Chapter I
Introduction
Theoretical Background and the Scope of the Study

The main objective of this dissertation is to establish the distinctive features of Third World Literature as a special category on its own terms without seeing it in opposition to the literature of the First World. Since it is not possible to examine most of the literature produced by Third World countries, I shall limit my discussion to a few representative Indian English novelists and their novels to exemplify some of these features. I have undertaken this task as a provocation to counter Fredric Jameson’s polemical views about the Third World writing expressed in his essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” first published in the journal Social Text in 1986. In Jameson’s analysis Third World Literature is seen as obsessed with the contingencies of everyday life and therefore is not free to indulge in acts of pure imagination. The point that needs to be emphasized here is that this fact of daily engagement with social and historical realities is not necessarily an act of bad faith; on the contrary, such an engagement gives the Third World Literature its inner strength and resilience. The narration of the Third World experience may not necessarily include the obvious category of the nation, although it is difficult for any narrative to completely escape from articulating this problematic.

The term ‘nation’ encompasses a wide range of associations, both material and spiritual. Some of the texts of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth, the three novelists I deal with in this dissertation, exemplify how creative writing can re-configure this trope of the nation by forging in their narratives the materiality of history and the subjectivity of the experience of that materiality, which finally blurs the distinction between history and fiction. The narrative techniques employed by these three writers reveal how history and time
are in a constant state of flux. While trying to understand the complexity in the narrativization of nation, history and identity formation through fictional form, I shall focus on how the three writers have perceived post-independent India in different ways, while maintaining their profound fascination with its resilient nature. A close reading of their works will help us to arrive at a new definition of the category of nation and to read fiction differently, not in the way suggested by Frederic Jameson. His theorizing of Third World Literature is negative and essentialist. This study tries to critique certain propositions of Jameson's essay where he avers that all Third World texts are necessarily to be read as “national allegories.” By closely examining Jameson’s politics of criticism against the fiction of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth, I shall try to re-conceptualize the notion of the nation in order to suggest that this notion transcends the limits marked in Jameson’s essay and includes other categories that are subsumed under the broad category of the nation. Rushdie appropriates the colonizer’s language to retell the sub-continental history from an Indian perspective, showing that this is but one of the many possible versions of India and its history. He reveals that this alternative version of history is a meta-text where the public and the private domains merge. Ghosh, on the other hand, uses history as a mode to combat the material, lived realities. His fiction gives agency to the subaltern voice and brings the margin into the main narrative. His writing privileges fiction over history, and the ways in which diasporic affiliations transcend geographical boundaries of nation, which are mere shadow lines. Seth’s writing carves a distinct trans-national identity in a globalized world, addressing issues of modernity in a world where family ties are still intact and community bonds are well preserved.

I

Jameson’s essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” which forms a pendant to the essay “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” states that there is an obsessive fascination with the national question among the
Third World intellectuals, which, he implies is a mark of subservience. He suggests that the First World has moved away from such a state. But I feel that the experience of 9/11 debacle has brought back to the United States, a major representative of the First World, the national question with a vengeance. Therefore Jameson’s aspersion against the nationalist question does not seem valid at the present time. This also implies that it is not possible to wipe out from one’s vestigial consciousness the attachment for the nation. Jameson feels that these Third World nationalisms could be replaced perhaps by some global American postmodernist culture. He suggests that the Third World non-canonical forms of literature may have generated some interest, but there is nothing to be gained from the reading of these radically different texts. This First World reaction to a Third World text is perfectly natural and comprehensible. The West cannot really look at them with sympathy because of a deeper fear of the affluent (Jameson is here implying that only the First World is affluent) about the life in the Third World countries. He feels that since Americans have a very limited experience of life they cannot respond properly to the people in other parts of the world. This lack of understanding of the experiential reality of other cultures affects the way they read the texts from the Third World. To Western readers whose tastes have been formed by their own modernisms, a popular or a socially realistic third world novel seems as though already read and relegated to a distant horizon, where it remains alien. But for a Third World reader such a text offers the freshness of information and perspective and some social relevance. The West does not seem to acknowledge and to comprehend this third world situation that is unfamiliar to it.

