Chapter I

Introduction

Since its inception Indian English fiction has been exploring different aspects of inter-personal relationships. But in the process it has evoked the larger aspects of family, community and society against the background of which the individuals interact with one another. The identity of an individual is determined to a great extent by the interplay of influences generated from these sites, and the authors have located and manipulated these elements in their fictional world. In its unfailing engagement with the exploration of the identity of the Indian individual in different phases, Indian Fiction in English has recorded all through, the role of the nation in shaping this identity. Much research has already been done on this relation between the individual and the nation. But this relation is hardly simple and one-dimensional. Rather, it is considerably complicated because the nation, as an institution, is in constant interface with various other social institutions, family being one of the most prominent among them. In a country like India, where the bond between an individual and the family is very important, this interface assumes seminal importance, as both the nation and the family play their roles in shaping the identity of an individual. But not much work has been done on this interface between the family and the nation. The individual is always caught between the two, often opposing, pulls. The dilemma of individual feeling the pressures of these contesting forces is worth exploring because this would reveal the changing dynamics of both the spaces. These spaces are open to forces operating at both the national and global spheres. Developments, social, political and economic, taking place inside and outside the country inevitably affect the
family, both materially and attitudinally, and also influence policies of the
governments, impacting upon the nation itself. From these perspectives it will be
interesting to explore how an individual negotiate the intermediary space between
the family and the nation. This aspect has not been dealt with critically in an
exhaustive way and hence in this thesis, I have tried to explore this family-nation
interface. This interface itself is not a static one, it is in a process of constant
evolution over the years. I have tried to take note of the phenomenal changes that
mark the history of this evolution. For the sake of convenience I have to restrict
myself to some select authors only, who have recorded these changes at different
periods of times. While I have primarily focused on Salman Rushdie and Amitav
Ghosh as two such milestone figures in the history of Indian Fiction in English, I
have referred to many other authors whom I consider to be crucially relevant. But
since this evolution is a continuing and unending process, the present study never
claims to be complete and exhaustive. It only aims at opening up avenues of
further research in this field, to be taken up by future scholars.

In the next sections we shall discuss the concepts of the nation and the
family, as these are important tools for understanding the works of Indian English
writers in general and Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh in particular.

I

Emerging with the growth of Western Capitalism and Industrialisation, the
nation has undoubtedly become, by far, the most important mode of social and
political organization in the modern world. It has been accepted as the most
normal convention to map the world as a collection of different nations, each
separated from the other by borders. Simultaneously, nationalism has emerged as
one of the most powerful forces in the modern world. As an ideology and movement, it has exerted strong influence on various revolutions of the world, including the American and the French. Not only is it a vast subject spilling over into innumerable cognate subjects like race and racism, fascism, ethnic conflict, minorities, gender and immigration, but, down the ages and across the globe, it has also taken myriad forms like conservative, liberal, communist and separatist. Consequently, the study of nation and nationalism has no more remained confined to a single disciplinary perspective and has attracted the attention of scholars from various fields, who have engaged themselves incessantly in finding adequate definitions of the terms.

To define the concept of the ‘nation’ is undoubtedly the most problematic and contentious task. Charles Tilly, in the introduction to *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (1975), has rightly described the term ‘nation’ as ‘one of the most puzzling and tendentious items in the political lexicon’ (6). Most of the definitions of ‘nation’ can, however, be divided into two categories: one stressing the objective factors and the other, the subjective ones. For example, Joseph Stalin categorically stresses the objective factors when he defines ‘nation’ as “a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture” (61). Benedict Anderson’s famous definition, on the other hand, focuses on the subjective aspects: “it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). Or, one may consider Ernest Renan’s definition of nation as “a soul, a spiritual principle” (41). Another definition worth attention is by Max Weber: “A nation is a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its
own” (177). A. D. Smith, in his popular book on the subject, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (2001) supplies us with two sufficiently workable definitions deduced from this objective-subjective spectrum. The first one runs thus: “Nations… are felt and lived communities whose members share a homeland and a culture” (12). A nation, in order to constitute itself as a nation, must occupy a homeland of its own and it also needs to evolve a public culture and desire some degree of self-determination. Even if it does not possess a sovereign state of its own, it should have an aspiration for a measure of autonomy coupled with the physical occupation of its homeland. The second definition is even better, for it attempts to strike a balance between the objective and the subjective attributes of a nation: A nation is “a named human community occupying a homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a common public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members” (13).¹

