CHAPTER II
Family has always been an influential space in India and the Indian subcontinent. The political or the social history – even the Indian myths – are mostly woven around family stories, the narrators always falling back on the multiple familial bonds and politics involved in them that have crucially shaped the course of the stories. These family stories have formed the basis of the old tales of the *Puranas*. Nearer our times, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are perhaps the two most obvious examples. These two national epics also emphasise the point that at least in the Indian subcontinent, it is impossible to treat the family and the nation as two mutually exclusive sites. On the contrary, these two have got so inextricably linked together from the beginning that narration of one becomes impossible without referring to the other. In this chapter, we shall at first briefly look into the history of evolution of nationalism in India. We shall also take note of how, in the process of this evolution, the family got linked with the nation in a multi-dimensional interface which has been reflected in the fiction of Indian English writers.

Right from the time when India was gradually emerging as a nation, its relation with family has been complicated. At one time, when the Indian nation was opening up steadily to embrace western modernity, the Indian family cocooned itself more and more and entrenched itself as an inviolable space to continue as the bastion of the traditional Indian identity. Gradually it became increasingly difficult to keep these two sites separate. During the freedom
movement they overlapped into each other so much that one stood for the other—the Indian nation began to be projected as one family and the family, on its part, was to act as a micro-nation. Then again, in the post-independence era, when the quest for subjective identity started to be prioritized, the family and the nation again rolled back to their former relation—one distinguished from the other. This time, it was the woman who was caught up in this interface in a very complex role, as Anita Desai records in her novels.

Keeping with these changes, Indian Fiction in English changed its focus, too, over the years. I have tried in this chapter to choose some representative fiction to mark the important facets in this evolution. In most cases I have restricted myself to one fiction per author with lone exception in the case of Anita Desai. I have deliberately taken up quite a few novels by Desai, because there has been an interesting change in her perception of this interface from the early novels to her final novel, finally preparing the ground of Indian Fiction in English for the advent of Salman Rushdie. My survey in this chapter will limit itself to this pre-Rushdie phase in Indian Fiction in English, as I will try to highlight the major facets leading to the emergence of Rushdie.

In Section I of this chapter we will attempt to trace the history of nationalism in the particular context of India, while in Section II we will see how the nation and the family, interacting with each other and having profound impact on the individual, are represented in the fictional works of some Indian English writers.
The task of defining India as a nation, however, has always been a daunting one to all historians, sociologists or academicians who have attempted it. The difficulty arises not merely out of India’s geographical vastness, but mainly out of a note of plurality that marks all spheres of Indian life – its religions, languages, social and economic spheres. It has always been a challenge to accommodate this plurality within a homogeneous definition. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, while exploring the history of evolution of nationalism in India in his book *Nationalist Movement in India – A Reader* (2009), quotes imperial observer Valentine Chirol who described India thus in 1910:

Inhabited by a great variety of nations ... there are far more absolutely distinct languages spoken in India than in Europe, that there are far more profound racial difference between the Maharatta and the Bengalee than between the German and the Portugese ... and that caste has driven into Indian society lines of far deeper cleavage than any class distinctions that have survived in Europe (qtd. in Bandyopadhyay xviii).

Surendranath Banerjee, too, accepts this and describes India as a nation in making as indicated by the title of his book *A Nation in Making* (1925). This process of nation-making, as Sekhar Bandyopadhyay discusses, was facilitated by the colonial regime, which brought to the colony western education and print capitalism and created an intelligentsia which had been crucial to the process of ‘imagining’ the nation. Benedict Anderson suggests that the colonial intelligentsia chose their models from the European histories, which ‘were copied, adopted and improved upon’ (140). Partha Chatterjee, however, in his well-known book *The
National and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories (1993) contests this proposition and points out the differences between the western model and Indian nationalism. The most crucial problem of Indian nationalism was that the nation here did not evidently inhabit the ‘homogenous empty time’, but rather the ‘heterogeneous time of modernity,’ to use Partha Chatterjee’s expression (Politics of the Governed 7-12). In the Indian society, the working classes did never internalize the ethos of capitalism and the peasants, even when they participated in nationalist events. They had completely different understanding of those events because they had dissimilar life experiences, as Chatterjee observes, “Politics here does not mean the same thing to all people” (7). So Chatterjee rightly argues that in a country like India where the vast majority of the population was so unevenly touched by modernity, education and print capitalism only could not have played the most important role in the building of the nation.

Taking in consideration the inherent pluralism of Indian population, Chatterjee has sought to answer it in his book The Nation and its Fragments by dividing the nation’s space into an inner spiritual space where the colonized nation seeks its sovereignty, and an outer public sphere where it surrenders to western modular influences. Dipesh Chakraborty, too, in his book Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (2000), remarks that the Indian nation is spiritually experienced in this inner sphere. It was through such modes of spiritual imagination that Indian nationalism could permeate across various levels of popular consciousness. This is best illustrated in the popularization of the nationalist iconography of Bharat Mata or Mother India, which, through its spiritual aesthetic of visualizing nation as a nurturing mother, bridged the gulf between the literate elites and illiterate masses in a way that no print capitalism
could ever achieve. In her essay “The Goddess and the Nation: Subterfuges of Antiquity, the Cunning of Modernity”, Sumathi Ramaswamy explains this transformation of the nation into a kin group by making all its citizens sons of the same mother as a ‘cunning of modernity’. Even if we accept this suggestion, we cannot miss the evidence of cultural alterity in the nationalist imagination getting assimilated into one hegemonic space through the innovative use of various symbols.

Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi tried to solve this problem of pluralism by proposing a theory of assimilation. Tagore, in one of his poems, 
*Pilgrimage to India* (1931) (Chaudhuri 200), has described India as a meeting ground for various disparate communities. Mahatma Gandhi, too, focuses on this aspect of assimilation in Indian civilisation when he remarks: “The introduction of foreigners does not necessarily destroy the nation, they merge in it. A country is one nation only when such a condition obtains in it” (115-16). Thus, Tagore’s and Gandhi’s concept of the Indian Nation offered an alternative model of nationalism, uniting India at the social level rather than the political. Not that they rejected the idea of nation; on the contrary, they suggested ways to conceptualise it outside the political exclusivity of territorial states. In his book *The Legitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self*, Ashis Nandy has therefore described them as ‘counter-modernist critic(s)’ of the imperial West.¹

There is a group of historians² that refutes the idea of Indian nationalism as a derivative discourse, but insists that it is rather built on a pre-existing sense of territoriality – a confederate nation where different peoples united as one political unit out of necessity. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay completely agrees with the view as he cites the example of the revolt of 1857, when the rebels constantly referred to
the people of India as the ‘Hindus and Mussulmans of Hindustan,’ retaining the
difference within this people. The idea of confederate nation is also reflected in
the following words of Sir Muhammad Iqbal, who is often described as the
originator of the idea of Pakistan:

The units of Indian society are not territorial as in European
countries ... the principle of European democracy cannot be
applied to India without recognizing the fact of communal groups.
The Muslim demand for the creation of a Muslim India within
India is, therefore, perfectly justified ... (qtd in Bandyopadhyay
xiv).³

Iqbal is, in no way, speaking of a sovereign nation-state for the Muslims, but he is
definitely speaking of a confederate nation. Gandhi too had faith in this idea when
he gave leadership to the Non-cooperation-Khilafat Movement in 1920. But later
on he changed his vision to declare that ‘we are Indians first and Hindus,
Mussulmans, Parsis and Christians after’ (qtd. in Bandyopadhyay xxiv). It was
precisely during this time (1920-22) that the Indian National Congress
wholeheartedly switched over to the western concept of nationhood. It was
expected that this nation would speak in one voice, and not in a polyphonic note
which could be allowed only in the confederate models of nation.