Jameson argues that though his use of the term ‘Third World’ obliterates the profound differences between several non-western countries he is using this term as a descriptive category in the absence of a more precise term. He defends his use of the term by saying that he does not have a comparable expression that can articulate the fundamental differences
among the capitalist First World, the socialist Second World and the countries which have undergone the processes of colonialism and imperialism, which bring them together under the broad rubric of Third World. Despite his ingrained prejudice against the Third World narrative, he feels that as part of its humanistic curriculum, the Western academy needs to engage with the question of Third World Literature. All the Third World countries and cultures, he thinks, cannot be thought of as anthropologically autonomous as they are engaged in a constant struggle with certain forms of first-world cultural imperialism. As these countries are penetrated by forces of modernization coming from the West, a study of third world culture would involve a fresh view of the West, from the outside. Jameson makes a distinction between the nature and development of tribal cultures in Africa and the Asiatic mode of production particularly in India and China. This distinction is made to highlight that the West is the norm against which the differences between cultures can be marked. After these initial distinctions he hypothesizes that:

... what all third world cultural productions seem to have in common and what distinguishes them radically from analogous cultural forms in the first world is that “All third-world texts are necessarily, ... allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when...their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel...one of the determinants of capitalist culture, that is, the culture of the western realist and modernist novel, is a radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between ... the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of the secular political power: in other words, Freud versus Marx. (69)

The West has been trained to keep the public and the private domains separate from each other, whereas the relations between these domains interact in the Third World. So the “political”
may have the elements of the “libidinal” and vice versa. “The story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.” (69). This strong faith in the difference between the “political” and the “personal” makes a western reader resist the third world text as it appears somewhat “alien” to his perception, and such resistance persists throughout. Jameson’s notion of “allegory” here is somewhat pejorative. He gives the example of Lu Xun’s Diary of a Madman (1918) as a text that can be read as a national allegory. He examines the text under the following four aspects, in order to show the structural difference between a third world and a first world text:

1. The libidinal dimension of the story

2. The structure of its allegory

3. Role of the third world cultural producer himself

4. Perspective of futurity projected by the tale’s double resolution (71)

In the Third World texts, the relationship between the libidinal and the political components of individual and the social experience is radically different from what is obtained in the West and which shapes the First World cultural forms. “In the west,” Jameson maintains, “conventionally, political commitment is recontained and psychologized or subjectivitized by way of the public-private split” (71). This split in third world culture is to be read in primarily political and social terms. He comments that allegory as a form has been discredited in the West; the traditional conception of allegory is that of an elaborate set of figures and personifications to be read against some one-to-one table of equivalences. Jameson says that Lu Xun’s short stories and sketches did not develop into the novel form as such, implying that he was perhaps incapable of producing a real novel in structural terms. This view expresses Jameson’s disparaging attitude towards the Chinese in particular and third world in general. Jameson further says that “in the third-world situation the intellectual is always in one way or another a political intellectual” (74). He believes that the question of the narrative closure, the relationship of a narrative text to
futurity and to some collective project yet to come, is not merely a formal or literary-critical issue, but it is about returning to the space of bureaucratic power and privilege. He further argues:

Such allegorical structures, then, are not so much absent from the first world cultural texts as they are unconscious, and therefore they must be deciphered by interpretive mechanisms that necessarily entail a whole social and historical critique of our current first-world situation. The point here is that, in distinction to the unconscious allegories of our own cultural texts, third-world national allegories are conscious and overt: they imply a radically different and objective relationship of politics to libidinal dynamics. (79-80)

This is a very generalized and schematic interpretation of the difference in the exploitation of “allegory” by first world and third world writers. It also reveals a typical bias in the western mode of interpretation of the third world text. Jameson’s point that only in a first world text allegory is unconscious and thereby invites interpretation, is not a valid argument. The other novel he talks about is *Xala* by the contemporary Senegalese novelist and film maker Ousmane Sembene. He suspects that “the deeper subject of this second novel is not so much the evident one of the denunciation of a modern national bureaucracy, but rather the historical transformation of the traditional Islamic value of alms-giving in a contemporary money economy” (82). The double historical perspective – the archaic customs that get transformed and denatured due to imposition of capitalist relations – is evident in the novel, and the author’s intervention is suitable to the form of the allegorical fable, a technique not tolerated in realist narrative. Jameson feels that after decolonization writers like Ngugi in Kenya find themselves in a dilemma between a passion for change and social regeneration and a crisis of representation. So Hegel’s old analysis of the Master-Slave relationship may still be the most effective way of bringing out this distinction between two cultural logics, according to Jameson. It is the
allegorical nature of third world culture where the telling of the individual story and the individual experience involves the whole laborious narrating of the experience of the collectivity itself. For the westerner, who is not exposed to such a reality or to a collective totality, the allegorical vision becomes intolerable. Jameson’s distinction between the unconscious and the conscious allegory seems a reinstallation of the authority and power of the author, an idea that finds favor in the first world. Jameson’s implication here that the reader in the third world does not possess interpretive ability of his/her counterpart in the first world stems from his imagined difference between the two types of readers in separate cultural domains.