One obvious thing that emerges from all these definitions is that, fundamentally, the concept of the nation is a fabrication and is “not inscribed into the nature of things,” as Ernest Gellner, in his book *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), puts it (49). And since the individual members act as the basic constituent units of this ‘fabricated’ community, it is pertinent at this point to consider the relation between the nation (as a collective identity) and the individual (as its basic constituent unit). This relation has become all the more problematic in the contemporary times, because we now live in a world of multiple identities corresponding to a variety of collective affiliations – family, gender, religion, occupational groups, political parties; and the bond between the individual and the nation is crucially influenced by the complicated interactions of the individual with all these various collectivities.
Interestingly, among all these collectivities, the relation between the intimate circle of family and the wide circle of the nation stands out to be the most complicated. One of the most off-hand, interesting and crucial metaphors that have been invoked in order to describe the nature of the nation is that of family – the nation has eternally desired to be a ‘family.’ This is because, a notion of collectivity and belonging, a mutual sense of community that a group of individuals imagines it shares, and which is central to the idea of the nation, begins initially in the small unit of family. The concept of nation itself contains within it the notion of a family, as Timothy Brennan points out in his essay “The National Longing for Form.” He observes that the nation refers “both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous – the 'natio' – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging’ (45). Elie Kedourie has remarked on the relation between the individual and nation in the introduction to his edited book *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* (1971):

Nationalism... unites them in a private, amorous relation in which the body politic is united by love, the very same feeling that binds the individual to his family, because the fatherland is only a large household, and the nation a large family (xi; emphasis added).

This gives us a very important lead to the growth of the idea of nation in the mould of a family. For a nationalist, the idea of attachment to the nation is crucially important. Love for the nation, after all, is love of one great family. Hence, all those appeals to the members of a great ‘family’, for the defence of kith and kin of this ‘family’ and the need for self-sacrifice for the sake of ‘our country’. As Michel Aflaq, the co-founder of the Syrian Ba’ath (Resurrection) Party in the 1950s put it, ‘Nationalism is love’ (qtd. in Kedourie xii).
The existence of the nation, therefore, depends on the extent of the loyalty of an individual to the nation, very much like the family. The nation draws its sustenance from this wilful subjugation of an individual, and tries to impose its identity as the primary identity, and all other identities, secondary. Thus the nation becomes the chief securer of individual loyalties, and the chief definer of man's identity. Interesting in this connection is the 'organic version' of nationalism proposed by the German Romantics – Fichte, Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Arndt, Jahn and Muller (Smith 16). According to this theory, the nation stands over and above the individuals who compose it, and the members possess common mental characteristics which are objectively ascertainable and mark them off from non-members. Nature itself has ordained cultural individuality, manifested in the variety of language, customs and habits. From these external differences we must infer a distinctive 'spirit' of the nation, with its own independent causal power. Such a spirit combines the part of a nation into an organic whole, turning an aggregate of individuals and elements into a unique seamless pattern. The self-moving national spirit emerges gradually from the accretions of prehistory, amidst a host of cross-cutting dynastic, local, class and religious allegiances. Finally, it enters into self-consciousness and itself becomes an organic entity constituted of its members. It then sets forth on its historic mission for the liberation of mankind from slavery and various forms of tyranny. Individual freedom, in that case, is nothing but the expression of the nation state. As A. D. Smith observes, “Nationalism... preaches to the idealistic intellectuals... that there is no difference' between rulers and the ruled, that their interests, their preoccupations, their aims are exactly identical” (xxv 131).
But how is the ideal of national character, distinguished by its concern for collective character, to be achieved? It can never be secured without an effort; rather it has to be carefully constructed by the performance of various narratives, rituals and symbols which stimulate an individual’s sense of being a member of a select group. The performance of these national traditions keeps in place an important sense of continuity between the nation’s present and the past, and helps forge the unique sense of the shared history and common origin of the people. They help to forge a unique identity of the nation in which the nation’s members wilfully and emotionally invest, helping, ironically, the nation to consolidate its power over them. In other words, these become sure instruments of social control in the hands of the nation. The most important symbol is, of course, a collective proper name, chosen to express the nation’s distinctiveness, heroism and sense of destiny, and to resonate these qualities among the members. Similarly, national flags with their colours, shapes and patterns, and anthems with their verses and music, epitomize the special qualities of the nation and aim to conjure a vivid sense of unique history and destiny among the population. Moreover, capital cities, national museums, national assemblies, passports, remembrance ceremonies for the martyrs, the military parades and national oaths, as well as the national academies of music, art and science serve to express, represent and reinforce the boundary definition of the nation, and to unite the members inside through a common imagery of shared memories, myths and values. Then there is the cohesive role of history. The nation engages its intellectuals in the task of tracing the roots and character of the nation through such disciplines as history, archeology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics and folklore. These not only provide the tools for finding out ‘who we are’, ‘when we began’ and ‘how we
grew', but also for differentiating this ‘we’ from the ‘other’, a fundamental requisite for the definition of every identity. The more the members are conscious of their cultural unity and national history, and are devoted to cultivating their national individuality in vernacular languages, customs, arts and landscapes, through national education and institutions, the stronger is their bond with the nation established. So fast is this bond of the ‘imagined community’ that “...the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-member, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 6). Thus, with the passage of time, all these national narratives weave together a natural sense of historical attachment (time) to a geographical territory (space) defined by memory.