But the fact remains that it was difficult, in fact impossible, to muffle all
the discordant voices which disturbed the hegemonic discourse of nationalism all
along. One glaring example of such dissidence is that of the Dalit community.
This and numerous other voices of different regional-language users or the non-
Brahmin Dravidian culture of the south have constantly problematised the
definition of modern Indian nationalism. Again there was a basic difference
between the elite’s conception of the nation and that of the majority of the population, consisting of illiterate peasants. Those who came to see Gandhi in his numerous mass meetings were drawn to him for completely different reasons from that of their elite counterparts. If the Congress leaders wanted to achieve a nation state, their peasant followers dreamt of a utopian Gandhi Raj, where there would be no taxes, no landlords, no rents and no moneylenders. This nation and its nationalism therefore defy the modernist definition based on the experiences of European history.

Various other sociologists have come up with varied proposals on the aspect of pluralism, showing how deeply problematised the entire project of Indian nationalism is. Aditya Nigam, for example, has argued in his *The Insurrection of Little Selves: the Crisis of Secular-Nationalism in India* (2000) that ‘in a sense, the project of Indian nationhood was/is an impossible project. For nations, if they are to be nations, must become so by creating a homogenous cultural identity’ (16). On the other hand, sociologists like S. L. Sharma and T. K. Oommen in the introduction to their edited book *Nation and National Identity in South Asia* (2000) have defined India as a multi-national state. An interesting indigenous trope has been used by Sunil Khilnani. In his book *The Idea of India* (1997), he compares Indian nationalism with ‘a dhoti with endless folds’ to express its plural nature (6). Interestingly, on closer inspection, it will be obvious that Khilnani too is looking for underlying unity because the nation needs to be put into the mould of a nation-state. For Khilnani, this unity lay in the common democratic experience shared by all sections of the Indian population. But we have to remember constantly that in India, democracy functioned at two different levels: the ‘pedagogic’ level of the educated elites and the ‘performative’ level of
the masses.⁵ It is this duality that has prompted Ramchandra Guha to describe India as an ‘unnatural nation’, not fitting into any available political models derived from the experience of European history (744).

So ultimately, India is a nation with many voices. Pluralism manifested in the performative role played by the different voices has resisted the hegemonic tendency of Indian nationalism, right from its beginning. So, instead of searching for a homogeneous nation, we should, as Sekhar Bandyopadhyay suggests, celebrate its diversity. We should consider nation to be – to use Ania Loomba’s expression – ‘a ground of dispute and debate, a site for the competing imaginings of different ideological and political interests’ (207). Sanjoy Seth, in his essay “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism: The Politics of ‘Moderate Nationalism’ in India, 1870-1905,” suggests that we embrace the possibility of many histories, and thus also of many ways of being Indian. It is only by recognizing these ‘many histories’ that we will be able to avoid the risk of homogenizing a majoritarian discourse of national identity.

There is a consensus now among historians across the political spectrum that even when the early nationalists were imagining a modern nation, it was marked by ambivalence. It was not possible for these nationalists to visualise complete separation from the empire; even some of them believed in the providential nature of colonial rule as the harbinger of modernity. But how was this modernity to be incorporated into the matrix of Indian nationalism? The attempted solution was marked by ambivalence, as Indian life became divided into two distinct spheres: an outer sphere of society, where social reforms, ushered in by close contact with the west, were to be worked out; and an inviolable inner sphere of family, whose sanctity is to be protected at all cost through the
performance of tradition and conformity to stereotypical roles of its members. Thus the family became a space to consolidate the Indian identity – an identity posited in a binary position with the colonial West. Consequently, the family became entangled with the nation in a complicated way.

In *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: a Derivative Discourse* (1993), Partha Chatterjee points out that the political discourse of Indian nationalism under British colonial rule, emerged and developed as a series of cultural constructions that both challenged and reproduced the discursive formations of Orientalism and colonial English education. At its best, Indian Nationalism was a synthesis, combining the best of both the worlds, allowing India to be at par with the modern world even while reaffirming her traditional cultural difference, which she proudly paraded all along. At its worst, this meeting point of the east and the west proved itself to be a site of challenge – colonialist essentialism and the assumption of a one-way flow of ideas from ‘west’ to ‘east’ were challenged by the suggestion that modern European ideas can be fruitfully incorporated when they are filtered through Indian values, or that both sides of the colonial equation could be reinterpreted and combined to form something new.

Sudhir Chandra, in his brilliant book *The Oppressive Present* (1992) explores this tension. He observes that the Indian response to the west “was not along the exclusive lines of either accepting or rejecting the west” (5). Citing the interesting examples of Raja Radhakanta Deb and Raja Rammohan Roy, Chandra deduces that when even ‘rebels’ and ‘apostates’ belie the conventional image of having been mesmerized by the west, ... what Rammohan Roy – the archetypical adversary of Radhakanta Deb – embodied was the
best of both the west and of his own culture. And similarly, if even Radhakanta Deb did not symbolize a complete rejection of the west, it is reasonable to assume that the dominant Indian responses to the west, as to traditional culture, need to be seen not as exclusive acceptances or rejections, but as different mixes of acceptance and rejection (6).

The most interesting aspect of the social history in the (later half of the) nineteenth century is how the family proved to be a very sensitive site of the interpenetration of this acceptance and rejection. While the external world of education, politics and culture at large was favourably open to the western modernity, ushering in new reforms, making the earlier autonomy of Indian thought no longer possible, the family was still holding its bastion against any onslaught and carrying on upholding the tradition of Hindu orthodoxy. This was thought to lend the institution of family (mostly joint families at the time) an inviolable sanctity – the marker of ‘Indian’ identity. So while the outer world served as a ‘spring board of radical innovation’, the family continued as a ‘reservoir of orthodoxy’ (Chandra 71). This often resulted into a painful tension, particularly in the behaviour of the educated young generation of the century, who could not reconcile amicably between the social reforms they propagated and fought for and their obligation to their family. In Chapter II of *The Oppressive Present*, entitled “Tradition: Orthodox and Heretical”, Chandra discussed various interesting cases of such tension. Mahadev Govind Ranade, a prominent member of the Widow Remarriage Association of western India, lost his first wife in 1873. It was only expected that he would choose a widow for his second marriage. But he did not. To his friends’ consternation, and within a month of his first wife’s
death, this ‘thirty one year old bright star of the social reform movement married a minor less than half his age, she was chosen by his father’ (Chandra 72).