As a methodological-analytic tool the value of Jameson’s theorization of the third world narrative cannot be ignored. It is a fact that the nation as a concrete-lived reality is paramount in the life experience of the third world. Here one can say that the first world did undergo such an experience with the contingency of the nation; and it is difficult to say that this experience is not present even now among its writers. Therefore, defining the poetics of the nation runs the risk of overgeneralization. Jameson detects a latent national allegory in all third world texts. His analysis has to do with the opposition of the public and private spheres. The individual being in a capitalist modernity takes on a purely private form while its counterpart in the third world, which is not yet fully modernized, does not distinguish the private self from the social consciousness. A firm separation between the public and the private is difficult to institute and maintain in the narration of the third world experience. The private is always on the verge of becoming public, and Jameson argues that it is the relation of the third world individual to the sphere of national life as a whole that takes on a directly national dimension. This subsumption of the particular by the general is what Jameson chooses to call “allegory.”

It is difficult to entirely agree to Jameson’s *a priori* reduction of every individual third world text to a victim of an allegory syndrome. It is an oversimplification to suggest that all third world literature centres on the nation. The cinema of Satyajit Ray, Vikram Seth’s *An Equal
Music and The Golden Gate, Ghosh’s The Calcutta Chromosome and In An Antique Land transcend national-allegorical interpretation. Seth’s An Equal Music is an example of the urban novel concerned with acts of imagination in a purely global setting; Vikram Seth’s A Suitable Boy is a socially realistic novel that is concerned with life in a traditional community. These examples from the third world fiction demonstrate that they are not obsessive with the nation as a constitutive category in their fictional imagination. Benedict Anderson’s notion that literary texts make their readers imagine the communities they share their experience with can very well apply to these texts which mirror the little world of community relationships without being bothered by the larger question of the nation and its problems.

The effect of colonialism and imperialism was to divide the world between the West and Non-West, which is now re-defined in terms of a binary opposition between First and Third Worlds. The concept of Third World Literature as an “internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge” (Aijaz Ahmad 97, 1992) needs close examination. All the third world texts, especially Indian English Fiction, do not become just narratives of nationalism. This writing, in its linguistic variety and cultural and social complexities, poses questions which transcend the boundary of this reductive definition. Aijaz Ahmad, a major critic of Jameson’s polemic, does not subscribe to Jameson’s definition of the Third World as a “singular formation, possessing its own unique, unitary force of determination in the sphere of ideology (nationalism) and cultural production (the national allegory)” (Ahmad 119, 1992). He implies that India has moved away from its colonial hang-over to a realm of a type of capitalism, which is not the whole effect of its affinity to the West. Therefore it is not proper to generalize that all ex-colonized countries confront the same problems of national self-definition. Critics like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also have similar views. Jameson’s thesis that “a certain nationalism is fundamental in the third-world,” (65) where the story of the individual and his experience involves narrating the experiential realities of a collective identity, becomes questionable. What
he suggests is that the third world has nothing else to write about but its subjugation and slavery, a claim which seems to be over generalized, and highly prejudicial. I would like to suggest here that the so-called third world writing provides space for alternative readings and one need not take Jameson’s views as the only source for engaging with third world texts. In his critique of Jameson’s essay, Aijaz Ahmad finds fault with Jameson’s account because it does not include aspects of “periodization, social and linguistic formations, political and ideological struggles within the field of literary production” (97). The development of post-independent India could be cited as an example of how it has left behind its colonial past and shows all the trappings of capitalist economy and therefore its choice cannot be restricted to either nationalism or to a post-modernist cultural thinking. Jameson acknowledges that his account is somewhat sweeping in its generalization, but refuses to accept the charge that it is totalizing. Instead, he claims that it is an attempt to intervene in the dominance of First World criticism and an attempt to understand global culture. I would also like to propose that the notion of allegory should also be seen as a structural device in the narratives, and not just as a thematic obsession.