So far, we have considered how nations are created, to use Paul Gilroy’s words, “through elaborate cultural, ideological and political processes which culminate in the individual’s feeling of connectedness to other national subjects and in the idea of a national interest that transcends the supposedly petty divisions of class, region, dialect or caste” (49). This feeling of connectedness, and the myth of the nation that it produces, have proved to be valuable resources to many anti-colonial movements. To the western-educated, native, intellectual leaders of the freedom movements, these have provided immensely successful mantra to unite all people against the colonial rule. In fact, even in the postcolonial era, this feeling of connectedness has been politically manipulated with shrewdness to reiterate the myth of nation, because as Fanon has pointed out, the anti-colonial movements, most often, lead to an era of neo-colonialism, where “the national bourgeoisie steps into the shoes of the former European settlement” (122). In that case, the national, elite middle class have nothing better to do than to take on the
role of manager for Western enterprise, and ironically, though the anti-colonial nationalism replaces the Western colonial ruling class, it incessantly strives to keep the people disempowered. As Etienne Balibar puts it in his essay “Racism and Nationalism,” many decolonized nations have undergone the painful experience of “seeing nationalisms of liberation turned into nationalisms of domination” (46).

But all said and done, the fact remains that this much advertised feeling of connectedness is not so easy, spontaneous and uncontested as it apparently seems. The myth of the nation, which endeavors to unite all people by ignoring the diversity of these individuals, can hardly do so without a constant threat from its subjects. It is relevant in this context to invoke Homi K. Bhabha and consider his most influential and challenging interventions in the debate concerning nationalist representations. In his famous essay “Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins,” Bhabha shows how nationalist representations are highly unstable and fragile constructions which can never produce the unity they seek to achieve. In his analysis of the nationalist discourse, Bhabha speaks of the ‘double narrative movement’ which problematises the nationalist discourse. In Bhabha’s argument, the discourse becomes split by similar kinds of ambivalence to those that threaten the coherence of colonial discourse. In order to create community out of difference, to convert ‘many’ into ‘one’, the nationalist discourse engages two contradictory modes of representation, which Bhabha calls the ‘pedagogic’ and the ‘performative’, each possessing its own relationship with time. Consequently, the nationalist discourse is split by a disruptive ‘double narrative movement’:

It is precisely in reading between these borderlines of the nation-space that we can see how the concept of the ‘people’ emerges
within a range of discourses as a double narrative movement. The people are not simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic. They are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference: their claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address. We then have a contested conceptual territory where the nation's people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process (The Location of Culture 145; emphases original).