It is worth remembering that in the second half of the nineteenth century, English educated Indians were gradually becoming restive with an increasing desire for freedom from material, intellectual and psychological subjection, even as they felt themselves to be indebted to the British colonial presence. Feeding them an idealized image of enlightened English liberalism through English literary study, colonial education simultaneously otherised them with their moral and military inferiority, their superstition and decadence and overall backward civilization. The familial space became the last bastion to these Babus to consolidate their Indian, Hindu identity in face of this waning confidence. Thus the home and the world got inextricably linked.

II

Written nearly twenty years before Anandamath, where Bankimchandra was to craft a new Indian identity challenging the foreign rule with military action, Rajmohan’s Wife (1864) bears testimony to this confusion of the English educated Indians in locating their identity. After an early grounding in Sanskrit scholarship from his father, Bankim sat for the entrance examination of the newly established Calcutta University in 1857. He took his B.A. in 1858 and shortly thereafter, a law degree from Presidency College. That same year, he took up the post of Deputy Magistrate in the British Colonial administration, where he was to stay for thirty-one years with a brief spell of promotion in the middle. At the same time, he had a parallel and distinguished literary career as one of the leading intellectuals in Bengal. Nevertheless Tapan Raychaudhuri in his essay “Bankimchandra
Chattopadhyay" records that at least at the beginning of his career, he was sufficiently proud of his English education and at least once “confessed that both in writing and speaking he was more at ease in English than in Bengali” (125-126). In view of this double life, it was not surprising that conflict was central to Bankim’s personality. This conflict gave his work, what Sudipta Kaviraj calls its characteristic “unhappy consciousness”, as he alternated between “tragic fiction and comic commentary … both rationalism and its critiques … both enlightenment and religion”, and in the process, “managed to retain the complexities of these contradictions through his characteristic mode of irony” (168). The resulting ambivalence (love for social reform but not without qualifications) was, however, not unique to Bankim, but was representative of the class to which he belonged. His first novel bears clear witness to this conflict exemplifying the struggle of Indian writers under colonialism to formulate a coherent subject. The exigencies of Bankimchandra’s colonial employment, the language and narrative conventions of his English education in an Indian colonial setting, and the tension between the norms of feudal social orthodoxy and emergent middle-class sensibility combine in this work to narrow the range of his creative options to an unacceptable degree.

Like many of Bankim’s later novels, Rajmohan’s Wife chooses as its strands some of the contemporary Bengali middle-class family concerns – the stealing of a will, extramarital passion, childhood attachment growing into adolescent love but repressed by the family morals. But what complicates matters is Bankim’s inclination for the social reform, which, he thinks, is only possible through the positive intervention of the colonial reformers. Mathur and Madhav in the novel are close relations but with a palpable difference in their personality.
Bankim, though not explicitly, attributes the refinement in Madhav to his English education and exposure to the new liberal humanist education he received in Calcutta. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her essay on *Rajmohan's Wife*, in her celebrated book *The Perishable Empire* (2000) explores “how the dialogic myth of Calcutta that was to evolve through the nineteenth century (the city as a site for culture and refinement as well as for debauchery and moral degradation) is already visible” in *Rajmohan’s Wife*, as for example in the conversation between Mathur and Madhav in Chapter II (“The Two Cousins”) of the novel (36-37).

Thus Madhav has been given a normally superior position to that of Mathur, who stares at the women with lust, indulges in bawdy gossip and uses illegal means to satisfy his craving for money. Again while Madhav was reclining on a mahogany couch in his chamber, Bankim foregrounds among all other things, a few English books scattered here and there, signifying ‘a civilized way of life’, as is the western furniture. This is unmistakably a signifier of an enlightened culture, to which rustic Mathur can never aspire. In his enthusiasm to valorize the English culture, Bankim overreaches and gives an unusually negative description of the paintings of the Hindu goddesses: “Two paintings of the largest size, from one of which lowered the grim black figure of Kali, and on the other of which was displayed the crab-like form of Durga, faced each other from high position on two opposite walls” (*Rajmohan’s Wife* 75 emphases added). This is not only in sharp contrast to the idealized pictures of the Hindu Goddesses in his later novels, say in *Anandamath* (1884), but also to a unmistakably favourable description of a specimen of European art that follows:

> On the two remaining walls, and placed lower than the terrific Kali and the gorgeous Durga, might be seen arrayed a few specimens of
European art, and the *exquisite* conception of the Virgin and Child might itself be seen adorning the chamber, the inmates of which had little knowledge what the *artist's genius* and *engraver's skills* had strove to represent (*Rajmohan's Wife* 75 emphases added).

Another striking thing about *Rajmohan's Wife* is the positive role ascribed to the white man and the unequivocal proclamation of the British rule at the end. Within the familial site, the woman is oppressed and can be delivered, if at all, by the British administration. When Matangini, Rajmohan's wife, is almost destroyed by the invincible alliance of patriarchy within and criminality outside the domestic arena, the 'fair-minded white administrator' – a shrewd restlessly active Irishman, appears 'almost as divine retribution' to the evils in both the Hindu domestic and the social fields (Mukherjee, *Perishable Empire* 37). This unquestionable faith in colonial justice was one aspect of the ambivalence marking the elite educated class of the nineteenth century.

But this could not breed in Bankim the courage to knock out orthodoxy from the Hindu middle class family totally. Towards the end of the novel, Bankim, perhaps frustrated in not being able to free himself from this ambivalence, abruptly loses interest in the novel. Rather he hurries to the conclusion – one of the robbers is captured, Rajmohan is sent to prison, and Mathur hangs himself before he is caught. Rather at a loss with what to do with Matangini, Bankim sends her back to her father's house, where she spends her days in celibacy as a near-widow. Matangini could have found happiness if only she could have realized her passion for Madhav. But that would ruin the sanctity of the 'family'. So the best that the author can do for his heroine, is to make her life thereafter mercifully short. Madhav, in spite of all his English education, is
another bundle of confusion. Bankim cannot liberate him as well, because the family traditions should be upheld and the domestic arena proves to be an inviolable space. He is madly in love with Matangini, but can not be desperate enough to pursue it, because he has already married his sister. Therefore both Matangini and Madhav have to practise a lot of self-control to forswear their love. Madhav, out of frustration, is left to shed unhappy tears. This self-denial and generosity valorize Madhav but makes him bloodless in comparison to the ‘bad’ characters like Mathur or Bangshibadan.