In this connection it is also worth referring to Partha Chatterjee’s distinction between the ‘material’ and ‘spiritual’ domains in his discourse on Indian nationalism, a distinction which could be useful in critiquing Jameson’s rather schematic dichotomy between the public and the private. Chatterjee remarks:

... anti-colonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains — the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the “outside,” of the economy and of state-craft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual,
on the other hand, is an “inner” domain bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity. The greater one’s success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one’s spiritual culture. This formula is, I think, a fundamental feature of anti-colonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa. (6)

The colonial power is not allowed to enter or intervene in the spiritual domain, according to Chatterjee. If one follows Jameson’s argument about the split it would look as if the discourse of the nation does not come under the private domain. Jameson seems to function within the traditional framework of Marxist analysis of culture in its relationship to a mode of production and its specific social formations. By valorizing the public-private split, he holds that cultural production is a form of superstructure which articulates the interests and ideologies of those who control the economic base of society. But, as Benedict Anderson (1983) maintains, nationalism has to be seen in conjunction with the political ideologies and the large cultural systems out of which and against which it has evolved. Homi Bhabha holds a similar view in his suggestion of “the nation’s ‘coming into being’ as a system of cultural signification, as the representation of social life rather than the discipline of social polity…” (Bhabha 1-2).

In a provocative response to Jameson’s views, Aijaz Ahmad in his “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’” finds fault with Jameson’s motives in his plea for inclusion of the literature of the Third World in the Humanities curriculum in the U.S. universities. He implies that such a plea is made in order to demonstrate, by placing the literature of the other countries with those of the western world, that the literature in the west is superior to that of the other countries. He reminds Jameson that Africa, Asia, Latin America have produced great books, now available in English, which can be compared with the best that is produced in the U.S. He finds that the Humanities curriculum in the U.S. is indicative of the general myopic tendency of the western scholars in their narrow and restrictive attitude towards the others.
Ahmad feels that “there is no such thing as a ‘Third World Literature’ which can be constructed as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge. There are fundamental issues – of periodization, social and linguistic formations, political and ideological struggles within the field of literary production, and so on – which simply cannot be resolved at this level of generality without an altogether positivist reductionism” (96-97). There are also texts, as Ahmad says, which are not written in a global language which Jameson does not take into account, though these texts have interesting things to offer by way of thematic novelty and stylistic innovations. Further, he remarks that “a literary theorist who sets out to formulate ‘a theory of the cognitive aesthetics of third-world literature’ will be constructing ideal-types, in the Weberian manner, duplicating all the basic procedures which Orientalist scholars have historically deployed in presenting their own readings of a certain tradition of ‘high’ textuality as the knowledge of a supposedly unitary object…” (97). He also questions Jameson’s distinction between First World as characterized by capitalism and Third World as characterized by colonialism by suggesting that the processes of capitalism and socialism are not exclusive to the first world but are also evident in the working of third world politics. As an example Ahmad cites the nostalgic splash of the splendors of the Raj on the Indian TV and other media today as almost a mode of capitalist dissemination of ideas to refute Jameson’s argument that there does not seem to be any option for a third world country but to mimic the American version of postmodern culture. Moreover, nationalism itself is not a unitary thing; it can be progressive in some cases, but in some it may not be. Ahmad further argues that if third world history had no internal multiplicities based on caste, class, gender, language etc. to contend with, then its narrative would have followed the path of nationalism in its trajectory. But the reality of third world history is more complex and contentious than what Jameson depicts in his grossly abstract version of singularity. The world at present is not divided into three segments; it is one global village where boundaries do not matter. But the American imperialistic impulse is still ubiquitous. The world at present is
engaged in a fierce struggle between capital and labor, irrespective of national boundaries. Even capitalist countries are not culturally homogeneous. Ahmad thinks that if Jameson has traced the origin of the First World to Graeco-Judaic civilization, then a similar generative impulse can be traced for Indian civilization to the *Quran* and the *Gita*. Ahmad seems right in critiquing Jameson’s insistence that the national experience is central to the cognitive formation of the third world intellectual and suggests that such an insistence does not take into consideration the vast multiplicity of collective experience, where it is difficult to separate the public engagement from a host of private concerns. Therefore, nation should be replaced with a larger, less restrictive domain of collectivity, the process of allegorization should be thought of as a relation between the public and the private, personal and the communal.

I propose that the idea of the nation needs to be rethought by disengaging ourselves from the western definition. Sara Suleri remarks, “... the discursive site of alterity is nothing other than the familiar and unresolved confrontation between the historical and the allegorical.... Jameson’s intuitive apprehension of the blurred lines of cultural demarcation between the idioms of postcolonial public and private discourse notwithstanding, his recourse to a rhetoric of “third-worldism” bespeaks a theoretical fear that has still to reconcile the uneasy distance between alterity and the problematic of national specificities”(13). Suleri is right in stating here that Jameson’s binary division between the self and its “alterity” has resulted from a fear to reconcile the distance between the abstract “other” and its innumerable internal dissensions.