On the one hand, nationalism is a pedagogic discourse. It claims a fixed origin for the nation and asserts a sense of a continuous history which links the nation's people in the present to previous generations of national subjects. It is 'pedagogical', because it warrants the authority, legitimacy and primacy of the nation as the central political and social unit which collects the population into a 'people'. The people are the object of pedagogical discourse; they are the body which nationalism constructs and upon which it acts. Pedagogical narratives are shaped by a 'continuist, accumulative temporality' which gives the impression of the steady, linear movement of time from past to present to future.
But, Bhabha argues, that nationalist discourse is simultaneously ‘performative.’ It implies that the nationalist icons and popular signs (all those representations which help fix its ‘norms and limits’) must be continuously rehearsed by the people in order to keep secure the sense of ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’. A national culture must be endlessly performed; the arbitrary range of symbols which it uses to forge unity requires repeated inscription as the stuff of national significance:

The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects. In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation (LoC 145-146; emphases original).

The people are, therefore, also subjects of nationalist discourses, actively involved in the (re)production of its signs and traditions: they must repeatedly tell their history, perform the rituals, celebrate its great figures and commemorate its anniversaries. Hence, nationalist discourses in their performative aspects function under a different temporality, the ‘repetitious’ and ‘recursive.’

From this tension between the pedagogic and the performative, the nation is split by what Bhabha terms the ‘conceptual ambivalence’ at the heart of its discursive strategies. The nation is always being pulled between two incompatible opposites: the nation as a fixed, originary essence (continuist and pedagogic), and
the nation as socially manufactured and devoid of a fixed origin (repetitive and performative). Between these two positions, out of this ‘disjunctive temporality’, the sense of the nation’s homogeneous ‘people’ begins to fragment. The pedagogical representation of the people as ‘object’ constructs an idealized image of unity and coherence in the past. But because of the necessity for the performance of the nation’s signs by the people as ‘subject’, the pedagogical ideal of the homogenous people can never be realized. Rather, this performative necessity of nationalist representations enables all those different identities other than the national, to intervene in the signifying process and challenge the dominant narrative of the nation with counter-narratives that “continually evoke and erase its (nation’s) totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – (and) disturb those ideological maneuvers through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities” (LoC 149). The official text of the nation, therefore, gives way to everyday, ‘performative’ narratives of the people in which perceptions of history and identity become split and doubled. There is a pressing need, therefore, to separate the grand narratives of nationalism at the level of elite scholarship and political rhetoric from the imagining of a place as one’s home that functions on the everyday level of ordinary people as they write and live ordinary lives, and focus on this micro-narrative. Mary Layoun insists:

(the) everyday struggle and choices of ordinary folk, their attempts to come to terms with and sometimes to change the shape of a dominant narrative have too often been minimized by critical consideration....and yet they too ...engage in both theorizing about and acting in the narrative(s) of the nation. ... there are moments when this everyday experience of parts of the nation/people truly
confounds the dominant definition of the national narrative and, sometimes offer more pragmatic and flexible alternatives to dominant national constructions (413-14).

What emerges in this ‘uncanny moment’ of interface between these different identities is a new hybrid identity, which remains perpetually in motion and is open to further change and reinscription. The idea of subjectivity as stable, single and pure is forever demolished, and

We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. The barred nation It/Self, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal signifying space that is internally marked by the discourse of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference (Bhabha, LoC 148).

One of the most prominent identities which constantly intervenes and challenges the hegemonizing attempt of the pedagogical grand narrative of the unified nation with its performative micro-narrative, is the ‘familial’. While nationalist discourse requires essence, origin, unity and coherence, and badly needs to forget the micro-narrative, the familial space continuously disrupts this unity by bringing in a jarring note, a ‘difference’ from within. Failing to exclude these ‘different’ stories, ‘different’ experiences, ‘different’ histories, the nation’s dream of smooth self-generation at the level of the performative is constantly eluded. In “Locations of Culture”, Bhabha refers to the ‘recesses of domestic space’ as ‘sites for history’s most intricate invasions,’ when the ‘borders between home and world become confused and uncannily, the private and the public
become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (LoC 9). Thus the national history and the family-history, the national space and the familial are interlocked in a moment of tension, the outcome of which is an interesting hybridity of history and displacement of grand narratives.