It is really surprising to find that in the novel, written almost in the fashion of a Gothic romance and packed with abductions, robbery, impossible love, and adventures at night, Madhav, the English educated hero remains till the end, an enigma. With all his English education, he has nowhere to go. After completing his higher education in Calcutta, he willingly succumbs to the feudal structure of the village family where his liberal ideas are decidedly out of place. His situation is explored elaborately in chapter 16 “What Befell Our Hero”, where the novelist discusses his “deep and tender feeling which he had stifled in his breast at such cost” but no positive solutions come to him. Madhav does not find happiness. His exposure to colonial education loses its battle to his high Hindu principles that dictate the middle class Indian family. Ultimately, the novel ends in a dull fashion dictated by the logic of colonial situation – British justice consolidating order and justice in the society infested with corruption, violence and disorder but leaves the familial site to practise its sanctified moral order even if it fails to deliver the women from the dungeons of orthodoxy. Like Madhav, his creator continued to struggle with this enigma, both in his life as a Bengali intellectual in the British colonial employ and in his fiction.
But things started changing gradually. Twenty five years after the publication of *Rajmohan’s Wife* we find at least a wish for a change in *Indulekha* (1889) by O. Chandu Menon. It was gradually being felt that instead of using the site of family as a rockbed of Hindu orthodoxy, it would be better to give it a considerable overhauling and subject it to a modernizing project, thereby making it more compatible with the Victorian standards. Consequently, one of the earliest expressions of cultural nationalism was the moulding of an ideal Indian woman, who combined the best of high caste Hindu and the Victorian ideals of womanhood. Besides their role in preparing the ground for future political action on the part of the English educated middle classes, these new women represented an effort to enact in the domestic realm the desire of their male counterpart in the realm of the political.

Of course, in real life as well as in the world of fiction, the modernization project taken up by the male reformers (or novelists) was not entirely altruistic in intentions. These male reformers and the novelists tried to assert their agency through the creation of this new modern woman and a new Indian middle class family. Even *Indulekha*, going by the author’s own admission, is a wish, an illustration of what Menon wants the Malayalee lady to be:

... my object is to write a novel after the English fashion, and it is evident that no Malayalee lady can fill the role of the heroine of such a story. My Indulekha is not therefore, an ordinary Malayalee lady (*Indulekha* xx).  

But even this desire to let modernity creep into the hitherto inviolable family sphere was of course a resolute step forward.
Indulekha, who has been educated both in English and in Sanskrit, is a model woman in the Nair family. She is beautiful, and intelligent too. She meticulously observes the caste ritual, the propriety in her dress and family tradition; she is unfailingly reverent to his parents, guardians and her religious faith, but by virtue of her English education she has also mastered a considerable degree of self confidence with which she resists any attempt of her family to oppress her: she refuses to marry old lecherous Nambudiripad and has vowed to marry Madhavan, the most eligible bachelor she can think of. Thus, through this marriage, Menon records the new tendency of bringing about the marriage of modernity with tradition. Jyotsna Rege observes in her well-researched book *Colonial Karma* (2004):

The representation of a harmonious marriage in the new literary genre helped to domesticate the cultural hybrid of Indian nationalism and to allow it to take root in the private sphere by redefining the middle class family (30).

Thus *Indulekha* presents the fairy-tale marriage between Indu and Madhavan as a union not only between two well matched souls, but also between the highest Indian and English ideals. The challenge to Indu, Madhaban and similar liberal young Indians of the contemporary age was to resist the power of feudalism and religious orthodoxy played out against them in the familial site, and to secure greater individual freedom, turning the family in particular and the society in general to be a little more liberating space for themselves. This they do partially with patience and partially with tact, not challenging the traditions of the family straightway, but maneuvering the limited space they have, with patience, till they bring about considerable revolution in the domestic sphere. But this does
not mean that the familial site suddenly opened its door to the West, and did away with all its difference with the outside world for ever. Resistance to modernity and consolidation of the Indian identity through a religious upholding of the tradition continued for at least half a decade more.

In R. K. Narayan, who was a social conservative and a political agnostic, nationalism often becomes indistinguishable from the rejection of English education and the re-embrace of indigenous tradition. While *Indulekha* promoted the superiority of love marriage, for example, in *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) Narayan demonstrates the superficial hold of alien notions of romantic love. Narayan consistently normalizes and upholds Indian social conventions and presents the adoption of English norms as evidence of extended adolescence that must inevitably be outgrown, to create his authentic Indianness within and out of India. Or one may consider *The Dark Room* (1938), where Savitri, the middle class Brahmin woman, has been named after the devoted wife of Indian mythology and is expected to conform to this stereotype. In a family consisting of her husband and two children, she is entirely powerless. Her husband Ramani ill-treats her continually and her only defense is to withdraw periodically in silence into the dark, storeroom next to the kitchen. She leaves home to drown herself in the river when she finds Ramani engaged in an extra-marital affair. She is rescued and taken to a temple where she starts working to earn her livelihood. However, Savitri finds herself too weak to renounce family life:

> And she grew homesick. A nostalgia for children, home and accustomed comforts seized her. ... her soul racked with fears, she couldn’t help contrasting the comfort, security, and un-loneliness of her home. When she shut the door and put out the lights, how
comforting the bed felt and how well one could sleep! Not this
terrible state (*The Dark Room* 189).

Ultimately the novel ends with Savitri going back and voluntarily
accepting her to the stereotypical role, even when family has robbed her of her
agency, and making a part of her considerably dead. Instead of such tyranny,
Narayan unequivocally asserts that Savitri belongs to her family and can feel at
home nowhere else. Independent action is not theirs and in spite of its tyranny,
Indian family is the inviolable space. For Narayan, the Indian family is the most
authentic site of Indianness.

The next phase of Indian fiction in English spans from 1920 to 1947, and
has been named after the most influential figure in the Freedom Movement in
India – Mahatma Gandhi. Although the Gandhian Non-Cooperation Movement
had gathered considerable strength by the early 1920s, the Congress still remained
a party consisting largely of upper-caste and upper middle class professionals and
industrialists. Gradually, the necessity to be more inclusive was felt as Non-
Brahmin movements in the West and the South were on the rise and there was a
steady emergence of the outcastes and untouchables. The challenge for the
congress was to synthesise as many different voices as possible within its fold and
create a grand narrative of united harmonious nation out of this synthesis.

Interestingly, it is perhaps because English had always been the effective
medium of intra-national communication for the Congress that the novel in
English proved to be an effective tool in the creation of this united India. As
Meenakshi Mukherjee opines, “It may not be a coincidence that the novel in
English emerged in India in the 1930s, the decade prior to independence, when
there was an urgency to foreground the idea of a composite nation” (*Perishable*
Empire 174). She goes on to explain that writing novels in English facilitated the construction of this pan-Indian national identity wiping out national differences by “erasing the difference within the border and accentuating the difference with what lies outside” (174), during a time when the Congress was struggling to uphold its claim to be the sole spokesperson for the Indian subject.

