patronage; and the old inhabitants, though still alive, have lost their pride and grandeur under a foreign yoke. Yet the city stands still intact, as do many more forts and tombs and monuments, remnants and reminders of old Delhis, holding on to life with a tenacity and purpose which is beyond comprehension and belief. (Ali 4)

Mir Nihal's violent attack upon the snake which entered his pigeon house can be conceived in symbolic sense as indictment against the usurpers. Pigeon house and pigeon-flying were immensely popular during Mughal period. Mir Nihal who emblematically represents Old Delhi takes great pride upon his pigeons which symbolise the purity of Muslim culture. His pent up grief against the colonisers lead him to kill the snake with a stick. Probably, he perceives the snake as a coloniser encroaching upon the native customs of Muslim life. He derives great satisfaction after killing it because he has an illusion that one day they will drive the colonisers out of the country. His contempt for the British also emerges in the way he criticises his son Asghar for aping the colonisers. He uses a term "Farangis" in a derogatory way in order to demolish their

cultural superiority: “I will have no aping of the Farangis in my house. Throw them away!” (Ali 13)

Mir Nihal’s confrontation with the British takes place mostly within the cultural realm. His conception of rich Mughal tradition is embodied in the cultural metaphor of Delhi. His assertion of the colourful decadent Muslim culture can be interpreted as a kind of anti-colonial imagination in order to challenge the colonial history. The treasured past becomes the repository of anti-colonial imagination. So, Ali portrays elaborately the customs and ceremonies of Old Delhi in the form of pigeon-flying, zenana/mardana distinction, paper kites competition, wedding rituals, poetry reading, flower vendors with their sing song voices among many others. The cultural markers are imbued with a kind of eternal and living identity. For instance, Azaan, the call for prayer symbolises a revolutionary call for liberation from the oppression of the outsiders. Mir Nihal pins hope on the prayer call and believes that the darkness enveloping the city will soon give way to light “the world came to consciousness with the resonant voice of Nisar Ahmad calling the morning *azaan*...But the *azaan* carried forth a message of joy and hope, penetrating into the by-lanes and the courtyards, echoing in the silent atmosphere (Ali 17).” The morning sky studded with decorative kites, Mir Nihal and Khwaja Ashraf Ali’s flock of pigeons hovering around serves as a reminder to their roots.

Mir Nihal’s son Asghar embodies a cross-cultural perspective which upsets the balance of the historical past of Delhi represented by Mir Nihal and his generation. According to Muhammad Hasan Askari, Asghar emerges as a cultural mongrel whose life neither had the depth nor balance and uniformity rendering him somewhat contemptible man (quoted in Priya Joshi 224). When Asghar finally marries Bilqeece, against the wishes of his family, Mir Nihal renounces from the changes taking place around him. He seeks solace in pastimes of the Mughal area such as alchemy, mysticism and herbal medicines. After the departure of his mistress Babban Jan he gradually loses the solace of nostalgia and remains a passive observer of the declining Mughal ways of life. The intrusion of the “hodgepodge” (Ali 240) culture upon Hindustan apparently turns him into an exile even in his native land. He laments for the vanished past:

...a new Delhi meant new people, new ways, and a new world altogether. That maybe all right for the newcomers: for the old residents it was a little too much...  
The old culture, which had been preserved within the walls of the ancient town,

was in danger of annihilation... Her language, on which Delhi had prided herself, would become adulterated and impure, and would lose its beauty and uniqueness of idiom. She would become the city of the dead, inhabited by people who would have no love for her nor any associations with her history and ancient splendour. (Ali 197)

Mir Nihal ruminates on the loss of relationship which existed between the poets and the members of the society. The wealth of poetry has been adulterated with new vulgar and cheaper verses. Poetry reading sessions and long discussion on great poets of Hindustan like Zauk, Dagh, Mir and Galib seemed to be of distant past. Mir Nihal blames the foreigners for looting the richness of the Muslim culture. Ali repeatedly invokes the grandeur of the verses of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar through the recitation of a beggar named Bahadur Shah. The novelist deliberately names one of the beggars as Bahadur Shah in order to reduce him to a distorted replica of the poetic genius as well as to reveal the unfortunate condition of the progenies of the emperor. Gul Bano another beggar too mourns the loss of their ancestral privileges:

We are beggars and the Farangis are kings. For us there is only a bed of thorns, and they sleep on the beds of roses. But God gives to whomsoever He pleases, and takes away from others as it pleases Him. Yesterday we were the owners of horses and elephants, slaves and territories. But *they* usurped our throne, banished the king, killed hundreds of princes before these unfortunate eyes which could not even go blind, drank their blood, and we could do nothing. (Ali 139)

Mir Nihal becomes grief stricken after his poignant encounter with a beggar named Mirza Nasirul Mulk, who turns out to be the youngest son of the banished king Bahadur Shah. He realises that the colonisers have not only deposed the patrons of Urdu poetry but even rendered the heirs to the throne homeless and penniless.