Jameson has opened a Pandora’s Box, and is therefore unable to come to terms with the diverse elements coming out of it. Therefore he seems to take an easy way out by allegorizing the “third world experience” and obfuscating the problematic. Jameson uses the term “allegory” in a pejoratively limited sense.

The term “allegory” should not be defined in a narrow sense; it is not necessarily a medieval concept. It enfolds a variety of modes and meanings, and cannot be termed pre-
Allegory is not to be interpreted as having a one-to-one correspondence between two contexts; on the contrary, it establishes levels of meaning and provides space to subvert, expand, alter or accommodate socio-cultural-historical shifts. Jameson’s project of theorizing the nation overdetermines his understanding of and approach to the so-called Third World. The present study and the analysis of the Indian English Fiction, especially the fiction of Rushdie, Ghosh and Seth, are premised on the idea of the nation that is not fixed or conclusive but a discursive formation. Within the Jamesonian paradigm, the third world nations are subsumed under the grand narrative of capitalism.

By emphasizing that the third world texts are not products of pure imagination, Jameson valorizes the canonical texts from the West. He says that “third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce; what is more damaging than that, perhaps, is its tendency to remind us of outmoded stages of our own first-world cultural development and to cause us to conclude that “they are still writing novels like Dreiser or Sherwood Anderson” (65). This last line implies that there is a qualitative difference, according to Jameson, between the writings of Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson and those of Proust and Joyce, but what is problematic here is that Jameson seems to discard the writings of the former as they are socially oriented. He equates third world writings to the writings of these socially conscious American novelists. Here one could say that Dreiser is as important as Joyce, and there is no reason to believe that Joyce has moved away from Dreiser to occupy a loftier ground.

III

The Third World writing reveals several thematic and stylistic transitions: a shift from realism to magic realism; from colonial subjection to postcolonial freedom; from homogeneous, centralized cultures to decentered multicultural societies; a transition from the order of law to disorder, guerrilla warfare; a transition from nationalism to terrorism, both within the nation state and cross border terrorism. This transition is not the same as the transition from modernism to
postmodernism in the First World. It reveals a movement towards representing a new world order where magic realism is the chief innovative mode of self representation. This does not mean that social realism has been completely done away with; it coexists with the new post realistic styles as in the writings of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Seth.

Timothy Brennan calls writers like Rushdie, Llosa, Marquez 'Third-World cosmopolitans' [whom] "Western reviewers seemed to be choosing as the interpreters and authentic public voices of the Third World- writers who, in a sense, allowed a flirtation with change that ensured continuity, a familiar strangeness...." (viii, 1989). I agree with Brennan's labeling of Rushdie, Marquez as 'cosmopolitans' as it refutes Jameson's construction of a stereotype of a third world cultural producer and his belittling attitude towards the third world novelists. For the third world writers writing about the nation becomes a discursive practice, a projection of imagination, at once celebratory, critical, and skeptical. The Third World writing presents a fascinating transition to alternative paradigms, each of which has engendered an entirely refreshing international fictional universe in terms of strategies of treatment, both thematically and stylistically, of new realities facing it.

The desire for cultural self definition and political self determination in the 1960's and 1970's resulted in the emergence of New Literatures from the former British colonies. The decolonized countries seemed to be engaged in "a process of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome" (Hulme, 246). Although the major issues debated in the third world literature are broad, they are of immediate relevance to present history, language, race, gender, identity, migration and cultural exchange. Fanon emphasized national culture as an important factor in the struggle for political independence. Amilcar Cabral, too, defends the use of one's culture in the process of attaining cultural and political self-assertion. As a result, the old notion about traditional literary studies has undergone a significant change. Third World Literature tries to grapple with two kinds of awareness: the colonial inheritance as it continues to affect the
sensibilities of so-called decolonized selves and the changing relations between these cultures in
the globalized world. The third world writing represents the new power relations. The rise of
New Literatures has slowly denuded the importance of British Literature. In such new literatures
the old humanistic basis of studying literature with emphasis on characterization, plot structure
has given way to a reading within specific social, historical, cultural contexts.

The world is now connected by economic and technological changes and by the politics
of modernity. The postcolonial perspective, which is utilized by the new writers, is a
“...substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity — progress, homogeneity,
cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past ...” (Bhabha, 4,1990). Bhabha’s point is that
these writings about the “nation” provide a critique to the earlier modes of writings premised on
the notion of universalist categories.