Consequently the field of action in politics as well as in fiction, moved out of the private site of the family to the public arena, with the leading roles increasingly occupied by men. Or as in Kanthapura, the family was remodelled after the nation, and was invited to carry out the same principles as guided the nation.

Raja Rao’s Kanthapura, also written in 1938, engages the familial space in a different relation with the nation. Kanthapura is a mythified and idealized story of an organic village society that is caught up in and transformed by the Gandhian independence movement. The guiding principle for Rao behind writing this novel was to achieve a collective spirit of the united India, which will do away with all the individual voices and become a united, one voice. To this end, Raja Rao uses a first person plural narrator (the novel begins with ‘our’), thereby including the entire village in her account of the action, and addressing her audience as if it consisted of fellow villagers only. Kanthapura does admit the rifts within Indian society, but the consistent aim is to close these rifts somehow so that the independence movement may be successful. The focus is on the creation of a cohesive society that can act together to end colonial rule. Hence the repeated use of the word ‘we’ instead of ‘I’. Though Rao’s utterly Brahminical worldview limits the extent of the transformation in the novel, Rao’s constant anxiety to
endow the villages with collective agency puts the actual subject(s) of the novel’s action to a penumbral existence.

At the very outset, Rao sets the tone of the novel, as the Indian National Congress enters the village of Kanthapura by way of religion, through a nationalist storyteller who comes to the village to recite *harikathas*. Thereafter, Gandhi and his nationalist message make their entry to each and every household through upright, idealistic Moorthy. Kanthapura is rigidly stratified by caste and religion (the only Muslim in the village is the hated policeman, Bade Khan, an outsider who is sent as an agent of the British to monitor and squash the Congress gathering. Bade Khan ultimately becomes the generic policeman: “... and we close our eyes and we imagine Bade Khans after Bade Khans, short, bearded, lip-smacking, smoking, spitting, booted Bade Khans” (*Kanthapura* 127) and Moorthy gradually breaks away with all these barriers one by one in order to create a greater community – the whole village turned into one big family. So Moorthy struggles with his mental barriers, enters the families of the untouchables, drinks the water they offer and involves them in the movement. Moreover he also unsettles the gender hierarchies by involving women centrally in the struggle, under the leadership of Rangamma.

The movement begins close at home, with the women picketing the government toddy shops. It then picks up momentum, in mass protests against the treatment and working conditions of the migrant workers from the British-owned coffee plantation. Finally, the worldview of the local villagers of Kanthapura is progressively widened from the confines of family to Kanthapura as a whole and even beyond the village to the nation as large. This is precisely the achievement of
Rao – to turn Kanthapura into a micro-nation, each family being nothing but a constituent of it, playing out its ideals unquestionably.

Towards the end of the novel, however, Rao uses Moorthy to register the breach between Nehru and the Congress socialists on the one hand and Gandhi on the other on the issue of what the goal should be:

... what is the goal? Independence? Swaraj? Is there not Swaraj in our States, and is there not misery and corruption and cruelty there? ... it is the way of the masters that is wrong. And I have come to realize bit by bit, and bit by bit, ... that as long as there will be iron gates and barbed wires round the Skeffington coffee Estate ... there will always be pariahs and poverty (Kanthapura 188-89).

The tone of a socialist is unmistakably audible, with Nehru becoming the new hero. But Rao never allows the breach to acquire strength. As Rumina Sethi points out in her book *Myth of the Nation* (1999), Rao “subsumes the [socialists] within Gandhism” (Sethi 98) and with all his difference of opinion, Nehru is ‘Bharata’ (India) to Mahatma. As the familial bond in the *Ramayana* was consolidated through the brotherly love shown by Bharata, who, in spite of all threats, refused to rule the Kingdom in Rama’s stead while Rama was in exile, Rao’s incessant endeavour through comparing Jawaharlal Nehru with Bharata, is to present India as a family the bonds of which are consolidated by love alone. Hence the relationship of Nehru vis-à-vis Gandhi, as Rao likes to see it, is an entirely non-threatening one, and although the future is uncertain, the village women keep the faith and look forward to a *Ramrajya* promised by Gandhi, when all of India will return from exile, as Rama and Sita returned after fourteen years of exile after their victorious war with forces of evil:
They say there are men in Bombay and men in Punjab, and men and women in Bombay and Bengal and Punjab, who are all for the Mahatma. They say the Mahatma will go to the Redman’s country and he will get us Swaraj. He will bring us Swaraj, the Mahatma. And we shall all be happy. And Rama will come back from exile, and Sita will be with him, for Ravana will be slain and Sita freed, and he will come back with Sita on his right in a chariot of the air, and brother Bharata will go to meet them with the worshipped sandal of the Master on his head. And as they enter Ayodhya there will be a rain of flowers (Kanthapura 189). 8

Thus the resolution in the novel is deferred to a mythified future, keeping it quite ambivalent. But one thing is certain – Rao’s own social vision remains wholly Hindu and Brahmin, though he tries to open up on gender and caste issues. Brahmins remain firmly in control of the movement’s leadership throughout, even though members of the lower castes take as many risks and make as many sacrifices. Tabish Khair in his Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels (2001) notes how Rao frames his highly textualized, highly Sanskritized Brahmin definitions, tradition and worldview as “universally Indian”, implicitly rendering any other Indian viewpoint invalid (204-221). Similarly, although women actively take part in the movement and show positive signs of opening up, the central female characters are all Brahmin women. And more importantly, their participation in the social level is to be seen as an extension of their duty in the family. So nation is to be seen as an extended family, the women playing out the stereotypical role of grihalakshmi in both the spheres. When the women form a Congress group (Sevika Sangha) of their own in Kanthapura, their
husbands begin to complain that their wives are neglecting the household chores. So taking part in the nationalist movement is neither a liberation from the household nor an excuse to neglect the duties to the husband. As Rangamma says, “Of course, Satamma has to look after [her husband’s] comforts. If we are to help others, we must begin with our husbands and then the final resolution, ‘we should do our duty. If not, it is no use belonging to the Gandhi-group’” (Kanthapura 110).

So the moral duty of the Sevika begins with her seva of the husband, and their taking part in the national movement is to be considered only as an extension of their familial duty. Later, when the police are beating the women, Ratna encourages one of the other women thus: “Be strong, sister, when your husband beats you, you do not hit back, do you? You only grumble and weep. The policeman’s beatings are the like!” (Kanthapura 127)

The Gandhian model of action advanced here is that of the performance of one’s socially ordained duty, equating the familial space with the national. Though the novel ends with dislocations and without any promise of thorough going social transformation being realized, Raja Rao’s sthala-purana is a conscious attempt to articulate an ideal of rural self-rule with a firm foundation in place that starts basically within the family, and widening up gradually to include the nation. “The hope is collective while the loss has been individual,” as Meenakshi Mukherjee comments in her book Twice Born Fiction (2001) (50).

