By Way of Conclusion

An attempt to arrive at an understanding of the meanings of nation and nationalism has only led us to believe in the multiplicity of their semantics. The focus, quite clearly, has been on the textuality of these concepts, in so far as film and military literature have been interpreted to deconstruct notions of nation and nationalism in war. The conviction in textuality arises from the fact that war, to most of us, is a narrated event.

A detailed analysis of Hindi war films and military literature has led us to believe that the "national question" may be raised through the antithetical categories of popular culture and niche writing. While military literature addresses the idea of nation and nationalism in direct ways, popular film is somewhat more covert. The filmic text's negotiations with the nation occur in the public space and this has an impact upon its construction of nation and perception of nationalism. On the other hand, writing and reading are completely private activities. The imperatives of commerce do not operate in the field of military literature to the extent they do for popular film.

The mass appeal of film makes it an inclusive medium. Every stage of film-making – production, distribution, reception – involves the participation of diverse groups that represent the "people" of the nation. Men, women, children, rich, poor, urban, rural, upper caste/class, lower caste/class – all are part of the process of producing and consuming a film. By contrast, military literature is not representative of the nation's demography. It is not a conscious disavowal of the totality of the nation, rather the specificities of the organization's composition, task and needs determine the exclusionary nature of military literature. Even so, its marginalization of women, children and
civilians is not completely innocent. Military literature underlines the idea of a belligerent, masculinist nation that is vigorously militaristic, fully acquiescent with the idea of war as a legitimate means to achieve peace. The most conspicuous metaphors of war in Hindi cinema as well as military literature are those of masculinism. As per the Freudian notion, violence and war are sublimations of aggressive urges of the phallus for uncultivated men who did not learn to control these urges at an early stage. Discourses of an endangered nation indulge in engendering the nation. That is, the nation in war popularizes, through its cultural products, the idea of a strong, brave, masculine, military hero as the saviour of the nation under threat. The self-abnegating female counterpart in her avatar of the fecund mother is the producer of war heroes.

However, the male, too in war narratives is represented as not an entirely free and privileged individual. War breaks down to a great extent the soldier's individuality, agency and subjectivity through expectation of complete submission to the will of the state. Males in war are collective symbols of controlled virility with the tragedy intensified by stressing on the wastage of youth.

Insurgent narratives are, on the surface, more subversive in content than in form. They create a space for the articulations of the insurgent, variously described as militant, terrorist and so on. The insurgent films, as seen in Chapter III, foreground the private domain with the happy family as its major trope. The happy family is shown to be systematically destroyed by the state, when one of its members joins the militant ranks as a reaction to police brutalities. The causality thus established closes the possibilities of other
readings of the narrative. This dissertation submits that the filmic narratives are emptied of their subversive contents, and the state is restored to its pristine position.

Although memoirs are written and published after the officer has hung his uniform, it continues to cling to him like second skin. It would seem the authors are condemned never to peel off this invisible second skin to reveal their naked selves. They fight shy of writing candidly about their personal lives the way autobiographers do. The soldier's obliteration of the personal may be read as a form of transcendence required to be prepared to give up life on the battlefield. The self is usually depicted as an unfolding of manhood and death is characterized as a rite of passage from manhood to transcendence. The military experience is described as a ritual that makes a man out of the male. Self-reflexivity is largely absent in military memoirs. They have a sanitized, solipsistic, self-laudatory tone. The war accounts by contrast are fairly objective and their authors do not hesitate to critique the state for its faulty policies. All the same, for both military memoirs and war accounts, the inviolability of the nation as a territorial and cultural unit is absolute.

While the endorsement of the nation by "insider" literature in military texts is understandable, "outsider" literature too engages in a similar enterprise. The reason for this lies in the fact that war is a peculiar situation in which one deals with the "nation-under-threat". At a moment like this, both the event and its narration are infused with sentiment. The upsurge of dormant feelings of belongingness to one's nation, and pride in the soldier who protects it from the hateful enemy cause one to be temporarily blinded to
the grievances that he/she may otherwise have. Mobilization of sentiment to create consensus for war fosters jingoism and erasure of internal divisions and differences.

Therefore, the fashionable notion of the nation as redundant and obsolete can at best be fanciful for a decolonized country. In a postcolonial nation, the nation is a terrain won back from the colonizer after a struggle (either violent or non-violent). It is a socio-economic-cultural-political space over which sovereignty can now be claimed. It becomes an emblem of that classic "lost and found" Hindi film formula, enormously boring, yet hugely popular.

Nation, although a clearly demarcated entity, is constituted in and through a range of cultural categories like language, ethnicity, and so on. The stability of a nation goes beyond mere political stability. Rather, a nation is constantly contested by various groups, which deploy different varieties of nationalism to do so. In India, we have noted a clear shift from secular to cultural nationalism within a fairly short span of fifty years. The shift manifests itself in the arena of popular film in which the basic aim is entertainment. Yet, it is invested here with the heavy semantic burden of narrating the nation. The investment is justified because popular film, whether self-consciously or not, is inevitably rooted in the society from which it is produced. War films in Hindi cinema reflect this paradigm shift. The film from the nineties analyzed here upholds a majoritarian, patriarchal and chauvinistic nation. The content of the hegemonic ideology of cultural/Hindu nationalism stands exposed. Some space for the contestation of such a nation is provided by the terrorist
film. However, this genre also finally blends with the ultra nationalist war film genre, few exceptions notwithstanding.

War discourse is celebratory of the overarching category of nation. Since war by nature is disruptive, narratives of war seek solace in the notion of a unified nation. A nation, despite claims to the contrary, is not a monolith. It is divided on the basis of caste/class/gender/religion and so on. War discourse irons out these divisions in order to foreground the national identity of the inhabitants of a nation. The narratives, whether visual or verbal, strive to mobilize sentiment towards consensus for a strong, centralized nation for which it is imperative to foster nationalistic and patriotic feelings.

In the course of analyzing military literature and Hindi war cinema, I have used the poststructuralist idea of the nation as a discursive space. This idea denounces the territoriality of the nation. Interestingly both military literature and Hindi war cinema (especially the former) foreground the territoriality of the nation. In the case of the latter, in conjunction with territoriality, cultural sovereignty is also emphasized. This study, therefore, has the potential to be expanded to develop a theoretical framework that would help us retrieve the territoriality of the nation, as a part of our understanding of the concept, even as we appreciate its value as a discursive category.