In the postcolonial situation, the use of English language by third world writers became a
subject of controversy. Achebe, Rushdie, Seth write in English, while Ngugi thought of its use as
a form of self-inflicted neo-colonization. Indian Writing in English deviates from the standard
linguistic practices, subverts the master language, and creates a new idiom combining diverse
cultural elements reflecting the multilingual, multicultural ethos of the country. Similarly, for the
Caribbean’s, Edouard Glissant feels that creolization, an example of cross-cultural transmission
and fertilization, was the best instrument to resist western hegemony. Critics and writers about
the third world seem to homogenize the concept of third world literature but it is problematic to
demarcate it as a unified field of study. The English language is not only a link between these
literatures, the way it is deployed in each de-colonized nation speaks of a plurality of voices
within what is generally thought of as a unitary language. The cross-cultural linguistic
pollination has helped to create new hybrid varieties of English which bear little or no
resemblance to the parent language i.e. standard language. In this process English language has
multiplied into its many variations, which indicate its flexibility and resilience.
The third world writing exists at the interface of different literary and cultural traditions which are hybrid and transcultural. These writings are concerned with several themes criss-crossing with one another: history, language, oral and scribal traditions, nation and nationalism, gender, class-caste politics, migration and cultural hybridity. In the writing of third world writers specific cultures are not idealized or exoticized or undermined; they are depicted in their matter-of-factness, as lived realities. The local references in their writings indicate the writer’s social responsibility to his or her society. These writings also celebrate the reader’s own position in gaining an understanding of the world. The earlier neat division between the text and context is now redefined to suggest that the meaning of the text is determined by the way it is generated while negotiating various contingent realities of the world.

It is rather unfortunate that while writing about the third world literature critics do not seem to include into the domain the various regional literatures produced in a country like India where each state has a language and a literature of its own. Each regional literature is concerned with local issues, which are peculiar to the region in which the writer is located. Such issues spring from the complex social structure of the region affected by numerous castes, class, gender and religious configurations. In the west such complexities are not present. That is why it is possible to define the western literature in terms of a determinate canon. Besides, the Indian reality includes myths, legends, and folklore, which are not the trappings of an obsolete past, but are part and parcel of the creative imagining of everyday life.

One of the positive attributes of the new literature in India is its robust assertion of the spirit of the nation, articulated in very different forms. Eric Hobsawm (1990) seems right in arguing that the nation depends upon the invention of national traditions which manifest through the repetition of specific symbols or icons. Such traditions become a kind of continuity between the nation’s present and its past and help to create a shared history and common origins of its
people. The strategic motive behind the invocation of a nationalist past and traditions in a third
world text is a means to counter linguistic, cultural or political hegemony of Europe.

Another feature of the third world writers is their multiple consciousnesses, participating
in several cultural groups or traditions. The third world narratives occupy a liminal space
between home and abroad and establish a vibrant relationship between the two worlds. Magic
realism is one such mode which straddles both the worlds. The third world writing cannot be
homogenized into a movement of resistance to imperialism. The third world narratives address
themselves to the theme of continuity with the larger cultural and literary traditions of English
and European literature and wanting to maintain significant difference in their deployment of
stylistic innovations and thematic elements. In the process of reconstituting their racial,
linguistic, historical difference, the third world writers needed to restore history and reconstruct
it, recover it from memory as Rushdie does. Since this history is recapitulated from memory,
sometimes its authenticity is questioned. But memory cannot be brushed aside as inauthentic as it
carries in its texture the burden of prophecy. For third world writers the writing of history
becomes a political act. It means constructing an account of the past, involving selection and
choice. Narratives are fabricated in order to counter the claims of the “real.” The subaltern
historians have tried to put together a counter history to contest colonial and nationalist accounts.
Third world fictional narratives also raise issues of political agency of the ‘silenced’ oppressed
sections of the society. In giving agency to the women’s question, Ghosh attempts to bring the
marginal into the mainstream narrative. The purpose of such a project is to redress the
imbalance; it recognizes the fact that subordination cannot be understood except in a binary
relationship with dominance.

This history and difference gets articulated in an indigenous yet intelligible vocabulary
with the standard form of English language, the result being the Indianization or Africanization
of English. The third world writing resorts to oral mythic traditions and legends for a cultural
revival and self definition. Rushdie’s protagonist, Saleem in *Midnight’s Children* says, “...there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumors, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane” (9). India, itself, as the novel makes clear and explicit, is an excess. This excessive diversity, the staggering abundance is obscured in Jameson’s account of Third World Literature.