The spectatorial display surrounding the coronation ceremony of George V as the emperor of India can be perceived as a colonial strategy to proclaim its dominance over the former Mughal city. The Delhi Durbar demonstrated “the permanence and grandeur of empire far more effectively than other, textual, forms of proclamation” (Barrinder qtd in Anjaria 195). According to another critic Hosagrahar, the field adjacent to the Jama Masjid where the ritual enactment took place is also significant because this monument

of Mughal splendour “was a principal site of the 1857-1858 uprising and suppression, Delhi would... serve as a constant reminder of the British victory in that conflict”(Anjaria 195). Ali deftly portrays the elaborate preparations for the coronation ceremony which turned the city into a kind of exhibition ground. The roads were cleaned and washed, motor cars were brought from outside, horses and elephants were seen everywhere, the Tommies roamed around in colourful costumes and enormous stands were erected all around to witness the royal procession and the glamour of their new authorities.

Ali does not hesitate to describe the conflicting responses of people towards the British Raj. The mere show of power lured the feudalists and the younger generation with the former hoping to establish their control over the poor natives and the latter expecting prosperity and betterment under the British. Some of the natives were well aware with the evil intentions and insensitive nature of the British. For instance, when Begum Jamal and Begum Nihal hear about the Coronation Darbar, they make disparaging comments: “What would these beaten-with-the-broom Farangis do?... 'When the Mughal kings used to go out, rupees and gold mohurs were showered by the handfuls. What will these good-as-dead Farangis give? Dust and stones!...”(Ali 135). The milk seller too curses the English for their past misdeeds and states that: “All this show and prosperity is temporary. It will all vanish one day, soon. I am not abusing God's graciousness who is always good. But I do believe that the rule of the Farangis can never be good for us. See how they imprisoned Bahadur Shah, banished him, killed his sons and looted Dilli. All this does not betoken any good...”(Ali 136)

The British policies of meddling with the infrastructure and economy of the country generated discontentment among the natives. They became conscious of their loss and started a revolutionary movement against the rulers with Bengal taking the lead in this direction. The residents of Delhi resented the changes taking place in the city of their dreams “In Delhi itself, many changes were being proposed. The gutters which were deep and underground from the times of the Mughals to this day were being dug and made shallow, and the dirty water flowed very near the level of the streets, and the stink was everywhere. The city walls were also going to be demolished”. (Ali 195)

The Chandni Chowk and the memories associated with it were destroyed by changing the configuration and atmosphere of the market area. They introduced unplanned and



drastic changes in the economy too without taking into account the agricultural base of the country. The exorbitant prices of essential commodities made it all the more difficult for the poor people to survive. The cloth merchants and grave diggers started making profits even out of dead body winding sheets which made it difficult for the people to give proper burial to their loved ones whom they lost in the war of 1919. The government even ordered open fire on the Indian mobs in Chandni Chowk area. With these drastic changes, the past glories of the old city of Delhi started to crumble under the influence of the British Raj.

### **Conclusion**

The texts discussed in this chapter reveal that concocted rumours, widespread assaults, consciousness of being outsiders and exasperated wish for freedom trigger the growth of sub nationalist sentiments among the minority communities with some demanding autonomous territory, some engaging in violence while some others asserting their unique culture in order to preserve their identity. The analysis of the novels bring to light how mingling of party politics and self-interests of the politicians, environmental conservation and capitalism, bureaucracy and favouritism undermine the democratic fabric of nation. Critical reflection on the predicament of the migrants reveal that home turns out to be a deferred reality for them as the interests of the dominant community and the repressive state apparatuses dictate their lives and render them vulnerable within the territory of the nation. The novels also highlight the fact that colonial policy of meddling with the history, economy and culture of the South Asian region generate discontentment among the natives.

From a comparative analysis of the historical novels it emerges that the idea of homogeneous nation is a misnomer which is staged by subsuming the identity of minority communities that compete with official nationalism. The dissonant narratives of nation portrayed in these novels lay bare the possibilities of appropriation and marginalisation of voices within the discourse of nation. The anguish of the discontented communities reveals that national identity instead of ennobling the mind of the people has turned out to be the potent divisive agent. Critical reflection on the novels also unveils the nation's failure to meet its promised ideals of freedom, democracy, secularism and socialism in the post-independence period. The focus on the discontented community in the historical novels helps to capture the affective dimension of nation

which is otherwise ignored by professional historians. The varied responses of the marginalised communities in the form of subnational movements, cultural assertions and assimilation seem to suggest the heterogeneity inherent in the idea of nation.