After the much awaited Independence came in 1947, the newly born nation found little time to celebrate its birth, for the next decade was spent in coping with the trauma of partition resulting into severe dislocation and the assassination of the ‘father’ (a word that shows how the nation is imagined in terms of a family) of
the nation. As the nation gradually struggled to deliver itself from the memory of this horrible experience and think of the construction of the future India, it once again fell back on the familial space wherefrom this construction would begin. Consequently, the onus fell on the women – who were given the task of building the nation from within the family, not through any positive action/agency, but through continued self-sacrifice for the family and the nation. In R. K. Narayan’s *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), for example, Bharati’s superhuman capacity for hard work and self-sacrifice was foregrounded as the necessary precondition of the construction of new India. Bharati’s self-denial not only defined her femininity but the only prescription for the success of her marriage and the construction of India. The same role was assigned to the women in various novels written during this period, as for example, Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *Music for Mohini* (1952) or even much later Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli* (1977). In fact, the women in the Indian English novel became a sign of the nationalist synthesis under strain. The post-1947 position of Indian women was complicated by a powerful convergence of historical forces that both defined and confined the space in which Indian women could act. In nationalist discourse, the figure of woman continued to serve as self-sacrificing mother of the nation, bearer of tradition, and bridge between the old and the new. On the one hand, in the universalist post-independence ethos, with equality of gender, caste and creed enshrined in the Indian constitution, woman was defined as free; on the other hand, their idealized duty was to work selflessly for the family and the good of the nation. Both the novels referred to above, feature urban, educated bride married off into an orthodox family. After liberal upbringing and modern education the women’s valorized ideal was to fit into the role of a typical Indian housewife, bridging the nation with the family as it
were, as one of Bhabani Bhattacharya’s characters describes the instrumentality of such a marriage in nationalist terms: “‘We who’re so wed, serve some real purpose. It’s as though we made a bridge between two banks of a river ... our new India must rest on this foundation’” (Music for Mohini 93).

Partha Chatterjee in his essay “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question” has discussed this issue in detail. In this essay he discusses how the Indian middle class men coped with the hierarchical imposition of colonial “modernity” upon Indian “tradition,” not by creating a real synthesis but by developing a gendered opposition between the private and the public, the home and the world, the family and the nation. Male cultural nationalism compartmentalized reality into inner and outer realms, naming the inner realm female, and a space where Indians were already free, hence nationalism’s subsequent silence on issues of domestic social reform (233-253). According to Chatterjee, the material and economic dominance of the western world in the outer world cannot pose a threat to the sovereignty of the cultural and the spiritual inner world, where an essentialized idea of tradition reigns supreme, presided over by the Indian woman who is the symbol of purity. Ultimately, therefore, with all its modernity, Indianness, remained “the pure and a historical signifier of interiority” (Radhakrishnan 84).

The binary position of the male and the female, in the decade immediately after independence has been remarkably summarized by Josna Rege in her book Colonial Karma: “The Manichean polarities of colonialist discourse now consigned men to Production, women to Reproduction, men to Doing, women to Being, men to Nation, women to Alienation” (85). This also aptly summarises the binary between the family and the nation in this period. Thus, as Rege shows in
the same book, women found themselves trapped within the family, caught
between national, social, religious, moral and sexual duties. While men were able
to separate the public and the private spheres, women had to bear the burden of
the both without the freedom of either. The result was an increasing alienation of
the woman within the familial space.

Thus, in the sixties, the Indian English literary scene saw the emergence of
a new aim – to explore the interior world of quest for identity. And this
exploration of the interior world of the family naturally started focusing more and
more on women. In the complex interface between the family and the nation after
the independence, the women’s story became more and more important because of
a clear change in the nature of this engagement with this familial space after
years have seen Indian writing get more and more subjective” (35). Meenakshi
Mukherjee, in Twice Born Fiction sums up the situation in her characteristic lucid
prose:

… the shift of interest from the public to the private sphere may be
regarded as a characteristic of the 'fifties and the 'sixties. This
private search often constituted a quest for a satisfactory attitude
towards the West, and for a realistic image of the East that would at
the same time be emotionally valid. This search has taken varied
and complex forms. At its lowest, it has often descended into
sentimental chauvinism and neurotic rejection, at its highest it has
attempted a reintegration of personality, a revaluation of all values
(80).
Mukherjee explores five novels written during the period 1956-61 where the central conflict of the women is between two ideals of life – to seek a passive gratification of the self by sacrificing the life for the sake of family, or to seek actively one’s own happiness, outside the tyranny of the family. In most of the cases, family triumphed by making the protagonist accepting its values and tradition after temporary infatuation. For example, in Attia Hossain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), Laila, after a lot of struggle and ups and downs in her life, ultimately comes back to the deserted family house, and rediscovers her cousin Asad waiting for her all through. Or in B. Rajan’s *The Dark Dancer* (1959), Baba Goray, after a brief infatuation with the American way of life, resolves her crisis in her marriage with Hari, the steadfast old friend, approved of by the family. This triumph of the family, as Mukherjee suggests, is the triumph of the East in its struggle with the West and a result of the novelists’ attempt to sentimentalise and idealise them even at the cost of unsatisfactory, improbable conclusion. But at the same time, Mukherjee does not forget to point out that the palpable nostalgia for the joint family was not totally undue – it also stood, and it has always stood so in the Indian society for security, relaxed comfort and a kind of sharing of joys and sorrows. So, in all these novels, to quote Mukherjee, “the institution of the joint family is very conveniently used by the Indo-Anglian writer, in order to get a close view of the struggle between self and society” (*Twice Born* 84).

But as the writers appeared to fall silent on national issues and turned away from the violent, turbulent half-century in which the independence struggle had dominated the literary scene to a subjective world, some of them also found themselves engaged in portrayal of loneliness and estrangement, as they started
depicting the isolated individual voice, mostly of the woman. Anita Desai, one of the most prolific novelists of the sixties and the seventies, explored this alienation most effectively. Desai’s novels assume great significance in our study because of their ability to record this change coming over in the attitude of women as they were caught up in the family-nation interface during this time.

The most striking thing about Desai’s exploration of the familial space is the varied bonds with which it bound its inhabitants, the woman in particular. For example, most of Desai’s female protagonists found the interior, the private sphere of the family a prison as well as a refuge. Shying away from the broad political canvas, Desai, in her novels, reveals a great deal about post-independence Indian social and political life, particularly on the vexed relationship between national and personal identity, and on the pressures of the dominant Indian nationalism upon women. A close examination of Desai’s work reveals the gradual internalization of the response to the dominant national identity reflected in and refracted through the personal identities, internal conflicts, and family relationships of central characters in her novels. Their withdrawal from the public sphere of the nation to the private sphere of family, often dark and silent, gives ample focus on the relationship between the individual and the nation, and particularly of women’s vexed relationship to the nation.