Third World writers relied upon the notion of hybridity, blending different cultural influences, active syncretism to disrupt European hegemony. The writers knew that no matter how hard they tried to reclaim it, cultural purity was not going to be reclaimed in any manner. Some writers re-read and subverted the canonical texts of the Empire as a strategy for decolonization. For example, George Lamming’s *The Pleasures of Exile* inverts the perspective of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*; Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* offers a crucial and situated counterpoint to Rochester’s colonial narrative in *Jane Eyre* by writing a part of the text from the point of view of Bertha Mason. Disruption of the narrative voice and structure is integral to Third World narratives. Postcolonial narratives constantly negotiate between different registers, between high and low cultures and voices, contrasting realities, past and future, the elite and the masses, the first world and the third world. In Indian English Fiction the use of local contexts, obscure proverbs and untranslated words all resist simple decoding. Another contrapuntal technique is to give space and prominence to marginalized characters like slaves, women including low caste sweepers, untouchables etc.

Third World writing also deals with the issue of diasporic movements and brings into focus the vexed issue of the relationship between the population and territory. Imperialism led to the formation of the Asian-African Diasporas. The fabric of the decolonized societies is interwoven with diasporic population. The western metropolis must confront its postcolonial history, told by the influx of postwar migrants and refugees, a narrative that is internal to its national identity. These histories by the migrant groups should not be considered as the ‘Other’
or alien. Postcolonial work invites a lot of criticism because it looks on the diasporic communities as a metaphor rather than as real people or actual political issue. In the literature of the third world it is interesting to see how people construct and negotiate identities in the unsettling conditions of postcolonial migrancy. If the western colonial powers dislodged indigenous cultures and identities, third world fictional narratives can be seen and read as writing back to the Empire. For many writers, post-colonialism relates not just to the experience of being colonized, but it also means the pain of the recovery of the pre-colonial identities, the futility of such a task and the task of constructing a new identity. Third world writers are faced with the problems of reconstructing, rewriting the past; they have to face the global capitalist postmodernism that threatens the concept of a stable identity. The crisis of identity and its nature varies from culture to culture. A certain level of awareness of who speaks what, and from where and for whom it is spoken is necessary in terms of history and exclusion. Therefore, Jameson’s position in the west becomes questionable. The text is just one mode of representation; the suppressed, the silenced subaltern voices have to be analyzed and accommodated too. In third world writing the problem of representing identities should be seen in the collective, historically shaping processes as well as in relation to individual consciousness. By opening up texts to alternative perspectives, politicized readings and theoretical nuances, we can enrich the reading process and consequently the whole act of reading and interpreting texts becomes very liberating. A critical insight of one reading (as a national allegory) might well become the blind spot of another reading. By privileging one category of analysis at the expense of the others, each of these methods risks setting up what Jameson describes as “strategies of containment” (x,1981), which restrict or repress different or alternative readings. Blinding oneself to the specificities of Third World texts would mean occluding the subtexts of race, class, religion, caste and language in their writings. It would mean like reading a black woman’s writing as a gendered subtext and blinding oneself to the racial subtext within it. What is proposed is that third world narratives
should be approached in a way that signifies a reading that acknowledges and overcomes the limitations imposed by assumptions of homogeneity. Such a reading will steer us away from a simple reductive paradigm of absolute and self-sufficient “Otherness,” i.e. from Jameson’s prescriptive reading of Third World texts as national allegories. His denial of our own imagination and dictating how we should read our texts thus are problematic and an exclusionary reading of Third World narratives.

IV

The publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight's Children* (1981) becomes the focal point while discussing post independent Indian English Fiction. The evolution of the modern Indian literary tradition is charted alongside the publication of this novel. As a writer of fiction and non-fiction, Rushdie can be treated as having connections with more than one country, i.e. India, Pakistan, Britain, and the U.S.A. His fiction reveals that he is a writer for whom a multicultural setting is not just a thematic content for his writing but a mode of perception; his worldview encompasses hybridity, newness and multiplicity. He challenges the humanist notions of a unified self and an integrated consciousness by first installing a coherent subjectivity and then subverting it. In this novel he challenges and subverts the implied assumptions of history and history writing like objectivity, impersonality, and transparency of representation. He employs parody to reconstruct and rewrite history with the help of memory but in doing so puts both history and fiction at a juncture which defies questions of causality. As someone culturally displaced, Rushdie rewrites the past from within a postcolonial contingent modern India, accepting its hybrid character and resilient nature. He does not fall prey to parochial, indigenous nationalism. His magic realism draws on epic, folk tales, and oral narrative modes to weave together the social fabric of the Indian sub-continent wherein the real and the not-so-real do not constitute the binary opposition. Instead his writing shows the co-existence of the secular and the magical; the narrative structure and the unfinished stories provide varied possibilities. The
blending of the oral vernacular into the craft of writing reveals Rushdie’s dissatisfaction with the insufficiency of western style realism and the corresponding preference for marvelous realism. His work comprises the most radical experiment in postcolonial writing of redefining and rewriting the concepts of ‘language’ and ‘history’ through fiction. Rushdie demolished the claims of objectivity that the West claims for its history and knowledge. In order to correct the normative western monolithic construct of history, Rushdie uses the powers of imagination, myths, legends, structural allegory. While contesting thematically and formally the white versions of history, he does not make a case for a revisionist or subaltern historiography nor does he have an adversarial attitude towards colonial enterprise. The publication of _Midnight’s Children_ gave legitimacy to a particular concept of the novel (“historiographic metafiction,” Linda Hutcheon 5, 1988). It is centered on the comic analogy that the narrator Saleem Sinai, born at the exact moment of India’s independence, draws between his own life story and that of the young nascent nation. The text is a conglomeration of non-realist narrative modes, among them the Hindu-Islamic storytelling, western metafiction, and the cinematic style of Bombay talkie, and the use of the language of advertising and Indian officialese are techniques used to explore the problematic of constructing and writing history and to explode the myths of a unified coherent nation and nationalist discourse.