It is against this backdrop that we have to consider the nature of the interface between the nation and the family in the world of Indian English Fiction. Right from the beginning, the narration of the nation, in the hand of the Indian Writer in English, started with the ‘family’, for it has played a crucial role in at least two very basic ways. Firstly, family (ghar, sangsar, home) offers an emotional space to any individual in the Indian society. Secondly, and more importantly, we find that the different spaces (from ‘familial’ to ‘global’) are placed within a pattern of concentric circles (family > society > province > nation) where each of the constituents influences the other, and are influenced by them. So, while this familial space has constantly been influenced and moulded by the nation, it itself has gone a long way to construct the imagined and invented space of the nation and recently, of the ‘global village’. Right from the beginning, the fictional discourses have tried to capture this interface between these two spaces – the national and the familial, resulting into interesting explorations of complex problems produced at the moment of this interaction.

II

Defining family is as difficult as defining the nation. Different definitions have different implications for which social structures can legitimately lay claim to be recognized as families. The classic definition of the family was given by
George Murdock in his book *Social Structure* (1960). He defined the family as a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults. Such a family refers to the body of persons living usually in one house including parents and children, whether living together or not, or in a wider sense, all those who are nearly connected by blood. It can also mean those descended or claiming descent from a common ancestor. So, it at once provides its members an identity, much more basic, immediate and intimate than the identity the nation can provide. This familial space or ‘home’ connotes in our mind a private sphere of shelter, comfort, nurture and protection as contrasted with the chaos and anxiety outside, and hence placed in a binary position with the nation. Ideally, the family protects and lends its status and honour to its members to the outside world. Family, as a space, helps an individual to assert the subject position for him which draws its validity and energy from a new engagement with the intimate circle of family members, friends and kin. Moreover, while the illiberal aspects of nationalism “leads to the interpretation of diverse phenomenon through one glossary, thus erasing specificities, setting norms and limits, lopping off tangentials’ (Marangoly 14) and hence tries to hegemonise, family gives the necessary self-identity. So, the familial space or home is a desire for a coherent subjectivity, the desire for origin. Precisely because of this, the home is represented as fixed, rooted and stable, and hence people supposedly ‘feel at home’ within the familial space. Most of the articulations on the various aspects of home make sweeping assumptions of the therapeutic value of this emotional space. For example, Porteous’ essay “Home: The Territorial Core” states:
Home provides both the individual and the small primary group known as the family with all three territorial satisfactions (identity, security, stimulation). These satisfactions derive from the control of physical space, and this control is secured by two major means. The personalization of space is an assertion of identity and a means of ensuring stimulation (383).

In most cases, the words 'home' and 'family' evoke an aura of safety and stability. Yi-Fu Tuan, in *Space and Place* (1977) suggests that “Home-bases are intimate places to human beings everywhere” (147).

But most importantly, in the present world of fragmentation and psychosis, where the identity of the self is under constant threat by a schizophrenic and disturbed existence, or by the nation’s desire to erase this identity and impose its own, home/family gives one the badly needed identity by giving a sense of belonging. Home is an attempt to locate oneself, at a time when so many people have a feeling of being lost and unsure. This identity that one receives from the familial space is crucial because it alone enables one to resist the nation’s continuing desire for a hegemonic, totalitarian control over the individual self.

But it would be a gross mistake to consider family/home as an unproblematic and neutral space. Far from that, family is an area of conflict as well as support, violence as well as nurturing. As a psychic space, it witnesses conflict of ego, struggle for power and an instinctive desire to dominate, because, these too are common ways to establish a member’s subjective identity. The varied bonds of love, fear, power, desire and control that an individual establishes with different members in this familial space, helps him to create, nourish and protect this identity. Sachidanand Vatysyan Agyeya gives us two very important
formulations in connection with space and identity: condition 1, where one is at the centre of a space; condition 2, where space is that in which one is at the center. While the first condition specifies physical location only, the second takes into account the authority behind the location, how space is created subjectively (Jain 44). The creation, nurturing and protection of the familial space is an example of the second condition, because it is an attempt to consolidate the identity of the self through the creation of a subjective space. Again, it is important to note that this will to dominate and consolidate power cannot always be satisfied through violence. It may come through what is claimed to be ‘love’ as well. Family is the fundamental territory where all these varied desires are manifested.