As has already been mentioned, the interior space of family is both a cage and a refuge to most of Anita Desai’s female protagonists. It is essentially a woman’s place where she is both confined and cut off from the world, but at the same time, this is a place which she dominates and where she can speak with authority, her authenticity unchanged. This makes her position in the family sufficiently ambivalent. This ambivalence is one of Desai’s recurring themes: the
simultaneous struggle to engage and the pressure to withdraw, on the part of the female characters. It forces them mostly into alienation, but sometimes also a ‘safe’ isolation at the same time.

In *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), Desai’s first novel, Maya is a sensitive, childlike wife, secretly haunted by a childhood horoscope that had prophesied violent death for either her or her husband after four years of marriage. Throughout her life, Maya is characteristically subjected to patriarchal domination – by her cultured, Anglicized Brahmin father in her childhood, and her unimaginative (to the point of being indifferent) husband Goutam in her married life. Maya’s ultimate desire to live intensely and love passionately remains unfulfilled in a middleclass family of the in-laws, where every body lives practical, busy, ‘useful’ lives. Maya and Goutam live two separate lives detached from each other by mutual incomprehension:

> In his world there were vast areas in which he would never permit me, and he could not understand that I could even wish to enter them, foreign as they were to me. On his part, understanding was scant, love was meager. Not to be loved as one does love … (*CP* 104).

So, the husband and the wife fail to establish that magic bond between themselves that could have made a fruitful utilization of the familial space. Goutam remains unfamiliar to the family of Maya; for Maya, family remains a segregated, claustrophobic space as well. Conversations between them unfailingly get aborted in a note of frustration – “you don’t understand”: “‘Oh, you know nothing, understand nothing … Nor will you ever understand. You know nothing of me – and of how I can love …’” (*CP* 112).
Cry, the Peacock, thus, is an exploration of the desperate effort of a young woman to survive, in an environment where she is not in a position to make herself heard or understood. Desai does not blame either parties, but poignantly laments the lack of communication between the constituents of the family – Goutama completely divorced from emotions which overwhelm Maya. The novel’s tragedy lies in the polarization and disjunction of Maya and Goutam’s worlds, and in the power of the outer, rationalist world to devalue the inner world of sensibility and emotion. It is due to the lack of this sensibility and emotion, the familial space fails to unite the two. All through the novel, Maya longs to engage fully with the world, and to derive form of agency thereby. All along, Goutam denies her this agency, by prescribing her detachment when she needs to engage. While Maya desperately cries ‘I don’t care to detach myself into any other world than this. It isn’t boring for me. Never boring. I suppose I get much more out of it than you do’ (CP 117), Goutama’s indifferent advice to her is striking: ‘if you must have a real, solid, personal world, why not create one within oneself, to detach oneself …” (CP 117) Goutam betrays Maya treacherously by preaching her detachment to mask a total lack of understanding and to justify his excluding her from his masculine spheres of action. Her father has betrayed her equally, raising her as a sheltered child and giving her expectations of life that have been dashed by marriage.

Not that Goutama is a villain. Honestly speaking, he is a successful product of modern India – honest, socially conscious, rising to prominence through his own efforts, rather than through caste or class privilege. He is patristic, believing in the Hindu religious tradition in its philosophical aspect. But he is only too rational. In his dry rationality, he cannot experience love, emotional
or physical closeness with a woman, or sensuous perception. For him the Gita serves only as a coping machine that gives him an excuse to avoid the emotional aspects of life. Goutama uses the Gita to suppress his wife’s sense of self, preaching self-denial constantly to her so that she is unhinged with the world. Ultimately, she becomes detached from reality altogether.

Thus Cry the Peacock explores the impossible rifts between the public world and the private, the material and the spiritual, male and female, reason and passion, duty and desire, Goutama and Maya embodying within themselves these binary attributes. It may be quite interesting to note in this connection the case of Maya’s brother Arjun. Arjun broke away from the overprotective family, mixed defiantly with low-caste and Muslim boys as a child, and eventually ‘escaped’ to the United States, cutting himself off completely from his family. Arjun escapes, while Maya, being a girl, is denied of such avenues of escape. Transnational space is posited here as one where subjectivity can be achieved. It is a space for self empowerment. This aspect has been explored by later fiction writers and will be discussed more elaborately in Chapter IV and Conclusion. She had no choice but to remain imprisoned in the gilded cage of the family mansion, first of her father and later, of her husband. Finally, Cry the Peacock is an exploration of the desperate effort of a young woman to survive in an environment where she is not in a position to make herself heard or understood. She therefore ends up as being doubly colonized to the nation and patriarchy, imprisoned forever in the family.

In Voices in the City (1965), accomplished Monisha has been married into a “respectable, middle-class Congress family completely unsuitable to tastes and inclinations”. Why her father agreed to the match nobody knows, except that perhaps he thought that she “sought not to be encouraged in her morbid
inclinations and … it would be a good thing for her to be settled into such a stolid, unimaginative family” (VC 199). This family is equally claustrophobic – no privacy, no silence, no opportunity for Monisha to be alone with herself. Through her narrow, barred bedroom windows, she can only see other windows and other bars, and think of

… generations of Bengali women hidden behind the barred windows of half-dark rooms, spending centuries in washing clothes, kneading dough and murmuring verses from the Bhagavad-Gita and the Ramayana, in the dim light of sooty lamps (VC 120).

This is what the familial space had to offer to the contemporary women.

Monisha sees the only escape from such claustrophobic existence in casting away all involvement, totally withdrawing into her own self, into darkness, into a mode of complete alienation. Ironically, this isolation is both a prison and a refuge for Monisha in the joint family. She writes, “They have indoor minds, starless and darkness. Mine is all dark now. The blessing it is” (VC 139). Here is the seeming paradox: darkness has become freedom to Monisha because it represents a total lack of contact with the world. Yet her diary is evidence that she desperately wants to reach out and communicate; she has been forced to isolation. “What a waste”, she realizes, “What a waste it has been, this life enclosed in a locked container, merely as an observer” (VC 241). Denied productive engagement with the world, she only desires more intensely to be engaged with it.

Sita, Desai’s next middle-class married heroine in Where Shall We Go this Summer (1975), is equally denied any active relation with the outside world. Middle class married life, she has learnt with her own life, is only a brutal,
grinding rat race and not the ‘solidity and security’ she hoped for. In this family, she has only been attributed the passive task of child bearing. Partly out of her rebellious attitude against this passive role she is forced to perform, and partly out of her motherly concern to shelter the child from the cruel world, she is desperate to say ‘No’, rejecting the cruel tyrannical world. Against the inevitability of the child’s birth, she longs for a magic that will prevent the child from being born. With this illusion, she returns to Manosi, her childhood island home, lying empty for twenty years since 1947, when her father (a nationalist leader, known as the second Gandhi) died and Sita was married off to Raman. In the figure of the father, Desai has found a trope of the Nation – both the father and the nation wash off their hands after the woman’s marriage. In Where Shall We Go, Sita’s naïve faith in her father is explicitly associated with the expectations of the national, which are crushed after marriage and independence.