Like _Midnight’s Children_, Amitav Ghosh’s _The Shadow Lines_ (1988) focuses on the experiences of a family which can be seen as a microcosm for a broader national experience. In the novel the lives of the family have been irrevocably changed as a result of the Partition of Bengal. The title ‘_The Shadow Lines_’ suggests that the borders are drawn by politicians to separate people and territories, it reveals the arbitrariness of cartographical divisions. It mourns nationalism in a world which is increasingly becoming borderless. The shadow lines are also lines of demarcation that separate the colonizer and the colonized, the present and the past, the self and the other. As a writer who straddles different worlds, Ghosh depicts the migrant
condition as protean, inventive and creatively rooted in the country of origin and outside i.e. 'Home' and 'Away.' For him dislocation does not become an impoverishment but enhances the cultural and aesthetic experience; the experience of straddling different worlds becomes a regenerative phenomenon. *The Circle of Reason* (1986) is an example of such an experience. It is a narrative of traveling, a loosely structured picaresque, connecting the Indo-Bangladesh border, the Persian Gulf city of al-Ghazira and the Algerian Sahara, bringing together the modern world and the ancient civilization, disrupting the realist unities of time and space while traversing political borders. In *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) the social and ideological specificities get obscured as Ghosh attempts to excavate a labyrinthine network of traces which reject the essentialist versions of national and regional histories. In an attempt to rewrite the late 19th century malaria research history he posits a subaltern history not articulated so far.

Vikram Seth's work embodies the complexities of constructing and negotiating hyphenated identities and hybrid realities. Seth is more of a cultural traveler, writing from the western metropolis yet retaining thematic connections with the country of origin. *A Suitable Boy* (1988) is comparable to the classics of the 19th century European social-realist novels. It offers a microcosmic view of a society in post independence India, narrating the intertwined lives of four families. As in Victorian novels, here marriage provides the thematic content and it focuses on the social mores within a typical (North) Indian context, the central theme being to find a 'suitable boy' for its heroine Lata Mehra. Seth depicts the multicultural ethos of both rural and urban India; he also articulates the emotional, cultural, social, intellectual life of modern India. In *An Equal Music* (1999), Seth travels beyond the national frontiers, moving to Europe, London crafting a fragmentary romantic world against the backdrop of western classical music.

The present study of the three major postcolonial Indian English novelists tries to reveal the multiple ways in which they define and reconfigure the notions of nation and nationalism, the shifting conceptions of identity, the syncretic worldview where the relationship with the...
homeland, the past, history re-emerge in new forms. Their writing shows how cultures get affected when they undergo the experience of colonialism and when traditional borders demarcating nations, cultures and people get redefined and re-constituted. I feel that the writings of these novelists can be termed oppositional-alternative discourse that can effectively redress the First World-Third World dichotomy. As strategies aimed to destabilize dominant hierarchies, their work attempts to reassert and recover histories, indigenous narrative techniques and local and global concerns. Their writings may not have entered the Western canon, but have found an appropriate cultural context for self expression and are no longer caught up in the anxieties of self definition. These writers have moved away from the “ghetto mentality” (Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands, 19, 1981) toward community and broader geographical-cultural frontiers. Despite the fact that they are removed from their native soil, away from their familial, national roots, these writers have made brilliant use of the polyphony of the fictional form for self expression.

Works Cited