But, interestingly, this very desire to use the familial space for consolidation of the ego-based subjective identity of an individual complicates this space considerably. The family is a very large space, although it might be small in comparison to the nation. So the concept of the pedagogic and the performative that Bhabha associates with the nation equally problematises the family. Keeping this in mind, we must realize that family is not a readymade identity either, where one can automatically slip into, without effort. The same conflict between the pedagogic and the performative is equally strong in the familial space, giving birth to a number of micro-narratives of its basic unit, the individual. Through these micro-narratives, the individual self resists the hegemonic desire of the ‘family’ to define the identity of its constituent members by its own pedagogic tools. One such important micro-narrative that the individual produces is through the creation of innumerable familial bonds according to his own choice, outside the connection of blood. Murdock’s definition of family proves to be inadequate in the recent times. In recent decades, understandings of
family have been broadened to include a wider range of social structures. Apart from the natal, conjugal and the affinal family (all based on bonds of blood) that Raymond, Hubert and Forge speak of, the concept of extended family is becoming more and more relevant these days. Kinship was traditionally defined only as a “set of ties socially recognized to exist between persons because of their genealogical connection, that is, in terms of the relationships thought to be created between them by marriage and/or procreation of children” (Raymond et al. 3). So as these sociologists remind us, family, in the contemporary times, is essentially a relative term. It is not simply a term of demarcation of certain categories of kin. It tends to be a term of affective significance, and the inclusion or exclusion of kin in ‘family’ is a mode of classifying people not so much by degrees of consanguinity and affinity as by the effective quality of their relation to ego. In other words ‘family’ is really a way of expressing a sense of identity with specified persons who are members of one’s kin universe. The kinship relation of the persons specified may vary greatly from one Ego to another and even on different occasions for the same Ego. This sense of identity may have complex components, negative as well as positive, but for a person to be recognized as part of the ‘family’ means that the relation to him or her is not neutral (Raymond et al. 92; emphasis original).

So, the familial space remains flexible and manifests itself in various forms, following the basic pattern of inclusion/exclusion. Its prime importance and politics lie in the fact that it is not equally available to all – it remains a
desired place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few. The familial space, therefore, redefines and stretches itself again and again in keeping with the incessant search of the self for identity, creating micro-narratives transnationally. Consequently, it is in a state of constant flux, and its interface with various other spaces like that of the nation is becoming more and more complex. For example, sometimes the family has just become a microcosm of the nation, reminding us of Frederic Jameson’s suggestion that the third world texts perform the function of national allegories (69). But later on, particularly in the post- Rushdie era, family often has signalled a dislocation in our understanding of the myth of our so-called ‘national identity’. Amitav Ghosh, for instance, has suggested displacing the ‘nation’ altogether by ‘family’ in his novels.  

A new dimension that has been added to the familial space in the present age of postcolonialism and multiculturalism is that it does not necessarily confine itself to a fixed geographical space of a nation any more. It can effortlessly defy the boundaries of the nation and can be created transnationally. In the global world, therefore, it is no more a simple journey away from home/family, but from one home/family to another. It is no more necessarily a space where from one travels in the morning and comes back at night. It may be rather an imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography. And this is precisely what the diaspora has been doing across the globe for quite some time. Family and re-creation of family to the diasporic people is a completely different story.

What makes the diasporic experience crucial to our discussion is that it involves a significant crossing of borders – a cross-cultural or cross-civilizational passage. This passage between a source country and a target country, source
culture and a target culture, has multiple layers of significance, because the passage (forced or voluntary) involves considerable tension between the source and the target culture. The community living in the interstitial space of in-between nations, continually evokes and erases the totalizing boundaries of the modern nation-state in the process, as it engages itself fully in the creation of a new (extended) family in transnational spaces. The genesis of this new family is interesting and worth our attention for it grows out of a mixed feeling of loss and pain for the mother/father land left behind on the one hand and a feeling of fear and anxiety in the host country. The creative process of this family is not without complexity, for the feelings that go behind the genesis of this family vary widely from one group of migrants to the other. It may be an attempt to relive the family/home that has remained locked in memory and/or nostalgia, or it may be substantially replaced by amnesia and assimilation. For the exile, for example, the memory is a kind of heavy luggage which he can never do away with, wherever he goes. In After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives (1986), an evocative narrative on the lives of present day Palestinians, Edward Said writes of the ways in which Palestinians living in exile handle such luggage:

When A.Z.’s father was dying, he called his children, one of whom is married to my sister, into his room for a last family gathering....