It is no surprise that what Sita thinks to be a noble desire, the world takes to be crazy, self indulgent, irresponsible. So ultimately what is left to her of her charmed childhood is a crumbling old house and disillusionment. In the end, Sita succumbs to the necessity of return to another bout of motherhood and the never-ending round of middle-class existence because her long imprisonment within the stereotypical role in the family as the middle class house wife has rendered her so powerless and feelings so numb that she cannot recognize her real desire, her real self. She fails to realize which one of the two – the Sita in the Manosi island and the Sita in the role of a mother/wife – was her true identity:

How could she tell, how decide? Which half of her life was real and which unreal? Which of her selves was true, which false? All
she knew was that there were two periods of her life, each in direct opposition to the other (WSWG 153).

Thus both the family and the nation have crushed her by denying her an identity of her own.

In the late seventies, however, there was a gradual change in Desai’s perceptions, revealing the familial space as a site of turn-round from passive alienation (The journey is at last from darkness to the clear light of the day!). The protagonists of *Clear Light of Day* (1980) are more self-willed. They return to face the past and struggle to come to terms with it, rather than suffer in passive alienation. They engage themselves in terms other than the normative national models. Thus *Clear Light of Day* is able to raise questions that her earlier texts were unable to articulate, as the protagonists now use the familial space much more actively, using it to shape their identity.

Tara, the second-youngest of four now-adult siblings returns to her childhood home with her diplomat-husband. Bimala, the eldest sister is the matriarchal figure, trying hard to keep the broken pieces of family together with her sacrifice and stamina. She never marries but arranges for Tara’s wedding, looks after the family business as well as Baba, her handicapped brother, and also teaches History at a nearby women’s college. She however is estranged with Raja, the elder brother who has left them all selfishly and settled in Hyderabad. Tara assigns herself the task of reconciling the family. And in doing that, she never escapes reality, but faces the raw nerves of memory with a positive and resolute attitude. Rather it is now the male members who either break free selfishly of the claustrophobic childhood world or take refuge in its dark corner: Raja rejects the responsibilities of the eldest son, and Baba’s existence is like that of a snail. The
few times he ventures forth into the world outside the family compound, the
harshness and cruelty of the world drive him back into the safety of home. His
sole activity is to replay endlessly old records on the gramophone.

Interestingly, we have two different visions of India seen through Tara and
Bakul. For Tara, returning to India means returning to her family, to address the
past and mend the raptures in the family; for Bakul, India suggests “The Taj
Mahal – the Bhagvad Gita – Indian Philosophy – music – art – the great, immortal
values of India”, where “local politics, party disputes” are not at all important. But
for Tara, it is a subjective enterprise to take part in the story of the nation or of the
family. To her, family is neither a space of refuge nor alienation but a space which
engages her more actively in solving its problems. Ultimately it is not only Tara,
but Bimala and even Raja who play collective roles in the interconnected web of
the family to create their identity and consolidate it by reaffirming the family
bonds of love and forgiveness. Finally, Bimala learns to see her own family not as
something binding or something to escape from, but as containing, linking,
nourishing all its members:

With her inner eye she saw how her own house and its particular
history linked and contained her as well as her whole family with
all their separate histories and experiences – not binding them
within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which
to send down their roots, and food to make them grow and spread,
reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always drawing
from the same soil, the same secret darkness. That soil contained
all time, past and future, in it. It was dark with time, rich with time.
It was where her deepest self lived, and the deepest selves of her
sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her

(CL D 182).

For the first time, Desai engages her protagonists in an active relation with the family and the nation. At the beginning, Desai repeatedly draws our attention to the fact that the nationalist discourse is not appropriated successfully even by upper-caste, middle class women, who fail to constitute themselves as subject-agents of action. For these women, the nationalist synthesis is not an enabling formulation but a destructive synergy of patriarchal discourses of power. But with *Clear Light of Day* there is definite change in the assertion of the subjective role of the individual in the history of the family and the nation. Already therefore, we hear the voice of the individual taking precedence over the collective voice of the nation and feel that this individual voice cannot be excluded in the story of the nation. The family-nation interface has evolved from a passive phase to an active one, objectivity to subjectivity. The stage is, therefore, now set for Salman Rushdie to take over.
Notes

1. Ashis Nandy, however, asserts in this book that the educated Indian middle class and the Indian National Congress, did not accept Tagore and Gandhi’s universalist concept of nationhood, and adopted instead the narrower western political model of nation-state. Even Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Discovery of India* (1946) explores the Vedic civilization to look not for a modern territorial nation, but a pre-modern civilization core that could transform itself into nationhood.


4. It may be interesting to note that Khilnani takes help of dhoti, which is essentially a Hindu trope, to discuss the plural nature of Indian nationalism.

5. Refer to Chapter I for a detailed discussion on the ‘pedagogic’ and the ‘performative’ as suggested by Homi K. Bhabha.

6. Though *Indulekha* was originally written in Malayalam, I consciously refer to this novel for more reasons than one. Firstly, the theme of the novel and its treatment point to a sure change coming over in the family-nation interface towards the end of the nineteenth century. In want of an Indian novel in English written during this period, which would record this change, I thought I should allow myself to go at least for this Malayalam one, to show the change. Secondly, the novel was immensely popular in the
contemporary times – so much so that it was published in 53 editions between 1889 and 1956. The novel was also intended to be translated into English right from the beginning, as is obvious from the fact that the English translation by W. F. Dumergue was published the very next year. See Rege, *Colonial Karma* (29-32) and Mukherjee *Realism and Reality* (77-85) for details.

7. Meenakshi Mukherjee quotes this in her discussion on the novel in *Realism and Reality* (80-81) to show how *Indulekha* belongs 'more to the tradition of exemplum literature.' She also discusses in this context how the position of women in society seems to have been an important concern to the nineteenth-century novelists as well as social reformers. This perhaps marked the gradual failure to keep the inner world of family and the outer world of society mutually exclusive hereafter.

8. Among many other issues, one basic one that the *Ramayana* engages with, is the celebration of pure love among brothers that strengthens the familial bonds in the *Raghu* dynasty, and protects it from all external threats. So, by focusing on *Ramrajya* and referring to Rama and Bharata in connection with Gandhi and Nehru, Rao is also inviting us to see the nation as a larger family, where brotherly love will bury all internal difference and the nation will receive its strength from its being a fraternity.

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