Now he murmured to his children the final faltering words of a penniless, helpless patriarch. “Hold on to the keys and the deed,” he told them, pointing to a battered suitcase near his bed, the repository of the family estate salvaged from Palestine when Haifa’s Arabs were expelled. These intimate mementos of a past irrevocably lost circulate among us, like the genealogies and fables.

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of a wandering singer of tales. Photographs, dresses, objects
severed from their original locale, the rituals of speech and custom:
much reproduced, enlarged, thematized, embroidered, and passed
around, they are strands in the webs of affiliations we Palestinians
use to tie ourselves to our identity and to each other (14).

The immigrant can, however, look at the past unsentimentally, and is rather keen
on relocating himself to this new familial space in the foreign location. One might
remember Annie John, the seventeen-year-old protagonist in Jamaica Kincaid’s
novel *Annie John* (1986) who determines to leave her native land without any
luggage of the memory. On the morning of her departure from Antigua for
England where she will train as a nurse, Annie resolves never to return and never
to remember:

> Everything I would do that morning until I got on the ship that
> would take me to England I would be doing for the last time, for I
> had made up my mind that, come what may, the road for me now
> went only in one direction: away from my home, away from my
> mother, away from my father, away from the everlasting hot sun,
> ... The things I never wanted to see or hear do again now made up
> at least three weeks’ worth of grocery lists... (134-135)

And for those who are voluntary migrants, who have left the shores of the
home country in search of fortune, they too are engaged in a web of multi-
culturalism, a richer and a more complex way of being that is equally at home and
abroad, sometimes replacing the one for the other, mentally. This is a new global
identity feeling equally at home in New Delhi and New York. But even this
feeling depends on successful recreation of home/family/ extended family abroad
transnationally, where the identity of nationality, caste, race – all get boiled in a melting pot to give birth to a new cosmopolitan subjective identity irrespective of the nation.

In *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983) Edward Said draws a distinction between the two kinds of affinity that an individual can hold – filiations and affiliations. Theorizing primarily in the context of late nineteenth and early twentieth century writers, Said calls ‘filiations’ the ties that an individual has with places and people that are based on his natal culture, that is, ties of biology and geography. Affiliations, which replace filiations, are links that are forged with institutions, associations, communities and other social creations. The movement is always from filiations to affiliations (20). Filiations are natural and affiliations are naturalized. But in the contemporary context of globalization and multiculturalism, these ties have got amorphously linked. They confuse fixed borders and sequences in the process(es) of filiation and affiliation and the defined moments of change from one to the other tie. Thus, one tie coalesces into the other either materially or psychologically, sometimes even unconsciously. Thus, in postcolonial discourses both filiations and affiliations are contested and confusing.

Yet, again another interesting point to consider is how the nature of this new extended family is. Is it a space of safety and refuge or is it an uncomfortable space, an unsatisfactory or even a futile consolation for the family left behind? But then, if the former family from which the person has fled was the scene of violence, can one still be nostalgic for such a family? These are some of the issues that continually problematise the psychic space of family.
Whatever might be the nature of this family and the problems associated with its relocation, the fact remains that family/home will continue to be created across the borders. Salman Rushdie says:

A full migrant suffers, traditionally, a triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behaviour and code is very unlike, and sometimes even offensive to, his own. And this is what makes migrants such important figures: because roots, language and social norms have been three of the most important parts of the definition of what it is to be a human being. The migrant, denied all three, is obliged to find new ways of describing himself, new ways of being human (Rushdie ix-x).

Recreation of family alone solves this crisis. It is only in this home/family that the diaspora world compensates for the alienation he suffered in the foreign physical space. When Yi-Fu Tuan speaks of ‘topophilia’ in his book *Topophilia: A Study of Environment, Perception, Attitudes and Values* (1974), he focuses on his instinctive ‘desire to feel at home’ characteristic of all people everywhere – rooted or uprooted. This desire is necessary to be kept alive. And it is precisely because of this that invention of home in a foreign, unfamiliar geographical space is a basic necessity in the diasporic world, where people are constantly getting detached from their roots. It gives the diaspora the subjective identity that he so badly needs. In the disrupted world of the colonial space, the diaspora finds an answer to that ‘unheimlich’, that ‘unhousedness’ or the identity crisis that characterizes him. Interestingly, it is this nature of home that enables it to be
relocated transnationally, beyond the ‘shadow lines’ of the home country, in
different foreign physical spaces.

Right from the beginning, the Indian English fictional discourse has tried
to capture this complex interface between the national and the familial spaces,
which, from the early years of this genre till this day of globalization, has gone
through an interesting evolution. Bhabha succinctly sums up this complexity in his
observation that the home is no longer only the domain of the domestic; neither is
the world simply an antithesis of the space(s) that constitute home. Bhabha
defines the ‘unhomely’ as the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home and
the home-in-the-world (Bhabha, ‘The World and the Home’ 445). In the following
chapters, it will be my endeavour to trace this evolution with particular emphasis
on the fictional worlds of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh.

Notes

1. An equally balanced definition seems to be the one by David Miller in On
Nationality (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): “(A nation is) a
community (i) constituted by shared belief and mutual commitment, (ii)
extended in history, (iii) active in character, (iv) connected to a particular
territory, and (v) marked off from other communities by its distinct public
culture”(27).

2. To quote Rousseau: “Ce sont les institutions nationales qui forment le genie,
le caractere, les gouts er les moeurs d’un people...qui lui inspirent cet
ardent amour de la patrie.” “It is the national institutions that form the
genius, the character, the tastes and the mores of a people... which inspire in
it this ardent love of the fatherland”. “Coniderations sur le gouvernement de
3. 'Home' and 'family' have been used in the present study as synonymous, as 'home' refers to a 'private space of retreat' acting as a site of 'cultivation of family relationships' (Cheal 17). The close identification of family with home, is a relatively recent phenomenon in the west, as T. K. Hareven shows in his essay “The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective.” In Europe and America, it came into existence between the end of the eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth century, when, 'home' began to assume an enormous symbolic meaning, referring to a space where people experienced togetherness and happiness. By the latter part of the twentieth century, the identification of family and home had become part of a traditional family ideology. Cheal discusses this at length in his book *Families in Today's World.* In India, 'home' (translated as 'ghar' in Bangla) has traditionally been distinguished from 'house' (translated as 'baari' in Bangla) as an emotional space to be created and nourished. In that sense, it is synonymous to 'sangsar' (difficult to translate in English) and a happy home spontaneously evokes a picture of a happy family. Both 'ghar' and 'sangsar' therefore refer to a construct and not a given, and in Indian tradition, emphasis has always been given on the creation of these two, as preconditions of a thriving life.

4. Jasbir Jain refers to this discussion of space by Sachitanand Vatsayan Agyeya contained in his two lectures: “Smriti Aur Desh” and “Smriti Aur

5. Amitav Ghosh in an e-mail correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty dated December 14, 2000 writes:

   …Two of my novels (*The Shadow Lines*, and my most recent *The Glass Palace*) are centered on families. I know that for myself this is a way of displacing the ‘nation’…In other words, I’d like to suggest that writing about families is one way of not writing about the nation (or other restrictively imagined collectivities).

   The correspondence was published as “A Correspondence on Provincializing Europe” in *Radical History Review*, Issue 83, Spring 2002, 146-172. It is also carried on www.AmitavGhosh.com.

6. Another interesting example may be Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). The novel begins on a bitterly cold winter afternoon at Waterloo station, where Moses, an immigrant from Trinidad, waits to pick up a new immigrant from Jamaica. When Henry Oliver saunters off the train, Moses is shocked to see that he is not carrying any luggage:

   “Where your luggage?”

   “What luggage? I ain’t have any. I figure is no sense to load up myself with a set of things. When I start work I will buy some things.” (18)

7. By ‘Topophilia’ Tuan means the sentimental attachment that people have to certain places. Tuan defines Topophilia as a visual pleasure and sensual delight as well as “the fondness for place because it is familiar, because it is
home and incarnates the past because it provokes pride of ownership and creation” (247).

Works Cited


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